



## INDEPENDENCE HOUSE, INC.

Cape Cod's leading resource, counseling and advocacy center to address and prevent domestic and sexual violence.

*Promoting safe and healthy relationships*

160 Bassett Lane | Hyannis, MA 02601 | 508.771.6507 | FAX 508.778.0143 | TTY 508.771.6782  
24-Hr. Hotline 800.439.6507 | [independencehouse.org](http://independencehouse.org) | [independencehouseTEENS.org](http://independencehouseTEENS.org)

# HOW CAN I BE SUPPORTIVE TO SOMEONE WHO IS A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE

*There are many ways to offer non-judgmental and respectful support of the decisions that victims and survivors make.*

- 1. Listen without judging and don't rush into providing a solution.** The victim is not responsible for someone else's abusive or violent behavior. There are times when being a good listener is more valuable to that person than any other action might be.
- 2. Believe them.** Let them know that you support them and ask what you can do to help. Talk with them gently, understanding that everyone needs to take their own time talking about such difficult things.
- 3. Support them.** Let them know that you care about them. Don't blame them for what happened. Let them know that it wasn't their fault. If they have been assaulted, encourage them to seek medical attention. Offer to go with them to a domestic violence (DV) or sexual assault (SA) resource center.
- 4. Help them to make their own decisions.** They are the authority of their own life decisions and your role is to help them figure out their choices and get the resources they need rather than doing it for them.
- 5. Encourage them to contact a DV or SA resource center.** Research is showing that this is the greatest help a victim can get! This is a place where they can speak with an advocate who is trained and who can listen, connect them with the resources they need and ensure that they have the information they need to make the best decisions for themselves. Independence House is Cape Cod's leading domestic violence and sexual assault resource, counseling and advocacy center. Visit Independence House websites: [www.independencehouse.org](http://www.independencehouse.org), [www.independencehouseTeens.org](http://www.independencehouseTeens.org) or call 1-800-439-6507
- 6. Be part of their safety plan.** A safety plan is created by a victim, often with the help of a trained advocate. The intent is to plan for a victim's safety needs before another violent episode erupts. While typically associated with domestic violence, victims of sexual assault can also benefit from a safety plan. If you believe they are in immediate danger, call 911.
- 7. Contact Independence House yourself.** You may want to get information for another person, get support for yourself, learn more about how you can support another person and better understand what resources may be available. Co-workers can contact their Employee Assistance Program to learn about workplace-based advocacy services for you, your co-worker and often their family members.
- 8. Express concern for their safety.** Whether they are leaving a relationship, if they are staying in a relationship and/or if they aren't sure about their next steps, planning for safety is key. Safety

planning is a tool that is useful for all victims and survivors of domestic and/or sexual assault. Visit [www.mass.gov/mova/safeplan/safety-planning](http://www.mass.gov/mova/safeplan/safety-planning) for safety planning brochures in various languages.

9. **Explore the legal remedies available.** There are measures, including abuse prevention and harassment prevention orders, that have been developed to support victims and survivors and protect their rights to safety. Learn more about legal remedies at [www.masslegalhelp.org/domestic-violence](http://www.masslegalhelp.org/domestic-violence)
10. **Learn about immigrant and refugee victims' legal rights.** Many battered immigrant victims who have legal immigration status do not know that their batterer cannot take that status away. You should know that immigrant victims are U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, or have a valid visa, they cannot be deported unless they have entered the U.S. on fraudulent documents, violated conditions of their visa, or have been convicted of certain crimes. Visit [www.janedoe.org/find\\_help\\_for\\_immigrants](http://www.janedoe.org/find_help_for_immigrants) for more information on the rights of immigrants and refugees.
11. **Get information about other legal issues.** The legal needs for each victim of sexual or domestic violence are different. There may be workplace or housing issues, concerns about safety at college or job training sites, fears about the abuser's access to children's schools or daycare. An advocate can help identify legal issues and help develop solutions through referrals and resources.
12. **Maintain confidentiality.** Do not share this information with anyone else without the specific permission of the victim or survivor.
13. **Understand that healing is a process that is different for each person.** Here is no formula and healing is not a time limited experience. Express compassion, non-judgmental support and acceptance.

Why should I reach out to someone who is being or has been abused or assaulted?

Survivors tell us that just helping break the silence surrounding sexual and domestic violence can be like opening a door!

One of the biggest barriers to action is that many of us have been raised to believe that sexual and domestic violence are private matters and none of anyone's business. The bottom line is that sexual and domestic violence affect us all. As with other public health, public safety, and human rights issues, we all have a role to play in ending violence on an individual, community, societal and global levels.

We know it can be difficult to reach out to someone we care about. Your non-judgmental support can help someone access the resources they may need.

Adapted from information presented on [www.janedoe.org](http://www.janedoe.org)

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