

ACWS

Alberta Council of
Women's Shelters



**Level 1:
Foundations**

**Case Management
Foundations Workbook
Module 6**

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Introduction

Welcome to Case Management Foundations Module 6.

Use this Workbook to capture your thoughts, reflections, ideas, or insights as you go through the eLearning module.

Acknowledgements

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) wishes to acknowledge the traditional territories on which we live, work and play. We recognize that all Albertans are Treaty people and have a responsibility to understand our history so that we can honour the past, be aware of the present, and create a just and caring future.

We honour the courage and strength of Indigenous women. We honour them as life givers and caregivers as we honour and learn from their continuing achievements, their consistent strength, and their remarkable endurance.

We acknowledge that this course, Case Management Foundations, was created on Treaty 6, 7, and 8 lands, as well as the six Métis regions of Alberta. We dedicate this education to all the women and families who inspire us with their courage, strength, resilience, and kindness. We thank the many individuals whose work, input, and expertise have contributed to its development.

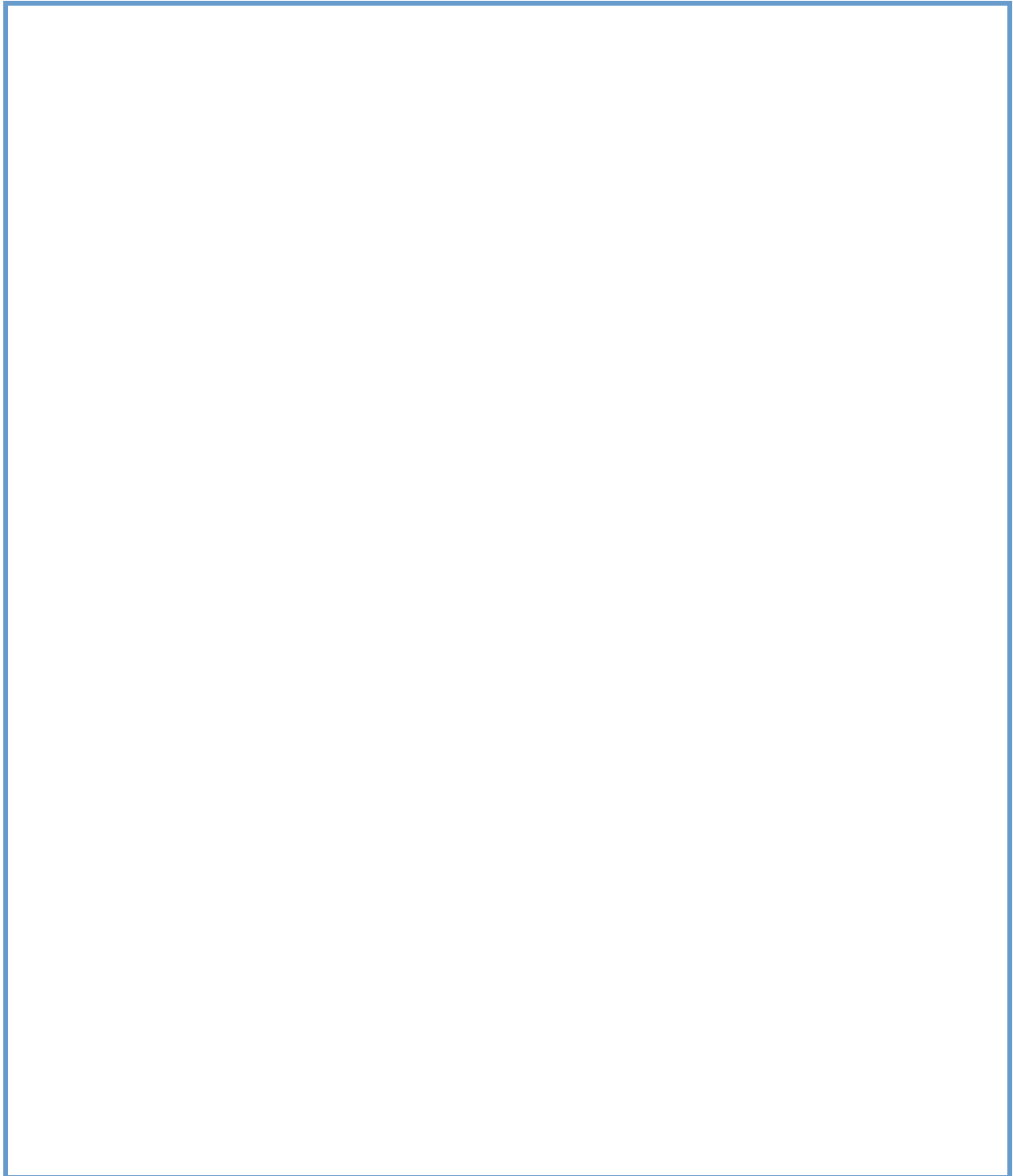
ACWS benefits from the wisdom, expertise, and innovation of our members across Alberta, who provide front-line support to individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse. This project could not be completed without their generous support and knowledge-sharing. Case Management is an evolving practice and the ongoing input and feedback from ACWS members, both individually and collectively, has made and will continue to make this course relevant for, reflective of, and responsive to the Alberta context of domestic abuse shelter practice. Special thanks to Stepping Stones Crisis Society for providing specific exercise content for this course.

We would also like to acknowledge that this educational offering is made possible with funding and partnership from the Government of Canada under the Community Services Recovery Fund, and from the Ministry of Children and Family Services.



Questions, ideas or suggestions? Contact learning@acws.ca

Notes





Module 6: Tailor Support to Individual Needs and Goals

Lesson 1: Frame your learning

Domestic abuse happens **every single day** all over the world, and it affects women of **all ages, classes, and backgrounds**.

Survivors of domestic abuse often face challenges in finding compassion and effective assistance. It's vital that support be tailored to their unique experiences and needs. When you provide **individualized, survivor-centred care**, you can promote healing, empowerment, and resilience for survivors. This, in turn, can enable them to take **meaningful steps toward safety and autonomy**.

Lesson 2: Educate survivors

Abuse or violence of any kind is **never** the survivor's fault. **Responsibility always lies with the abuser**, as they make a choice about the abusive behaviour.

We have a crucial **responsibility to educate** survivors about the dynamics of abuse and the common responses to violence to help them **avoid self-blame** and make progress towards healing (Pence, 1987).

Coercive control

Coercive control is a pattern of controlling behaviour that an abuser uses to dominate and manipulate the survivor. **The goal is to make the survivor dependent.** Instead of relying solely on physical violence, coercive control involves various tactics designed to isolate, intimidate, degrade, exploit, and control the survivor (Women's Aid, 2018). It can have severe psychological and emotional impacts on the survivor. If unrecognized, this controlling behaviour can escalate to physical violence or even increase the survivor's lethal risk.

Coercive control creates **invisible chains** and **a sense of fear** that pervades all elements of a [survivor's] life. It works to limit [her] human rights by depriving [her] of [her] liberty and reducing [her] ability for action.

— Women's Aid, 2018

To learn more about coercive control, contact learning@acws.ca or visit the ACWS Members' Hub to find out about upcoming training.

Power and Control Wheel

The Power and Control Wheel was developed through thousands of survivor interviews. It is intended to illustrate the most common coercive controlling behaviours.

Social myths and stereotypes may prevent many individuals, including survivors, from recognizing non-physical forms of abuse as abusive. The Power and Control Wheel can enable survivors to better understand the abuse in their relationship and assign responsibility for the abuse to their partner, rather than assuming blame. Take every opportunity to reinforce this within your interactions with survivors.



Additional strategies to help survivors understand the impact of abuse and trauma

In addition to helping survivors understand the dynamics of abuse, we can use the following strategies to help them understand the impact of abuse and trauma to support their recovery (Haskell, 2003).

1. Address safety issues in the survivor's life
2. Recognize and normalize trauma reactions
3. Empower survivors with concrete strategies and resources

Please see Appendix A for concrete strategies and resources to teach survivors to manage their trauma reactions.

Lesson 3: Support survivors in the shelter

It can be very difficult for a woman to leave an abusive partner – even if she wants to.

Women stay in abusive relationships for many different reasons (Dobash, et al., 2000; Barnett, 2001):

- Still in love with her partner
- Hopes the relationship will improve
- Believes his promises of change
- Is frightened for her life
- Is concerned for the safety of her children
- Is under financial constraints
- Fears homelessness or isolation
- Fears further violence



Stop & think

What thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations do you notice when you consider various reasons for a woman to stay in an abusive relationship? How do you interpret these reactions? What insights might they offer?

Build a safe and healing environment

Covington (2003) identifies five essential elements of a therapeutic environment.

Therapeutic environment

A carefully arranged environment is designed to reverse the effects of exposure to interpersonal violence.

Attachment

Shelters foster a culture of belonging among survivors by ensuring that they feel welcomed and supported.

Containment

Shelters prioritize safety for all survivors. The safety of one does not take precedence over others.

Communication

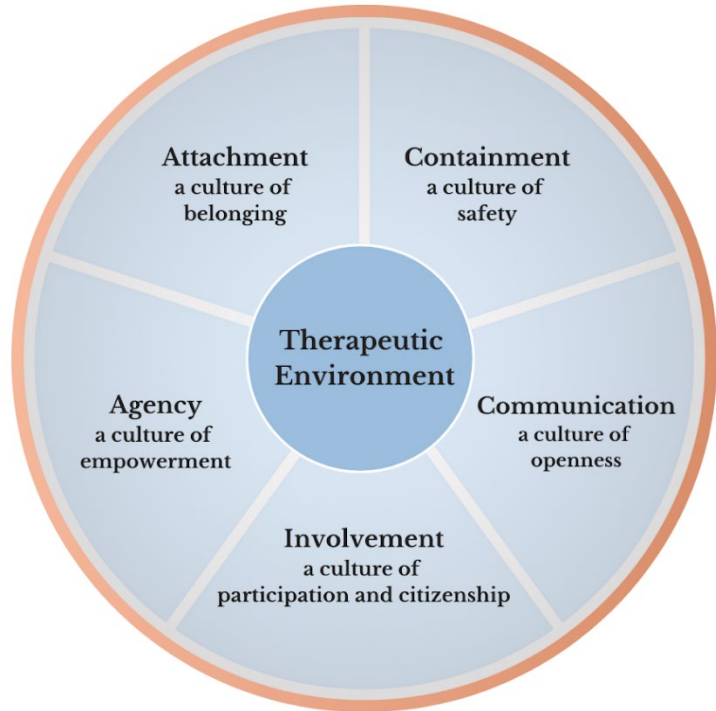
Shelters establish a culture of openness by providing a safe, confidential place to meet with survivors and operate from a position of acceptance and non-judgment.

Involvement

Shelters encourage survivor participation and engagement through a variety of activities.

Agency

Shelters promote a culture of empowerment by encouraging survivors to build upon their strengths. This involves seeking every opportunity to identify and highlight skills and competencies and affirm their capabilities.



When we create and maintain a therapeutic environment at the shelter:

Survivors can benefit from:

- Emotional support provided by shelter staff
- Safety and awareness of their level of risk
- Solidarity with fellow participants
- Child Support and Parenting programs
- Valuable information and connections to community resources

We benefit from:

- Enhanced collaboration and cohesion among colleagues
- Strengthened rapport and trust with survivors, which supports effective case management
- A boost in morale and job satisfaction



Talk to your team

What are some creative ways you can make the shelter environment more welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for **EVERYONE** – including yourself, your colleagues, survivors, and their children?

Choose appropriate strategies

Survivors enter shelters with different goals and intentions regarding their abusive relationships. Understanding these goals is crucial in providing effective support and assistance.

Baker and Cunningham (2008) identified four common reasons survivors enter shelters.

1. *Take time out from an abusive relationship*

The survivor seeks a break from the abusive partner. Her goal is to return to the relationship. She may recognize that there are problems, but she wants or needs to stay in the relationship. Her stay in the shelter may be brief. She may not be receptive to information involving significant changes or commitments, such as housing referrals, or questions about her decision.

2. *Leverage power in an unequal relationship*

A survivor may feel she can leverage her power to get her partner to change. She may believe that seeking refuge at the shelter will communicate to her partner that she is serious. She may decide to reconcile only if her partner commits to getting therapy and changing.

3. *Make a decision about the future of the relationship*

The survivor seeks shelter following a serious assault or during a crisis. She is uncertain about her relationship and aims to use her time at the shelter to evaluate her options and test being apart from her partner.

4. *Transition away from the relationship*

The survivor has decided to end her relationship but may still face emotional challenges. Providing practical information and support is essential during this phase.

Acknowledge the difficulty in making ANY decisions about the status of a relationship. Understand that it is natural for the survivor to recall positive memories with her partner or to express grief while weighing her options. Validate these feelings. The survivor may be losing not only her relationship but also many hopes and dreams she had for the future.

Central to all gender-based violence work is a **profound respect for self-determination**.

Lesson 4: Support parenting survivors and their children

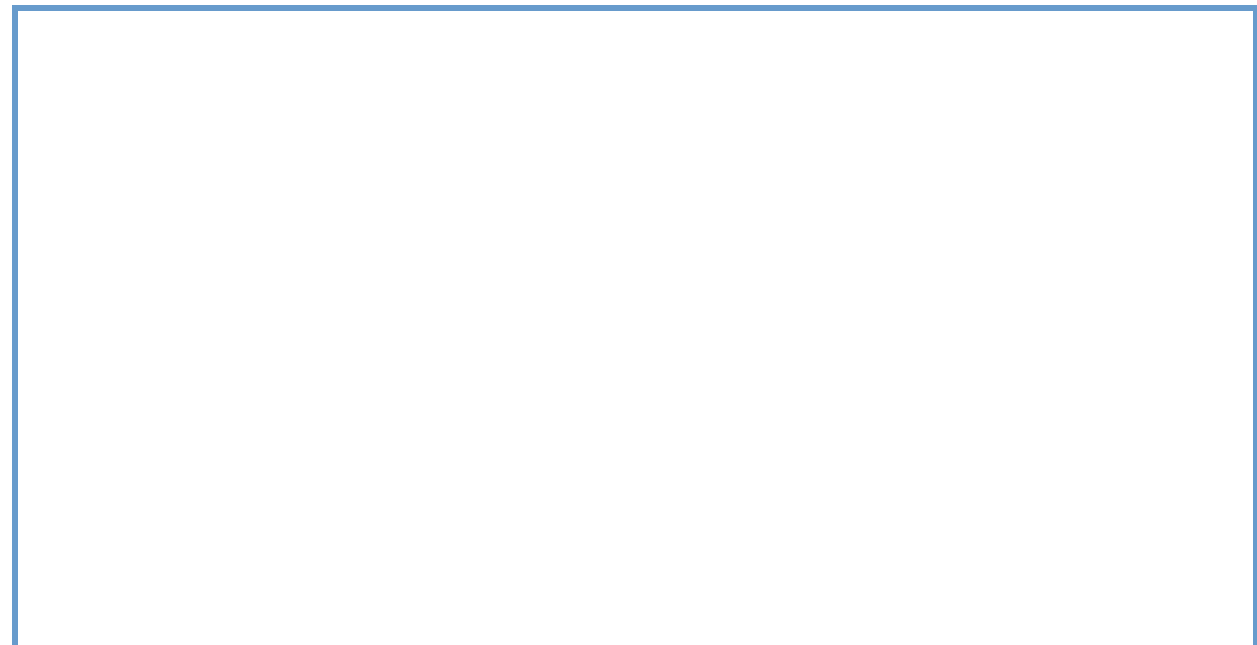
As a front-line Case Manager, you must have a basic knowledge about the issues related to children to effectively support survivors. Recognizing that children's behaviours and parenting challenges can stem from trauma exposure is crucial for **maintaining a professional and non-judgmental stance**.



Talk to your team

Find out if your shelter has dedicated child support staff. Reach out to collaborate with them to support children impacted by domestic violence.

Leverage the expertise of child support staff to enhance your knowledge and awareness and to ensure that personal biases and judgment do not negatively influence your professional interactions.



When a partner is abusive to a child's mother/caregiver, it is **bad parenting**.

— Cunningham & Baker, 2007

While the developmental consequences of living in chronic violence can be devastating for some children, and all children pay a price, not all children experience developmental harm or clinical outcomes.

— Garbarino, et al., 1992

Recommended timeline upon arrival at the shelter

Survivors and their children who arrive at shelters are often in a state of dysregulation. It is important to meet their key concerns promptly. This will help ensure a smooth transition and promote a sense of security.

While the following timeline is recommended (Jaffe & Loosely), each situation is unique and requires the Case Manager to adapt the approach taken. Rigidity and time constraints can be retraumatizing. Continuously check in to see if the survivor feels she is coping well and whether she is comfortable proceeding.

Within the first 24 hours

Special considerations for infants

- Provide formula, food, and diapers as needed.
- Ask about complex needs.
- Inquire about the infant's health and well-being.

Within 48 hours

With the child(ren)

- Provide a detailed tour of the shelter. Highlight safety features as well as limits.
- Describe activities and programs for kids and teenagers.
- Shelters often provide toys, blankets, games, or snacks to increase comfort. Check in to see what is available at your shelter.

Within 48 hours

With the survivor and child(ren)

- Develop a safety plan.



Remember: Review consents, confidentiality, and limitations to confidentiality as early in the process as possible. Revisit this frequently.

Two of the most beneficial interventions

1. Offer “activities that provide opportunities for mothers and children to ‘take a break’ from the stress and tension” while at the shelter.
2. Refer the survivor to a variety of community resources she has identified as relevant when she leaves the shelter.

Mitigate the impacts of domestic violence on children

To promote healing and growth in children impacted by domestic abuse, we can model — and help parenting survivors take — several supportive measures (Perry, 1999; Scobie, 2007; YWCA of Calgary, n.d.):

1. *Use age-appropriate and accessible language*
 - Reassure children that violence is not their fault.
 - Let the children know they're not forgotten.
 - Let the children know they are loved and cared for.
 - Let the children know it's normal to be upset after witnessing abuse.
 - Let the children know others have had similar experiences.
 - Let children know it's okay to talk about their abusive parent and to love them.
2. *Model respectful behaviours and healthy boundaries*
 - Clarify that violence is not okay and that no one deserves to be hurt.
 - Discuss expectations for behaviour and discipline with the child in the context of the shelter or child support area.
 - Allow children to make age-appropriate decisions.
 - Allow children to cry or be sad.
 - Allow time for children to experience and talk about their feelings.
 - Listen without judgment.
 - Do not criticize regressive behaviours.
3. *Foster resiliency in your interactions*
 - Be nurturing, comforting, and affectionate.
 - Help children build emotional regulation skills.
 - Implement interventions across various domains of a child's life simultaneously (e.g., personal counselling, family-based interventions, school programs, community mobilization).
 - Provide support and resources to help children access necessary services and resolve challenges.

4. *Create a relationally-enriched and predictable environment*

- Initiate conversations and talk with the children.
- Be open, honest, clear, and patient in your communication with children.
- Be mindful of tone and body language within these interactions.
- Provide a consistent predictable structure for the day. Keep in mind that transitioning from limited structure or routine will necessitate gradual adjustments and significant time to implement effectively.
- Rely on the survivor as the expert on her children and allow her to lead

Lesson 5: Put it all together

Listen actively and without judgment to understand the survivor's unique needs and goals. **Empower** them to lead the way in determining their path to healing.



Write it out

What are your biggest takeaways from this module?

What is ONE thing you'll implement in your practice right away?

Notes



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Appendix A: Strategies to Manage Trauma Reactions

Grounding activities

Grounding activities help survivors connect to the present and detach from emotional pain (Najavits, 2002) . By focusing outwardly on the external world, rather than inwardly, individuals can regain control over their emotions and stay safe

Guidelines for leading survivors through grounding exercises

- Survivor can learn to practice grounding on their own. Grounding can be done anytime, anyplace, anywhere.
- Use grounding when faced with a trauma reminder, having a flashback, dissociating, experiencing a substance craving, or when emotional pain becomes distressing.
- Keep eyes open and scan the room; lights should remain on.
- Rate mood before and after grounding exercises to monitor effectiveness (e.g., use a 10-point scale, where 10 means extreme pain).
- Avoid discussing negative feelings or writing in a journal during grounding.
- Use no judgments—only descriptions.
- Focus on the present.

Examples of grounding activities

Mental grounding, focusing one's mind

- Ask the survivor to describe the physical environment that they are in, using all senses. You can use this strategy when you are working with a survivor in person or with someone on the telephone.
- Ask the survivor to count backwards from 10.
- Invite a survivor to recite a safety statement – My name is _____, I am safe right now. I am in the present, not the past. I am present here _____.
- Ask the survivor to read something. For example, have affirmation cards or books.

Physical grounding, focusing on one's senses - touch, sound, and smell

- Give the survivor a glass of water to drink.
- Invite the survivor to take off their shoes and tap their feet or dig their heels into the ground; have them focus on the feeling of becoming grounded.

- Have grounding objects in the office space for survivors to hold; for example, rocks, soft stress balls, beads, pieces of cloth and so on.
- Focus on breathing. Have survivors breathe with you; count with them while encouraging them to breathe deeply.

Soothing, talking to oneself in a kind, gentle manner

- Ask the survivor to repeat positive statements.
- Ask the survivor to think of their favourite color, animal, food, TV show, etc.
- Ask the survivor to repeat a coping statement “I can deal with this;” “I know that this feeling will pass.”

Additional resources

- [Guided breathing exercise during a panic attack](#)

Containment

Containment is an act of containing painful emotions in order for survivors to manage overwhelming feelings. It encourages survivors to have control over their own healing process. It is different than stuffing or denial, as it is a conscious act, and it is temporary.

1. Invite a survivor to imagine a container.
2. Ask them to visualize putting into the container painful thoughts and/or emotions that they have chosen to deal with at a later time.
3. Let them know they are in control of these emotions or thoughts and can choose when to take them out of the container and have a look at them.

You could also have a container in the office and have survivors write down thoughts and emotions that they choose to deal with at a later time and place them in the container.

Self-soothing

Some survivors may have engaged in unhealthy self-soothing activities, such as the use of alcohol or substances. You can explore other ways of comforting themselves.

It can be beneficial to have your office space exhibit some self-soothing activities:

- Play relaxation music prior to a meeting
- Have drawing materials available
- Have a basket of affirmation cards in the room
- Be conscious of the pictures or posters that are on the walls

- Have a variety of stuffed animals in the room
- Have a self-care basket and invite survivors to choose an item at the end of a meeting.

A cozy blanket or shawl can be very soothing to offer a survivor who is distressed. Always have a pitcher of fresh water in the room.

Invite survivors to create a **Comfort Box** (Dolan, 2000) so that they can access comfort items when they're distressed. Some ideas for what to include in the comfort box include:

- Their favourite tea
- Bubble bath or bath oil
- Candles
- A favourite picture, card or photograph
- A special book
- A stuffed animal
- An affirmation book; for example, *The Woman's Book of Courage*
- A special rock or sea shell

Encourage survivors to add their own ideas for soothing themselves when feeling overwhelmed and distressed.

Journaling

If possible, have a journal for every survivor that comes into your shelter. Explain that a journal is a safe place for drawing, doodling, jotting down things and sorting out their thoughts and emotions.

"A journal is an ongoing gift that you give yourself." (Dolan, 2000, p. 17).

Idea prompts

- Just write words – just write whatever comes to your mind.
- Focus on feelings. What do you feel in this moment? Where do you feel it in your body?
- Draw pictures. Draw a picture of your feelings.
- Write a letter to someone that has been a support to you.
- Write about a dream vacation.
- Write about accomplishments that you are proud of.
- Draw/write about what a safe place is. Write or draw about your safe place.
- Write a letter to yourself affirming who you are.
- Write to a higher power or ancestor.

- Write about your strengths.
- Write about what being good to yourself means.
- Make a list of things that bring you joy.
- At the end of the day make a list of everything that you have accomplished that day.
- When you need to be comforted and don't know what to do, close your eyes and doodle. Let your emotions flow out through your pen or pencil.
- Draw a comforting scene.

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