



Published on *Go Ask Alice!* (<https://goaskalice.columbia.edu>)

[Home](#) > Sister in abusive relationship

Sister in abusive relationship ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am having a problem with somebody else's relationship. It's my sister. I love her dearly and I know that she is being beaten by her boyfriend. She is tied to him by the fact that she has a child of six months by him. She doesn't want to come to her family for help. I think that this is largely because she is ashamed of herself and his behavior toward her. I simply cannot "mind my own business" because I am genuinely worried for her safety and the safety of my niece.

Part of me wants her to sort the problem out for herself, but she is so immature and is used to having men do things for her. This has been going on for some time now. What can I do to stop him?

Yours,
Concerned Sibling

Answer

Dear Concerned Sibling,

It's great that you're looking out for your sister and her child and thinking about their well-being. The most productive thing you can do is to talk with your sister and let her know that you're worried about any harm — physical or otherwise — they may be experiencing at the hands of her boyfriend. Having a direct but empathetic conversation will let her know that you're concerned but also that you're there for her. With that in mind, it's also key to mention that attempting to physically intervene and stop your sister's boyfriend may put you and them in harm's way, so it's great that you've reached out to learn about options to help and support your sister. To prepare for the discussion, you might want to think about what you want to say, how you want to say it, and any resources you may want to share with her. Doing this can help show your support and help her find a way out of her abusive relationship when she's ready.

Before you jump into the conversation, you may reflect on the following questions: How do you know her boyfriend is beating her? Have you noticed any changes in her personality or behavior? Have you talked about this with her in the past? If so, how did she react? Do other members of your family also suspect that her boyfriend is causing her harm? How will you react if your sister

doesn't want your help? Asking yourself these questions will help you get clarity on what you believe to be occurring in her relationship. This will also help you frame how you want to approach the conversation. You might also want to get in touch with a domestic violence hotline. They can help you strategize how to talk with your sister and could also be a great resource for her to turn to if she chooses to leave the relationship:

- [National Bilingual Domestic Violence Hotline](#) ^[2]: (800) 799- 7233
- [Office on Violence Against Women \(OVW\) of the U.S. Department of Justice](#) ^[3]

As you approach the conversation you'd like to have with your sister, you may want to start by writing down your talking points. This can help ensure that you sharing all of your thoughts in the way you'd like to say it. Additionally, in order to avoid labeling or passing judgment on your sister's situation, it's helpful to share what you see and your own perspective — one strategy is to use "I" statements. You can also explain your feelings (such as your worry) about the situation, and reiterate that you'll be there to support and help her in whatever action or direction she decides to take. You can also remind her that the abuse isn't her fault, and nothing that your sister is doing is causing her boyfriend to act that way.

Keep in mind, Concerned Sibling, that people choose to stay in abusive relationships for a number of reasons. It's possible that your sister has received messages such as "It's your duty to stay with them," or "You have to do it for the child" and feels obligated to stay. It's also altogether possible that she's in denial and doesn't think anything is wrong. She may also feel like she has no way out. Being mindful of these potential circumstances may help you better frame the conversation.

When you speak with your sister, it's wise to consider that this is a first step. It's unlikely that she'll immediately change her entire life and no one can make the decision on how to proceed except for her. She may already be in a situation where someone is exerting power and control over her, and if you also try to tell her what to do, it can cause confusion and put additional stress on her. Additionally, if a family member tries to force your sister out of this situation, it can actually make things worse — it's possible that her boyfriend may try to isolate her from friends and family to limit any interference into their relationship. If she does decide to leave, it's key that she has a safety plan developed. The time that a person decides to leave an abusive relationship can be the most dangerous for a survivor of abuse, so it's critical to know when it's safest to leave and to have a plan in place. [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) ^[4] has information on a number of different scenarios to help develop a safety plan that's most appropriate.

You may still feel worried about your sister after the conversation, especially if she doesn't decide to make any changes or take any action immediately. However, by reiterating your support to your sister, regardless of any decisions she makes, will help her feel more comfortable coming to you if she does decide to make any changes in the future. You may also find it helpful to work through your concerns or plan your discussion with a mental health professional, who can help you manage your own concerns and well-being. It can be hard to realize that you may not be able to directly stop what you understand is happening. Taking care of yourself in this process is also key. All in all, being there to lean on when she's ready is likely the most productive way help her.

Alice!

Category:

[Relationships](#) [5]

[Nonconsensual Relationships](#) [6]

Related questions

[Girlfriend's ex-boyfriend won't go away](#) [7]

[Forgiving myself after being sexually abused](#) [8]

[What about emotional abuse?](#) [9]

[Lentil is a lentil is a lentil?](#) [10]

Resources

[Sexual Violence Response & Rape Crisis/Anti-Violence Support Center](#) [11]

Published date:

Dec 01, 1993

Last reviewed on:

Apr 27, 2018

Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
 - [Content Use](#)
 - [Media Inquiries](#)
 - [Comments & Corrections](#)
- ▼ [Syndication & Licensing](#)
 - [Licensing Q&As](#)
 - [Get Alice! on Your Website](#)
 - [Full Site Syndication](#)
 - [Link to Go Ask Alice!](#)

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please [visit our Emergency page](#) to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/sister-abusive-relationship>

Links

[1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/sister-abusive-relationship>

[2] <http://www.ndvh.org/>

[3] <https://ovc.gov/help/tollfree.html>

[4] <http://www.thehotline.org/help/path-to-safety/#types>

[5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/relationships>

[6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nonconsensual-relationships>

[7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/girlfriends-ex-boyfriend-wont-go-away-0>

[8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/forgiving-myself-after-being-sexually-abused-0>

[9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/what-about-emotional-abuse-0>

[10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/lentil-lentil-lentil-0>

[11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/sexual-violence-response-rape-crisisanti-violence-support-center>