



Safety Planning with Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence

A Guide for Homeless/Housing Programs

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- A project of the District Alliance for Safe Housing (DASH), a local safe housing program in D.C.)
- A national Technical Assistance and Training provider (launched October 2015)
- Project Partners: Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Part of the federal Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium (DVHTAC)





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NASH provides programs and communities with the tools, strategies and support necessary to improve coordination between domestic and sexual violence services and homeless and housing providers, so that survivors and their children can ultimately avoid homelessness as the only means of living free from abuse.



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Definition

Safety Plan:

A survivor's unique strategy designed to reduce the risks generated by a partner's or offender's abuse and control



Why Safety Plan in My Homeless/Housing Program?

- 80% of women and children experiencing homelessness have experienced DV (HUD Family Options Study).
- 50% of sexual assaults take place within a mile of the victim's home (Greenfeld).
- Leaving DV relationship can heighten the danger
- Talking through a plan helps identify high-risk situations, provide opportunities to mitigate the danger



The Fine Print

DSV (Domestic and sexual violence) advocates usually conduct a risk/lethality assessment; *this is best left to victim services experts.*

Homeless program staff should be equipped to discuss safety *as it revolves around survivors' participation in services*, and to provide referrals to DV/SA programs for more in-depth planning.



Working Together Safely: Some Examples

- Information-sharing you'll need to do
- Safety of housing location
- Safety connected to visits/appointments
- Leaving phone messages/sending texts
- How survivor wants to you to handle being seen by someone they know during course of services
- Advocating with landlords: should you disclose DV to help explain rental history?



Policies, Practices, and Approaches that Promote Safety

Goal: Our homeless/housing program has implemented policies and approaches that align with best practices and demonstrate our agency's commitment to promoting safety for survivors of domestic and sexual violence.



Safety and Transparency Right from the Gate

Best Practices:

- Demonstrate early on that you are concerned about safety.
- If you are a HUD grantee, explain that you must ask all required questions.
- Be clear about the info your agency may be legally required to disclose.
- Let people know that choosing not to answer a question will not result in being denied services.
- Explain options available around sharing private and personally identifying information.
- Hold safety-focused conversations when DV indicators are present.



Create Safety around Intake Process

- Adjust your physical space to better ensure a private conversation.
- Conduct separate interviews with couples (consult your local DV/SA experts for help sorting out power dynamics).
- Include a brief DV/SA risk assessment with everyone



Understanding Trauma is Key in Our Work with Survivors



- Trauma is pervasive; its impact is life-shaping
- Differentially impacts marginalized and vulnerable people
- May recur within families and communities across several generations (historical trauma + ongoing oppression)
- The service system has often been re-traumatizing
- **Trauma affects how people approach services**



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DV and Trauma: Extensive and Enduring

SAMHSA:
80-90% of
women seeking
services report
histories of
violence

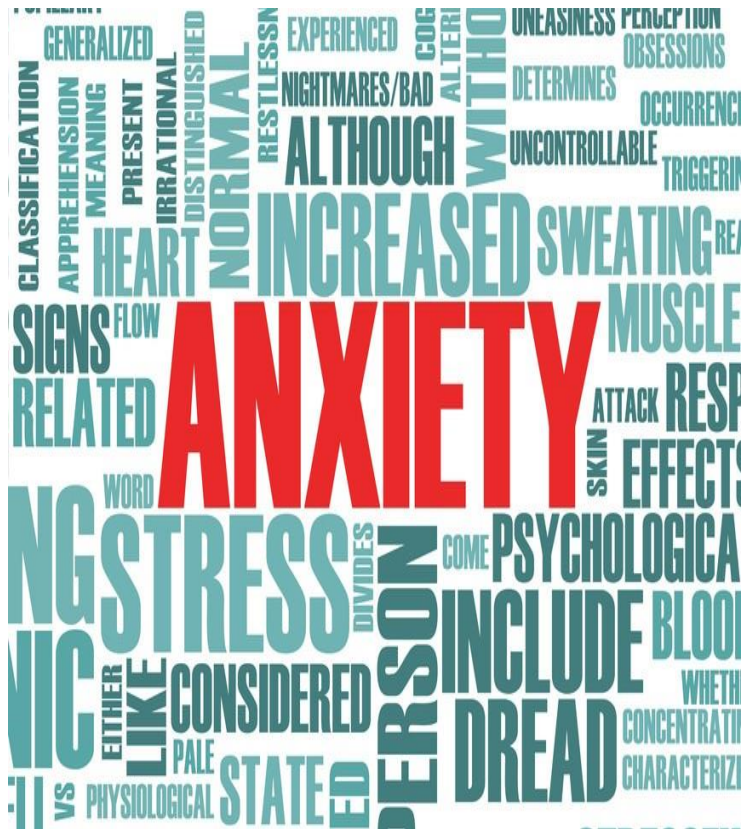
DV is an
overwhelming
and life-
threatening
experience;
creates toxic
levels of stress

SHARE Study:
Over 94%
experienced
PTSD; average
score equal or
higher than that
of returning
veterans of
combat

Survivors' sense
of power, self-
efficacy, and
well-being is
diminished; this
disequilibrium
affects all areas
of their lives



How Trauma May Show Up



- Emotional unevenness
- Inability to concentrate
- Hypervigilance, easily startled
- Intrusive imagery
- Pain, illness
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares
- Coping with drugs/alcohol
- Confusion, trouble deciding
- Difficulty with complex directions
- Forgetfulness
- Withdrawal, seeming “checked-out”



Remember Your Trauma Lens

- How would people with trauma history experience your intake process?
 - Rushed, goal-oriented?
 - Detailed, intrusive?
 - Attention to signs that conversation is triggering trauma reactions?
- Spend time establishing rapport before diving in
- Allow for pauses, a second appointment, bringing in a support person who can help “ground” the client, etc.



Be Ready to Respond to a “Yes”

Have a ready response when sexual or domestic violence is identified.

- If danger is current, immediate options for safety may be needed
- In all cases: informed consent, offer linkages to support services, priority placement, and **Safety Planning**



When Abuse is Uncovered Post-Placement

Suspend Judgement

- Honor survivor's choices – including to stay put

“Problem Tenants”

- Assure follow-up but protect confidentiality
- Separate meetings w couple

Enact agency policy (in concert with legal protections)

If abuser leaves

- Help them with new placement
- Help survivor determine best safety strategy



Violence Against Women Act (2013)

Under VAWA, survivors have the right to:

- ***Be accepted into shelter/housing.*** For example, a housing provider cannot deny an applicant housing/assistance because of domestic violence, including a criminal history or poor credit history connected with domestic violence;
- ***Remove the abuser*** from the public housing lease or Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher and stay in the unit;
- ***Ensure that the PHA and Section 8 landlords honor a civil protection order,*** specifically if it addresses the abuser's access to where the victim lives;
- ***Port*** (move to another location) if the victim has a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher;
- ***Seek an emergency transfer***



Violence Against Women Act (2013)

Under VAWA, survivors have the right to (continued):

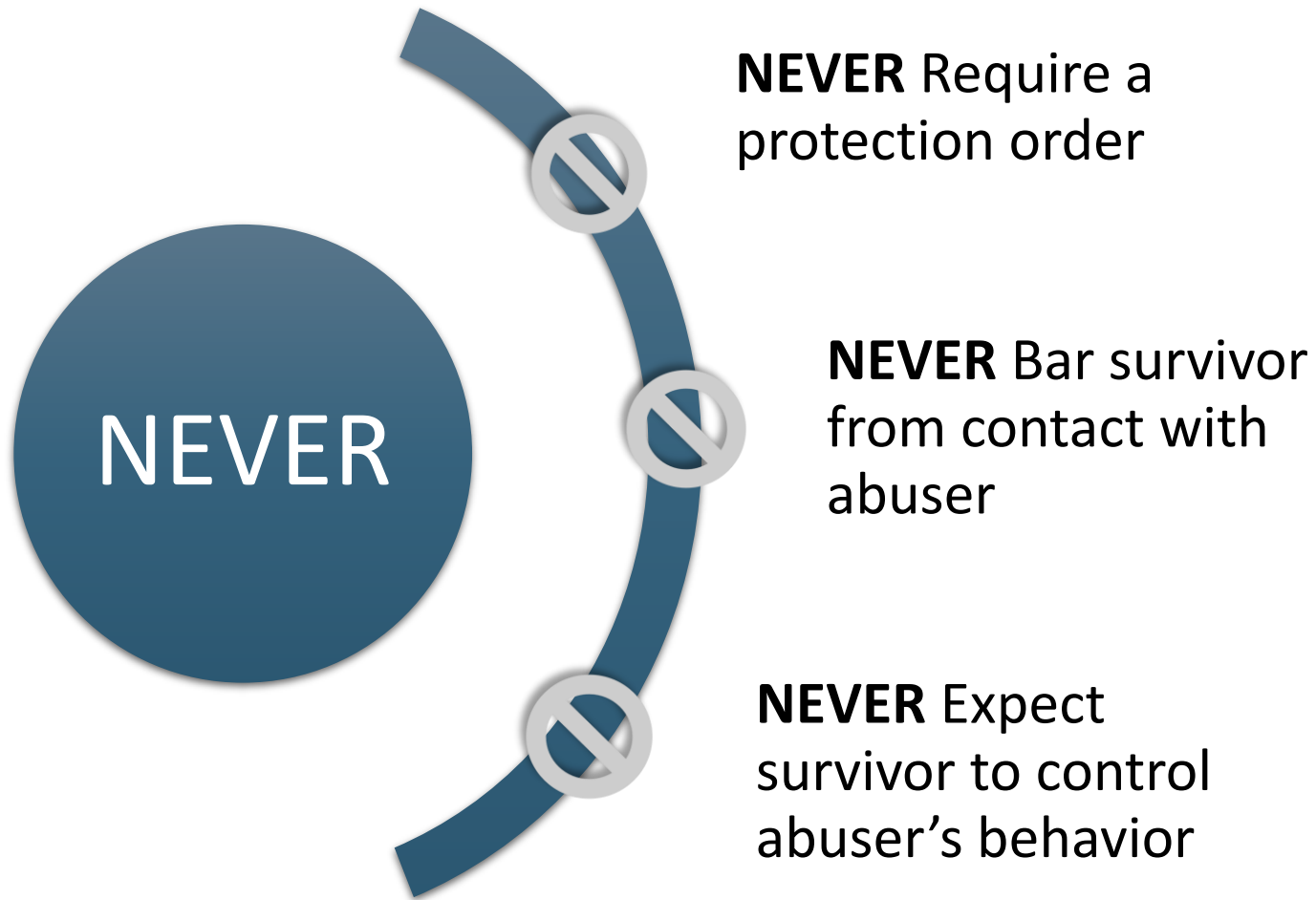
- ***Stay in the unit***, even if there is (or has been) criminal activity that is directly related to the domestic violence;
- ***Confidentiality of information*** about domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. This information can only be shared if requested by the survivor in writing, is required for use in an eviction proceeding or is otherwise required by law;
- ***Self-certify*** using the HUD designated form (Form HUD-5382 -comes in 15 different languages - see appendix) or provide a signed letter from a victim service provider (includes DSV organizations), attorney, or a medical/mental health professional; or provide a police report, court order (i.e. protection/restraining order) or administrative record, if documentation is requested in writing by a housing provider.



Policies/Requirements: What to Keep, What to Add



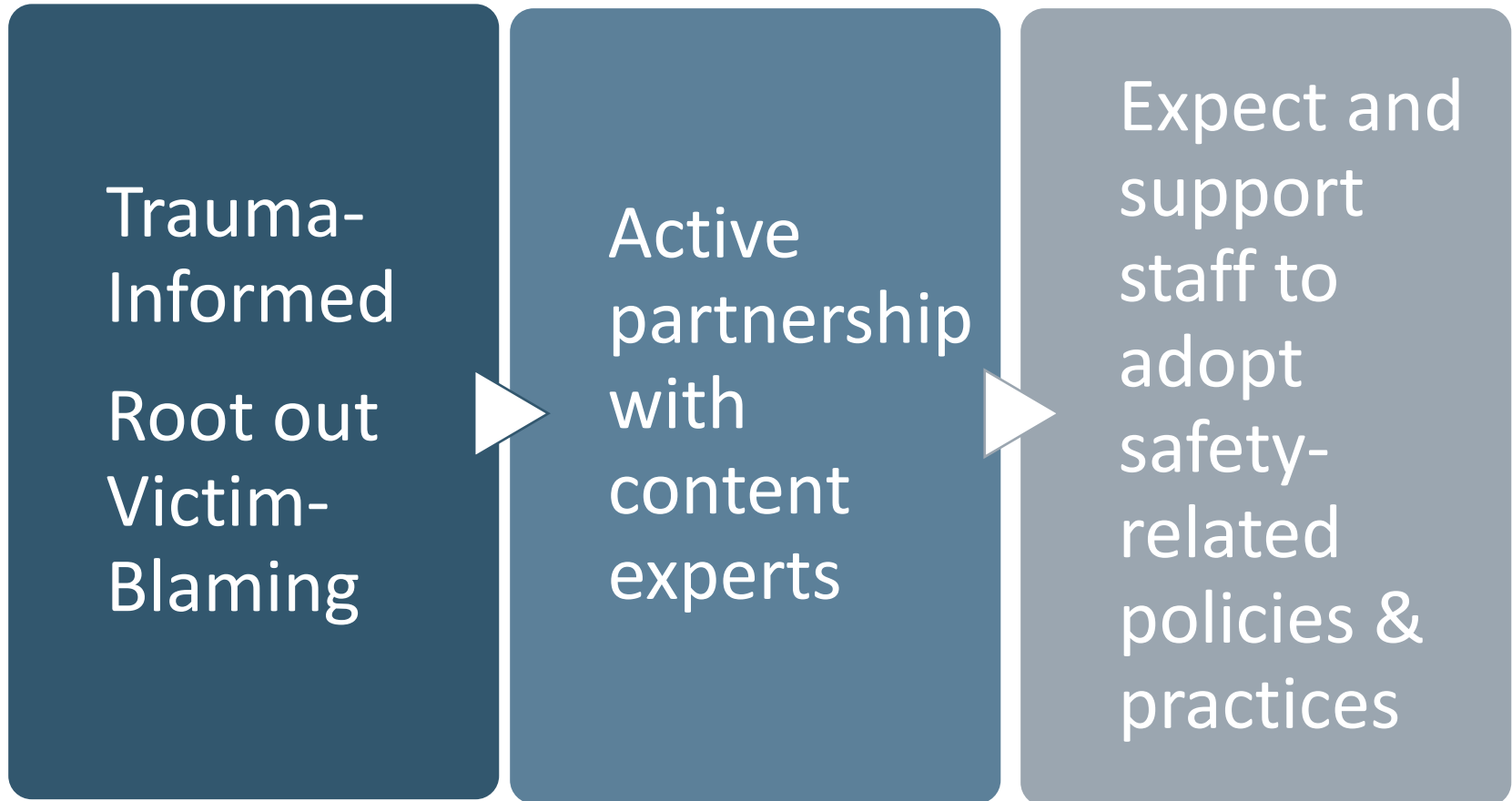
Match Intent with Impact



Preparing Staff and Engaging Partners

Goal: Comprehensive training ensures agency staff have tools, info, and support they need to work effectively with survivors. Investment in partnership cultivation to inform our work/ensure survivors have connections to services outside our scope.

Agency Culture

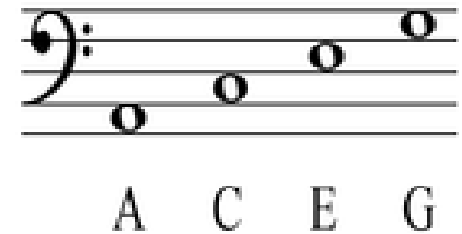
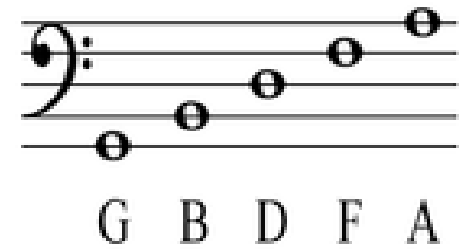


It's All About that Base: Fundamentals

Agency-wide training in DV/SA is core to survivor safety – and to housing retention.

Agency-wide training in trauma promotes a consistent trauma-informed approach

Partner with content experts!



Partnering to Promote Survivor Safety

- Look for ways to solidify ongoing contact with content experts
- Domestic and Sexual Violence organizations can be trainers, consultants, and co-case managers.
- Establish avenues for survivors to reach across systems for help with issues that otherwise might compromise safety and stabilization



Additional Helpful Community Partners

Cultural or population-specific programs	Legal Aid and Family Law Attorneys
Support groups, helplines, and drop-in services for survivors	Immigration Legal Services
DV/SA-specific financial empowerment programs	Family Justice Centers
Victim-focused recovery programs	Rape Victim Assistance programs
School-based resources, child-focused support or counseling in community	Specialized DV/SA units in PD, Prosecutor, and Child Welfare Offices
Parenting After Violence classes	Restraining Order/Family Court
Rape crisis centers	Trauma counselors
Nurse-family partnerships/home visitors	McKinney-Vento Local Educational Agency liaisons



Safety Planning with Survivors in Your Services

Goal: A commitment to conduct safety-focused conversations with every survivor we serve is central to our agency's DV/SA-specific protocol.



Keep in Mind...

- Domestic and Sexual Violence are complex issues, and the wrong intervention can lead to harmful consequences.
- Manuals, toolkits, and webinars are no substitute for live, interactive training.
- Ensure meaningful language access; nuanced and stressful conversations extremely difficult when not in your first language (*for help with developing a language access plan, go to <https://nationallatinonetwork.org/lep-toolkit-home>*)
- It's the survivor's plan, not yours. Honor survivor preferences and cultural considerations.



Homelessness and Race

The Center for Social Innovation's SPARC project examined over 111,000 HMIS records, collected 148 oral histories, and conducted 18 focus groups in six U.S. communities. They found:

- More than 78% of people experiencing homelessness were people of color. **The general population in the U.S. is 74% White, 12.4% Black, and 17.2% Hispanic/Latinx.**
- Black people comprise 13% of the general population in the U.S. and 26% of those living in poverty, yet account for more than 40% of the homeless population. **Poverty rates alone don't explain the over-representation.**
- Homelessness among American Indian/Alaska Native people was three to eight times higher than their representation in the general population.
- DV was identified as a common thread in the lives of many respondents.
- <http://center4si.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/SPARC-Phase-1-Findings-March-20181.pdf>

Assumptions

You are proactive and don't wait for disclosure before demonstrating that safety is a key concern in your program.

Staff receive solid training and have what they need to confidently discuss/plan for safety.

You're transparent around data; you're frank about what must be collected to determine eligibility, and offer options around recording/storing/sharing.

You work to root out victim-blaming and to routinely apply a safety lens and survivor choice to decision-making.



Some Basic Tenets



- Safety planning is a conversation, not a checklist
- Doesn't guarantee safety; looks at how to reduce vulnerability to risk
- Change plans as circumstances change
- It's voluntary (on survivor's part)

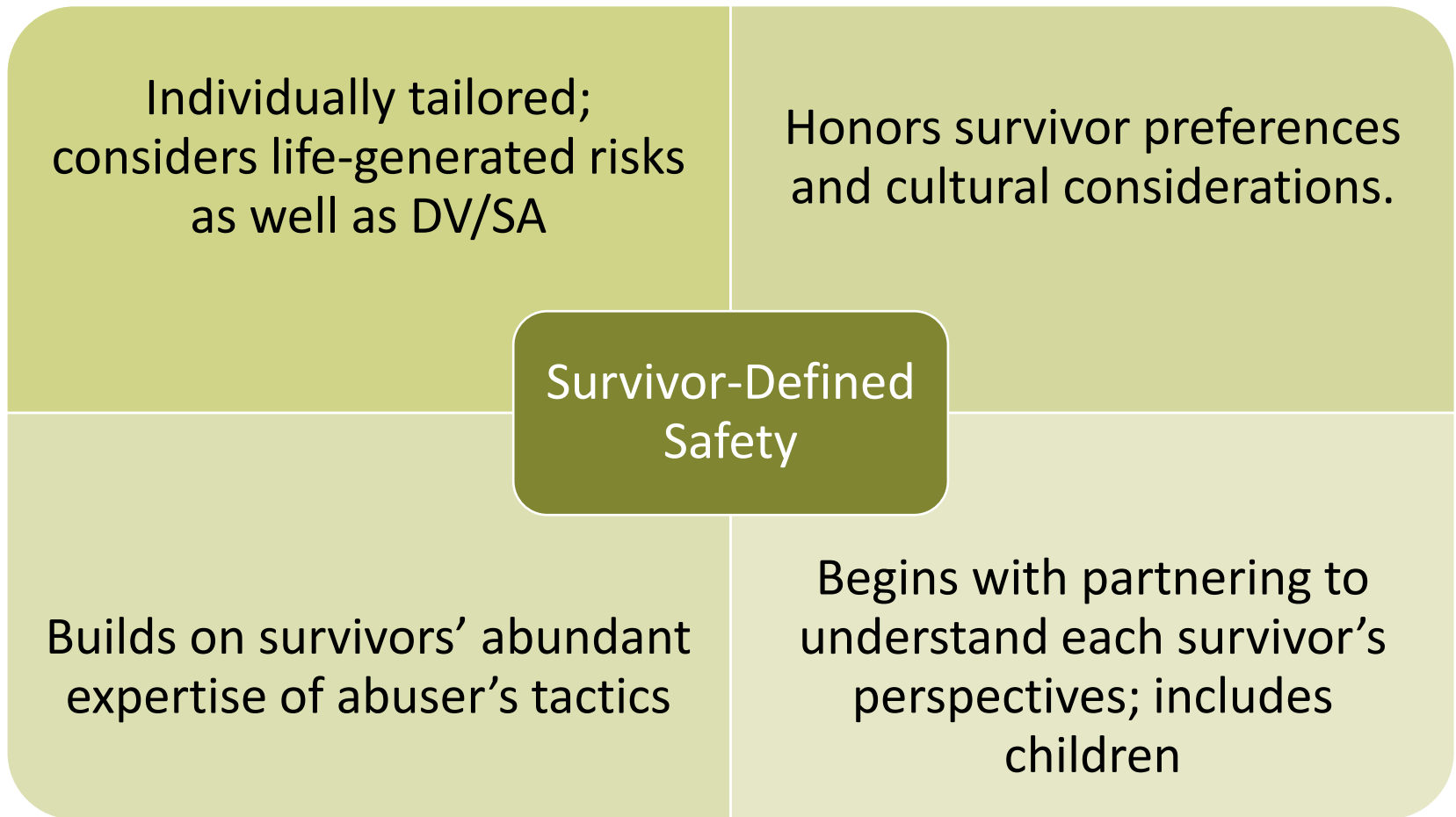


Start with Right Now

- “Is our location safe for you?”
- “Are you safe to sit down and talk for awhile?”
- “Is there someone here today who makes you feel unsafe?”
- “When we finish talking today, can you leave safely?”

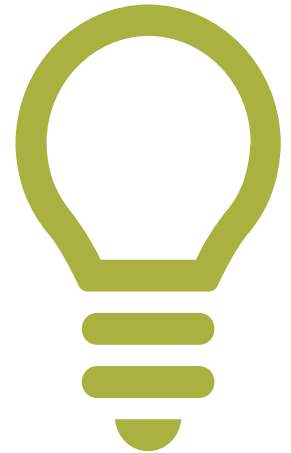


Survivors Lead the Way



“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 for help
- Set up signals with neighbors
- Changed daily routines
- Parked the car where abuser can’t block it in
- Shared partner’s photo with safe people
- Kept copies of important documents in a safe place



Keep the Conversation Going

“Do you have safe people you can involve in your plan?”

“Since you’ve been in our program, how safe have you been feeling?”

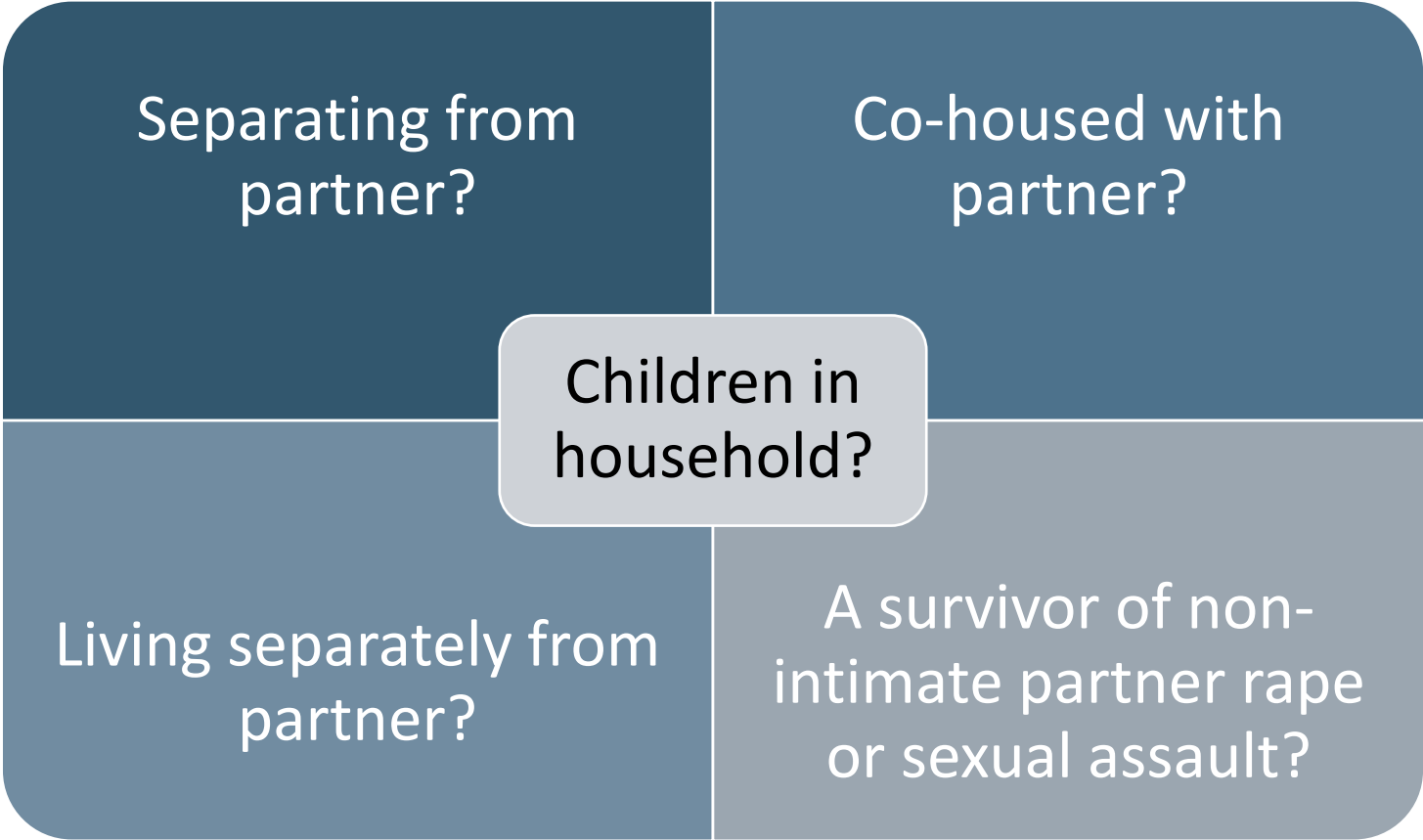
“Thinking about your safety, what concerns do you have?”

“What are some things you’ve done to stay safe?”

“What has your partner done in the past that made you unsafe?”



Tailor Your Focus: Is Survivor...



Address Emotional Safety

- Normalize how tough the emotional aspect of surviving DV/SA can be.
- “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.

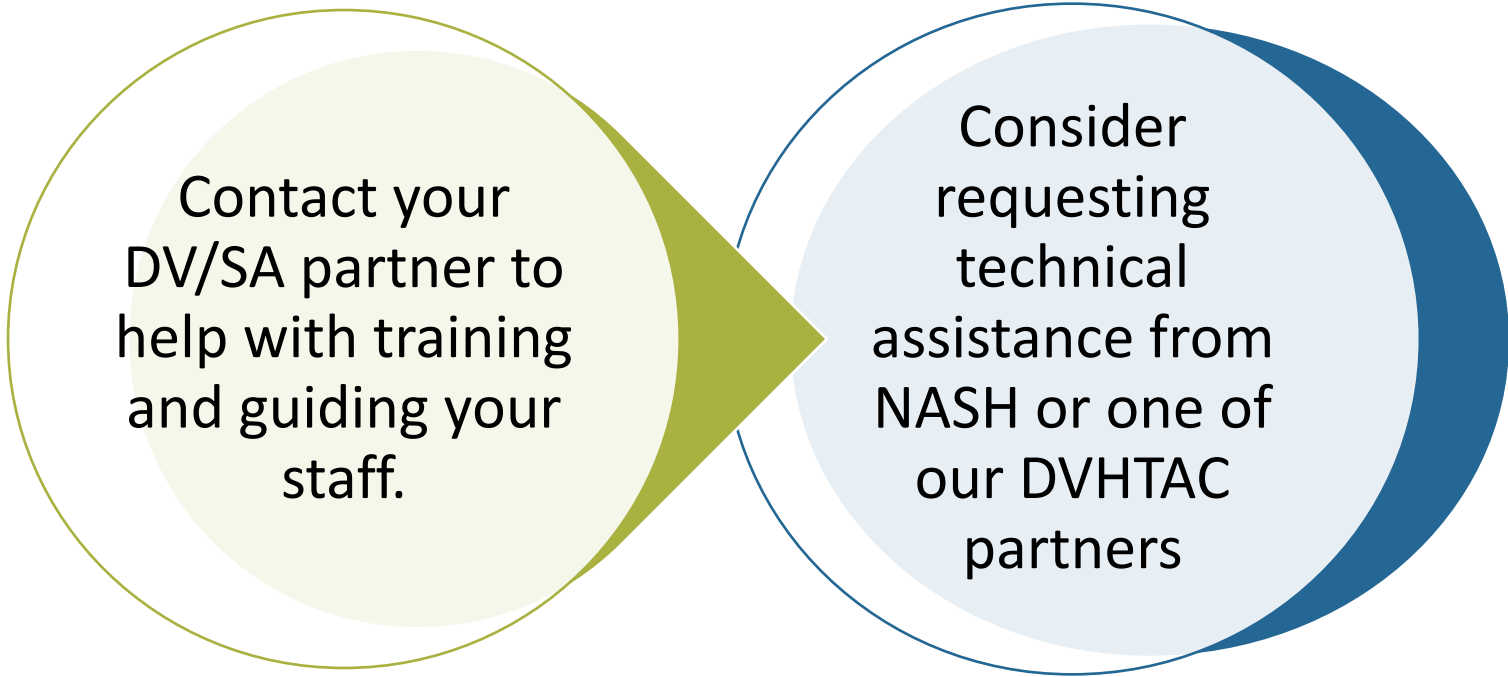


Some Final Tips

- Safety planning should be protocol for you, but is voluntary for the survivor. If survivor declines, offer a hotline number or other referrals.
- Ask survivor if writing things down would be helpful and where it can be kept so not a safety risk.
- **Never** include details of safety plan in client documentation.
- Always offer connection to local DV/SA and culturally specific resources.
- Leave the door open. Trust may take awhile to build.



After Today's Webinar...



Contact your DV/SA partner to help with training and guiding your staff.

Consider requesting technical assistance from NASH or one of our DVHTAC partners



safehousingpartnerships.org

The website for the Domestic Violence and Housing
Technical Assistance Consortium



UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTIONS

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

EMPLOYING KEY APPROACHES

PUBLIC POLICIES

- Data, infographics, literature reviews, and reports that describe the intersections between domestic violence, sexual assault, homelessness, and housing
- Strategies for building effective and sustainable partnerships across systems and case studies of successful collaborations
- In-depth resource collections organized around four key approaches to addressing and preventing housing instability among survivors
- Access to relevant federal laws, regulations, and policies

Have questions? Need TA? Want training?
Contact the Consortium directly through the site!



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NASH Training and Technical Assistance

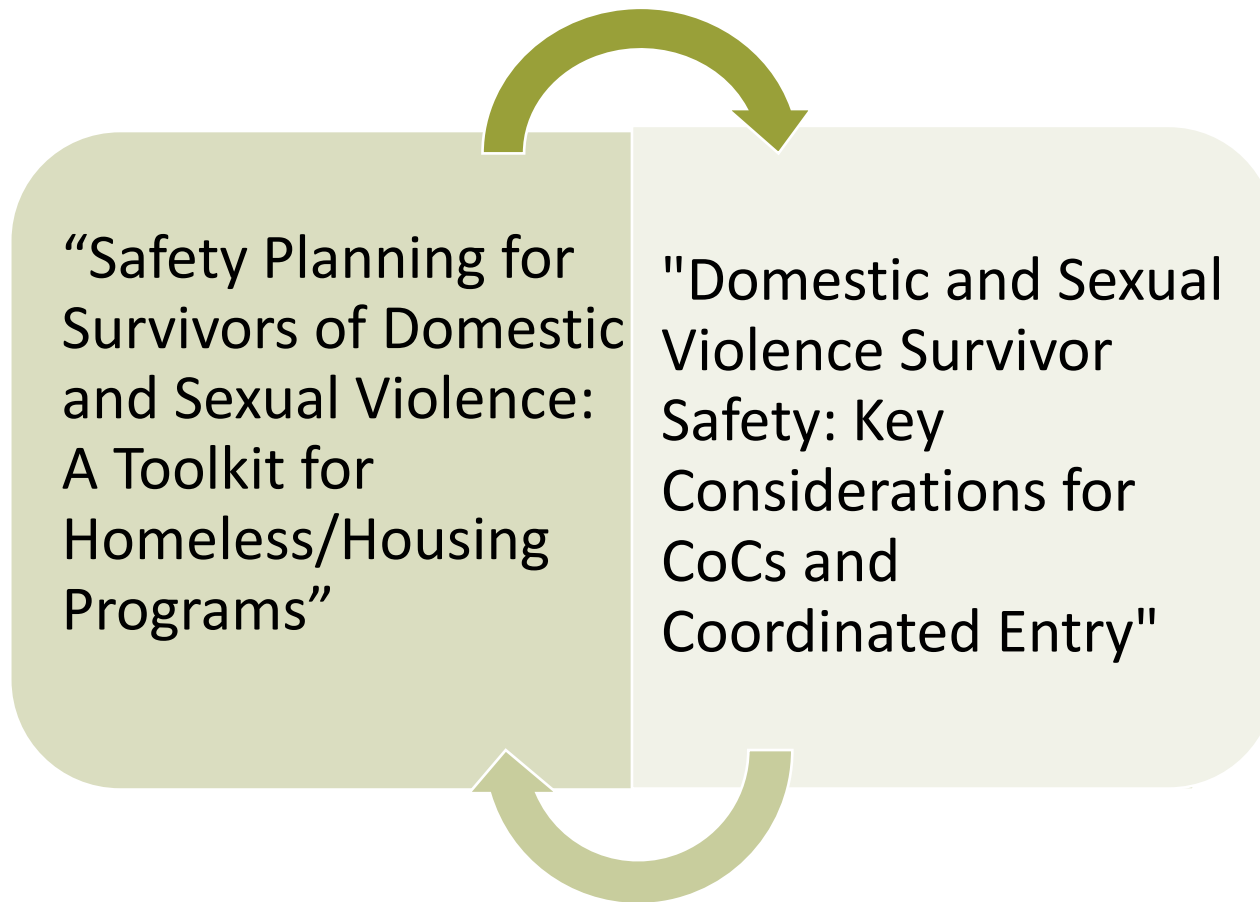
System and Program Level Technical Assistance issues include these and more:

- Coordinated Entry
- Building collaborative relationships
- Trauma-informed practice
- Rapid Re-housing, Housing First, Flexible Funds
- Federal, state and local housing protections



Upcoming Resources

Available This Summer: 2 Companion Guides



Upcoming Trainings

- **Making Mobile Advocacy a Reality Deep Dive**
May 24th or June 12th, 2018
10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. PT
- **DVHTAC Coordinated Entry Webinar Series: Best and Emerging Practices on Coordinated Entry featuring Texas**
May 30th, 2018
10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. PT
- **DVHTAC NOFA Webinar Series: Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) & Rapid Re-housing (RRH)**
June 27th, 2018
10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. PT

Find out more at
SafeHousingPartnerships.org

Questions



Contact NASH

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