



How to Support a Friend who may be in an Unhealthy Relationship

It is difficult to watch someone you care about being treated poorly. Below are signs that your friend may be in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. Often people in abusive relationships try to hide it due to feelings of shame and fear.

- Your friend begins to cancel on you and skip things they once really enjoyed
- Physical injuries, may not be obvious, friend may have excuses for the injuries
- Your friend begins to wear clothing/make-up to hide injuries (e.g., long sleeve shirts, scarves)
- Your friend seems eager to please their partner and makes many excuses for them
- Your friend may be agitated, anxious (or more anxious), tired, apologetic, meek, fearful, jumpy, depressed, sad, lacking in confidence when once had it
- Your friend may talk about or attempt suicide
- Your friend does not have access to their own money or credit card, may give money to partner
- Your friend breaks up with their partner often but they get back together, your friend may make excuses and say their partner promised things would be better this time
- You may feel like something is not quite right in your friend's relationship but are unsure what exactly it is – trust your gut/instincts – you may be on to something

Ways you could support and help your friend



- Ask them how they are doing and how their relationship is going, actively listen to them
- Check in (e.g., text, send a heart emoji, email, call), tell/show them you care
- Do not give up on them – let them know you are here for them when and if they need you
- Do not criticize/speak poorly of their partner, this may push them away, isolate them further
- Remember you cannot “rescue them” – they get to make their own decisions
- Continue to be supportive if they end the relationship and are upset, lonely, sad or return to the relationship, again they get to make their own decisions, and their feelings are valid
- Watch for and be aware of warning signs that someone is in an abusive relationship
- Continue to encourage them to participate in activities outside the relationship – invite them out, maybe pick them up and drop them off to make it easier for them
- Don't post details/pics about them on your social media without their consent as their partner may be monitoring their social media and their activities



It is also possible your friend has come to you for help or advice. If your friend tells you they are in a problematic/unhealthy/abusive relationship:

- Believe them, tell them it is not their fault and ask them how you can support them
- Acknowledge their situation is difficult, scary and tell them they are brave and not alone
- Listen, try not to get angry with them or tell them they should know better – do not criticize or guilt them over their decisions
- Do not give them an ultimatum (e.g., choose me or them!)
- With their consent document the violence (e.g., pictures of injuries, a calendar of dates of abuse, notes with details) – keep this for them in case their phone and space are not private
- Help them learn about their legal rights

The most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is often when people try to leave, it could be beneficial to ask your friend if they are willing to reach out for extra support.

- With their consent provide them with on and off campus supports – go with them to support services/appointments if they would find this helpful and you are able
- Provide them with 24 hour support line information
- Help them create a safety plan
- Store a “to-go” bag for them
- Keep some of their money safe for them
- Might need to involve others (e.g., friends, parents, Don, Student Advisor)



List of Resources

Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Office (SVPRO). University of Waterloo, non-crisis support svpro@uwaterloo.ca <https://uwaterloo.ca/sexual-violence-prevention-response-office/>

Waterloo Region Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASC), 24 Hour Support Line **519.741.8633**
<https://www.sascwr.org/>

Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centre

St. Mary's Hospital, Kitchener and Cambridge Memorial Hospital, Cambridge
<https://www.smgh.ca/areas-of-care/sexual-assault-domestic-violence>

Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region

24/7 crisis support line: [519-742-5894](tel:519-742-5894) or [519-653-2422](tel:519-653-2422) or access the live chat on website
<https://wcsvr.org/>



List of other crisis support services

<https://uwaterloo.ca/sexual-violence-prevention-response-office/resources/crisis-support-services>