

# CRAFTING SAFETY PLANS FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

2016 NAEH Ending Family Homelessness Conference

Kris Billhardt, VOA Oregon - Home Free

[kbillhardt@voaor.org](mailto:kbillhardt@voaor.org)

HOME  
*Free*

 Volunteers  
of America®  
OREGON

# A Framework of Safety

2

- **Survivors can enter the housing services system safely and confidentially**
- **Homeless/housing programs have examined policies and approaches with survivor safety in mind**
- **Staff receive training to enhance sensitivity and reduce victim-blaming**
- **Partnerships are in place to better ensure attention to DV-related retention issues**

# Consider...

3

- ❑ Multiple entry points/safe alternatives to central access
- ❑ A preliminary screen that includes DV risk assessment
- ❑ Separate intakes/case managers for couples
- ❑ Protocol for positive screens
- ❑ Transfer policy if DV is identified post-housing placement
- ❑ Housing location entails consideration of its safety to survivor
- ❑ Serious look at data-sharing
- ❑ Robust informed-consent process with Opt-in approach to HMIS
- ❑ Cross-training (DV/homeless-housing)
- ❑ Trauma-informed and flexible approach

# Why Safety Plan in my Homeless/Housing Program?

4

- ❑ Fleeing or attempting to flee an abuser heightens the danger for DV survivors
- ❑ Safety planning can help survivors brainstorm new ideas for staying as safe as possible in her/his current situation
- ❑ Survivors do lots to keep themselves alive every day; same skills can be put to use in new living situation
- ❑ Talking through a plan can help identify high-risk situations and provide opportunities to mitigate the danger

# Safety Planning Basics

5

- ❑ A conversation (not a hand-out or checklist)
- ❑ Doesn't guarantee safety, but looks at how to increase it
- ❑ Not a one-time deal; plan will change as circumstances change
- ❑ Individually tailored; survivor activities and abuser's tactics will guide the plan.
- ❑ Builds on survivors' abundant expertise

# In General ...

6

- ❑ The survivor knows best.
- ❑ Safety plans require flexibility, creativity, and are ever-changing as situation evolves.
- ❑ Don't assume survivor will remember everything you talk about - ask if writing it down would be helpful AND if writing it down would be a safety risk.
- ❑ Incorporate children in the plan.
- ❑ Remember: one size does not fit all.

# Starting the Conversation

7

- “Since you’ve been in our program, how safe have you been feeling?”
- “Thinking about your safety, what are you concerned about?”
- “What has your partner done in the past to make you unsafe?”
- “What are some things that you’ve done in the past to stay safe? What worked/didn’t work?”
- “Do you have safe people you could involve in a plan?”

# Spark Ideas by Bringing In Information

8

*“I’ve worked with other survivors who...*

- ❑ have carried around a 9-1-1 cell phone
- ❑ rehearsed a safety plan with their children
- ❑ taught their children how to call the police
- ❑ set up signals with neighbors
- ❑ changed daily routines
- ❑ parked their car where abuser can’t block it in
- ❑ shared his/her photo with safe people
- ❑ kept copies of important documents in a safe place

# Addressing Emotional Safety

9

- ❑ Normalize how difficult the emotional aspect of surviving DV can be.
- ❑ “For a lot of survivors, trauma can be triggered by everyday things - it can be alarming and exhausting. Has this been happening for you?”
- ❑ “What have you been able to do for yourself in that moment or afterwards?”
- ❑ Rehearse a self-care response for issues such as seeing perpetrator in public, or having to interact during scheduled contacts such as visitation exchanges, court, etc.

# Working Together Safely

10

- ❑ Talk with survivor about information-sharing you may need to do as part of the program
- ❑ Be sure the SP is the survivor's - not yours
- ❑ Thoroughly discuss safety of housing location
- ❑ For home visits
  - ❑ Confirm the safety of the visit – every time you visit
  - ❑ Check out whether it's OK to leave a message
  - ❑ Be sure someone in your program knows where you are
  - ❑ Bring a minimum of stuff with you; avoid looking “social-worky”
- ❑ For mobile advocacy
  - ❑ Discuss with survivor how s/he wants to handle it if s/he sees someone s/he knows while you're in public location

# If Contact is Brief: Plant Seeds

11

- **Validate**
  - “It sounds like you have a lot going on – do you have support people you can talk to, who know a little about what’s been happening?”
- **Explore next steps**
  - “Do you have a safe place to go (when you leave here, if you needed to be away from your partner, etc.)?”
  - “Do you know where you can get more information about options and resources if you needed it?”
- **Leave the door open**
  - “I’ll be here to talk to – I’ll remain a resource.”
  - “I’m familiar with some DV advocates, if you want me to connect you.”