

# **unsafe relationships**

**helping your  
partner deal  
with the past**

**MAYOR OF LONDON**



# Has your partner experienced violence?

This leaflet is for partners of women or men who have experienced sexual or domestic violence. As with everyone, the best way to support someone effectively is to ask.

Most victims don't 'get over' sexual or domestic violence – they come to terms with it. This can take a long time. If she still has contact with the abuser this may take even longer.

# What is domestic or sexual violence?

**Domestic violence** – controlling behaviour such as physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse by a current or former partner.

**Forced marriage** – a marriage conducted without valid consent of one or both parties, where duress is a factor.

**‘Honour’ based violence** – violence committed to protect or defend the ‘honour’ of a family and/or community, usually against young women where they have acted outside perceived acceptable female behaviour patterns.

**Sexual violence** – sexual contact without the consent of the woman/girl, including rape. Most attackers are known to the victim.

In extreme cases violence against women can include murder.

# How you might feel

As a partner you may:

- ◆ wonder if the survivor could have prevented the abuse
- ◆ find it hard to listen when they talk about it
- ◆ want it to go away
- ◆ be reluctant to tell others for fear of their reaction
- ◆ feel guilty and responsible believing you could have prevented it
- ◆ feel angry at the survivor and at others around you
- ◆ want revenge
- ◆ be uncertain on how to approach physical intimacy with your partner

All these feelings are understandable.  
Don't struggle on your own.  
Get help.

# The effects of sexual violence

These can include:

- ◆ being nervous or jumpy
- ◆ having nightmares
- ◆ obsessive cleaning

Also:

- ◆ difficulty in trusting
- ◆ panic attacks triggered by minor events
- ◆ being secretive

Your partner may experience rapid mood swings, rage, aggression, anger, be depressed and want to be alone.

Flinching when you come near is another common response to abuse.

## How you can help

- ◆ believe what your partner tells you
- ◆ don't question how they dealt with the abuse - your partner took the action they felt necessary to survive
- ◆ don't force your partner to tell you what happened - be there if they want help
- ◆ ask your partner how you can help if they have panic attacks, nightmares or flashbacks - and ask them what they want you to do

It is their decision to report the crime or not. A victim of domestic and sexual violence has that control taken away so respect their choices.

## Intimacy issues

Your partner may not want to be intimate. Try not to take this as rejection. Your partner needs time to heal. Allow your partner to decide what they feel comfortable with. Reassure them and always stop any sexual activity when they want you to.

Try to learn about the effects of domestic and sexual violence - including post traumatic stress disorder - and how you as a partner can support them.

# Immediate responses

There is no 'right' way to respond to a survivor. To help you should:

- ◆ be supportive, without overreacting - avoid being overly protective
- ◆ be sensitive to the fact that some survivors don't want to be touched including hugging and patting
- ◆ try not to be awkward or to show pity - abuse is only one part of their life - try not to let it overshadow everything else
- ◆ show interest, but do not pry

# Useful contacts

## **Relate**

0300 100 1234

<http://www.relate.org.uk/>

## **Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline**

0808 2000 247

[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

## **Rape Crisis**

0808 802 9999

[www.rapecrisislondon.org](http://www.rapecrisislondon.org)

## **Havens**

Camberwell: 020 3299 1599

Paddington: 020 3312 1101

Whitechapel: 020 7247 4787

**Men's Advice Line**

0808 801 0327

[www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk)

**Survivors UK (sexual violence)**

0845 122 1201

<http://www.survivorsuk.org/>

**Broken Rainbow (LGBT services)**

0300 999 5428

<http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk/>

For a full range of services in London,  
visit: [www.london.gov.uk/knowwheretogo](http://www.london.gov.uk/knowwheretogo)



