

# Respect & validation

It may have taken a woman months or years to reach the point of disclosing her abuse, so how she is treated is likely to have an impact on whether she is able to disclose more and find help. Fear of being blamed or not being believed can stop her talking about her experiences.

**You must ask the question.....**"Will my intervention leave this person & her children in greater safety or greater danger?" This requires you to take the following general principles of good practice into account;

Ensure that the safety of the woman (and of any dependent children) is the paramount consideration. A woman is deemed to be 'safe' once she feels she is.

Respond empathetically. Women who are experiencing domestic abuse are trying to find a solution to a dangerous and frightening situation. How you respond can crucially affect whether she can escape the abuse and make appropriate choices about her future. Asking for help is never easy, particularly when the woman is feeling vulnerable and powerless, so your sympathetic response is especially important on each and every occasion when makes contact, whether it's by phone or office visit.

Believe her. Domestic abuse can be both serious and dangerous and can lead to death. Recognise she is the best person to assess the danger.

Remember that physical abuse is only one part of the problem so a woman experiencing domestic abuse should never be asked to prove that physical violence has taken place.

Leaving an abusive partner is often a long process. Be careful not to seem to pass judgement or blame the woman for her situation. Don't ask her to justify her actions, e.g. why on earth did you go back to him last time? Accept that she will have had her reasons for making such a decision. She may simply want the abuse to stop and the relationship to be saved. She may not want to leave her partner, or they may previously have parted and reconciled, but this does not mean the abuse has not taken place or wasn't serious. The act of leaving in itself can escalate the abuse involved. Factors such as financial dependence, lack of adequate secure housing, immigration status, lack of information and support can make it particularly difficult to leave an abusive partner. It may be particularly difficult for black and ethnic minority women, immigrant and refugee women, disabled women, older women, women with mental health problems and women with addictions to leave an abusive partner.

Seek to empower the woman to make informed decisions and choices about her life and do not try to make decisions on her behalf. Remember that she may feel she has no choices; give her time to consider the options that you present to her and try not to put pressure on her to do anything that she isn't ready to do.

Respect confidentiality and privacy, and recognise the real dangers that may be created if this is breached. Experience shows that perpetrators who are trying to track down former partners are often very persistent and vindictive. Let her know in advance the limits to the level of confidentiality you can offer her.

Adapted from Glasgow City Council's Joint Housing/Social Work Protocol on Domestic Violence and Cardiff City Council's Domestic Violence Policy and Procedures for Housing Staff.