

## 2.1 General Intervention Best Practices

The purpose of these general intervention guidelines is to provide organizations with principles for service provision meant to empower women who are experiencing abuse. The York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee believes that it is important to offer women support, information and services that: (1) do not re-victimize women or put them at greater risk of harm; (2) optimize women's choices; (3) are respectful. It is also critical that service providers be aware of their own assumptions, biases and personal perspectives and that these not interfere with maintaining a respectful manner with the woman being assisted.

**Initial contact:** The initial encounter sets the stage for the woman's continued relationship with the service provider. Her experience should be validated and the impact trauma has on her should be recognized. During this initial encounter, the service provider should:

1. If you have received permission from the woman to speak with her:
  - Find out how she would like to be addressed. Minimize existing power imbalances by referring to her with the same formality with which she addresses you.
  - Identify yourself and the role you play as the service provider. Explain that you are there to help.
  - Explain clearly what types of services you offer and their duration. Discuss which types of assistance the women might find helpful.
  - Assure the woman that you understand that this may be a difficult process for her.
2. Respect confidentiality. Service providers have their own policies and procedures concerning confidentiality. It is the individual service provider's responsibility to be aware of their respective agency's policies and procedures concerning confidentiality and disclosure obligations, and to clearly communicate them to the woman.
  - Discuss what is meant by "confidentiality" and explicitly explain its limits.
  - All efforts to maintain confidentiality should respect the woman and her wishes, and be aligned with applicable legal requirements.
3. Try to ensure that the meeting environment is private, safe, and comfortable and that it facilitates communication.
4. Provide realistic and accurate information by identifying the implications and potential ramifications for the woman who accepts your assistance:
  - Discuss the limits of confidentiality and the possibility that your records may be subpoenaed.
  - Explain that if the woman gives a statement to the police she may have to repeat this information in court.

- Advise the woman that as a service provider who has tried to provide her with assistance, you may be called to testify.
  - Sensitively discuss the potential need to report to the Children's Aid Society, in cases where children are being exposed to woman abuse.
5. Provide her with any material, community contacts, or information that would benefit her and be certain to provide her with your contact information and ensure you have answered all of her questions.

**A women's rights and choices:** It is of fundamental importance that all service providers recognize a woman's right to make her own choices, regardless of whether these choices reflect our own personal beliefs and biases.

As such, it is crucial to emphasize the woman's choice in all matters, and to inform her of all the options that are available to her, including:

- The right to remain in, or return to, an abusive relationship.
- The right to withdraw from receiving services, and the right to choose the services she wants.
- The right to clear information about criminal proceedings with regard to her ex-partner, and the right to seek independent legal counsel to pursue civil action and representation at the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.
- The right to receive medical attention / intervention that is sensitive and that is first explained to her in detail.
- The right to services that respect her religion, culture, language, abilities, and sexual orientation.
- The right to free or affordable services.
- The right to accessible and timely services.
- The right to a complaints procedure.
- The right to tell her story as infrequently as possible.
- The right to reasonable access to agency and police reports / client files.
- The right to follow-up services and continuity in service delivery.
- The right of children to be protected against the harmful experience of being exposed to woman abuse.

## 2.2 Customer Service Best Practice Guidelines

### 1. The safety of women, children and workers is paramount

*When first speaking to a client ask whether she is safe now*

- Suggest contacting the police if she has concerns about her safety
- If it is not safe for her to speak to you at that moment, suggest that she phone back when it is safe
- Ask when it is safe to call her

*When making arrangements for a client to come to your office, enquire about any potential safety or security issues*

- When a client is waiting to speak with you, ask whether she feels safe in the waiting room. If not, make appropriate arrangements

*When dealing with a client's file, take precautions for her safety*

- Do not put a client's address on the front of the file
- Do not disclose a client's whereabouts unless given permission
- Always ensure that there are no identifying documents / files left in view or accessible to other parties at any time

*When seeing a client, take appropriate precautions for your own safety*

### 2. Violence is a crime whether it occurs in public or in private

*Give clients appropriate information about legal options to address violence*

- Inform clients of the option and process of making a complaint to the police
- Inform clients that violence is a crime
- Be aware of referral options for support services

### 3. Actively involve clients to assess their own legal needs and to have control to make decisions about their future

*When giving information to a client, let the client make up her own mind and provide her with enough information to assist her to make her own decisions*

### 4. It is important to work collaboratively with other service providers that support clients who have been abused

*When giving information to your client, provide information about services that will address her other needs and those of her children*

- Ensure that you have knowledge or access to information about appropriate services, e.g. shelters, counseling, and community specific programs

### 5. All clients should be treated with respect

*When assisting a client and hearing of her experience of violence, do not be judgmental in your response*

### 6. Services should be accessible and equitably delivered to all clients affected by violence

*When providing information and referrals, ensure that cultural and language issues are addressed*

- When referring a client from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, a client who is disabled, or who has other special needs, inform the agency of the specific needs that have been identified

*When arranging for a client to visit the office, be aware of possible barriers, including language, cultural and physical*

- When language issues are identified, trained interpreters should be offered
- Make alternative arrangements if a disability precludes her from coming to the office

### 7. Develop and maintain a knowledge of the social context of violence including power, control and gender

*When assisting a client who has experienced violence, inform her that she is not alone and is not to blame*

- Acknowledge that the responsibility for the violence lies with the offender

*Ensure that you are informed about the impact of abuse on women and children who witness it*

Adapted from the Best Practice Guidelines for the Client Service Centre for working with clients who have experienced violence, by Legal Aid Queensland, Australia