



You Can Call a Hotline Even If You Don't Want to Leave

10 questions you can ask an advocate that have nothing to do with shelter

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Contrary to what many believe, shelter hotlines are not only for people who are looking for a safe escape from domestic abuse; the trained advocates on the other end of the phone are also ready to provide information and resources to a wide range of callers. Whether you are in a relationship that is feeling problematic—but you’re not quite sure if it’s abuse—or you’re worried about someone else who is being abused, consider the ways calling a hotline might help answer some of your questions.

Below are 10 questions you can ask a hotline that don’t have to do with shelter.

1) Is this abuse? If your partner has a pattern of treating you in a way that makes you uncomfortable or scared, it can be hard to decide if what they’re doing is abusive, especially if there is no physical violence. You may believe you are at fault, or tell yourself that the mistreatment is not so bad. Through a conversation with a hotline advocate, you can learn about psychological, financial, sexual and physical abuse, and coercive control. This information will help you understand your relationship and your options.

2) Would you mind just listening? Everyone needs an empathetic, trusting person to listen and validate their feelings without judging or blaming them. People who are abused by their partner become especially isolated and need this extra support. Friends and family may not know about the abuse, or may minimize its severity. People call hotlines to speak with someone who “gets it,” who knows how horrible it can be to live with insults, criticism, control, threats, and possibly physical and sexual violence. The helpline advocate cares about the well-being of the caller—which is a welcome contrast from abusers, who are likely to say they care while behaving in ways that are selfish and cruel.

3) Should I tell someone what’s going on, and if so, how? Often, people who are being abused at home want to confide in friends, family members or neighbors, but are not sure who to trust and how much they should say. You may have tried telling someone and they did not believe you, or did not respond as you had hoped. Talking this over with an advocate will help you get a

clearer sense of how to begin to tell the truth about the reality of your life, and why this is important.

4) What should I do when I'm ready to leave? People often call a hotline thinking they might want to end the relationship at some point in the future. The helpline advocate can help with careful safety planning to ensure that you and your loved ones, pets, and finances will be as well-protected as possible as you prepare to leave. Read, "When an Abuser Tries to Block Your Separation," for more tips on how to leave safely.

5) What can I do if things get worse? Sometimes people call a hotline because they believe something awful will happen soon. For instance, someone might believe their partner is preparing to sexually abuse their child, is planning to steal their money or might even kill them. The hotline advocate can help you assess various risks and walk you through a danger assessment to help you determine what level of danger you are in, and how you can best protect yourself and your loved ones.

6) Will my partner change? Sometimes people call a hotline seeking confirmation that the abuser can change after an arrest, swearing off alcohol or promising to attend therapy. You may want the advocate to provide reassurances that the abuser will change because you feel love for that person or believe the abuser's affirmations of love. Helpline advocates will not make false assurances, but can give callers ideas about signs to look for to see if things are getting better, or worse, or seem to be about the same. (Important to note: Abuse is not caused by alcohol or mental illness. Many people abuse alcohol or have mental illness but still do not abuse their partners).

7) Can you keep this information confidential? If you call a domestic violence hotline, most of the time they do not ask you to reveal your full name or address, and if they do, it's OK to say you want to stay anonymous. Therefore, you can speak freely without worrying that anyone will find out. This is different, for instance, from calling the police, who have been trained to act quickly, or therapists who—if they discover that a child is at risk of abuse—are mandated to call child abuse authorities. (We should note here that hotline advocates are also mandated reporters who will need to contact child protection authorities if they believe a child is in danger).

8) Am I going crazy? Many abusive strategies such as gaslighting, emotional abuse, sleep deprivation, micro-management, and the silent treatment make victims feel as if they are losing their minds. A conversation with a helpline advocate can be tremendously reassuring. If you live with regular control and violence, you are likely enduring tremendous stress which can create symptoms including an inability to concentrate, forgetfulness and feeling either numb or excessively emotional. Removing the stress is the first step toward recovery.

9) What about the kids, pets, money, housing, and everything else if I decide to go? Hotline advocates typically have a range of local referrals for callers, to help them manage all the many parts of their lives if they decide to leave.

10) How can I help my friend/daughter/coworker? Domestic violence hotlines are not for survivors only—they often support and provide advice to concerned friends, family members, neighbors and colleagues. If you're concerned about possible abuse a loved one is enduring, you can call a hotline and get advice about how to broach the topic safely and the best way to intervene.

A domestic violence hotline is a resource for the entire community and is not simply a conduit for shelter beds. If you or someone you know needs help, reach out to a hotline near you. In the U.S., you can also chat with an advocate 24/7 every day of the year at The National Domestic Violence

Hotline by calling 800-799-7233. If you are not able to call safely, you can text LOVEIS to 866-331-9474.