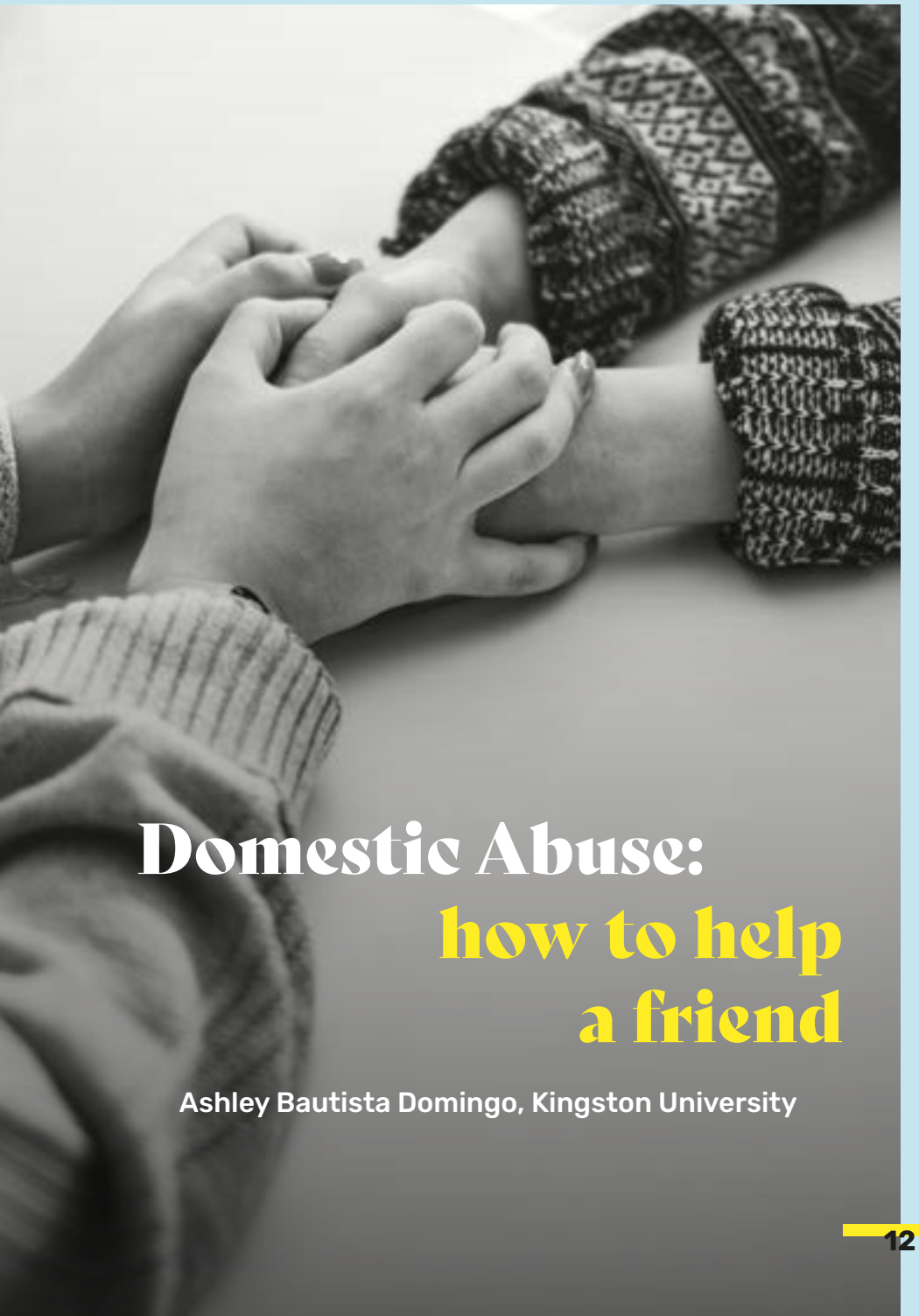


Domestic Abuse: how to help a friend

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Your flatmate tells you they've been abused by their partner. What do you do?

Every year, 2.3 million adults aged 16-74 experience domestic abuse. There's also a high suicide rate, of approximately 400 people each year, among those who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse. These figures underline the importance of ending the emotional and physical pain suffered by its victims.

And, putting these numbers into horrifying perspective, this time it's your friend; a young soul wanting to be loved, respected and valued, seeking happiness and stability. The early butterflies they felt faded away, because their partner – that person they thought they knew – began to treat them in a way they shouldn't.

It begins with small actions that may seem innocent or forgivable in the moment, but which worsen over time. The relationship always involves an imbalance of power and control. These forms include physical abuse; emotional and/or psychological abuse; financial or economic abuse; coercive control; harassment and stalking; and online or digital abuse. All of them are unacceptable.

The abuser uses intimidating and hurtful words and behaviour to control their partner. And 'control' is the word: according to Crimestoppers, a typical victim of domestic abuse endures up to 35 incidents from their partner before reaching out for help. "He would emotionally degrade me," revealed one student survivor of domestic abuse from their ex-partner. "Sometimes, when I look back, I cry because I can't believe I stuck around and allowed someone to make me feel my lowest."

One in four women and one in six men suffer domestic abuse. Should there be a price for love? The denial, hope, guilt and shame felt for an unsuccessful relationship keeps victims staying with their partners.

But in this hypothetical scenario, you've had enough. You can't – won't – see your friend suffer, physically and/or emotionally. So, how can you help?

Listen to your friend. Support them. Most importantly, ***believe*** them. Acknowledge their courage for speaking up, and tell them that nobody deserves to be threatened and abused by their partner. Getting involved doesn't mean you have to solve the situation, but you can make them feel heard, feel believed and feel as if they have somewhere to turn when needed. As the witness, to whom your friend has revealed the truth, you're there to help them, and that includes the vital assurance that they must not blame themselves.

You're their friend, so you'll want to fix this – but in such dangerous cases, the best thing you can do is point them in the direction of those best-placed to help. There can be a risk to you and others when with stepping in uninvited. You could suggest they also read stories from domestic abuse survivors, as a reassuring reminder that they aren't alone and that there's an end to the trauma. Encourage them to get in touch with an organisation to receive practical and emotional support, or even advice; these organisations can be found below. Ultimately, though, you must allow to them to make the decision themselves on what to do.

You ***can*** help. Just as you may have to tell your friend: you can do this.

Just as you may have to tell your friend: you can do this

Neighbourhood Watch
ourwatch.org.uk/DomesticAbuse

Victim Support
phone: 08 08 16 89 111 (24h)
live chat: *www.victimsupport.org.uk*

Freephone National Domestic Abuse Helpline,
run by Refuge: 0808 200 0247
www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Galop (LGBTQ+)
phone: 0800 999 5428
www.galop.org.uk

Men's Advice Line
phone: 0808 801 0327
www.mensadviceline.org.uk

There is a universal hand signal, created by the Women's Funding Network and the Canadian Women's Foundation, that someone can use to indicate on camera (or, say, when answering the door) that they're suffering domestic abuse. ***Palm to camera/visitor and tuck thumb, then fold the four fingers down.***

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