

WHAT DO I SAY AND DO WHEN SOMEONE SAYS SHE HAS BEEN ABUSED? (DVINdoc08A)

- I am so sorry this has happened to you.
- Are you and the children safe?
- How can I help? What do you need?
- This is not your fault. You don't deserve this.
- You are not alone. I am here for you and there are people at the Crisis Center who know how to help. **Encourage her to call the Community Crisis Center (847) 697-2380 and talk to a professional counselor.** You can assure her everything she says will be kept confidential and it is free of charge.
- Listen to her. Assure her you will not share what she says with anyone without her specific permission.
- Believe everything she says; do not doubt her; do not question her accuracy. Do not make suggestions about what she "should" do.
- Offer whatever practical support she asks for and that you can provide: rides to the grocery store, church, appointments, etc, child care so she can have time to run errands or just to think and plan, an invitation to "go for coffee".....

DO'S AND DON'T'S WHEN RESPONDING TO
FAMILIES EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (DVINdoc08B)

THE VICTIM:

- Listen to her with empathy and without horror
- Believe her
- Be non-judgmental. It's not her fault
- Affirm her. Don't expect that she can make the situation better, or that anything she does will stop the abuse
- Practical help: transportation to the grocery store, doctor, church, etc.; childcare, assistance with financial needs, safety planning
- **Referral to a local domestic violence program – not to couples or family counseling**
- Allow her to direct the process. She knows best what she needs at any specific time. She is also usually the best judge of what is safe for her to do at any given time.
- Be patient. The complexities of her life have evolved over time and it will take time to heal. Measure your success according your willingness to be available to her, not by what she decides to do or not do.

THE CHILD WITNESSES:

- Listen
- Believe
- Assure them it is not their fault
- Help them find safe places to be, to play, to talk, to be held
- Assist with practical needs if applicable: school supplies, new shoes and boots, etc. etc.
- Assist with a safety plan if needed: Where to go if home is not safe - How to summon help (This should be done with the mother and needs to be age appropriate for the child.)
- Provide a mentor.
- Be patient with them. Their world is not safe.

THE ABUSER:

- Expect the abuse to stop – out of respect for the victim's right to live in a safe environment
- Expect the abuser to enter into treatment focusing specifically on the abusive behaviors and attitudes. Usually this means active participation in an abuser treatment program for at least a year.
- Expect the abuser to experience the consequences of the law. The best possibility for rehabilitation comes through experiencing the combination of a court-imposed sentence and treatment.
- Expect the abuser to respect the victim's wishes about very practical things. Let him know you will do whatever you have to to assure his partner's and his children's safety.
- Expect the abuser to become fully accountable to his partner. This means accepting full responsibility for his actions, acknowledging intention to control or punish, and recognizing the pain and suffering caused.
 - **This is more than the immediate, "I'm sorry. This will never happen again. Please forgive me." It means changed behavior over a long period of time and successful completion of a treatment program.**
- Help with practical needs: a place to live, transportation, etc.
- Listen to the abuser's pain, not in a way that excuses or minimizes the abuse or centers on complaints about the partner, but in ways that allow the abuser to talk about the hurt caused by what he has done.

GENERAL PITFALLS TO AVOID:

- Do not disclose any information to the abuser about the victim's discussions with you. **YOU COULD ENDANGER HER LIFE.**
- Do not suggest marriage counseling, mediation sessions, or communications workshops.
- Do not interview or counsel a victim and her abusive partner as a couple.
- Do not minimize what the victim shares with you.
- Do not be manipulated by a batterer's claim of a conversion experience. An experience of a conversion may be genuine, but should not be used as a reason to avoid the consequences of the abuser's abusive behavior.
- Do not encourage premature reconciliation. Safety of the victim and children is a priority in domestic violence situations.

Our primary concern is that people are safe in their own homes. When this happens, communities become safer places for all of us. Let's work together to help make this happen.