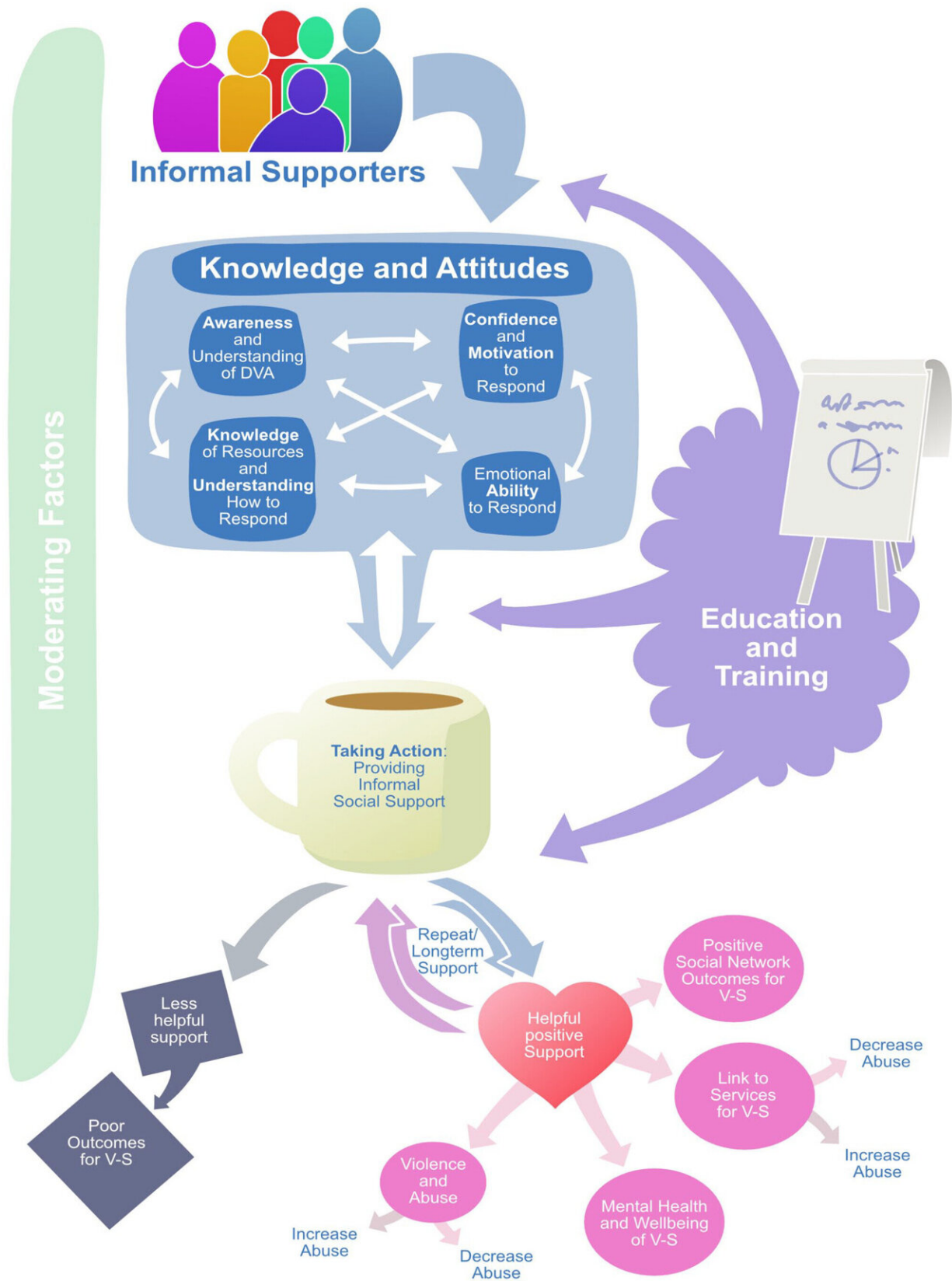


# **Study finds education about domestic abuse improves knowledge and motivation to respond to victims**

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Logic model: How education/training interventions influence outcomes. Credit: *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* (2023). DOI: 10.1177/15248380231189191

Education about domestic abuse equips and empowers friends, colleagues, and neighbors to respond in positive and helpful ways when someone discloses experiences of abuse, finds a new study by researchers from UCL and SafeLives.

The study, published in the journal *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, synthesized the findings of 11 existing studies from around the world that examined the effects of [domestic abuse](#) training for colleagues, neighbors, or faith leaders.

It concluded that educational activities tailored towards friends, colleagues and neighbors improves their awareness and understanding of domestic abuse, knowledge of how to respond, and motivation to do so, especially in the short term. This increases the likelihood that they will take action to [support](#) individuals experiencing abusive relationships.

However, the study did not find evidence about the kind of support that might be provided and whether it would be viewed as helpful by victim-survivors.

Dr. Karen Schucan Bird (IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society), the lead author of the research, said, "For people living with domestic abuse, empathetic and helpful responses from friends, colleagues and neighbors are vital. These responses can affect individuals' safety as well as their well-being, [mental health](#), and decision to seek further help."

"Our study suggests education can play a role in equipping friends, colleagues and neighbors with the knowledge and skills to react

positively and support individuals experiencing abuse. This re-affirms the importance and potential of social and community networks for supporting victims of abuse as part of a societal-wide response."

"Our findings provide further impetus to employers, community and faith organizations to provide education about domestic abuse as part of their duty of care—by upskilling their workers or members and teaching them how best to respond to such situations."

"To respond positively to disclosures of abuse, it is important to listen with empathy, to create a space where people can explain their situation and experiences without being judged, and to know about helplines and local organizations that can provide expert support."

Based on research, Dr. Schucan Bird and SafeLives identified four steps for responding positively in the form of "four Rs":

- Recognize: Become aware of the signs of domestic abuse.
- Respond: Listen without judgment and show empathy.
- Reassure: Convey belief and validate the experiences of your friend, relative or neighbor.
- React: Find out about local sources of support and offer to help.

The 11 studies reviewed in the new paper were chosen out of 9,345 records found in research databases and [online resources](#). They included mainly self-reported data—i.e., participants reporting on whether the training they received had improved their knowledge and awareness of domestic abuse—with one study providing independent assessments of these outcomes.

The training ranged from one-hour online presentations to more in-depth courses taking place over several days, but focused on similar subjects: basic information on [risk factors](#) and warning signs of abuse, the impacts

on victim-survivors, businesses, and wider community, and the support needs of victim-survivors. Most of the data about the training's effectiveness was collected immediately or three or six months after the training.

The study found statistically significant evidence that educational activities aimed at informal supporters improved their knowledge and attitudes in the short term.

Analyzing these shifts in knowledge and attitudes in light of a behavior change model called COM-B, the paper found evidence that the training fulfilled the three essential conditions for behavior change: capability, opportunity, and motivation.

That is, being able to spot warning signs of domestic abuse increased opportunities to provide support; understanding the devastating impacts that domestic abuse could have increased motivation to help; and capability to support was improved through an awareness of the resources that could help, such as helplines and domestic [abuse](#) charities.

**More information:** Karen Schucan Bird et al, Training Informal Supporters to Improve Responses to Victim-Survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Systematic Review, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/15248380231189191](https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231189191)

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