

SURVIVORS of CHEMICAL DEPENDENCE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE and SEXUAL ASSAULT

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Keep in mind that not all people who drink or use drugs are alcoholics or addicts. When alcoholism or addiction is present there is great pain, shame, fear and isolation.

- Alcohol and drug use is associated with greater severity of injuries and increased lethality rates. However, SUBSTANCE ABUSE DOES NOT CAUSE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE or SEXUAL ASSAULT.
- Being identified as either an alcoholic or an addict (even if people are in recovery) can impact ability to get housing and gain or maintain child custody. This may affect careers, community standing, and/or support (or lack thereof). Increased insurance rates, and legal difficulties may also be experienced.
- Chemically dependent people face many service barriers. Shelter space is often denied, detox may not be available immediately, and treatment may seem less urgent than getting SAFE.
- Chemically dependent battered persons and survivors of sexual assault are not powerless. They are victims of both a life threatening disease **and** violent crime. Empowerment for these survivors involves **both** SAFETY and SOBRIETY.
- Many substance abusing victims of domestic violence and sexual assault are introduced to drugs by partners who use substances to gain and maintain power and control. A violent person may use alcohol or date rape drugs like rohypnol to more easily harm another. This is a form of physical, emotional, social, sexual and spiritual abuse. Recognizing this may help establish trust and reduce stigma.
- Substance abusing victims of violence are often victimized by substance abusing perpetrators. Cessation of drinking and drug use alone **cannot** ensure safety. Often, recovery is accompanied by more danger for victims. As victim sobriety increases perpetrators may find their ability to control their partners threatened. They may seek to sabotage recovery efforts or look for new ways to regain control. Refer people to support groups addressing both the substance abuse as well as the domestic violence/sexual assault issues.



- Treatment for substance abuse can pose many risks for victims of domestic violence/sexual assault. **Conjoint or couples counseling is not appropriate and should not be encouraged by providers.** Domestic violence/sexual assault victims in methadone programs may be particularly vulnerable because they must appear daily at a set time for their dose and thus can be easily tracked by an abuser.
- Validate that anyone might use drinking or drugging to cope but there are safer ways to survive sexism, homophobia, racism, ageism, ableism, classism, sexual assault, rape trauma, abuse, domestic violence and other forms of pain and oppression.
- Offer options but recognize substances impair judgment, making advocacy-based counseling more challenging. Don't be afraid to refer to 12-step programs, but be able to explain both strengths and limitations. Be aware of alternative referrals, especially for gender-specific or culturally appropriate support groups or chemical dependency treatment providers.
- Recognize euphoric recall and blackout make safety planning harder. Denial of use is not about fooling the provider. It's a tactic to be addressed in a respectful manner. Facing the truth is scary and painful for the alcoholic or addict. Always be honest and direct, but remember tact and dignity.
- Chemical dependency undermines both health and judgment. Withdrawal symptoms can be painful and life threatening. Encourage people to seek medical attention prior to detoxing.
- Realize, chemically affected victims of violence often believe their use of a substance means the violence directed against them is warranted. Always affirm no one has the right to hurt them, and that violence directed against them is **never their fault** under any circumstance.
- Understand both negative stereotypes and negative internal views about domestic violence, sexual assault and addiction act as barriers preventing people from realizing they need support. Additionally, service providers must examine their own beliefs about alcohol and other drug use, abuse and addiction to ensure addict phobia is not impairing their ability to effectively advocate for recovering or actively using victims of violence.
- Refer people addressing chemical dependency and interpersonal violence issues to the local domestic violence/sexual assault or substance abuse program. You may also refer them to the **Alcohol Drug Help Line Domestic Violence Outreach Project at 1-800-562-1240.**