



**HOW'S YOUR  
RELATIONSHIP?**

Conversations with someone  
about their abusive behavior



BROUGHT TO YOU BY

WASHINGTON STATE COALITION

**WSCADV**

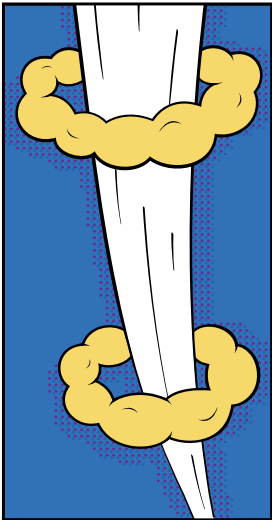
AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

[WSCADV.ORG](http://WSCADV.ORG)

## WHAT IS THIS?

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!**



# IS THIS WHAT YOU'RE SEEING?



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

A yellow and orange explosion graphic with black lines radiating outwards, containing the word "BAM" in red, stylized letters.

BAM

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.**

# IS THERE ANYTHING YOU CAN DO?

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**.



SOMETIMES PEOPLE NEED TO HEAR  
THAT WHAT THEY ARE DOING ISN'T OK





# STAY CONNECTED

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.



**HEY,  
YOU TWO!**



**HOW'S  
IT GOING?**

### **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.



# IN THE MOMENT

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.



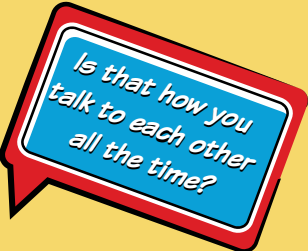
**YOU NEED  
TO STOP**



**KNOCK IT  
OFF!**



**HEY, THAT'S NOT COOL.**



*Is that how you  
talk to each other  
all the time?*



I KNOW YOU GUYS  
LOVE EACH OTHER.



THAT'S  
MESSED UP!



HOW CAN  
I HELP?



What can I say  
to get you to stop?

# HAVE A CONVERSATION

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.



**YOUR TOOLS ARE**  
**COMPASSION**  
**LOVE** **PATIENCE**

TURN  
OVER

## 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.

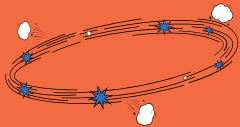
## Lead with OBSERVATION

Then ASK A QUESTION, LISTEN UP, and STAY CONNECTED.

**DON'T USE THE WORD "ABUSER"**



# SAMPLE SCRIPTS



Hey, I'm worried about you...  
Is everything ok?

Sometimes I've noticed...  
How do you feel about that?

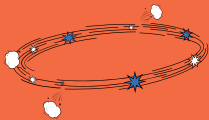
You probably don't intend this, but  
the impact on your partner is...

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.





## CONVERSATION STARTED, NOW WHAT?

**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



## THINGS TO REMEMBER

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**

# RESOURCES

The National Domestic Violence  
**HOTLINE**

1.800.799.SAFE (7233) • [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)

*Anyone can chat or call for support.*

**NO MORE**

TOGETHER WE CAN END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT

*See their strategies on how to help.*

**The  
Northwest  
Network**  
of bi, trans, lesbian &  
gay survivors of abuse

**206 568 7777**  
[nwnetwork.org](http://nwnetwork.org)

*Check out their toolkit  
for friends and family.*

YOU CAN

DO IT!