

## Victim Awareness Session

### Purpose:

To give the victim information to better understand Domestic Violence, the protocols and the role of the Court in dealing with DV. To provide education and information to allow them to be in a better position to make good informed decisions in order to make the changes necessary to deal with their issues of Family Violence.

### Goals:

To assist victims in taking control in their lives through better understanding and recognition of the cycle of violence and destructive patterns in their relationships. To give them knowledge support, options and resources that are available in order for them to make changes and work towards healthier relationships.

### Tone:

Setting the right tone for the VAS is crucial as women are often angry and defensive and are feeling a loss of control when they are required to do this session prior to talking with the Domestic Crimes Unit or the Crown in an attempt to get the No Contact Order removed or charges dropped. Informing the victim at the beginning of the VAS that this session is being done for them, that it is not our role to judge their relationships, but to give them lots of information that will help them to make their own strong informed decisions during this difficult time will help take the victim off the defence and encourage participation.

Explain confidentiality, the intake process and what will be discussed during the session.

### The Intake:

The intake process will get their personal information and contact numbers, partners name, children and their ages, referral source, medical concerns, types of abuse they have experienced, and what support systems are in place for them. It is helpful to get some incite into the incident and what led up to charges, whether weapons were involved, if substance abuse was a factor, previous police involvement, length of relationship and how early into the relationship abuse began. A Release of Confidentiality Information Sheet can be signed to allow us to share information with Domestic Violence Action Team (DVAT) and other Service Providers.

### **Counselling Session:**

Begin the session with some factual information on **Domestic Violence** in Alberta, (i.e. Alberta has the highest numbers in Domestic Violence in Canada and the highest death situations in DV). This will emphasize awareness and information rather than the personal. Inform the client of changes in the role of Domestic Violence Court, the court protocols and the goals of the court in rehabilitation vs. punishment, sentencing with probation and conditions, what those conditions involve and their purpose, of helping the abuser through assessment, treatment and counseling. This program is normally paid for by the court system. Change does not happen without recognition.

Talk about the role of the **police**, the nineteen questions they must ask in order to bring in the history of abuse in the relationship and their need to do a threat assessment. The **NCO**, why it is put in place and the process of having it removed. Ideally if the abuser gets into court quickly, talks with Duty Counsel, gives an early guilty plea, takes responsibility for his or her behavior, gets their sentence, (Suspended Sentence, Peace Bond, Conditional Discharge, Fine); with Probation and Conditions, the NCO is dealt with at that time, either lifted or kept in place if safety remains an issue. If the defendant gets a lawyer, there are often numerous adjournments, a not guilty plea, and trial date set for as much as 6 months down the road, then in this situation if the parties want the NCO lifted before sentencing, they must follow the process. This involves making an appointment with Outreach at the YWCA to complete a Victim Awareness Session which takes one and a half to two hours to do, then an appointment is set up with one of the officers from the Domestic Crimes Unit for the following Thursday morning, (often Children Services will also sit in on this meeting). The results of this meeting will then be discussed with the Crown and a decision is made as to whether it is safe to drop the NCO at this time. This process usually takes a couple of weeks.

**Definitions of Abuse** should be gone over with the client and a copy given to them. Discuss **Domestic Violence** and how it has been around as long as people have been together. It is in every walk of life and for many years it was considered a private family matter swept under the rug. Domestic Violence is never about love but rather, like Rape, is about power and control. Domestic Violence is different than assault in that people are connected through children, finances, and emotion and the situation unless dealt with becomes repetitive.

Discuss the **Cycle of Violence** – how the Cycle of Violence, (Honeymoon, Tension and Explosion), becomes the pattern of the relationship. It is like being on a merry-go-round, unless something changes to get you off this cycle it becomes faster between stages and more violent. Women will sometimes push the tension period to explosion in order to



get back to the honeymoon stage. By recognizing what is happening in the relationship one can make changes if they choose to. It is the goal of the courts through mandating conditions of DV counselling, assessment and treatment, as well as anger awareness, to give abusers the opportunity to understand the effects of violence and learn new coping skills so they can make changes if they choose to. A visual of the Cycle of Violence should be given to the client.

**Children Services** are normally informed if there are children in the home during a DV incident. Be sure the client understands the role of CS and that as a parent they are responsible to keep their children from a violent environment.

Discuss the **Effects of Violence On Children** – how violence changes who they are and how it impacts their lives. We know that children who are around abuse are every bit as affected as children who are abused. If during pregnancy a mother is abused, babies can be born with smaller brains and parts of their message systems missing. The first few years of a child's life is when their core values, self esteem and identity are formed. (i.e. my mother will always be here, the world is a safe place, I am a good person), this becomes their center. We are like an airplane traveling through the air, we go off course and come back on. We are often out on our edge but usually know when we are. You here people say "I need to get my life back on track", meaning I need to come back to my center where I feel safe and comfortable with myself and who I am. Children who are abused or live around abuse have no center or good sense of who they are and can struggle with identity issues their whole life. Your center is where that child is in you, where you can relive moments and things that were important to you when you were 6 or 8 or 10 years old like it was yesterday. If that child were standing beside you, rather than inside you, you wouldn't let anyone hurt them, but we let people hurt us all the time. Children who live around abuse have no center and are usually at one end of the spectrum or the other.

At one end of the spectrum they may become avoiders, children who stay out of the way so they don't get yelled at, they often suffer from head aches, stomach aches or bed wetting. They are often caregivers for little brothers and sisters, they may get good marks in school or be the best football player on the team, trying to normalize outside what isn't normal at home. They make friends but have difficulty keeping friends, trusting or sharing their feelings. These are often children you see at school who may be gothic one week, then another gang or group another week, always looking for a place they may fit but never finding it. They have real on-going identity issues.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who act out. These are children who believe hitting is okay, they believe hitting is a way of getting their own way. These are children who are bully's, they don't follow rules so get into problems at school and the community. They may skip school or get involved in drugs and alcohol. As they grow up they don't follow rules of society so get into trouble with the law. Their whole lives tend to be caotic. Some children have a combination of both avoiders and acting out.

Children who are avoiders may grow up saying they will never abuse their wife or children but we live what we learn and when they get into problems in their relationships or have negative issues in their lives they deal with their frustrations the way they saw their parents behave. This is how family violence moves from generation to generation. While we can't condone this behavior it is important to understand where it comes from. As children they can't do much about this but when you become an adult and the police are at your door, your wife and children are upset and afraid you need to realize that this is not working and get the help you need to deal with your anger and to learn new coping skills and better ways to deal with your issues. This is one type of person who abuses.

Another type of person who abuses is someone with narcissistic or sociopathic behaviors. It is important to recognize this as these people do not change. It works for them, (if I am always right and you are always wrong, why would I change)? These people have something human missing in them, empathy, they have no understanding of others feelings, it doesn't even come up. Every thing is about me, they have their own agenda in all their actions. They have no conscience and no remorse. They know the difference between right and wrong because if you did it, it would be wrong but they can justify their behavior. These people are blamers and take no responsibility for their behavior. (i.e. Sorry I pushed you down the stairs but you made me do it). We are never responsible for another person's behavior, everyone has choices in how they respond, no matter what the situation. Not everyone who is ever abusive falls into these categories but this is often where abuse comes from. Be sure to ask the client on occasion if this is helpful and give them a chance to express their feelings and how this may relate to them personally.

Go over the sheet on **Violence and the Impact** on victims in school, workplace and the community.

Help the client understand violence as power and control by going over the "Duluth **Model**" **Power and Control Wheel**. As an alternative, go over the **Equality Wheel** to show behaviors of nonviolence. Talk about parents as role models for their children, particularly mothers who accept abusive behavior are teaching their daughters that this is normal and that they do not deserve to be treated with respect. Abusive fathers are modeling for their sons that it is okay to treat women in this manner. Here in Canada we believe that adults have a right to their own thoughts, beliefs and power over their own bodies and that should be respected. We can agree to disagree and still respect the other person's point of view without having to convince them we are right and they must think the same as us.

Have the client go through and complete the **Abuse Checklists** for psychological and physical abuse so they can see for themselves what abuses they are being subjected to.

Go over the sheet **Why Some Women Stay**, as this will help them to understand and relate it to their situation as well as be able to help relieve guilt and to understand the abused woman syndrome. Discuss with them how it is innate in us as women, to think it



is our job to fix everything, to deny, minimize, and often block things out. (otherwise we would all only have one child, as during labour we say never again and as soon as we are given our baby we say it really wasn't that bad, or when our child is behaving badly we say he is just tired). We tend to see "the people we love and things as we want them to be rather than how they are, and are always hopeful things will change.

Whether we decide to do anything about the abuse or not it is important to keep things real, if we don't want to find ourselves 5 years down the road wondering how we got here. (Call it what it is, i.e. he hit me, rather than he just had a bad day and I wasn't being supportive enough). One way of doing this is to journal our thoughts so we can see the difference in how we see things after the abuse when we are angry and how we see things the next day as we try to justify what happened and carry on. It may also help to use a calendar to keep track of every abusive incident.

Explain the **Danger Assessment** to the client, how these red flag questions show the level of risk in the relationship to this point. A Danger Assessment may change in future if violence increases or decreases. Help the client understand how each question evaluates risk and can give a picture of the overall risk being control, substance abuse, or extreme violence. Calculate the score and show the client where their score is on the four levels. Ask for their input on the results.

Give the client a copy of the **Personalized Safety Plan**, go through the entire booklet with the client. Explain the purpose in doing a safety plan is that when we are emotional and in the middle of an incident we can't think clearly but if we have had time to plan and think through what we need to do to be safe and keep our children safe then we know exactly what to do. There are 3 parts to the Safety Plan: Safety: While in the home with the abuser, Escaping from the home during an incident, and Safety: after leaving an abuser. As you go through each of the points given be sure to allow the client input and allow her to relate it to her particular circumstance. Encourage her to have a plan for the children, as children are more empowered when they know what to do, (if you watch a child during fire drill when they know what to do they are very confident in their action). Remember children do not need details but rather a picture, (i.e. Mommy is taking care of this, we are going to have a new home, new school and friends). Talk about Harbour House and how this may fit into their plan, as an emergency shelter, or for transportation to shelter to be able to talk with crisis counsellors to evaluate their situation in a safe environment while they make other arrangements. Advise client that the shelter and counsellors are there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and can assist them not only with their safety and temporary accommodation but to talk to about their situation and get support at any time. Give them Harbour House card or brochure. When discussing Safety: after Leaving The Abusive Relationship, help the client to understand the dangers and obsessive behavior of Harassment and Stalking. Talk about how violence escalates not when a victim says they are leaving, (as the abuser tries to get back to Honeymoon Stage

of the Cycle of Violence), but when the abuser believes the relationship is over, (when the abusers efforts don't work or the victim moves on without them).

Helping the client to understand what can happen and what to expect can make it easier for them and help them to be more prepared in case of further violence and in moving forward in their life. Give her the information on **Leaving The Relationship**, anxiety and loss of control, disorientation, loneliness, new relationships, anniversaries and helping children cope are all important issues she will likely have to face. Give her the poem on **Letting Go** as well.

Give the client other information that you feel will help her to move forward, such as the sheet on **Positive and Useful Attitudes, and What is a Good Relationship?** The booklet, **Fresh Start**, could be another resource for her. Offer her the **Community Connections** booklet and talk about other supports she may need. Discuss Interim Custody and explain that when two parents separate it is necessary for one parent to get the day to day decision making for the children and what that means for her. Give her the options she has in getting that parenting order done and what it entails. Talk to the client about **Legal Guidance**, and **Legal Aid**, as well as **Counselling** options and **Programs** that may assist her. Inform the client your role as an Outreach Counsellor and ways in which you can assist her and give her support in dealing with the legal and personal issues she is needing to handle in this difficult time. Offer to assist her with her **Victim Impact Statement** if this is difficult for her. Make another appointment with her to create a plan for her if she requests further support. Give her your card and ask the client if she has other concerns or questions and if this has been helpful and reassure her she can do this and she is not alone.

Make her an Appointment to meet with someone from the **Domestic Crimes Unit** and be sure she understands what that will entail and that **Children Services** may be in that meeting as well.