



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS AND HOUSING



What Housing and Homeless
Organizations Need to Know

Training Objectives

1. [Domestic Violence and Homelessness](#)
2. [Recognizing and Responding to DV](#)
3. [Domestic Violence Advocacy](#)
4. [Scenarios for Discussion](#)
5. [Resources](#)
6. [Acknowledgements](#)

Understanding the Dynamics

- DV is a pattern of coercive power and control
- Abusive partner's behavior often affects survivor's choices and behavior – both to increase her/his own safety and to cope
- Survivors have real fears, beyond physical safety (ex. deportation; losing custody)
- May seem difficult to identify victim vs. abuser

Section 1: DV and Homelessness

More than shelter....

“The availability of safe, affordable, and stable housing can make a critical difference in a woman’s ability to escape an abusive partner and remain safe and independent. Without viable housing options, many battered women, particularly those already living in poverty, are forced to remain in abusive relationships, accept inadequate or unsafe housing conditions, or become homeless and perhaps increase their risk of sexual and physical violence.”

-Anne Menard

Why Talk About DV?

DV is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children (families) in the U.S.

- Survivors often must leave housing to escape DV
- May be evicted due to abusive partner's behavior
- DV interferes with ability to access housing - bad credit, poor rental histories, safety needs
- Abuse partner can sabotage survivor's economic stability - trouble paying deposit, rent and utilities

Housing Insecurity

Homelessness is only one end of a continuum of housing problems faced by DV survivors

- Missed or late payments for rent/utilities
- Compromises: selling belongings or skipping food to make payments
- Ineligibility for housing services due to credit, landlord, or criminal justice problems

Some families face barriers to using emergency shelters

Disproportionate number of survivors of color among the homeless

Why Survivors May Go to Homeless Programs

- DV shelters lack capacity; often prioritize the highest degree of current DV danger (regardless of street danger)
- Over half of the survivors who identify a need for housing services upon fleeing abusive homes don't receive them
- Survivors often faced with choice of return to abuse or coping with chronic homelessness with little hope of housing



Section 2

RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Identification and Screening

- Some survivors self-identify or are referred by DV agency
- For others... welcome/intake protocol must include asking about DV safely, respectfully, and universally
- Survivor and abuser may show up together, both needing services – program must address safety issues without victim blaming or increasing danger

Common Pitfalls

- Screening out due to danger
- Unintentionally re-victimizing or increasing danger - usually via policies meant to increase safety (ex. requiring a PFA)
- Forgetting the survivor is *the* expert in her/his own life and situation
- Competing instead of collaborating

A Few Practices to Avoid

- Asking survivor about DV in an abusive partner's presence
- Giving her/him written materials when it's not safe
- Blaming her/him for damage or danger caused by her abusive partner
- Expecting she/he can “control” abusive partner's behavior (ex. showing up at her unit uninvited)
- Setting eligibility criteria that prevent access to services or increase danger

Pairing Housing Help with DV Know-How is Powerful

- DV interferes with housing access and with success in maintaining it
- Survivors who can't maintain their housing are highly vulnerable to return/re-abuse
- Specialized, DV-informed, tailored services can address these interacting factors and be the difference in survivors' ability to truly embed safety in their lives

The Need for a DV Lens: Children

- More than half of DV survivors live in households with children under 12
- 47% of homeless school-aged children and 29% of homeless children under 5 have witnessed domestic violence in their families
- Exposure to violence significantly impacts on development, behavior, education, health, mental health, and increased risk- taking behaviors as adolescents and adults

The Need for a DV Lens

- Denials, evictions, ruined credit, lease terminations often based on violence/abuser interference
- Survivors experience discrimination based on status as victims
- High density/high violence in public housing complexes may place women at continued risk, trigger trauma
- Stalking, harassment, on-going violence and threats by the perpetrator may occur even after survivor is housed

Section 3

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCACY

- Trauma Informed, Survivor Driven
- Strength Based
- Emotional & Physical Safety Oriented
- Voluntary Services Approach – Self Directed

Confidentiality: The Cornerstone

Federally funded programs (VAWA, HUD) have statutory requirements to protect survivor confidentiality

Best practice is to afford all survivors basic safeguards of confidentiality, regardless of statute or funding (ex. Release of Information)

Examine all program aspects for breaches of confidentiality – use of technology, sharing paperwork, using personally identifying info. in public, etc.

When in doubt, ask the survivor. *Which info. is OK to share? Is it OK to leave a message? Should we have a code word?*

Issues That Can Challenge Stabilization

- Trauma impacts (survivor and children)
- Ongoing legal issues
- Fears about child custody, deportation
- Stalking-prone abuser
- Interrupted/sabotaged employment history
- Criminal record
- Substance Use/Abuse
- Bad credit, inexperience with handling money
- Pets often part of the household

Keying in on Trauma

- Trauma: When external threat overwhelms coping resources; for survivors, an ongoing state of being
- Brain becomes hyper-vigilant – scanning for danger, sensing/reacting to perceived threat
- PTSD symptoms are seen as the behavioral manifestation of all of these changes
- Trauma responses are *completely normal* for a human being who's adapted to a traumatizing life – BUT – may interfere with survivors' ability to enact patterns and behaviors it takes to maintain housing
- *Trauma also affects how people approach services*

How Trauma May Show up

- Difficulty with emotional regulation
- Hyper-arousal, flashbacks, nightmares, startle reaction
- Memory and concentration problems
- Pain, sleep disturbances, illness, substance abuse issues
- Short attention span; easily distracted
- Slowed thinking, difficulty with decisions
- Intrusive thoughts, confusion
- Changed sense of self, others, and the world
- Loss of sense of time and space
- Trouble with abstract concepts, complex directions

Survivors May Need Support Around Trauma

Trauma may be mistaken for:

- Apathy
- Poor self-worth
- Lack of follow-through, unreliability
- Disinterest in getting help
- Uncooperative or oppositional manner
- “Spaciness”
- Poor judgment, inability to make good choices
- Deeper mental health issues

How Can Your Program Help with Safety?

- Have policies in place with your DV agency partner for emergent needs
- Help the victim with other safe housing resources within your program or another program
- Help the abuser with resources if s/he becomes homeless due to exclusion from the unit
- Don't judge or restrict the level of contact they might need to have with each other

Immediate Safety

- Listen to the survivor and ask what s/he needs
- If the abusive partner is also a resident or housing applicant, do not have safety-related conversations with him/her present
- Remember that the victim may use violence—in self defense or to regain control over her/his life
- Utilize your DV agency partnership—either as a referral or for consultation

Conversations

- Safety planning is a process, not a one-time event or check list.
- Safety planning is tailored to the survivor's life and daily activities—each day may even be a little different.
- If the survivor is interested, refer to local DV program for safety planning assistance

Understanding the Abusive Partner's Role

- Does she/he have visitation?
- Was she/he the primary babysitter/transportation, etc.?
- Support vs. safety vs. isolation
- Is she/he sabotaging her efforts?

Long-Term Safety Planning

Once a survivor has obtained alternate/transitional or permanent housing, maintaining safety remains a priority

- Safety at home and with children
- Financial safety and independence
- Safety on the job and in public settings
- Safety if I am using drugs or alcohol

Voluntary Services

- Based on a philosophy and framework that emphasizes providing information and encouraging *true* choice
- Also called Empowerment Model, Harm Reduction, etc. – term is less important than underlying principles and practices
- Shelter/housing eligibility is NOT contingent upon accessing support services
- Participant-driven and relationship-based
- Intentionally focuses on whole person, including historical and relational context, not a singular issue or deficit

Section 4

Now what do I do?!

Scenarios for Discussion

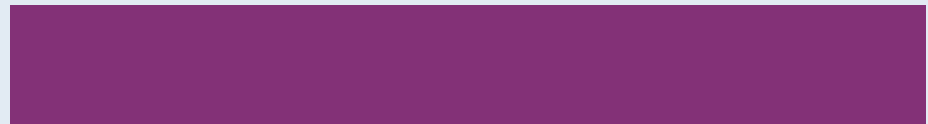
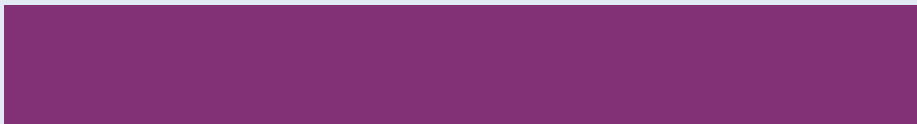
Scenario

There's current DV!

We don't have the resources—our location isn't confidential!

She/he needs to go to a domestic violence agency, but she/he wants a housing program.

- *What are your fears?*
- *What can you do?*



Tips: Safety Concerns

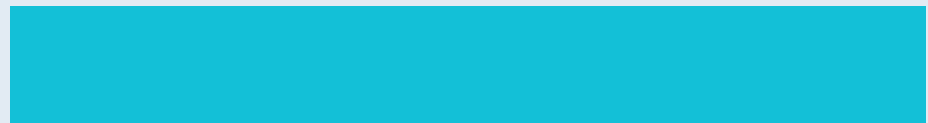
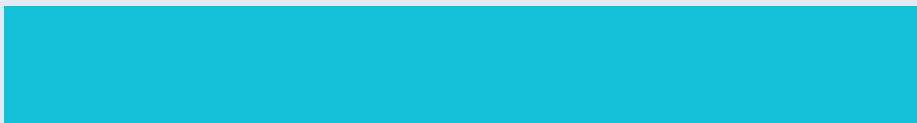
Safety planning is a process, not a one-time event or check list

Safety planning is tailored to the survivor's life and daily activities—each day may even be a little different

Ask the survivor what the abuser's power and control tactics are

Listen to the survivors and ask what s/he needs

Survivor activities and abuser's tactics will guide the safety planning process



Scenario

We know there's DV in that unit, but they're both violent!

- *What do we do? How do we know who the victim is?*

Tips: Talk to them—separately

You can't rely on gender or a list of behaviors

Consider CONTEXT, INTENT, EFFECT to see who is establishing a system of power & control

Assess needs versus screening out & evicting both.

Is there actual or imminent danger to other tenants or to program/facility employees?

Resources

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence – www.pcadv.org- website contains interactive map to locate local DV program
<http://www.pcadv.org/Find-Help/>

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape – www.pcar.org

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence - www.wscadv.org

National Network to End Domestic Violence - www.nnedv.org

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence - www.ncadv.org

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence - www.nrcdv.org

Full Frame Initiative – www.fullframeinitiative.org

National Alliance to End Homelessness – www.endhomelessness.org

District Alliance for Safe Housing - www.dashdc.org

Resources (cont.)

Institute on DV in the African American Community-
www.idvacc.org

Asian Pacific Islander Institute on DV- www.apiidv.org

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
www.nlchp.org

Section 7: Acknowledgements

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