

Help a friend or family member who is in trouble

- *Lend a listening ear.* Tell your friend or family member that you care and are willing to listen. Don't force the issue, but allow her to confide in you at her own pace. Let her know she is not alone and people are available to help her. Never blame her for what is happening or underestimate her fear of potential danger. Focus on supporting her right to make her own decisions.
- *Become informed.* Find out all the facts you can about domestic violence. Call the **Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.838.8238** (v/tty) or visit the Virginians Against Domestic Violence Web site at www.vadv.org for more information.
- *Guide her to community services.* Gather information about domestic violence programs in your area. These programs offer safety, advocacy, support, legal information and other needed services. If your friend or family member asks for advice on what she should do, share the information you've gathered with her privately. Encourage her to seek the assistance of domestic violence advocates and assure her that they will keep her information confidential. Many battered women first seek the advice of marriage counselors, psychiatrists or members of the clergy. However, not all helping professionals are fully aware of the special circumstances of domestic violence. If the first person she contacts is not helpful, encourage her to look elsewhere. A good first place to call is the **Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.838.8238** (v/tty).
- *Focus on her strengths.* Your friend or family member is probably continually told by the abuser that she is a bad woman, a bad wife, or a bad mother. She may believe she can't do anything right and that there really is something wrong with her. Give her emotional support to believe she is a good person. Help her examine her strengths and skills. Emphasize that she deserves a life that is free from violence.
- *If she decides to leave, help your friend or family member make a plan to be safe.* She may want to call a local domestic violence hotline. Domestic violence programs can help her look at her options and make a plan to be as safe as possible. Battered women usually face the greatest risk when they try to leave their abusive relationships. If the batterer feels he has lost control, he may become very dangerous.
- *Help her find a safe place.* If your friend or family member decides to leave, a domestic violence shelter may be the safest place to go. Unfortunately shelters sometimes don't have enough room for all the women and children who need their help. Your friend or family member may need to rely on family and friends for temporary housing.

LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE