HOW’S YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

Conversations with someone about their abusive behavior
Everyone deserves healthy, safe, and respectful relationships—that’s a fact. But the reality is some folks are in bad relationships. And some are in abusive ones.

We’ve focused our efforts on survivors of abuse but ultimately we can’t end domestic violence without changing people who abuse. And we think conversations are one of the best ways to do that.
You have the ability to influence how your loved ones expect to be treated and how they treat others just by having thoughtful conversations with them over time. It’s an incredible power—use it!

We hope that these conversation cards will help you to talk with a person in your life who is struggling in their relationship, who maybe isn’t their best self, and who has the will to change.

JUST TRY IT!
It can be tough to tell for sure if a relationship is just bad or actually abusive. In some ways, it doesn’t matter—these cards can help either way.

Here are some things you may see in both a bad relationship and one that’s abusive:

- Screaming, yelling, fighting
- Threatening to break up
- Jealousy
- Cheating
- Drugs/alcohol use/abuse
- Mental health problems
Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior that one person in a relationship uses to gain power and control over the other.

Abuse is not caused by anger, mental problems, alcohol, drugs, or other common excuses (although having these issues can make it worse). The real cause of abuse is a person’s belief that they have the right to control their partner by:

- Isolating them from friends
- Threatening to take the children
- Hurting, choking, hitting them
- Controlling money
- Humiliating them
- Forcing sex

If you are seeing any of this, it might be time to check in about the relationship.
Let’s be real, most of us think of an abuser as an easy-to-spot evil monster and not someone we care about. So it’s hard to admit or even recognize when someone we care about is being abusive.

When we do start to see it, some of us want to vote them off the island and some of us want to stick our head in the sand.

But what if we want to continue to be in community with someone who has done harm? What if they are in our lives no matter what? What if they are our family? What if they are our friend? What if we love them? What if...?
How do we convey that we won't tolerate this behavior while staying connected and asking them to change?

We believe the answer lies in having conversations and being real. The most important thing is to STAY CONNECTED. Then you can pick what feels right for you IN THE MOMENT or when you are ready to HAVE A CONVERSATION.
Hey,
You Two!
How's it going?

Whether you decide to say something or not, you can understand the tactics of abuse and help to:

**Decrease isolation**
Abuse works best when others don’t see it. So hang out with them and encourage their other friends to do the same.
Offer a different perspective
Make it clear how much you love and value the person being treated badly. This can be an antidote to the abuse.

Check in with the person being harmed
Let them know that you see the way they are being treated and that you want to help. And then listen to what they say will be helpful for them.
At some point you’ll find yourself in the middle of an uncomfortable situation. Here are some things you can say (instead of staying frozen). You have the power to influence.

YOU NEED
TO STOP

KNOCK IT OFF!

Hey, that’s not cool.

Is that how you talk to each other all the time?
What can I say to get you to stop?

I know you guys love each other.

That's messed up!

How can I help?
PEP TALK: Yes, it might seem kind of scary and it might be uncomfortable, but YOU CAN DO IT. Think of yourself like a farmer—no matter what happens, you planted the seeds and gave it your best shot.

Regardless of what type of relationship you are seeing (whether it’s super scary or you’ve just seen a few red flags) these three strategies will help you have the conversation that you want.
Address behavior privately
Be direct but loving as you challenge their actions, words, or violence.

Focus on the behavior
Talk about the behavior and how it impacts you. Be clear that you don’t think they are a bad person.

Lead with OBSERVATION
Then ASK A QUESTION, LISTEN UP, and STAY CONNECTED.

DON'T USE THE WORD "ABUSER"
Hey, I’m worried about you… Is everything ok?

Sometimes I’ve noticed… How do you feel about that?

You probably don’t intend this, but the impact on your partner is…

When you do these things, I feel…

Consider talking while you are engaged in an activity. This helps to break eye contact and makes the conversation less intense.
I know I’m not around you all the time, but who else do you treat this way?

Things don’t seem right in your relationship. What’s going on?

**General tips:**
- Be specific. Share concrete examples.
- Share your perspective: “I noticed” or “I’m worried.”
- Avoid “You never...” or “You always...” kinds of statements.
They’re getting defensive. Switch back to the positive for a minute: “I really love you guys and I think you love each other” or “I just want you guys to be happy and have the relationship you both deserve.”

Uh-oh, it’s escalating, you’re getting scared. End the conversation and give the other person a heads-up about what went down.

CAUTION! ABUSERS OFTEN MAKE EXCUSES, FEEL LIKE THEY ARE THE VICTIM, BECOME DEFENSIVE, OR MANIPULATE SITUATIONS.
Feeling uncomfortable. Yes!  
You’re doing it right. Acknowledge the discomfort but keep going!

They are blaming their partner.  
“Even if what you’re saying is true, no one deserves to be treated that way.”

It’s going well. Keep that train rolling. Keep checking in and stay connected!

YOU CAN love
SOMEONE WHO DOES BAD THINGS
Taking care of yourself is important. You don't have to give all of yourself. Helping other people with their relationships shouldn't take over your life.

It's not your job to change someone. You can't make someone change, but you can hold up a mirror and support them.

Get help! You don't have to do it alone. Talk to your trusted people and reach out to experts.
TRUST YOUR GUT
Anyone can chat or call for support.

Check out their toolkit for friends and family.

See their strategies on how to help.
YOU CAN
DO IT!