



Guiding Principles for Working with Survivors of Domestic Violence

- ❑ **Believe the survivor.** Abusers tend to be very good con artists. A survivor may have had the experience of talking to others about the abuse and not being believed. Tell the survivor that the abuse is not their fault, no matter what they did. Only the abuser is responsible for the abusive behavior. Remind the survivor that they have done the best they could to survive.
- ❑ **Condemn the abuse, not the abuser.** If you attack the abuser, the survivor may feel they need to defend their partner. Instead, say, "It's not okay for your partner to do this to you," or "No one deserves to be abused." Focus on concrete emotional support and problem solving, not subjective interpretations of behavior.
- ❑ **When appropriate, express your concerns for the survivor's safety.** Take all violence and threats seriously.
- ❑ **Respect the survivor's right to self-determination.** Do not try to talk them into a particular course of action, and don't tell them what you would do in their situation. Only they know what is best for them. Do not get impatient with them if they seem not to want to take immediate action; they have already taken an enormous risk by telling you about the abuse. The survivor has had countless people tell them what to do – they need someone to care, not give advice.
- ❑ **Let the survivor decide their own pace for change.** Allow them to decide on their own plan of action. Some people in crisis have never recognized their own resources. Others have lost touch with their resources. Respect and believe in an individual's capacity to change and grow.
- ❑ **Know that the survivor does not need rescuing.** Help them assess their own resources and support system. Help the survivor get in touch with their own strengths and emotional resources and the decision they make will be their own. Remember, you help the survivor define the problems, not solve them.

- **Understand that the only things you know about the survivor's life are what they tell you.** Never make assumptions about their experiences based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, ability/disability, or level of education. Although there are commonalities among all people, no one is a stereotype and each of us has different life experiences.
- **Respect the cultural values and beliefs which affect behavior.** Know these beliefs may have been a source of security in the past for the survivor and their importance to them should not be minimized.
- **Understanding the dynamics of domestic violence** can help you avoid anger and despair when survivors struggle with decisions about ending a violent relationship or "giving it one more try".
- **Remember:**
It's not your job to solve all of their problems. People in crisis often feel hopelessness or despair. Remember that they will not always feel this way. Each time you treat a survivor with dignity and respect, you make it easier for them to reach out to you or others in the future.

Source: WOMAN, Inc