

Three Ways to Support Domestic Violence Survivors

Supporting survivors includes holding space for them by being physically, mentally, and emotionally present. This support allows others to express themselves without fear of judgment; it can be life-changing for survivors of domestic violence. During Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), here are three ways to hold space for survivors.

1

Listen Without Judgement

Listening attentively is one of the most powerful ways to hold space. Listen to their words and emotions instead of interrupting or offering unsolicited advice. By listening without judgment, survivors can feel understood and less alone in their struggles. Here are some ways to be attentive without judgment:

- **Reflect** on what you hear to show you're engaged
- **Ask** open-ended questions
- **Validate** the other person's experience
- **Be present** when victims of violence or sexual assault are ready to open up

2

Validate Their Feelings

It is vital to **validate** the survivor's feelings without diminishing them. It is okay to acknowledge and validate the survivor's feelings while at the same time letting them know they have made or are about to make the right decision for them.

Often, all they need is a listening and trusting friend. Using phrases like "It's okay to feel this way" or "What you're feeling is completely understandable" affirms survivors' feelings.

3

Respect Their Boundaries

Trauma is a complex thing, and not everyone is ready to talk about it. Let them lead the conversation and be sensitive to their needs. Respect their **boundaries** if they prefer silence or need time to gather their thoughts. By respecting their boundaries, you show them that you value their comfort and autonomy, fostering a sense of security.