

Working with Victims in Crisis



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Role of Volunteers

- To comfort and relieve distress
- Be active, direct and calm
- Be interactive
- Listen empathetically
- Respect individual beliefs and values
- Assess stressors



Role of Volunteers

- Clarify what happened
- Be supportive
- Normalize
- Assist in obtaining services (empowerment)
- Educate about victim's rights
- Be culturally sensitive
- Refer as needed



Victims Have Multiple Needs

- Safety Plans
- Housing (short and long term)
- Financial Needs
- Legal Assistance
- Children (custody, safety, counseling)
- Immigration
- Family (support?)



Meet Immediate Needs

- Help them collect their belongings
- Offer something to eat or drink
- Ask if they need anything for themselves or their children



Establish Rapport

- Fosters open and free communication
- Helps the victim feel comfortable and safe
- Enables client to gain enough trust to reveal personal information



Affirm the Worth & Dignity of Clients

- Unconditional positive regard
- Non-possessive warmth
- Acceptance
- Nonjudgmental attitude
- respect



Empathetic Communication

- Perceive accurately and sensitively the feelings of the client and communicate with the client in a way that reflects this sensitivity
- Reduces threat and defensiveness
- Conveys interest and helpful intent
- Creates an atmosphere conducive to problem solving



Confidentiality

- Vital to the helping process for practical, ethical and legal reasons
- Discussion with family and friends
- Conversations in public areas (hall, dining room, playroom)
- Discussing one client with another
- Leaving paperwork out in the open



Tips on Discussing DV

- Let the victim tell you the problem in their own words
- Avoid asking “why” questions
- Tell them that they have a right to feel safe, you are concerned about their safety and that if they aren’t safe, their children aren’t safe
- Expect minimization, denial, rationalization and desensitization of the abuse
- Be aware that by discussing this with you, they are putting themselves at risk



Understand the Separation Cycle

- Indifference
- Manipulative Anger
- Manipulative Courting
- Defaming the Survivor
- Renewed Manipulative “Anger”



View “Leaving” as a Process

- Women who leave a shelter and return to a partner had separated an average of 2.5 times before going to the shelter
- Women ending their relationship had separated an average of 5 times
- It's important to think of leaving as a process rather than an event



Why is it difficult to end the relationship?

- Fear for their lives and their children's lives
- Fear of poverty
- No other place to live
- Lack of social support
- Children



Why is it difficult to end the relationship?

- Stigma of divorce
- Immigration status
- Religious and cultural beliefs
- Abuse perceived as infrequent/not severe
- Response of “the system”
- Love, guilt and the hope for change



Things to say when they are reluctant to leave

- I am afraid for your safety and the safety of your children
- It will only get worse
- You deserve better than this
- It's not your fault
- We are here for you now and will be here for you if you decide to leave



Emotional Reactions

- Shock
- Fear
- Grief
- Irritability
- Resentment

- Guilt
- Shame
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Emotional numbness



Cognitive Reactions

- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Indecisiveness
- Worry
- Shortened attention span
- Concentration problems
- Memory loss
- Unwanted memories
- Self-blame
- Easily frustrated with others
- Repeated annoying thoughts



Physical Reactions

- Tension
- Fatigue
- Edginess
- Difficulty sleeping
- Bodily aches/pain
- Startled easily
- Racing heartbeat
- Nausea
- Change in appetite
- High blood pressure
- Headaches
- Inability to relax



Interpersonal Reactions

(school, work, friendships, parenting)

- Distrust
- Irritability
- Conflict
- Withdrawal
- isolation
- Feeling rejected or abandoned
- Being distant
- Judgmental
- overcontrolling



How Survivors Cope

- Denial
- Minimization
- Nightmares
- Shock and Dissociation
- Seeking out support



Crisis Intervention

- Begin where the client is by focusing on the crisis. This is what they want help with.
- Address significant risks immediately
- Be supportive, active and directive
- Be warm, empathetic and non-judgemental
- Address guilt reduction and tension relief
- Communicate confidence in the client



Crisis Intervention

- Allow client to ventilate in a context of trust and hope
- Accept and support client's defenses
- Help the client partialize and prioritize the crisis
- Review a range of possible resolutions
- Use supports and resources



Volunteer Qualities

- A sense of responsibility beyond routine
- Ability to establish rapport quickly
- Ability to listen to difficult feelings and experiences of others
- Awareness of their own feelings, thoughts and biases
- Maintain confidentiality
- Aware of limitations
- Aware of the need for self care