



# Common Reasons for Non- Disclosure

- Shame
- Blaming themselves
- Too trivial to tell anyone
- Loyalty to abuser
- Fear of not being believed

# Responding to Common Feelings of Victims

- Fear of People/Sense of vulnerability
- Loss of control over life
- Fear of abuser/Concern for the abuser
- Anxiety/Nightmares
- Anger
- Guilt/Shame/Self-blame
- Sexual Concerns

# Responding

- **Responding to disclosures of violence**
- Listen
- Communicate belief (*'That must have been very frightening for you'*)
- Validate the decision to disclose (*'It must have been difficult for you to talk about this'*)
- Emphasise the unacceptability of violence (*'You do not deserve to be treated this way'*)
- Emphasise her right to confidentiality
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- **The following questions imply that, somehow, the victim was to blame for the violence:**
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- Why do you stay with a person like that?
- What could you have done to avoid the situation?
- Why did he hit you?
- Why don't you leave him?

# Responding

## WHY PROFESSIONALS DON'T ASK

- **Haven't considered it as a possibility.**
- **Have considered it but own preconceived ideas sway their beliefs.**
- **Perceived or real lack of time.**
- **The belief that (s)he doesn't have the skills to handle things properly.**
- **The feeling that they may not be helping anything by asking.**
- **Concerned/don't know how to respond if someone were to disclose.**

# Basic Skills of Support

- Focus on the victim
- Be non-judgemental
- Be supportive
- Be compassionate
- Do not give advise
- Do not probe for details
- Reassure them they are not to blame
- Be sincere
- Know the options available
- Be aware of your own prejudices

# Spectrum of Prevention



# How To Intervene

## **Understand-**

- It may be difficult for some to recognise the behaviour as abuse
- Some women have very few supports

## **Promote-**

- Basic human rights –freedom from violence

# How To Intervene

## **Help-**

- Identify and remove barriers

## **Reinforce-**

- The abused person cannot control the abuse
- She is not responsible for her partner's behaviour

# How To Intervene

## **Allow-**

- Time to talk about her situation
- Do not pressure her to make a decision

**Do not write person off if she makes a decision you do not think is for the best- remember she has control over her choices or she may not be able to recognise what is happening to her as abuse**

## GOOD PRACTICE RESPONSES – DO'S & DON'TS

### **DO'S:**

#### **If a woman does disclose domestic abuse:**

- Take her seriously and believe her
- Reassure her that the violence is not her fault
- Do provide a safe environment to disclose – remember if a woman is accompanied by her partner it will **not** be safe for her to disclose – do **not** discuss with her partner
- Give priority to ensure her and her children's immediate safety whether she leaves or not
- Do recognise her need for a positive response and offer your support
- Do remember that confidentiality is crucial to her safety
- Do remember that options may be limited by lack of resources
- Let her know that she is not alone in being abused

- Consult with colleagues if you are not sure what to do
- Advise the woman that she does not have to leave her home to talk to someone about her situation. Advise her to speak with staff in a domestic violence service or a refuge
- Remember the decision to leave has to belong to the woman
- Keep in regular contact with the woman
- Make a safety plan with the woman

- **DON'TS:**
- Don't ignore your intuition if you suspect a woman is being abused
- Don't insist on joint meeting with her and her partner – there are potential serious safety implications/repercussions from joint sessions
- Don't make choices for her
- Don't give the partner the address or phone number of where she is staying
- Don't promise to give a letter or message to her from her partner or to facilitate contact in any way
- Don't give up on her because things are taking longer than you think they should

# Dealing with your frustrations

- Women victimised by domestic violence very often stay in abusive relationships, seemingly not allowing intervention by professionals. This can be exhausting, frustrating, and difficult to understand. Though you may feel frustration, you may be her first and only point of contact and it is important to inform her of an 'open door' policy in terms of coming to you for help.
- Realise early that a woman may never leave her abuser.
- Recognise that leaving is a process, not an event; the timeline from the beginning of abuse to the point of leaving may take decades.
- You don't have to act alone for the woman; remember that there are specialised domestic violence support workers who will help you to support her.
- Get to know as much as you can about how domestic violence is being responded to at a local level, e.g. the details of support agencies in the area so that you can provide accurate information for the victim

# Dealing with your frustrations

- Don't feel you have to know everything there is to know about domestic violence. Listening and communicating support and accurate contact details for an external support agency is better than not talking about it at all.
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- Workers should be aware of their own safety needs: Perform a safety review for yourself frequently. Should a violent incident occur, perform a staff debriefing session. Violence affects everybody differently.
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- Look after yourself: Working with the effects of domestic violence professionally can bring to the surface personal issues – particularly if you are experiencing or have experienced abuse yourself.