

RESPONDING TO FAMILY VIOLENCE – DO’S AND DON’TS

Before people feel ready to access formal supports, most will turn to those they trust: family, friends, coworkers, etc. The first step in being supportive is being aware of the vastness and complexities of family violence. In considering your responses to those that may be experiencing family violence:

Do

- Ask about it within a safe and secure environment.
- Listen and validate their experiences.
- Explore safety and planning.
- Give the message that no one deserves to be hurt.
- Explore what they want to do about their relationship, and respect their decision.
- Share resources (do so privately).
- Be patient – change takes time.
- Be aware of limitations of confidentiality (e.g., if children are involved).
- Seek supports for yourself.
- Contact the police if you observe violence occurring (rather than intervening yourself).

Don’t

- Turn a blind eye to the realities of family violence.
- Judge or criticize the person’s choices in the relationship.
- Give advice – rather, explore their choices and hopes for their relationship.
- Use labels (e.g., offender, abuser, etc.) and put-downs when referring to the person using violence.
- Ask too many unnecessary questions (this may promote a feeling of judgement or being too “nosy”).
- Pressure the person to leave the relationship. The reasons for staying in the relationship are very complex and will make sense for the person, even if they don’t make sense to you.
- Feel that you need to be an “expert”.
- Overreact.
- Be a silent bystander to comments, attitudes or actions that promote violence