

LIFE

listen
inform
facilitate
empower and assist

A GUIDE TO WORKING WITH A WOMAN IN CRISIS

REMAIN CALM

Get to know the woman you are working with so you can help her separate current reality and her immediate sense of fear so she can begin to plan. Fear and anger are contagious, and a woman in crisis has enough fear and anger bottled up to last a lifetime. By reacting to a woman's fear or anger emotionally you might limit your own ability to think clearly. The best ways to combat your fear or anger is to be well-informed on procedures and resources. Know yourself and learn to gauge your own emotional reactions. If you react to a woman's fear or anger you may limit your and objectivity.

LET WOMEN RECOGNIZE THEIR ABILITY TO CHANGE

Allow the woman you are helping to decide her own plan of action. A woman in crisis may never recognize her own individual resources. She may have lost touch with her resources. Respect and believe in her capacity to change and grow.

THOROUGHLY AND CONCISELY PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING HER RIGHTS AND AVAILABLE SERVICES

Don't assume that she knows about her rights or available services. Don't talk down to her, but do be thorough in explaining information about your services and other community resources. Listen to her. She may be so overwhelmed with her situation that she may not be able to absorb all the information you are giving her. Be prepared to repeat the information at the next scheduled meeting. The most important thing you want your client to know needs to be the last thing you discuss with her. Use if ... then... to clarify.

DO NOT IMPOSE YOUR OWN VALUES

This does not mean you cannot express concern about a woman's choices if you believe she is in danger. It does mean you must be careful not to reject her even if you disagree with her behavior. She might feel like she is failing you if she senses your rejection. Remember that she is her own best expert on her situation.

ENCOURAGE EACH WOMAN TO DEVELOP A TIMETABLE AND INITIATE A PLAN FOR THE PRESENT

There might be a tendency for you to want to develop a plan for her. Even though you can and should help her, she will become stronger and more self-sufficient as she assumes responsibility for her own choices.

CONVEY WARMTH, RESPECT AND CONCERN IF A WOMAN RETURNS TO AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

She will have enough conflicts about her decision. You can point out your concerns about her safety while still accepting her. Respect her decision and remind her that you are available if she needs you in the future.

BE ABLE TO COPE WITH YOUR OWN ANGER

Have some personal outlets for your anger, anxiety and frustrations. You will be better equipped to help women in crisis if you can avoid "burn out" and overwhelming stress. Talk to your supervisor or other staff members or domestic violence program advocates if you need help dealing with your anger or a woman's anger about the violence she has survived.

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