

CALLING ALL FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF FAMILIES EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE AT HOME

Do you have a loved one who is experiencing domestic violence, sexual violence or child abuse?

During this time when physical distance is a priority for our overall public health, many of us have increased worry about the safety of our friends, neighbors and family members who are experiencing violence, and are now at home all the time with the person hurting them. This is the time for us as family and friends to support our people, even if we can't be there in person.

Here are 8 different ways to help children and adults living with violence. Not all apply to every situation, but these suggestions can help you think about how to be there for the people in your life.

1. REACH OUT

Families who are living with violence are often isolated from friends and extended family. Many children and adults are afraid of asking for help or feel ashamed. They might feel like the violence is their fault. Now is the time for us to reach out. You can let your loved ones know that it is not their fault, and that you are there to listen. Tell them you care about them and want to help in any way you can. You shouldn't force them to talk to you about the violence, but offering to be there for them right now can go a long way. This "pod-mapping" worksheet from the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective can help you and your loved one identify people in your networks that you trust and can reach out to: <https://batjc.wordpress.com/pods-and-pod-mapping-worksheet/>.

2. SEND BASIC NECESSITIES

If your family members or neighbors need food, transportation or supplies, ask them what they need and help out when you can. You could offer to drop off food or cleaning supplies, send takeout/grocery gift cards or money through cash apps, or give care packages of books, toys, and learning supplies for children. You can also share what you know about local resources, like food bank hours or transportation programs. If you are connected to a neighborhood, faith or other community group, you can offer to connect your loved one or ask for support on their behalf.

3. INTERRUPT OR INTERVENE

Every situation of violence is different and needs different responses. As friends and family, there are ways we can interrupt or intervene to support our loved ones, even during a pandemic. For example, you and your loved one can agree on a code word that will alert you that they need an interruption from you or an outside intervention from the authorities. One code word could mean “call me now, so I can move to another room.” Another code word could mean “knock on my door now.” A third code word could mean “please call the authorities.” Depending on the situation, any of these things can interrupt violence or child abuse in the moment.

4. USE THE POWER OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP

If you have a strong and trusting relationship with a person abusing their partner or a child, call them and talk to them about how to handle their behavior. Use this time as an opportunity for real talk and support them in getting help. Ask them if they can work with you to make a behavioral plan and give them local and national helplines they can call to get support. For friends and family of people causing sexual harm to children, call Stop It Now at 1-888-PREVENT (773-8368) or visit stopitnow.org. If you know someone is hurting their partner, have them call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or visit thehotline.org. LGBTQ people can also call the Anti-Violence Project at 212-714-1141 or visit avp.org/get-help. If you are worried about a parent hurting a child, you can call the National Parent Helpline at 1-855-4A-PARENT (427-2736) or visit nationalparenthelpline.org.

5. PROVIDE VIRTUAL OR PHYSICAL RESPITE

While most of us can't open our homes to family and friends who are experiencing violence during the pandemic, some of us have extra rooms and spaces we can offer, especially if a parent gets sick and can't take care of their children. Even if you can't provide a place to stay, you can still give parents a break for themselves or their kids. Even 30 minutes of downtime each day can be a huge help for someone parenting children who are living with violence at home. You can read children a story over WhatsApp or Facetime every night at 7:00pm, or virtually teach older children how to cook a favorite family meal. You can also find local virtual community entertainment for children, like library story times.



6. PROVIDE A WARM REFERRAL TO A PROGRAM OR COMMUNITY GROUP

Most communities have advocates, counselors, attorneys and faith leaders who are working tirelessly to reach survivors during this pandemic. Family and friends can find information by researching programs in the area where they live. You can also call national hotlines that can point you to local resources and help you think about additional ways to support your loved ones. They can also be there for you as a support person. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or thehotline.org. The National Sexual Assault hotline is 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or rainn.org. The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline is 1-800-4A-CHILD (422-4453) or childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline. Latino and Latina survivors can reach out to Casa de Esperanza at 1-651-772-1611 or casadeesperanza.org. Native American and Alaska Native people can reach out to StrongHearts Native Helpline at 1-844-7NATIVE (762-8483) or strongheartshelpline.org. LGBTQ people can reach out to the Anti-Violence Project Hotline at 1-212-714-1141 or avp.org/get-help, or the Northwest Network at nwnetwork.org. Young people experiencing relationship or domestic violence can contact Love Is Respect at 1-866-331-9474 or loveisrespect.org. LGBTQ young people who may be experiencing abuse because of their gender or sexuality can contact the Trevor Project at 1-866-488-7386 or thetrevorproject.org.

7. SEND TEXTS AND HANDWRITTEN LETTERS OF LOVE AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO ADULTS AND CHILDREN WHO ARE HURTING.

While we should keep in mind that anything we put in writing can be read by others, we can send notes that remind our friends and family how much they matter to you, and that they are worthy of love and support. Remind them that they are strong and courageous. Share one of your favorite quotes, proverbs, verses or affirmations. Draw a picture for children. Small acts of encouragement can go a long way.

8. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

You deserve support too. Worrying about a loved one who is experiencing violence can take a toll on our emotional and physical health, especially when there are so many stressful events going on. Here are some ideas for how to take care of yourself while you support others: <https://www.rainn.org/articles/self-care-friends-and-family>

About Futures Without Violence:

Futures Without Violence is an international social justice and advocacy organization to prevent violence and to help survivors and communities heal. Based in San Francisco, FUTURES provides groundbreaking programs, policies, and campaigns to empower individuals and organizations working to end violence. For more information and resources, visit: <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/>

