CRAFTING SAFETY PLANS FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

2016 NAEH Ending Family Homelessness Conference
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A Framework of Safety

- 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...

- 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?

- 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

- 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 …

- 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

- “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

“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

- 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

- 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

- **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.”