

If you were ever abused by anyone than the person you tell can be a parent, a grandparent, or caregiver. It can be a doctor or nurse. It can be a teacher, counselor, therapist, or coach. It can be a friend's parent. If you don't have an adult you can turn to, you can call or text **1-800-422-4453** to talk to someone at the Childhelp Hotlin.

You can start by saying you need to talk, and that you need to tell them something. Or that you need their help. You might feel nervous or awkward at first. But don't let that stop you. When the person is listening, just go ahead tell the truth about what has happened to you. If the first person you talk to doesn't help, tell someone else. Keep telling until an adult listens, believes what you say, and helps.

The most common question survivors get asked and the one behind which immense pain is hidden. Leaving an abusive relationship isn't as simple as walking away. There are many things a victim has to consider before taking this step such as their partner, finances, housing, dreams and more.

Emotional abuse involves nonphysical behavior that belittles another person. Emotional abuse can include insults, put downs, verbal threats or other tactics that make someone feel threatened, inferior, ashamed, or degraded. [You can learn about the five signs of emotional abuse here.](#)

Remember, emotional abuse is complicated and confusing. It's natural to have a lot of questions but be aware of your tone and phrasing. The person sharing with you is experiencing a lot in their relationship and most likely already feels a mix of emotions, including guilt and shame. Try not to add onto that.

Give the person experiencing emotional abuse space to share their story. It may be difficult, but do not jump in with advice, your personal thoughts or emotions. When listening to a story that's difficult to hear, check in to make sure you're actively listening by paraphrasing or repeating what you've heard, for example: *"I'm so sorry you're going through all of this. It sounds like a lot."*

Abusers are often very skilled at creating a façade: it may be hard to believe that they are capable of abuse. This doubt is a tool used to exercise control.

Believing someone when they tell you they were abused not only supports them but can also serve to loosen the control exercised over them by the person who is hurting them.

How to talk to a victim

"I'm here for you." Letting the person know that you're there to listen and provide support creates a safe space for them to open up. They might be feeling isolated, and your willingness to be present can be immensely comforting.

"I believe you." Believing their account of the events validates their experience and affirms that you take their feelings seriously. This can be especially important, as victims of harassment or abuse might fear not being believed.

"I'm so sorry you're going through this." Expressing genuine sympathy conveys your empathy and shows that you care about their well-being. It acknowledges their pain and the difficulty of their situation.

"It's not your fault." Many victims blame themselves for what happened, which can compound their emotional distress. Reiterating that the responsibility lies with the perpetrator helps them shift away from self-blame.

"What can I do to help?" Offering specific assistance demonstrates your commitment to being an active support. It also empowers them to decide how you can best contribute to their well-being.

"You don't have to go through this alone." Victims often feel isolated and vulnerable. Assuring them that they have someone in their corner can provide a sense of security and reduce their sense of isolation.

"Let's explore your options." This statement opens the door to discussing practical steps. Encourage them to think about actions they could take,

such as reporting the incident to the appropriate authorities or seeking legal advice.

"Have you considered talking to someone you trust about this?" Encouraging them to confide in someone they're close to can provide additional emotional support. Sharing the burden with someone they trust can be relieving.

"Your feelings are valid." Acknowledging their emotions validates their experience. It's common for victims to feel confused or guilty about their feelings, so your reassurance is important.

"It's okay to take your time." Pressure to make decisions quickly can add to their stress. Letting them know that they can proceed at their own pace empowers them to prioritize their own healing process.

"I'm proud of your courage in speaking up." Expressing admiration for their bravery reinforces their decision to address the situation and can boost their self-esteem.

"You deserve to be treated with respect." Reminding them of their worth reinforces that they shouldn't accept mistreatment. It can counteract any negative thoughts they may have about themselves.

"Let's document everything." Keeping records of incidents, messages, and interactions can be crucial if legal action or other formal steps need to be taken. Encourage them to keep a detailed record of what's happening.

"Consider blocking or limiting contact with the person." Providing practical strategies to reduce exposure to the harasser, abuser, or bully can help them regain a sense of control over their situation.

"Would you like to involve authorities or higher-ups?" This question acknowledges their agency in deciding how to proceed. It also emphasizes the seriousness of the situation and the possibility of seeking outside intervention.

"I'm proud of you for taking steps to protect yourself." Acknowledging their efforts shows that you recognize their agency and their commitment to their own well-being.

"You're not alone in this fight." Emphasizing that they have a network of people who care can provide a strong sense of support. It helps counteract the isolation they might feel.

"Your safety is the top priority." Prioritizing their safety reinforces the importance of their well-being above all else. It underscores that seeking safety and well-being is a legitimate goal.

"Let's look into resources together." Researching available support groups, hotlines, or professional help shows your commitment to finding them the resources they need to cope and heal.

"You're stronger than you realize." Reinforcing their strength and resilience can help boost their self-esteem, especially during a challenging time when they might doubt themselves.