

WORDS MATTER:

How to Talk About Domestic Violence without Blame or Shame

CREATING CONVERSATIONS THAT BUILD UNDERSTANDING, SUPPORT, AND CONNECTION

Conversations about domestic violence can feel difficult, but they play an important role in raising awareness, challenging harmful beliefs, and supporting those who may be impacted by it.

The way we talk about abuse matters. Thoughtful, compassionate language helps create space for honesty, understanding, and healing. By approaching these conversations with curiosity, empathy, and respect, we can reduce stigma and encourage people to reach out for support when they need it.

TIPS FOR MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

Lead with empathy

Every person's experience is different. When someone shares a difficult experience, focus on listening and understanding rather than evaluating their choices.

Try:

- "Thank you for sharing that with me."
- "That sounds incredibly difficult."

When people feel heard and supported, they are more likely to continue the conversation and seek help if they need it.

Avoid victim blaming

Domestic violence happens because someone chooses to use controlling, harmful, or abusive behaviors. Keeping accountability where it belongs helps challenge victim-blaming narratives and promotes a clearer understanding of abuse.

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Try saying:

- "No one deserves to be abused."
- "Abuse is a choice made by the person causing harm."
- "Everyone deserves to feel safe and respected in their relationships."

Listen to understand

Meaningful conversations begin with listening. Give people the opportunity to share their thoughts, experiences, or concerns without immediately offering solutions. Listening communicates respect and helps build trust.

Helpful questions include:

- "How has this experience affected you?"
- "What would feel supportive right now?"
- "What would you like me to understand about your situation?"

Choose language that invites connection

Words have the power to either open doors or create distance. Using supportive, non-judgmental language encourages open and honest conversations. Instead of focusing on what someone "should" do, focus on listening to what they need, want, or deserve.

Examples:

- "You deserve support."
- "Your feelings are valid."
- "You know your situation best."
- "I'm here to listen and support you."

Respect each person's journey

There is no single path forward for someone experiencing abuse. People make decisions based on their unique circumstances, needs, and safety considerations.

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Supportive responses include:

- "What feels safest for you right now?"
- "How can I support you moving forward?"

Respecting autonomy helps people maintain control over their own choices and next steps.

Stay Curious and Open

Approaching conversations with curiosity and empathy allows us to learn, reflect, and deepen our understanding.

Consider asking:

- "What do you wish more people understood about domestic violence?"
- "How can our community be more supportive?"

Your support can spark meaningful dialogue and help challenge common misconceptions about abuse.

Every thoughtful conversation is an opportunity to build understanding, challenge stigma, and remind people that support, safety, and hope are possible.