

UNITED WISDOM

How to support someone under pressure

Relationships and Intimacy

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *through affection and understanding*

Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace*, Chapter I, closing paragraph, p. 30. Fragment of an authorial sentence, Macmillan edition, 1906.

What this article is about

When someone close to us is under pressure, the desire to help often runs ahead of our understanding. We want details immediately, want to identify the person responsible, draw up a plan and secure compliance. Yet someone who already has to justify themselves to somebody else may hear another demand in that care. Support begins with a more modest question: what can I do so that, in my company, they have a little more choice available?

Pressure takes different forms. A colleague's persistent request, family disapproval and a threat of harm call for different responses. This article concerns supporting an adult, rather than assigning a diagnosis or supplying a universal rescue plan. In immediate danger, talking about feelings does not replace local emergency help. Where abuse may be involved, a safe way to communicate and suitable specialist support matter, even if the person does not yet want to describe what is happening in detail.

We will consider an imagined story about two friends, Lena and Dasha. It is fictional and represents neither research nor a model of correct behaviour for everyone. Historical texts will offer several questions to think with, while current guidance will help identify limits. The practical outcome is small: offer a specific action, agree how to stay in touch and leave the person free to change their answer. Neither a well-chosen phrase nor good intentions alone guarantee safety, trust or a change in somebody else's behaviour.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

I. Notice without turning the person into a case

In our imagined scene, Lena has cancelled several meetings. During a short conversation, she says that at home she is continually required to explain every time she goes out. Dasha is worried. She wants to ask immediately who is demanding this, what happened yesterday and why Lena has not done anything yet. But at present she has only a few things Lena said and her observation about the meetings. Worry cannot make missing information known, although the need for support may already be real.

Dasha can begin with something specific: she is sorry her friend is going through this, and she is willing to listen if Lena wants. This does not require Lena to confirm Dasha's interpretation or provide a complete history. The invitation needs to allow for no conversation at all. Someone may want company, help with an ordinary task or simply to sit without questions. These answers do not necessarily indicate trust or distrust: we do not know every reason for the choice at that moment.

In an ordinary disagreement, it can be useful to clarify the request, deadline or agreement involved. With threats, control of movement or possible abuse, the situation cannot automatically be treated as a dispute between two equally placed parties. The NHS page on domestic abuse lists isolation, financial control, monitoring and threats among its signs. These are reasons to take a disclosure seriously, rather than assign a diagnosis ourselves. Support need not depend on visible injuries. NHS

Nor must a helper recite every sign to the person and check each item like a questionnaire. Dasha can hear a particular disclosure without demanding an immediate verdict on what to call the relationship. If Lena herself uses the word pressure, that is enough to begin a considerate conversation. Clarification is useful when it helps choose the next action, rather than satisfying curiosity or gathering material for a final judgment about somebody else.

Sometimes the helper's hardest step is acknowledging that they do not know the whole picture. This means neither indifference nor a need to wait for conclusive evidence. We can take what is reported seriously, distinguish what is known from what is unknown and refrain from promising an outcome. Dasha need not become an investigator to offer food, accompaniment or quiet company. Equally, confidence in her own insight does not entitle her to decide how Lena should live next.

II. First agree how to communicate

An ordinary friendly gesture may be unsuitable where control is involved. A long message discussing the relationship in detail, an unexpected evening call or a photograph of a meeting posted on social media could reveal something the person did not intend to share. Before a substantive conversation, it is therefore worth finding out whether now is a suitable time and what contact is acceptable. The opening question need not describe the sensitive subject in detail when we do not know who sees the screen or hears the conversation.

At a suitable moment, Dasha can ask when and how it is best to get in touch. This does not promise invisible communication. The US National Domestic Violence Hotline warns that internet use can be monitored and cannot be erased completely. Advice simply to delete messages must therefore not become a guarantee. We are not offering technical instructions for concealment here; with this risk, ways of contacting support are better discussed with an appropriate specialist service. The Hotline

An agreement may be simple: do not write about personal matters now, meet at an already familiar time, ask first whether a conversation is possible. But its details are chosen with the person, rather than announced as a universally safe rule. A neutral phrase alone does not rule out somebody else's attention. If Dasha is uncertain, she should not invent an elaborate signalling system and present it as a verified means of protection. Such a system requires understanding particular circumstances and limits.

It also matters to distinguish personal support from public advocacy. Dasha may want to write to friends, publish the story or show that Lena is not alone. But circulating information without agreement can deprive Lena of control over who knows what. Even without a name, details can sometimes identify someone. The Hotline specifically advises against posting information that could identify the person or places they spend time. Asking whether a particular action is acceptable is more useful than assuming publicity is beneficial.

The right to decline a conversation remains after contact has been agreed. Lena may change the time, choose another subject or say she cannot answer today. Dasha can state her own availability, but should not turn access into a reporting requirement. An agreement about the next contact serves both friends' convenience, rather than continually checking Lena's behaviour. Immediate danger calls for separate action; silence in a messaging thread alone does not establish that such danger has occurred.

III. Listen without testing their resolve

Imagine that Lena decides to say a little more. Dasha hears things that make her want to interrupt and advise immediately. For a short time she can set aside her own plan and ask what her friend wants from the conversation: to be heard, to think through options or to have a particular task done. This question does not require a final strategy. Someone can want one thing today and another tomorrow; a partial understanding does not make the conversation worthless.

We can acknowledge the difficulty of what we hear without assigning a feeling. If Dasha says the situation sounds frightening, Lena may answer that at present she is more tired than afraid. That correction deserves acceptance. A ready-made emotional account can obstruct hearing the particular experience. Support allows the person’s words, pauses and disagreement with the helper’s interpretation. Dasha retains her own anxiety, but Lena need not confirm it every minute to deserve care.

The NHS recommends listening without blame and not pushing someone to talk when they do not want to. We use this as a current boundary for conversation about possible abuse, rather than a promise that attentive listening will remove risk. Dasha can refrain from asking why Lena was silent before or has changed her decision again. She can say that threats and harm do not become deserved because of disagreement, a mistake or a difficult conversation.

The conversation should not become a test of consistency. Lena may remember events in an order unfamiliar to Dasha and may not want to explain certain details. This does not automatically establish either dishonesty or the accuracy of every assumption. Her friend can stay alongside her without writing a final conclusion. If a professional or service needs information for a particular referral, that is a separate process with its own purpose; a friendly meeting need not reproduce it in advance.

Sometimes Dasha has already snapped, asking why Lena allows it. Repair is possible without a lengthy speech about her own good intentions. She can acknowledge that the question sounded blaming and offer to continue differently or stop. Lena need not immediately reassure her friend or forgive the awkward remark. Here support also means being willing to tolerate the absence of quick confirmation that everything is fine again. Correcting a phrase is the helper’s action; restored trust is a possible outcome, without a guarantee.

IV. Do not take the vacant position of director

Once a story has been heard, taking charge becomes tempting. Dasha may decide whom to call, what belongings to gather and which relationships to end. But supporting an adult does not automatically give her authority over their decisions. Being able to suggest an option differs from being entitled to make it compulsory. It is particularly important not to make continued company conditional on immediately doing what the helper considers right. Help then begins to depend on obedience.

The Hotline explicitly places life decisions with the person and recommends not judging their choices. This does not mean that Dasha must approve of harm or silently accept every request. She can take what she has heard seriously and state her own limit. But care should not be used as a reward for the required answer. In our story, Lena may not yet know which decision is available; an unfinished decision does not make her undeserving of friendship.

The words that the decision is yours also require honesty. They mean little if followed by a stream of messages, reproaches or a conspicuous disappearance after each disagreement. A helper can have anxiety, fatigue and reasons to decline a particular action. Naming these directly is better than disguising punishment as respect for choice. Dasha can say she is unwilling to negotiate with the person pressuring Lena, while being willing to help her contact suitable support.

Do not arrange an unexpected joint meeting to secure reconciliation. Where abuse may be involved, a format in which everyone supposedly explains themselves on equal terms may not fit the actual conditions. This article does not propose mediation as a safe solution. If Lena wants to learn about a particular form of help, she can approach professionals who understand such situations and discuss available options. Dasha’s wish to see the relationship repaired creates no obligation for Lena to meet someone she fears.

Respect for choice does not remove the distinct case of immediate danger. It does not imply a general prohibition on seeking emergency help before obtaining convenient, detailed consent. We derive no universal legal rule from a friendly conversation. With a current threat to life, local emergency services and safe action appropriate to the circumstances are needed. Preferences can be discussed in a calm moment; in danger, we cannot promise that any previously chosen decision eliminates risk.

V. Offer help that can be accepted in part

A sweeping promise to do everything sounds warm but leaves uncertainty. What exactly is available today? For how long? Are details expected in exchange? Dasha can offer one ordinary action: bring groceries, accompany Lena to an appointment or help find a service’s official contact. Lena benefits from being able to accept part of the offer or decline it without proving gratitude. The scale of the action is determined by real capacity, rather than the intensity of the promise.

Fictional Lena asks for help with groceries but does not yet want to discuss other questions. Dasha can accept this request without a hidden sequel requiring a plan once the delivery is made. The agreement remains what was agreed. If the helper needs to limit the amount or time, she can say so in advance in ordinary language. A clear limit does not make small assistance less real; an expansive promise can instead create a new, uncertain dependence.

Practical actions also require care. A money transfer, delivery, storing belongings or accompaniment may have consequences unknown to the helper. Not every idea drawn from somebody else’s experience should immediately be implemented. Dasha can ask whether a particular method is acceptable and agree who will know about it. Where abuse may be involved, risk assessment and a full safety plan are better discussed with a suitable specialist service; a few suggestions in an article do not replace that conversation.

If Lena wants to seek help, Dasha can offer company while finding a contact or attending. The right to tell the story remains with Lena. Her friend need not speak on her behalf, add assumptions or answer for her without agreement. They can clarify beforehand what participation is welcome: walking together, waiting nearby or helping formulate a question. A service’s availability, conditions and jurisdiction should be checked directly rather than assumed from its name.

Support should not become a debt repaid through compliance. Dasha can accept thanks without treating her spending as grounds for determining later decisions. Lena can also ask whether an offer has conditions. Clarity protects both from unspoken expectations. If help is paid or limited by an agreement, that is a distinct arrangement worth naming. A friendly action does not require inventing professional-service status or promising availability that does not actually exist.

VI. Three historical voices and the limits of analogy

In the first chapter of *Newer Ideals of Peace*, Jane Addams seeks an active alternative to a military model of social life. Everyday knowledge of people and sustained participation in their lives matter to her. We draw a question for the helper from this: how closely is my idea of doing good connected with this particular person? This is historical reflection on cities and social cooperation, rather than a domestic-abuse manual. Her hope of overcoming war is not used as a verified prediction. Addams

In the Gospel story of the Samaritan, attention goes to someone needing care, and assistance includes concrete actions and another person's involvement: the innkeeper. For this topic, it offers an image of care with a material dimension and continuation. But the story answers a religious question about one's neighbour, rather than establishing contemporary consent procedures. Its oil and wine are not medical instructions for readers today. Luke 10:25–37

In paragraph 45 of the *Enchiridion*, Epictetus distinguishes describing an action from adding an assessment when its grounds are unknown. In support, that question can turn towards our own haste: what have I heard, and what have I already attributed? It does not prohibit recognising harm or threats. The Stoic text concerns human judgment, rather than contemporary safety services. It does not require Lena to maintain contact, prove goodwill or endure pressure for the sake of philosophical discipline. Epictetus

These voices have different tasks and foundations. Addams considers social organisation, the Gospel story concerns one's neighbour and Epictetus addresses judgment. They cannot be combined into a single teaching on safe assistance. We compare limited questions and check decisions about contemporary risk against current specialist guidance. Where a historical image does not answer a particular question, acknowledging the gap is preferable to building a compulsory instruction for somebody else's life out of it.

For Dasha, historical analogy is useful only while it returns attention to Lena. It stops helping if her friend becomes an example of nobility, a spiritual lesson or the correct way to pass a trial. A person need not find meaning in pressure to receive support. Nor must the helper undergo a heroic transformation. Sometimes doing what is available, without giving that action power over somebody else's future, is enough. This is an editorial application of questions, rather than a claim that all traditions agree.

VII. When conversation gives way to urgent help

If an attack is occurring now, there is an immediate threat to life or another emergency, the task differs from a calm friendly conversation. Emergency help should be sought where the person is located, taking their safety and the helper's safety into account. Numbers supplied by the British NHS and the US Hotline belong to their respective countries; we do not present them as worldwide numbers. Do not enter a dangerous confrontation to demonstrate loyalty or wait until the ideal supportive phrase is found.

If there is no immediate danger now, that does not mean help must wait until an attack. The NHS explicitly distinguishes emergency contact from obtaining support earlier. For a particular city or country, available local services, medical assistance and specialist organisations need to be identified. Their hours, conditions and contact methods can differ. Dasha can assist this search without promising that every contact found will provide protection or immediately resolve all the questions.

This article does not construct a full safety plan. Circumstances we do not know may be important to one, and nobody should have to disclose them publicly to complete an exercise. There is no requirement here to gather documents, leave immediately, tell every acquaintance or meet the person applying pressure. Such actions cannot be prescribed identically to everyone. With possible abuse, specialist advice that considers availability and safe contact can be useful; this recommendation does not guarantee a particular outcome from seeking help.

If Lena reports physical harm, Dasha can offer accompaniment to medical care without substituting her own inspection for professional assessment. If her friend wants information about legal options, an appropriate local source is needed. We make no general assertions here about who must report or how every incident is handled. Clearly distinguishing friendly support, medical care and local procedures helps prevent promises beyond one's actual role.

The helper may need support too. Dasha can seek advice about her role and limits without disclosing unnecessary identifying details. She can acknowledge that she does not know what to do and obtain professional guidance. This differs from passing the story to all her friends for emotional relief. If the situation exceeds her capacity, naming the limit honestly is better than remaining the sole promised source of help and quietly disappearing at the hardest moment.

VIII. Stay alongside without an unlimited promise

Support often continues beyond the first conversation. Dasha may tire of uncertainty and want a visible result. But contact with a person is not a project with a compulsory outcome by a fixed date. Lena may change her decision, decline an offered action or return to an earlier option. That does not entitle Dasha to declare all help pointless or demand a report. At the same time, Dasha herself has finite energy, time and other commitments.

They can agree an available next step: a short meeting on a particular day, help with one contact or availability during agreed hours. The arrangement should not impersonate a round-the-clock service if it is not one. If Dasha cannot answer at night, it matters to say so without shame or blame. An urgent situation needs a separate local route; a friend’s phone should not be presented as the only possibility. A helper’s limit can form part of clarity rather than withdrawal of care.

Sometimes a friend declines help. Dasha can leave the door open within a clear scope: if wanted, she can return to this offer. Repeating it every day after a refusal, however, is not necessarily useful. A refusal concerns a particular possibility and moment; it does not establish that nobody at all is needed. Agreeing whether a later question is welcome makes sense, rather than choosing between intrusive control and a conspicuous total disappearance.

After the conversation, Dasha can ask what she actually did: listened, offered, clarified the contact method or performed an agreed action. That is the part available to her. Somebody else’s change of behaviour, Lena’s decision and the whole situation’s safety are not fully within her control. The distinction does not diminish the seriousness of events; it helps her avoid claiming success or guilt for everything. Compassion does not require a promise of complete knowledge and control over another life.

There is no happy ending to our imagined scene that would prove these suggestions correct. Lena has accepted groceries and a meeting, while other decisions remain open. Dasha knows a little more about what she can do today and demands less of her friend. Support in this limited sense is being a person alongside another person: taking things seriously, not trading care, noticing risk and honestly stating the limits of one’s knowledge and action.

What this means in practice

The practice is voluntary and intended for a calm situation where reflection and contact do not create additional risk. In immediate danger, set it aside and seek appropriate local emergency help. Sensitive details need not be written on a device or in a place where others may see them. You can do only the reflection, skip any step or stop. The exercise does not test a relationship’s safety or replace a specialist plan.

First separate what you heard from your account of it. What did the person actually say, and what did you assume about causes and needs? Do not compile a dossier or demand evidence. Choose one question needed for the next action: whether talking is convenient, what they want from the meeting or whether a particular form of help is acceptable. If suitable contact conditions are absent, do not move into details merely to finish the exercise.

Then formulate one offer with a real limit. For example, you might help find an official local contact, bring groceries or accompany someone seeking help, if needed and acceptable. Leave room to accept part, decline or think. Clarify who may know about the agreement. Promise neither secrecy without exceptions nor guaranteed protection; an immediate threat to life requires a separate safe route, rather than waiting for every answer in the exercise.

Finally examine your own expectation. Does your offer demand gratitude, a detailed account, immediate departure or reconciliation? The condition can be removed, or the action’s limit honestly stated. If help is agreed, perform that particular help. If the answer is negative or has not yet arrived, the person has not failed. The practical result is a clearer offer and an understanding of the helper’s role; trust, future decisions and safety are not declared achieved merely because every step was completed.

Key quotation

> *daily knowledge and constant companionship*

Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace*, Chapter I, p. 30. Fragment of an authorial sentence on sustaining active involvement. Historical social thought, rather than a guarantee of safety.

Connections between traditions

Source and context	Question for this topic	Difference and limit
Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace*, Chapter I; social cooperation	Is my idea of assistance connected to a person’s particular life?	Historical social ethics; neither a contemporary protection plan nor a verified prediction of peace.
Luke 10:25–37; the question of one’s neighbour	Does care take a concrete material form?	Christian narrative; neither a theory of consent nor a medical algorithm.
Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, paragraph 45	What do I know, and what have I already attributed?	Stoic distinction of action and assessment; no prohibition on recognising harm or limiting contact.

This comparison is by United Wisdom. It claims no agreement among all traditions and derives no modern safety rules from an ancient text. Separate current specialist sources are used for those questions.

Sources

• Jane Addams. Newer Ideals of Peace. New York: Macmillan, 1906; printed December 1906, Gutenberg 69879. Title details and selected authorial paragraphs of Chapter I were read with adjacent context; embedded quotations of other writers are not used as Addams's words.

• National Domestic Violence Hotline. Ways to Support. US specialist organisation. Internet-monitoring warning and emotional/material support sections checked. Linked safety plans and local service providers were not verified.

• NHS. Domestic violence and abuse. British source; page last reviewed 23 June 2026. Signs, seeking help and supporting a friend sections read. British contacts are not represented as available in every country.

• Luke 10:25–37. Updated World English Bible, eBible.org. Selected narrative read with chapter context; no modern treatment is derived from it.

• Epictetus. Enchiridion, paragraph 45. Elizabeth Carter translation, Internet Classics Archive. Selected paragraph read with adjacent context; the version's precise print basis was not established.

Tags

support, pressure, choice, safety, agreement, contact, listening, assistance, friendship, limits, responsibility, threats, control, availability, uncertainty, privacy, accompaniment, local services, participation, material help, refusal, trust, Addams, Epictetus, Luke, Stoicism, Christianity, social ethics, practice, United Wisdom

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki