

**TABLE 3: STATEMENTS TO USE WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS**

Here are some nonjudgmental statements to use with domestic violence victims:

- ▶ Domestic violence is such a common problem that I discuss it with all of my patients.
- ▶ Many people get hurt by their partners and receive injuries. We see it everyday. I'd like to talk to you about domestic abuse.
- ▶ I notice that you have a bruise (mark) on your arm.
- ▶ Normally when I see an injury like this, it is because someone is being abused (battered).
- ▶ I don't see many adult women who get hurt from walking into doors.
- ▶ This looks really painful.
- ▶ This looks like a handprint (fingerprints) to me.
- ▶ I am concerned for your safety.
- ▶ I am concerned for the safety of your children.
- ▶ I am here to help you.
- ▶ I understand domestic violence.
- ▶ It's not your fault.
- ▶ I think I can help you if you will let me.
- ▶ I know places you can go for help and to be safe.
- ▶ It is wrong (illegal) to beat another person.
- ▶ You have the right to be treated with respect.
- ▶ This is not something that you need to be ashamed about.
- ▶ This will not get better. Violent relationships tend to get worse.

**TABLE 4: BLAMING AND COLLUDING STATEMENTS TO AVOID USING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS**

- ▶ Why don't you just leave?
- ▶ It can't be that bad, I guess.
- ▶ You must have done something to cause this.
- ▶ He must have gotten mad for a reason.
- ▶ You should (should not) have ...(anything after this implies blame).
- ▶ You must have pushed his buttons.
- ▶ Didn't you know that would make him mad?
- ▶ Why did you do that?
- ▶ He didn't hit you that hard.
- ▶ How hard did he actually hit you?
- ▶ I wouldn't have done that to my husband (boyfriend, partner).
- ▶ I would have been mad at you (hit you too) if you did that to me.
- ▶ How many times are we going to see you here before you get it?
- ▶ Why don't you just leave?
- ▶ He just pushed you one time?
- ▶ He just ...
- ▶ Is this the only time that this has happened?
- ▶ Why did (didn't) you hit him back?
- ▶ How can you stay with this guy?

to include a detailed, subjective description of the incident with direct quotes from the victim. Objective charting will include medical findings; pictures drawn or taken of injuries; specific size, shape, color, and depth of injuries; and treatment given for those injuries. Comprehensive documentation preserves a history for comparison. Charts retrieved from medical records may reveal a pattern of abuse. This will help a medical provider rule out somatization disorder and hypochondriasis.

Photographs may be used to give color, size, depth, and texture of injuries, but they require a signed release in most cases. Body maps help identify the location, perspective, number, and range of wounds.

**INTERVENTION**

Information and resources from trained professionals make an impact on many women who are feeling trapped and alone in an abusive relationship.

The choices to be made by a victim are difficult ones. The process may be grueling for the healthcare provider as well. Empathy for a victim is important during intervention. The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence says:

Understanding the dynamics of abuse and the difficulties women face in trying to leave abusive partners can help providers deal with the frustration and pain they may experience when helping a woman who is in an extremely difficult and dangerous situation. The process of leaving an abusive spouse is often slow. Victims often leave and return many times before leaving for good.<sup>18</sup>

## LETHAL BEHAVIOR

The batterer's potential for lethal behavior must be a concern for healthcare staff. This is relevant to both victim and staff safety. It is important to learn the signs of a potentially lethal batterer. Even though we refrain from telling victims what they should or should not do in a particular situation, if the threat of death seems likely for the victim or her children, it is our duty to warn her. Safety planning may be appropriate at this time.

According to Sgt. Anne O'Dell, formerly of the San Diego Police Department, signals that a batterer may try to kill his partner include:<sup>19</sup>

**Threats of homicide or suicide.** The batterer who has threatened to kill himself, his partner, the children, or her relatives must be considered extremely dangerous.

**Fantasies of homicide or suicide.** The more the batterer has developed a fantasy about whom, how, when, and where to kill, the more dangerous he may be. The batterer who has previously acted out part of a homicide or suicide fantasy may be invested in killing as a viable solution to his problems.

**Depression.** If a batterer has been acutely depressed and sees little hope for moving beyond the depression, he may be a candidate for homicide or suicide.

**Weapons.** If a batterer possesses weapons and has used them or has threatened to use

them in the past in his assaults on the battered woman, the children, or himself, his access to those weapons increases his potential for lethal assault.

**Obsessive about partner or family.** A man who is obsessive about his female partner, who either idolizes her and feels that he cannot live without her or believes that he is entitled to her no matter what because she is his wife, is more likely to be life endangering.

**Centrality of battered woman.** If the loss of the battered woman represents or precipitates a total loss of hope for a continued relationship, a batterer may choose to kill.

**Rage.** The most life-endangering rage often erupts when a batterer believes the battered woman is leaving him.

**Drug or alcohol consumption.** Consumption of drugs or alcohol when in a state of despair or fury can elevate the risk of lethal behavior.

**Pet abuse.** Those batterers who assault and mutilate pets are more likely to kill or maim family members.

**Access to the victim and family members.** If the batterer cannot find her, he cannot kill her.

Shelters may be suggested as a temporary respite to save a woman's life. This step may give her time to make a life-saving decision for herself and her children.

## SAFETY PLANNING

It is essential to discuss safety planning with a victim of domestic violence. The focus of intervention is to ensure that victims understand the potential for lethal behavior on the part of their batterer. Safety plans are published by many government and local agencies and are usually available from local domestic violence shelters. They help victims leave abusive relationships safely. These plans should be made with the help of medical staff, social services, or a domestic violence advocate from a local shelter. Safety plans may be discussed with everyone, but only given to those who feel safe possessing them. A staff member willing to take an extra

### Study point

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## SAFETY PLAN FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is a serious crime. It includes behaviors like pushing, grabbing, poking, pinching, hitting, punching, and threats to harm. It includes being attacked in any unwanted way. Persons who may be included in domestic violence cases are:

- ▶ husband or wife
- ▶ boyfriend or girlfriend
- ▶ parent of your child
- ▶ family member
- ▶ someone you have lived with as if in the same family

If you have been forced to do something sexual that you didn't want to do or if you have been kept from food, medicine, or a doctor's care, you are a victim of domestic violence. It is not your fault. The abuser is responsible. There is someone who will listen and support you and your decisions. There are steps you can take to help end the abuse.

### What are some options you may consider?

- ▶ Call the police in an emergency.
- ▶ file a police report about the violence.
- ▶ Call the domestic violence hotline (1-800-500-1119) to talk, get information or ideas, find a shelter, or make a safety or escape plan.
- ▶ Have the abuser ordered by the court to stay away from you by getting an Injunction for Protection.
- ▶ See a doctor for injuries (and consider having him/her write down what caused the injuries).
- ▶ Talk to a friend, family member, neighbor, or someone else for support and ask for help.

### Use and Care of Your Safety Plan

- ▶ Keep it in a safe place. (At work, a friend's, etc.)
- ▶ Read it carefully, then call the domestic violence hotline (1-800-500-1119) and ask a counselor to help you make a plan. Everyone is different, and your plan should cover your personal situation.
- ▶ Put your important phone numbers together so that they will be handy if you leave.
- ▶ Check-off items which will apply to your situation. See what will help you the most and concentrate on those items.
- ▶ Update your safety plan often. Review it with a supporter or hotline counselor.
- ▶ Share your plan only with those who will absolutely support you. Do not share it with anyone who may tell or "let it slip" to the abuser or his supporters.

### If You Are Living With or Dating Someone Who is Violent

*Because danger can occur at any time, will you consider the following:*

- Yes/No
- Practice an escape plan for emergencies. \_\_\_\_\_
- Go over it with a counselor or advocate. \_\_\_\_\_

- Teach children emergency and escape action and phone use. \_\_\_\_\_
- Keep pay phone change in a safe place for self/children. \_\_\_\_\_
- Use portable or cellular phones, if possible. \_\_\_\_\_
- Use noise makers (whistle, personal alarm, etc.) to get help. \_\_\_\_\_
- Ask neighbors to listen, watch, and call police about suspicious people or activities. \_\_\_\_\_
- Let someone know if you feel violence is about to happen. \_\_\_\_\_

*When violence does seem close, avoid the kitchen, bathroom, and rooms without doors to the outside. Begin action on safety plan at any sign of trouble.*

### If You Plan to Leave a Violent Relationship: What is Needed?

It is always best to plan for emergencies before there is one.

- ▶ Plan how you will get away from the abuser or get help to come to you. Emergency number to be called: \_\_\_\_\_ transportation will be: \_\_\_\_\_ helpers or supporters: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Plan where you will go, if you choose to or are forced to leave.
- ▶ Plan what you will take with you if you leave.
- ▶ Plan for children and pets.
- ▶ Plan for other responsibilities and needs.

### Which of the following items will you need?

*Keeping these items in a bag or container away from home is best. Avoid using your purse or car.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Identification (driver's license, passports, greencards, work permits)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Birth certificates for self and children
- \_\_\_\_\_ Social Security Cards for self and children
- \_\_\_\_\_ Extra car, house, storage, or other keys
- \_\_\_\_\_ Checkbook, ATM card
- \_\_\_\_\_ Credit cards, bank books, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Address book/phone numbers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Food Stamps, Medicaid Cards, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Car registration
- \_\_\_\_\_ Car, health, and life insurance papers
- \_\_\_\_\_ School and medical records
- \_\_\_\_\_ Divorce, custody, or injunction papers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Proof of income for partner (check stub)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Prepaid long distance card
- \_\_\_\_\_ Home calling card (calls can be traced)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Copies of bills you owe with your partner
- \_\_\_\_\_ Change of clothes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Medicine and prescriptions (extra)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Personal hygiene products (tampons, toothbrushes, deodorant, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Diapers, formula, toys, blankets
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pictures, jewelry, keepsakes

### Some Important Safety Tips

- ▶ Remember, the danger may get worse during an escape or after leaving a violent relationship.
- ▶ Have a safety plan for as long as there is communication with/from the abuser and longer. Review it with a counselor often.
- ▶ If you move, put the rent, phone, and utilities in someone else's name.
- ▶ Make sure all locks (doors and windows) and lights (inside and out) work properly.
- ▶ Install alarms on doors and windows. Install smoke alarms, metal doors, or other safety items.
- ▶ Get an unlisted phone number. (Change old number, if necessary.)
- ▶ Get an Injunction for Protection (call 1-800-500-1119 for information.)
- ▶ Keep copies of injunction orders at home, work, and in purse.
- ▶ Have another person to deliver and pick up children if a judge orders visitation.
- ▶ Use a post office box instead of a street address. Check it during busy hours.
- ▶ Report suspicious things to police, file violations of the injunction, as necessary.
- ▶ Keep copy of divorce, custody orders, etc. at school.
- ▶ Make special arrangements to pick-up children from school.
- ▶ Ask school to call about any unusual contact by abuser.
- ▶ Make same arrangements with childcare/babysitters as above.
- ▶ Have mail sent to the domestic violence center to be forwarded to you or to another safe place. Do not file change of address card with post office (it is not private).

### Using telephone services or special device may play a role in getting help or documenting threats

Some telephone companies offer services that may help domestic violence survivors. These services may also be used by abusers to harrass, stalk or threaten or find survivors. Most require phone company charges. Some of the services include:

**Operator Assistance:** Operators can dial police and other emergency numbers if you cannot do it or do not know the number. If you do not have some of the services listed below, operators in your area can advise you of other services if they exist.

**Voice Mail:** Allows you to have a phone number and get messages without answering the phone. No one has to know it's just voice mail.

**Caller I.D.:** Shows and records the numbers that call your phone. You have to buy a special electronic box to plug into the phone.

**Call Block:** Keeps caller I.D. from recognizing your number.

**Trap and Trace:** Local telephone companies may be able to mechanically check repetitive calls. This allows for outside documentation of violations of protective injunctions and stalking.

**Call Tracing:** Dialing \*57 on a tone-operated phone or 1157 on a rotary phone verifies to the police the last call into your number.

Last number re-dial: Dialing \*69 on a tone-operated phone or 1169 on a rotary phone dials back the last call into your phone.

Collect calls and calls billed to another number: Use caution when making these calls. They can be traced. If calling the batterer, make these calls from pay phones out of your neighborhood or town. Consider buying a "pre-paid" calling card.

Safety Planning at Work

It is important for survivors of domestic violence to be alert and prepared for possible contacts by the abuser during a work day. A safety plan for work may help you if the abuser calls or shows up. Which of these can you use?

- Yes/No: Tell co-workers/boss about situation. Ask the person(s) to call police in an emergency. Have a back-up person if the first one is not at work or not nearby. Ask someone to screen your calls. Ask someone to watch out for you. Plan your entry and exit each day. Keep a copy of your injunction at work. Let others know about the injunction. Request office or desk to be placed in a safe location. Request help from employee assistance program. Plan an escape route. Have a signal for help (whistle/alarm). Drive a different way to and from work each day. Find a safe room with a phone to use in an emergency. Be sure it locks, has a telephone and a window or second door. Locate a parking space close to the door and in a well lighted place. If possible, get dropped off and picked up, trade cars with someone, or car pool.

Call 1-800-500-1119 to brainstorm your plan with a domestic violence advocate.

If You Live in a Rural Area

Because of small population, family ties, and social closeness, it can be hard for victims in rural areas to get help. Many people who live in rural areas cannot leave their home without being noticed or stopped (even for social conversation). When shelters and services are located in larger cities, survivors must travel there to receive help. Staying or returning to a rural area can be safe for many, but domestic violence centers (phone 1-800-500-1118) can help you decide and plan.

- Yes/No: See if it is safe to stay with friends/family local or out of town. Make a special escape plan because it takes police too long to arrive. Make a special escape plan in case of problems with transportation or timing. See if the family car/truck can be taken without being seen or stopped.

- Yes/No: Get a ride from a trusted friend or family member. Get transportation from the county or health department. Keep an escape bag at church, the health department, with a friend, or other safe place. See if leaving and getting away safely can be done without someone alerting the abuser.

Preparing for Feelings

Leaving a relationship, even an abusive one, is very difficult. It is important to know that you may feel sad, lonely, or guilty. Having friends and others to talk to can make a difference.

- Please consider: Calling 1-800-500-1119 when you feel lonely or upset. Joining a church, synogogue, temple, or mosque, if appropriate. Taking classes, going to workshops or seminars. Getting involved with the children's activities. Volunteering—call the United Way or your local domestic violence center.

Where Can You Call for Support?

- (Enter phone numbers for your area.) Domestic violence center hotline: 1-800-500-1119 Local #: Sexual Violence Counselor or Center: AlAnon or A.A.: Church Groups: Social Clubs: School Groups:

Who Will Give You Support?

- (Enter phone number for anyone you can call.) Family member(s): Friend(s): Co-worker(s): Neighbor(s): Church: Others:

Other Important Numbers

- (Enter phone number you may need) Doctor's Office: County Transportation: Medical Transportation: Taxi: Greyhound/Trailways Bus: Child's School(s):

- Lawyer: Public Assistance: Food Stamps:

For Toll-Free Assistance

- Florida Domestic Violence Toll Free Hotline 1-800-500-1119 National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233 Child Support Assistance 1-800-622-KIDS Florida HIV/AIDS Hotline 1-800-FLA-AIDS Spanish 1-800-545-SIDA Creole 1-800-AIDS101 State Abuse Registry (formerly HRS) 1-800-962-2873

(Call here to report child abuse, elderly abuse, or abuse to the disabled.)

Important Numbers for Your Personal Use

- (Enter all phone numbers that apply.) Police or Sheriff 911 (if available) (other local number): Police Victim Advocate: Assisting Officer or Deputy: State Attorney Advocate: Injunction Counselor: Domestic Violence Counselor:

To Assist in Dealing with the Abuser

- (Enter all information known on the abuser.) Address or someone who can reach him/her: Phone #: Social Security Number: Employer: Phone #: Lawyer: Phone #: Car Make: Model: Year Color Tag Number

If You Know Someone Being Abused—Do Not Look the Other Way

- Let them know you are concerned about them. Offer to listen. Respect their choices, but encourage them to talk with professionals about safety issues. Offer as much help as you can, but do not take risks with your own safety. Examples of help: childcare, transportation, a place to stay, a job, lending money. Give them a copy of this pamphlet.

minute to discuss victim safety and the safety of children may make the difference in helping to prevent a future injury or save a life.

Safety planning may also raise awareness for an abuse survivor. It may present options for victims beyond mere survival. This encounter may be an opportune time to broach this subject of change. The process of safety planning may also contribute to ending a victim's isolation. Many victims are so far removed from the community that they are completely unaware of or unable to access help. This process of planning and talking with a medical or social service provider may give a patient hope of surviving her isolation.

It is important to be able to offer local community resources and to have a contact at each agency for staff referral at the time a healthcare provider sees a patient. If possible, have brochures or cards available for those who can safely take them.

When referring a client, it is important to remember that couple counseling is *never* considered appropriate in domestic violence situations. The safety of a victim can be compromised in couple counseling; if the violent partner becomes enraged at open discussion of his violence, he can later hurt or kill his partner. The use of a certified domestic violence agency is generally considered the best overall option for the aid and safety of an abuse patient.

## DISCHARGE PLANNING

Medical staff use planning to prioritize a patient's needs and to stabilize the patient or reduce her most serious symptoms. The use of integral team members, consultations, and most importantly, discharge orders that include community resources, are all examples of secondary planning for abuse victims. Everyone benefits when plans are in place for a successful discharge.

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

### New Florida Statute Impacts Reporting of Domestic Violence

Effective July 1, 1999, the Florida Legislature is enacting a bill, Senate Bill 1182, requiring:

Any physician, nurse or employee thereof and any employee of a hospital, sanatorium, clinic or nursing home knowingly treating any person suffering from a gunshot wound or life-threatening injury indicating an act of violence, or receiving a request for such treatment, shall report the same immediately to the sheriff's department of the county in which said treatment is administered or request therefor received.

The former statute required the reporting of "a gunshot or other wound indicating violence." The new statute attempts to clarify language that was considered vague or difficult for the healthcare providers to interpret. The modified statute states that healthcare professionals must report a wound from a gunshot or an injury that is considered life-threatening indicating an act of violence.

The difficulty for nurses is how to determine the phrase "life-threatening" and additionally, how mandatory reporting will affect the life of the victim and her safety. A victim's safety may be compromised if a well-meaning report on one incident of domestic violence prevents a victim from seeking help and medical attention from another similar incident.

Victims of domestic violence must be able to trust the medical system with confidential information. A victim may suffer further harm if the batterer finds out that she is seeking and receiving help or attention from outside sources. Most batterers perceive their partner's seeking of help as an act of betrayal.

The single best response to domestic violence by medical staff is a nonjudgmental ear and a referral to a domestic violence agency. A victim trying to escape a violent situation needs a carefully constructed safety plan. The risk of serious injury and homicide is greatest when the victim tries to leave her batterer. A coordinated community response to domestic violence is needed to keep a victim safe. One component of this response is medical treatment, but support must also come from social, physiological, financial, and other services to keep victims safe and alive.

### Studypoint

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## Injunctions for Protection

Injunctions, also known as “restraining orders” are court orders that limit or prevent contact between one person and another such as a husband and his wife. Injunctions commonly were granted for the period of one year and then they expired. If a person wanted to maintain the injunction, it meant returning to court for another hearing. The victim was again required to prove her case and demonstrate that she feared her assailant. This also meant that she would have to face him again.

In 1999, the law changed. Injunctions may now be granted on a permanent basis. This statute mandates the separation between a victim and her assailant. It helps to ensure continued safety.

It should be noted that injunctions do not necessarily keep victims safe. They merely help to enforce a judge’s order when police arrive at the scene. Women with active injunctions are still hurt and killed in this country every day.

## CONCLUSION

Healthcare providers are an integral link in victim and perpetrator education in domestic violence. The role that medical staff plays in assessing, intervening, and treating patients may be the difference between the end of physical abuse and a perpetual cycle of family violence. The medical caregiver remains the primary, critical responder in these cases for thousands of women and their children each year.

## NOTES

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