

A positive approach

Be aware that you, whatever your role within your workplace, could be the first point of contact for a woman who is seeking help and support because of domestic abuse. Your role could be vital. Any woman can be abused. This means that any of the women you encounter through your work might be abused, including your colleagues.

To support a woman:

- Believe what she is saying and let her know you do.
- Listen to what she is saying. Show that you are interested and concerned.
- Give her time to talk and don't rush her to make decisions. Remember, many women who are abused feel they have no choices. Don't put any pressure on her to do anything that she isn't ready to do.
- You may feel shocked at some of the details of the abuse. If you show you are distressed, horrified or disgusted by what a woman tells you, it may put her off talking to you.
- Be careful not to seem to pass judgement or blame the woman for her situation. Don't ask her to justify her actions eg 'Why on earth did you go back to him?'. Accept that she will have had her reasons for making any such decision.
- Ask her about her safety. Ask 'Is it safe to go home?'. Help her to look at what she might be able to do to feel safer. She might want to look at planning for an emergency by gathering information and preparing for the time when she may feel the need to leave and get help.
- Take her fears seriously: remember she knows what her partner is capable of better than you do - she lives with it every day.
- Let her know in advance if you will be unable to keep what she tells you in confidence.
- Respect her autonomy and her decisions. Don't make assumptions about what she might want or need. Put aside your own feelings when you believe she is making choices that are not in her interest or that you disagree with.
- Check whether it is safe to contact her at her home address. If not, identify a way of communicating with her that will not endanger her.
- Encourage her to recognise and build on her strengths.
- Tell her that she has rights and that everyone has the right to safety and respect. No-one has the right to abuse another person.
- If the woman does not want to get further help, then it is important that you respect this.
- No matter how many times you talk to her, always offer her the same respect and support.