

# I have heard about violent acts. How can I help those affected?

Tips from experts that help you if it is unclear what steps you can or should take.

- ➔ **Take what the person affected tells you seriously.**
- ➔ **Listen to her.**
- ➔ **Ask about what support she would like to have.**
- ➔ **Approach the woman**, tell her what you suspect or have observed. Do this only if you meet her alone.
- ➔ **Give the woman the feeling that you understand her and her situation**, no matter how she may react.
- ➔ **Your support is enormously important for the woman concerned**, even if you are unsure and unable to cope with the situation. Feelings such as fear, anger, despair and helplessness are normal in such exceptional situations.
- ➔ Even if the woman initially refuses your offer of help, **continue to offer her your support again and again.**
- ➔ **Pay attention to the needs of the affected person.** It may be that your own overstress creates great pressure to do something, but in this case the immediate needs of those affected are often overlooked.
- ➔ **Let the person decide for herself which steps she wants to take.** Each person concerned has her own pace and her own strategies for coping with the experience. It is important to accompany and support her and not to decide for her, even if it is well meaning.
- ➔ **Accompany her in her next steps**, if that is what she desires.
- ➔ **Make it clear to her that victims are not to blame for the violence.** Victims of violence often suffer massive shame and guilt. Recognising that guilt for the crime is to be attributed exclusively to the perpetrator, and that he bears the responsibility, is often very relieving for victims of violence.
- ➔ **Do not reproach the woman or push her into a defensive position.**
- ➔ **Do not speak disparagingly of the perpetrator.**
- ➔ **Give her time.** For relatives and friends it is often difficult to understand why the person concerned does not want to talk about the violence and withdraws, or why she does not want to take any legal action against the offender(s) or leave the perpetrator or why she continues – from an outside perspective – to live a „normal“ live and wants to forget and repress what has happened.
- ➔ **Respect the decision of the woman, even if she would choose another way** (e.g. in connection with a separation).
- ➔ **Give the woman concerned the feeling that you are supporting her in the steps** that she wants to undertake herself.

- **Do not put her under any pressure.** Especially after experiencing a violent act, where the person concerned was powerless and where her „no“ was not accepted, it is particularly important to accept requests and decisions of the person concerned and thus help her to regain control over her actions.
- **Do not plan or do anything that the person concerned does not want.** Decisions need to be worked out together with her.
- **Give her the address and phone number of violence counselling centres and women's shelters or accompany the woman to a meeting there.**
- **Make yourself available as a witness;** this can be of great importance for the victims.
- **When it comes to violence in your neighbourhood, call the police.** They must intervene and take appropriate measures.
- **If you witness a violent attack, you should not put yourself in danger.**
- **If children are affected by violence, report it to the police** and/or the youth welfare authority. These reports can also be filed anonymously.
- **As a family member or friend, you can seek help at a counselling centre,** express your fears and feelings in a meeting and find relief thanks to the advice of experts in order to have more confidence in dealing with your friend, relative or family member concerned.