

Encouraging the Victim

If you have a friend or relative who is the victim of domestic abuse, she's in a tough spot and she needs help. She may turn to you for help or she may not realize she needs it. The time to consider if you will help or not and how you will do that is **NOW**. Not when she shows up at your door. Providing help to the abused can be one of the most difficult things you will ever do. It takes courage, commitment and genuine concern. Even with that, she may not accept your help. It can be heartbreaking. Here are some clues and tips on how you can best help her.

The first thing she needs is someone who will affirm her as a person. She needs to know that she is valuable and special and worth the effort to be rescued. She doesn't need someone who will judge or criticize her for not getting out of an abusive relationship earlier. Nothing can short-circuit your effort faster than being critical. "How can you live in such a situation?" is not going to be received well and it will most definitely be counterproductive. Re-read that.

Next, she needs to know that you're someone she can trust and is willing to help. Before you tell her that, be sure you can. She may need someone to go with her to the Victims' Advocate's office (you should offer to take her). She will definitely need someone to provide constant emotional support and encouragement. She may need someone who can offer her a safe place to live. Realize that bringing her into your home may be a dangerous thing. Abused women are sometimes the victims of the ultimate crime, murder. Of those victims, 70% happen after the woman has left the home. If the abusive husband can successfully track his wife to your home, you may find yourself in danger. Secrecy is critical to preventing that and minimizing the risk for both the victim and your family. Make certain it's a risk you're willing to take before you offer. If you can't take her into your home you may be able to help her move to a relative's house or put her up for the night at a nearby hotel.

If you're still willing to take her in, talk it over with your family members. Find out if they have questions or reservations. Once you're involved it can become time-consuming and emotionally draining. Here are some questions for you and your family to consider:

1. Can we provide temporary shelter for the victim? Do we have enough room and can we afford it?
2. Are we willing to take her kids in? How will her children interact with ours? It could be an incredible teaching opportunity.
3. Can we provide secrecy for the victim? Is there a place to hide her car? Are we too obvious a choice or will the husband guess she's here? Can we minimize that risk?
4. Can we provide safety? Is the house safe and secure? If not, refer to the [Home Security Checklist](#) on the Prepare tab.
5. Are we the best choice? Is there someone else who is better equipped to help?
6. What resources do we have?

Finally, before you decide to help, read through the Victim page to see exactly what you will be helping her with. It's important to have a plan and she may need someone who understands the plan and can help keep her on track. The help you offer is not a small thing but it is greatly needed. 29% of American homes suffer from some sort of abuse. That's a lot of homes. There's a lot of helping to be done.