

Making it Safe up-front for victims of domestic violence

The information below comes from a survey response of 72 up-front workers across DHS. You can use this information in planning what your response should be when domestic violence victims come to your office.

Up-front:

Safety is the primary concern...

- If the victim is being hurt in the lobby or parking lot, call the police and then notify your manager.
- Take the victim to a safe and private place to talk about domestic violence. Be discreet. Don't talk about possible domestic violence in front of a potential abuser or other people in the lobby.
- Notify the screener, worker, counselor or protective services worker when domestic violence is disclosed or suspected.
- Don't make the client wait if you can avoid it.
- If the client has come to the wrong office, still make sure she's seen. *It may not be safe for her to go to the other office.*
- Know where the client can get help. If you can, give the client a name of a person at the crisis program. If the client is in crisis and can't make the call, call for them.
- Give the client resource information. Information should include what services are available through DHS as well as services through community partner. Examples include: Information or brochures from your local domestic violence crisis program; victim assistance; housing; food; medical help; *legal aid*; Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors (TA-DVS) program.
- If the client is applying for services, give them an application to complete. If they are unable to complete it, offer assistance.
- If we're unable to help the person directly, for example women without children who are applying for TA-DVS, then give them other resources and referrals.
- Be observant. Is the abuser in the immediate area?

Talking to the client:

Be respectful, show compassion, build trust, be supportive, help the client feel as safe as possible. Believe the client. It is not easy to disclose abuse. Most importantly, listen to what the client needs. Explain that the abuse is not their fault. Learn about the effects of trauma. The goal is to empower the client to make their own decisions. A client should have a voice in what is happening. Stay calm.

- Find out if the person is in immediate danger. Is the abuser in the lobby? Sitting in the car? Etc.
- Ask the client if she is safe.
- Does the client need to have the police called?
- Is the worker is not immediately available, keep the client informed of steps you're taking to get them seen.
- Share with the client what you can keep confidential and what you can't. Inform the client if you hear something that requires a mandatory report of child abuse, elder abuse or abuse of people with disabilities. *You could encourage the client to report or help the client safety plan around the report.*
- Pay attention to the client's body language. Are they looking over their shoulder or keeping an eye on the front door? These could be signs the abuser is close by.
- *If visible injury, you can say something like, "that looks like it really hurts" without putting the victim on the spot.*
- Does the client need to see a doctor?
- Ask questions in non-judgmental ways.
- Reassure the client that the violence is not her fault.
- Avoid putting too many demands on the client.
- Don't promise things you can not do.

The environment:

- Have posters against domestic violence in the lobby.
- Many offices have packets assembled with DV related materials.
- Keep brochures, crisis cards, and information in locations where clients can pick them up without having to disclose abuse.
- Keep Kleenex up-front

Additional workplace safety issues are address in the "DHS Emergency Action Handbook" - DHS 0053