

Providing women with information about other agencies

Given that women experiencing domestic abuse approach on average, eight agencies for help, all agencies should be able to provide accurate information and support them to explore their options. Even if your agency is not in a position to provide the service(s) the woman needs, remember your response may be crucial in terms of what happens next. Points to consider include:

- Safety of the woman and her children should be paramount in your response.
- Listen to the woman and find out what she wants and needs to happen. If the woman is reluctant to contact other agencies, then it is important that you respect this.
- Let her know what your organisation can provide and the limitations of this.
- It is essential that you give her accurate and up-to-date information on any other agency that could further address her needs. This information should cover:
 - *what the agency does and is likely to be able to offer her*
 - *practical issues like address, opening times and phone number*
 - *what is likely to happen*
- If you are unsure of any of the details, e.g. opening times, offer to phone them first (either with the woman's permission or without giving any details of her situation) to check out the information you are giving her.
- Give her time to consider the options you present to her. Try not to put pressure on her to do anything that she isn't ready to do.
- If possible, offer her access to a phone to make contact with them safely.
- Offer to contact the agency on her behalf, if this is what the woman wants. Check out how much information she wants to pass on over the phone.
- Obtain the name of the person you speak to and let the woman know whether that person will be available for her.
- Provide written details of contacts, numbers and addresses for the woman to take away. Make sure all information is up-to-date.
- Discuss the practicalities of the woman keeping written information, in terms of her personal safety.
- Consider developing a single referral form, copies of which can, with the woman's consent, be passed to all relevant agencies. If this approach were adopted, it would reduce the need for women to 'retell' their accounts to each individual agency.

Service Provision to Women Experiencing Domestic Violence in Scotland, Sheila Henderson, The Scottish Office Central Research Unit, 1997.

Adapted from: The multi-agency strategy to tackle violence against women in Edinburgh 1999 - 2002.