

# 6. Worker responses and safety

## Training topics

- A. Worker responses to dealing with domestic abuse
- B. Safety planning for workers

## Participant handouts

Possible emotional responses by workers

Actions I can take to deal with my own responses

Worker safety issues

[If available, county-specific worker safety information]

# **A. Worker responses to dealing with domestic abuse**

## **Review and discuss handout**

**Trainer note:** One of the challenges of conducting domestic abuse training is the broad range of issues this topic can bring up for training participants. Emotional responses to the content of the training may give trainers a glimpse into what workers experience on the job.

Review the handout "Possible emotional responses by workers." Acknowledge that reactions such as those listed are a normal and understandable part of working with clients in this difficult situation.

## **Activity**

Ask participants to think for a minute or two about ways they can deal with their own responses. Prompt them with questions like

- Who can you go to for support?
- What techniques do you use to deal with work-related stress?
- Where can you go when you need more information?

Have participants write down an idea or two on the handout "Actions I can take to deal with my own responses." Discuss in large group and record responses on easel pad. Encourage participants to add ideas from the discussion to their handout.

## **B. Safety planning for workers**

### **Review and discuss handout**

Review the handout "Worker safety issues." Add or substitute information about specific agency policies.

### **Activity**

Point out that balancing personal responses and empathic communication with clients can be a challenge. Ask participants to work in small groups to answer the question "How can I balance my need for safety and open, empathetic communication with clients?" Facilitate large group discussion. Record ideas on an easel pad and encourage participants to take notes on their handout.

# **Participant Handouts**

## Possible emotional responses by workers

Emotional response	Worker issues
<b>Fear</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Of getting involved</li> <li>▪ Of what might happen to you</li> <li>▪ That what happened to the victim could happen to you</li> </ul>
<b>Denial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Of seriousness or existence of the violence</li> <li>▪ That it could happen to you</li> </ul>
<b>Overwhelmed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ By lack of options and resources for victims</li> <li>▪ By hearing too many painful, scary stories</li> <li>▪ By anxiety over victim's safety</li> </ul>
<b>Helplessness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ From feeling nothing can be done for victim</li> <li>▪ From anxiety about your own helplessness</li> </ul>
<b>Anger</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ At victim, system, your own helplessness</li> <li>▪ At your own vulnerability</li> <li>▪ At indifference of institutions</li> </ul>
<b>Guilt</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ For being angry, indifferent or rejecting toward client</li> <li>▪ Over lack of options or victim's inability to use them</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of trust</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Because other clients have not fulfilled your expectations</li> <li>▪ If you think the victim's behavior was not in his or her best interests</li> </ul>
<b>Depression</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When victim does something you think is harmful</li> <li>▪ If you feel like you did not help</li> </ul>
<b>Ambivalence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ About whether or not victim should leave family</li> <li>▪ About getting involved with helping victim</li> </ul>

Adapted from Alpert, M., & Schechter, S. (1979). Sensitizing workers to the needs of victims. *Victimology* (4): 4.  
 Cited in Ganley, A., & Schechter, S. (1996). *Domestic violence: A national curriculum for child protective services*. San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund.

# Actions I can take to deal with my own responses

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# Worker safety issues

## Be careful about the possibility of confrontation

Be aware that the perpetrator may find workers threatening and that there is the potential for violence outside the family.

## Take threats seriously

Response depends on agency policy and may include

- Telling your supervisor
- Consulting with the agency
- Considering documentation
- Considering law enforcement
- Rethinking working near windows
- Not walking to your car alone

## Some basic precautions

- Use the buddy system when you think you may be dealing with a victim. The perpetrator may come to the office, too—with, after or separately from the victim. Have a coworker listen for unusual noises and be aware of when you should return to your desk.
- Keep control of the door to offices.
- Stop the victim from disclosing in the presence of a perpetrator

**Remember: keeping yourself safe keeps your coworkers safe.**

## Ideas on how to balance open, empathetic communication and worker safety

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**[If available, county-specific worker safety information]**