



Trauma-informed support for survivors rebuilding after abuse

Why Support Matters

Many people experiencing abuse, coercive control or emotional harm feel isolated, confused or afraid of not being believed.

Supportive responses from trusted people can make a significant difference.

Often, survivors are already carrying:

- Fear and anxiety
- Shame or self-doubt
- Emotional exhaustion
- Trauma responses
- Confusion around the relationship
- Pressure from others to “just leave”

Having someone who listens calmly and without judgement can help reduce emotional isolation and create safer spaces for support.

1. Signs Someone May Be Struggling

Not all abuse is visible.

Someone experiencing abuse or coercive control may:

- Seem withdrawn, anxious or emotionally overwhelmed
- Cancel plans or isolate themselves
- Constantly apologise or blame themselves
- Seem fearful about upsetting their partner

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- Lose confidence over time
- Become unusually quiet or hypervigilant
- Struggle to make decisions independently
- Seem emotionally drained or “not themselves”

Some people become highly skilled at hiding what they are experiencing.

2. Listening Without Judgement

One of the most helpful things you can do is listen calmly and without judgement.

This may include:

- Allowing them to speak at their own pace
- Believing what they are telling you
- Avoiding pressure or criticism
- Staying emotionally calm and supportive
- Acknowledging that the situation sounds difficult
- Respecting their emotional complexity and confusion

Helpful responses may include:

- “I’m here for you.”
- “That sounds really difficult.”
- “You don’t deserve to be treated that way.”
- “You’re not overreacting.”

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- “You don’t have to go through this alone.”

Support should help someone feel safer, not more ashamed.

3. Why “Just Leave” Is Not Simple

People often ask why survivors do not leave abusive relationships immediately.

The reality is far more complex.

Survivors may be navigating:

- Fear and intimidation
- Emotional attachment or trauma bonding
- Financial dependence
- Parenting concerns
- Housing instability
- Shame and self-blame
- Trauma responses and nervous system overwhelm
- Fear of escalation after leaving

Leaving safely often takes time, planning and emotional support.

Pressure and judgement can increase isolation and shame.

4. Supporting Without Taking Control

It is natural to want to “fix” the situation quickly when someone you care about is hurting.

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However, survivors of abuse often already feel controlled, pressured or emotionally unsafe.

Supportive help may include:

- Offering options instead of instructions
- Respecting their choices and pace
- Asking what support feels helpful
- Helping them access information or resources
- Supporting emotional safety and stability

Example:

Instead of saying:

“You need to leave now.”

Try:

“What would help you feel safest right now?”

5. Practical Ways to Help

Practical support can reduce overwhelm significantly.

This may include:

- Checking in regularly
- Helping with appointments or paperwork
- Offering transport or childcare support where appropriate
- Sharing support services gently

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- Helping create calmer environments
- Supporting you to create a safety/exit plan
- Being emotionally consistent and reliable

Small acts of support can have a meaningful emotional impact.

6. Understanding Trauma Responses

Someone experiencing abuse may react in ways that seem confusing from the outside.

They may:

- Return to the relationship
- Defend the abusive person
- Struggle to make decisions
- Seem emotionally detached or numb
- Minimise what is happening
- Become overwhelmed easily

These responses are often connected to fear, emotional survival and trauma responses.

They are not signs that someone “wants” abuse.

7. Looking After Yourself Too

Supporting someone through abuse can feel emotionally heavy.

It is important to:

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- Maintain healthy boundaries
- Access support if needed, e.g. support groups, friends, family
- Avoid taking full responsibility for the situation
- Recognise your own emotional limits
- Remember that lasting change takes time

You can care deeply about someone without carrying everything alone.

8. If Someone Is in Immediate Danger

If you believe someone is in immediate physical danger, contact emergency services or encourage access to specialist domestic abuse support.

Safety should always come first.

If This Feels Familiar

Support does not need to be perfect to make a difference.

Many survivors remember the people who listened calmly, believed them and helped reduce feelings of shame and isolation.

Emotionally safe support matters.

Support & Further Resources

You deserve support too if you are helping someone through difficult or unsafe experiences.

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Turning silence into understanding through lived experience.

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