

Be A Change Maker: Action Guide

Recognizing And Responding To Domestic Violence As A Family Court Professional



As A Family Court Professional, You Are Uniquely Positioned To Help

As a Family Court Professional, you are in a unique position to hear details about what life is like for families at home. You are likely to hear about issues involving power and control frequently.

Working With Survivors/Victims

- Learn about the impacts of Domestic Violence and how likely it is that survivors/victims will cross your path.
- Proactively connect with nearby domestic violence agencies to learn how domestic violence is impacting your community, what services they offer, and how to best connect survivors/victims with them.
- Learn about trauma responses. Domestic Violence survivors/victims are often actively experiencing trauma while seeking relief from court and this can impact the way they act and/or process information. Examine policies or procedures that could be improved to accommodate people experiencing trauma.
- Utilize community and judicial resources in a way that does not exclude or villainize the survivor/victim. Survivors/victims are often experts on how to keep themselves safe and this may include having continued contact with their abusive partner. Examine how community and judicial resources do or do not allow survivors to determine what is best for them.
- Listen to survivors/victims and help to advocate for equal facilitation of the judicial process for both parties. Share what you have learned with others in the judicial system.

Starting The Conversation

- Ask the survivor/victim what will make them the most comfortable. Give them options and do your best to provide those options without promising what you cannot provide.
- Listen to the survivor/victim. If they seem defensive, apathetic, or hesitant, know that these could all be coping mechanisms. Listen and understand that the survivor/victim knows what is best for their lives and safety.
- Survivors/victims in crisis may not have a stereotypical response when interacting with family law professionals. Recognize that there is no such thing as a "perfect victim," and everyone deserves the opportunity to be safe from harm.
- Do not assume that the survivor/victim is not truthful or that they are not being abused, if they decide not to seek court relief.

Example Scripts

Tailor To Your Style And The Situation.

1. What happens when you and your partner disagree?
2. Are you ever afraid of your partner?
3. When I see an injury like this, I wonder if someone is hurting you. Can you tell me what happened?

Safety

- Leaving the relationship may not be the best option for a survivor/victim; They know their lives best and reunification or dismissing a complaint is common.
- It takes a survivor/victim an average of seven (7) attempts to successfully leave an abusive relationship. A survivor/victim should feel like court resources are available to them regardless of how many times they have previously attempted to leave a relationship.
- Identify what ways you and your office staff can be as supportive to a survivor/victim as possible, including having information from local DV agencies easily accessible in your office and/or restrooms.
- Safety-planning is vital! It is possible to have a safety plan for staying as well as for leaving. Connect them with resources. Have info cards for local Domestic Violence agencies in your office.

Know The Resources

- NC Domestic Violence Service Providers can be found on [NCCADV's Get Help Page](#).
- Information on [trauma and intimate partner violence](#).
- [Next Steps \(English\) YouTube video](#): Discusses child custody mediation options for DV survivors
- [Why do Victims Stay?](#)
- [Legal Aid Simple Divorce Packet](#)
- [Legal Aid File It Yourself Child Custody Packet](#) for Parents
- [Legal Aid File It Yourself Child Custody Packet](#) for Non-Parent

To view the resources referenced in this guide and to connect with your agencies, please visit <https://nccadv.coalitionmanager.org/resourcemanager/resourcefile/details/689> or scan the QR code below.

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