

## HELPING TEENAGERS WHO ARE VICTIMS OR WITNESSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1. Try to facilitate an atmosphere in which the teenager can feel free to talk about what is going on at home. Disbelief and expressions of shock or disgust very easily discourage teenagers from confiding in potentially helpful adults.
2. Keep all information strictly confidential until you have assessed how passing it on will affect the teenager and his family and whether they will be endangered. If you do take some action in the teenager's behalf, make certain he or she knows what you are doing and what you expect will happen as a result of your actions.
3. Allow the teenager to vent his/her feelings because chances are he/she cannot do it at home.
4. Try to relay the message that no one deserves to be abused, including them and their mothers.
5. Help teenagers develop some self-esteem and resources that will be useful to them in the future. Focus on making plans for their adult life and finding ways to separate themselves from the fear of abuse.
6. Help girls look for potential warning signs of abuse. Help teenagers recognize generational patterns of abuse in families and teach them ways to deal with their feelings appropriately.
7. Find one or two adults who can spend time with the teenager and provide a good role model.
8. Encourage the teenager to get help for himself and his mother (shelter, ministerial help, counseling, etc.).
9. If the teenager decides to take some action, support his decision and help him/her carry out the plan.
10. Help the teenager understand the stages his/her mother is going through so that her actions and decisions are easier to handle.

### **Strategies to Approach Teen Dating Violence:**

*Questions you could ask:*

- What can I do to help?
- How has his/her behavior made you feel? How is it affecting you?
- How have you been coping with the violence/abuse?
- What can you do to make yourself feel safe?
- What are you afraid of if you choose to leave?
- What are you afraid of if you choose to stay?
  
- **Build and sustain a healthy relationship with youth.** This entails communication, listening, and validating youth experiences.
  
- **Find something** that both the young person and the adult can relate to i.e., sports, and personal experiences to begin conversation. This should help open communication between youth and adults.

- **Paraphrase** (repeating what the young person has said to you back to her/him) during a discussion to help her/him feel validated, appreciated and heard.
- **Acknowledge Confidentiality Guidelines.** When a young person begins to disclose information to you, make them aware that, depending on what information is given, you may be required to tell a supervisor or another official about the situation that the young person is facing.
- **Don't be critical.** Be encouraging and supportive.
- **Offer help** to protect the young person. Only if doing so does not put you at risk of danger. Providing resources, offering to be present when abuser is around, provide transportation, etc.

### **Strategies to Respond to Teen Dating Violence:**

- **Believe** what the young person tells you. It will have taken a lot for them to talk to you and trust you.
- Take the abuse seriously.
- **Meet** with a young person one-on-one.
- To receive honest responses, separate the young person from their friends.
- **Talk** with the youth in a non-threatening way and ask open-ended questions to get all of the facts.
- **Listen** carefully to youth and the conversations that they have with each other so that youth service providers are able to support youth more effectively.
- **Focus on the young person's safety.** A youth service provider **SHOULD NEVER** confront the abuser in teen dating violence situation. The service provider will create a dangerous situation for all involved.

### **Mandated Reporting**

In working with youth, your agency may mandate you to report any acts of violence by or against a young person.

The following points are stipulated by the Criminal Code:

- **Mandated Reporting Laws:**
  - Child abuse and neglect
  - Elder abuse

Currently there is **NO** mandatory reporting law that requires service providers to report cases of Teen Dating Violence to authorities.

*Adapted from Angela Thompson and Nancy Edelman (Fayetteville, AR) & from the Illinois Center for Violence Prevention.*