



helping abused women in shelters

101 things to KNOW, SAY and DO



a **Helping Hands** Guide
on Skill Building and Tools
for Helpers and Healers

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Welcome

This is our second guide written to help people who help and advocate for women, especially women with controlling or abusive partners or ex-partners. Mistreatment can take many forms – emotional, financial, spiritual, sexual or physical – but coercive control engendering fear is the hallmark of abuse as we use the term here. When a woman is ready to reach out for help, we must be ready to understand her situation, prepared to use words that comfort and guide, and able to advance her safety and healing.

The first guide covered general topics about abuse in the context of intimate relationships and principles for working with women. This second guide applies that understanding to women seeking the assistance of shelters. We use the word “shelter” because it’s used in many countries. Other names for the same thing are refuge or transition house. Variations include safe houses, emergency shelters, and second-stage housing units. Some facilities are designed for short stays in response to crisis and some allow women to stay for many months or even years. Some limit their service to women fleeing abuse and some welcome women in a broad range of circumstances such as finding themselves homeless. Each shelter reflects its local community, the wisdom of the founding mothers who designed its mandate, and the staff who evolved its approach. Each shelter or agency has its own policies and procedures. Some of the guidance here may not apply in your context. Take what is relevant and consider the remainder as food for thought.

Why 101 things?

The 101 format reflects our commitment to producing training material to help busy people learn or up-grade skills in a convenient way, respectful of their multiple commitments in life. There are no recipe approaches or cookie-cutter prescriptions for working with abused women and their children. We don’t want to imply that there are. But there is a lot to learn about this field and usually no post-secondary educational or training program teaches everything people want to know. Each woman is unique and at a singular place in her life. She deserves advocacy and support matching and meeting her needs. Instead of prescriptions, we offer principles to guide interventions, flexible tools for practice, and guidance on skill building. We assume that you know the woman best. You want tools and tips to apply flexibly as the situation dictates.

Who could use these guides?

The term “shelter worker” as used here means anyone who works or volunteers in a residential setting serving women who are or have been in abusive relationships. This includes people in front-line positions, management and administration. Everyone is affected by the nature of the work and benefits from being aware of abuse dynamics and how to help women. We aimed to make these guides useful and relevant across many countries and legal jurisdictions. We believe that shelter work is among the most important and invisible occupations in any society. You support women and their children experiencing transition and facing difficult decisions.



This guide about women in shelters is designed to be read in conjunction with the Helping Hands guide called *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know, Say & Do*. References to pertinent material in that guide can be found in boxes like this one.

Features you see here

As you read, you encounter little boxes of information to enhance your work or understanding.



Here you find references to further readings. There's a lot of information out there so we want to point you in the direction of helpful places to learn more about a topic.

RESEARCH FILE



If a specific research project helps illustrate a point, we talk about it in boxes like this one. You'll also find the citation, in case you want to know more about that study.

TOOL BOX IDEA



These boxes contain ideas for work with women and suggestions for using the handouts in individual and group work. You find the handouts for women at the end of the guide.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Caution boxes flag safety issues to keep in mind when helping abused women. The likelihood of serious assault or death increases in the period immediately before, during and in the months after a separation from an angry, controlling or abusive partner.

STAFF MEETING DISCUSSION



Here you find ideas to form the basis of a discussion at a team or staff meeting. This field is always changing and these topics represent opportunities to think about critical issues and key dilemmas.

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The Soundtrack of My Life

Assumptions About Women Living in Shelters

Everyone has assumptions informing their work. We believe you should be aware of your own assumptions and also make them known to others. These are our assumptions about abused women who seek shelter and what they might want and need from us.



For our assumptions about woman abuse, see the Helping Hands guide called *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know, Say & Do*. Assumptions listed there are: most bruises are invisible; coercive control is the hallmark of abuse; coercive control tactics are used primarily by men; any woman could find herself in an abusive relationship (although some are more vulnerable); abuse changes how a woman thinks and feels about herself; surviving and coping within an abusive relationship can look like problems; surviving and coping strategies can become problems; a woman is more than her choice of partner or his choice of how to treat her; an abusive partner makes it difficult for a woman to be the mother she wants to be; and, the opposite of abuse is not the absence of abuse.

1. Entering a shelter can be a difficult step

Crossing the threshold of a shelter is a journey into uncharted territory for most women. What lies behind those locked doors? Am I a failure because my life has come to this? Will anyone understand what I've been through? Will my family or friends judge me? Will the shelter staff judge me? Shelters exist to help women and we want to be welcoming, but never forget how foreign and intimidating an environment it is in those first hours and days.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Helping a Prospective Resident Know What to Expect



If your shelter has a web site, posting photographs of bedrooms and common areas helps Internet-using women visualize themselves in your space. Or maybe you have a pamphlet for prospective residents. Give the answers to common questions. Do I share a room? Can I cook my own meals? Can you accommodate my special diet or religious practice? Is there a curfew? Is there storage for my belongings? Can my kids go to school while we're there? To generate a list, tap the expertise of departing women in an exit interview. What did she expect before she came? In what ways was her stay the same or different than expected? What does she wish she had known before she came? Build a list of common questions and clarify misunderstandings early. Knowing what to expect makes a difficult transition a bit easier.

2. Shelters can help women with both parts of the leaving process

Ending an abusive relationship is best understood as a process with at least two stages – emotional leaving and physical leaving. The two stages can elapse over several days or take several years. As with other major decisions about moving (e.g., emigrating from your homeland), a woman might spend months thinking about leaving before she actually does leave. Or change comes in an instant if a sudden and violent assault causes her to fear for her life. Some women leave emotionally long before they leave physically. For some women, it's the other way around: they are physically separated while in the shelter but still emotionally engaged in the relationship. Their hearts are heavy with confusion about the future. In a shelter, a woman can work through both parts of the separation process, if that is what she wants.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Men also experience the end of a relationship as a process of both emotional and physical separation. When a woman enters your shelter, this move may be a sudden and highly unwanted turn of events for her partner. Perhaps her process of emotional leaving unfolded over months or years. For him, the world changed in an instant. When a man and a woman are out of sync in the leaving process, the risk of an extreme reaction on his part must be considered, including the idea that he could harm or kill her. See pages 47 to 48 for handouts to help her determine if she and her partner are in or out of sync regarding separation.

RESEARCH FILE: Homicide Rates Among Separated Women



In Canadian homicide data, the rate of intimate partner homicide among separated women was twice that for women living common law and eight times that of married women. Half of women killed by a former partner were murdered within two months of separation and a third were murdered between two and six months after the separation. The most common motive discerned by homicide investigators was jealousy over perceived infidelity, suggesting an inability to accept the end of the relationship and an obsessive desire to maintain control from a distance.

Tina Hotton (2001). Spousal Violence After Marital Separation. *Juristat: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*, 21(7).



In *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know Say & Do*, the handout called “Thinking About My Safety” is a checklist of factors correlated with lethal or potentially lethal violence. Random and unpredictable factors also play a role so this is not a way to predict with accuracy. However, you can start a conversation about safety and pro-active planning of protections.

3. Some women in shelters will return to their partners

The strong pangs of guilt, confusion and fear won't magically evaporate as she enters the shelter door. Even in a highly abusive relationship, emotional and practical pulls include the comfort of a familiar and predictable routine, guilt, and plain loneliness. There is fear for repercussions and the implications for the children. He may call her cell phone repeatedly, begging her to return, making promises for self-improvement, or threatening dire consequences. If her children are adults, they may rally around him as the abandoned party. Young children may miss him and beg to go home. A woman may leave and return several times before the last break. Many never leave permanently.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Leaving as a Process



“Leaving” is not an event, it's a process evolving over time. In the shelter, she is physically separated from her partner, at least at this point. What comes next for her is a difficult decision which is hers alone. Give her space to talk about good memories and what about the relationship she will miss. Don't give the message that she can't talk about his good points. She has physically left but may continue to be emotionally engaged and in love with him. Your negative comments can trigger an escalation of commitment on her part, or a defensive reaction. A criticism of him can feel like a criticism of her. The handouts about leaving (reproduced later in this guide) might aid a discussion of the pulls of emotional leaving and the practical barriers to physical leaving.

4. Most abused women do not access the assistance of shelters

Research suggests that fewer than 10% of women in abusive relationships approach a shelter for assistance. We also suspect that most women who end abusive relationships will do so without contacting a shelter. These facts shape the profile of women in shelters in two ways. First, shelters see women seeking the safety and security offered. To move in with family would put her relatives in harms way from her partner's potentially violent reaction. Or she worries he might abduct or harm the children. Or she is simply scared of him. The second implication is that you see women with limited choices or few alternatives. The shelter may be their only option for a place to stay. Put another way, the profile of women in shelters does not match the profile of all abused women in society in general.

RESEARCH FILE: Profile of Violence Experienced by Shelter Residents



This study showed how the abuse propelling women into shelters is more severe than the profile of abuse in the general population of women. Referring to an American study of 274 women, this author found that 89% of the violence reported was what he calls “situational couple violence” meaning episodic and not part of an on-going pattern of control. Less common (11%) was the more detrimental (and male-dominated) “coercive controlling violence” that characterizes abuse as we define it in this series of guides. Among women in shelters, the opposite was true. The vast majority of shelter women who reported violence by a partner described violence involving coercive control (79%).

Michael Johnson (2006). Conflict and Control: Gender Symmetry and Asymmetry in Domestic Violence. *Violence Against Women*, 12(11): 1003-1018.

5. A woman seeking assistance at a shelter could face multiple challenges

As we suggested in the introductory guide to this series, “seek to understand each woman in all her complexity.” She is more than her choice in a partner or his choices on how to treat her. It may not serve her well to assume that abuse is the only issue she faces. On pages 15 to 19, we present other issues with which a sheltered woman might need assistance. Shelter workers assist women with debts, health problems, addictions, and/or mental health challenges to name a few.

6. Women bring their coping strategies into the shelter

We talked in the first guide about coping with the crazy-making and dangerous situations women navigate daily when living with an abusive partner. They might numb emotions with drugs or alcohol, for example, or use self-defensive violence. Once in shelter, a woman must adapt to a new environment and cope with a new set of challenges: uncertainty, loneliness, boredom, embarrassment. It's not surprising if a woman falls back on coping strategies which served her well in the past. But a strategy that worked in other contexts may cause problems in the shelter context. A woman's coping choices can compromise her ability to gain full benefit from your services, alienate the other women or, in the extreme, disqualify her from staying in the shelter. We talk on page 29 about some behaviours you might see in a shelter that could reflect ways of coping with abuse.



In *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know, Say & Do*, you find a discussion on coping with abuse including how women try to stop or avoid the abuse (engagement coping) or adapt how they think or feel about it (disengaged coping). We discuss how all coping is to some extent effective if it solves the problem or helps her to feel better, but some types of coping can cause problems in the long run.

7. Living in a shelter can be both restful and stressful

A shelter is refuge from abuse and fear, but it is also a communal living environment bringing together people from different walks of life, different ages, different cultures, some with children and some without. People have variable standards of cleanliness, noise, parenting, or taste in music. Children's defiance and misbehaviour may spiral in this unfamiliar setting. Inevitably, residents find features of community living to be annoying, stressful or intolerable. In the extreme, some women leave because of the strain. Handling community living disputes is one of the dilemmas discussed later in this guide.

8. What a woman wants and what she needs may differ in your opinion

The most obvious example is a woman's decision to reconcile with an abusive partner. You might see it as an unequivocally bad idea. When thinking about what she *needs*, we assume to know what is best for her. She alone walks the path she chooses for herself. Our role is not to tell her what to do. That is probably what her partner did. Our opinion is not usually helpful, no matter how well-meaning, kindly worded or grounded in experience. A shelter worker reveals to each woman the many paths and choices she has but can't yet see for herself, and to do so with encouragement and without judgment.

9. The best interests of a woman and those of her children can be in conflict

Concern for children is an important factor helping women decide to enter a shelter. As acutely as we understand the life factors causing a woman's parenting deficits and as much as she demonstrably loves her children, sometimes children's need for safety outweighs a woman's need to be their caregiver at this time in her life.

RESEARCH FILE: Shelter Admission Patterns and the School Year



Reviewing almost 2,400 crisis calls and requests for admission to one American shelter, these authors failed to find a pattern of increases around "drinking holidays" such as New Years Eve, statutory holidays or major sporting events. However, admissions of women with school-aged children jumped when school let out for summer vacation and again just before school resumed. There was another jump between terms. Once school started, there was a slow rise of admissions suggesting that women tried to hold out for the next school break but some had to leave sooner than hoped. Patterns of calls for shelter admission differed from calls to police or use of emergency rooms. Shelter calls tended to be during the week (highest on Mondays) and not immediately following a major crisis incident. Findings confirm anecdotal observation that mothers seek to minimize disruptions to schooling and are planful about entering a shelter.

Kathryn Oths & Tara Robinson (2007). Give Me Shelter: Temporal Patterns of Women Fleeing Domestic Abuse. *Human Organization*, 66(3): 249-260.

10. Women can do amazing things once freed from fear and self-doubt

Women who survive within abusive relationships are skilled at coping with bad things. They are resourceful, adaptable and possess other qualities serving them in good stead once the relationship ends. A shelter is where they re-group and think and heal before moving to the next stage of their lives. When you have the privilege of supporting a woman in this process, it is plainly evident that – with a little support and encouragement – abused women can blossom and move forward to happiness and peace.

Assumptions Guiding Work in a Shelter Context



Our overarching principles for working with women in or leaving abusive relationships are described in *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know, Say & Do*. Each woman is the expert on her life: respect her choices; safety is the priority; seek to understand each woman in all her complexity; be aware of the power imbalance between the helper and the helped; don't give advice: help her identify and assess her choices; be aware of the messages hidden in well-meaning words; listen more than talk; do not pathologize coping and survival skills; adopt a strength-based approach; and, bring a message of hope and healing.

Shelter workers have many opportunities to exercise those overarching principles. These additional assumptions apply specifically in the residential environment of a shelter.

1. Having an understanding of abuse is necessary but it's not sufficient

Women in shelters share some common experiences or you may see patterns of issues. But each woman has a unique life's journey bringing her to your door. She may face challenges besides the abuse, including debts and poor family support. Shelter workers are prepared to address many issues beyond education and emotional support about abuse because a woman might need advocacy in many domains, as we discuss on page 15.

2. Place her in the driver's seat of your intervention

Abusive partners tell women what to do and when to do it. Some women have lost touch with their own opinions or preferences and are bewildered or scared by the possibility of choice. Take direction from her and seek permission before you take any step on her behalf. She may not be ready to give up on her relationship. See page 23 for guidance on tailoring your response to her stage in the leaving process. Also, psychological defences prevent us from absorbing information that is too painful to confront at this minute. There is much good wisdom and guidance you could impart, but only when she is ready. Applying this principle of intervention is itself an intervention. It's the gift of choice.

3. A shelter stay is a good opportunity for helping

Even if her stay is brief, the 24/7 availability of shelter staff provides a measure of support and protection rarely possible outside a residential setting. You might watch two women interact and note how one of them has difficulty saying "no" to a request she obviously wants to decline. Is she aware of her option to say "no"? Can she say "no" effectively? What worries her about saying "no"? When working with kids, you would call this a "teachable moment," where you offer support and guidance in a real-life context. With women, it's a "reachable moment," when she's open to assistance with an immediate problem. But don't make it a "preach-able moment" by telling her what to do.



In the Helping Hands guide about helping an abused woman, you find some principles for using strength-based interventions. Seeing and reacting to "reachable moments" is a big part of the strength-based approach.

TOOL BOX IDEA: The Power of “No”



Saying “no” sometimes, respectfully and effectively, to requests and demands from others is a crucial skill for self-care and building a sense of self. Saying “no” is saying that “my needs are important too.”

- Ask her to identify times in the past when she wanted to say “no” but didn’t. What were the consequences for her?
- What held her back from saying “no” those times? Common reasons are guilt, fear of rejection, politeness, wanting to avoid conflict, and the need to feel needed.
- Ask her to identify what worries her about saying “no” today (people won’t like me anymore, they won’t want me around, they won’t accept my reason for saying no, I feel guilty about letting others down).
- Reinforce that her needs are as important as the other person’s needs (assuming this example is about other adults and not her children).

Capitalize on a real-life situation to introduce and reinforce new concepts. For example, a shelter resident with a car might be inundated with requests for rides. She may initially say yes but eventually the imposition or the cost breeds resentment on her part and also confusion among women who assumed she didn’t mind. Role play if necessary how she might respond to requests for rides. Requests for cigarettes, to borrow money or for child minding are other scenarios. There’s a “tip sheet” on page 58 to use in a group or individual intervention.

4. Living in a shelter should be the opposite of living in an abusive relationship

If a shelter is to be a refuge from abuse, women must feel respected and valued while living there. Listen to her opinions, be generous with praise and positive comments, empower her to believe she is a worthy person, help her connect with her own opinions and needs, don’t judge or suggest what she should think or feel. Encourage her to dream of a happy life and to believe she deserves it. Treat her as an equal, ask her opinions, smile at her. Maintain a calm, balanced tone and demeanour and keep any anger, frustration or cynicism out of your voice. Validate her right to say “no” to requests and demands she would rather decline.

5. Pay attention to household climate issues

A communal living environment like a shelter can reproduce features of an abusive home under certain circumstances. Conflicts, personality clashes, cliques, even bullying can occur with some combinations of women. If tensions in the house cause women to “walk on egg shells,” isolate themselves in their rooms, or second-guess every word, a key benefit of the shelter environment is eroded.

6. It’s tough being the best mom you can be while living in a shelter

This is a challenging place to be a parent. It’s to be expected that children are not “on their best behaviour.” Noise and distractions. Novel sights and smells. New types of food. The loss of a comfortable and familiar routine. Missing cherished possessions and contact with friends and family. Maybe missing daddy and probably confused about the future. “When are we going home?” is a common question. Mothers may see a deterioration in children’s behaviour and mood and feel guilty or anxious that changes are permanent. She might be cut off from her support system such as a sister who helps with babysitting. She might feel judged by others if her children misbehave or receive unwanted parenting “advice.” And a woman must meet her children’s needs for care and nurturance when she herself is confused, exhausted or scared.

8. Her return to a partner doesn't mean you failed

Research demonstrates, confirming anecdotal experience, that some women in shelters will return to the partners they just left. Does that mean the shelter intervention was not successful? No. The shelter intervention was unsuccessful if she felt judged by her decision and if she feels unwelcome to return. A woman may leave and go back a dozen times. Hopefully, the abuse will stop. If not, let her know the door remains open as she works through this difficult decision.

9. Her return to shelter doesn't mean she failed

When the door remains open, her needing to return to the shelter doesn't mean that she failed. Moving to a life free of abuse is a process that can take a long time.

RESEARCH FILE: Returning to Partners After Shelter Stays



In a “snap-shot” study of women in Canadian shelters on one day in 2006, four out of every ten women in the shelter had been admitted to that same shelter on at least one previous occasion. Among them, 39% had been to the shelter once before in the previous year, 21% had been there two to four times, and 14% had been to the shelter five or more times in the previous year. Information about their stays in different shelters was not available. More than one third of women (38%) who left emergency shelters on snap-shot day planned to return to their partners. The rates of return in other settings such as transition houses was lower and averaged 11% overall across all types of settings.

Andrea Taylor-Butts (2007). Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2005/2006. *Juristat: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*, 27(4).

10. Work collaboratively in your community

You can't do it all. Shelters are a vital component in the movement against domestic violence but they are one piece of an overall, societal strategy. It's important to help women and children in crisis, one family at a time. It's also important to collaborate with police, courts, health services and child protection authorities to coordinate efforts at the local level. Identify the range of women's needs in your community, find what services are missing from the local spectrum of options, and work together to fill those gaps. Preventing violence against women and children cannot be accomplished without coordinated effort on multiple fronts.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Collaborating to Create a Full Spectrum of Services



Here's some other ideas. Empower men to speak out against abuse and make them feel welcome in the anti-violence movement. Incorporate lessons about domestic violence into post-secondary educational programs in all the helping professions. Teach school children about healthy relationships. Components of a national strategy against domestic violence can include public education campaigns, population surveys, and toll-free hot lines. Help politicians understand these issues so they can pass good laws and support adequate funding for shelters and other services such as legal advice clinics, counselling for women, programs for abusive men, sexual assault centres, support for victims who testify in court, services for immigrants, subsidized housing and income support, family planning, and affordable high-quality child care. Ultimately, promoting the equality of men and women – legally, socially, economically, politically – is crucial as a backdrop to more targeted anti-violence efforts such as shelters.

Principles in a Staff Code of Conduct

Shelters vary in size, organizational structure, funding, security, rules, and even mandate. These principles of staff conduct can be applied in any setting.

1. Respect confidentiality and a woman's right to privacy

Do not discuss the situation of one woman with others, inside or outside the shelter. Limit discussions with a woman to a private space. Each woman has the right to expect that her personal information will be maintained in strict confidence and that other women in the shelter will know only what she chooses to share with them. Also important, explain any limits on your promise of confidentiality. For example, in some jurisdictions, you must report suspected child maltreatment to mandated child-welfare authorities.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Reporting to Child Protective Services



When you must report child maltreatment, first share your plans with the mother and explain your rationale and legal responsibilities. Encourage her to make the call herself, if circumstances permit. In other words, when taking this step, be as consistent as possible with the principles of empowerment and respect.

2. Maintain appropriate boundaries

Only strategically share personal information about yourself and never share personal information about your colleagues. This includes not using women as confidantes for your current frustrations or problems. We all have them, but select a more appropriate sounding board. Do not give or accept gifts, loan money, or make arrangements to meet socially outside the shelter. When meeting unexpectedly in a public place, let her be the first person to open a discussion. It's awkward to explain to companions how you met.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Being Conscious About Using "I" Statements



It's tempting at times to share a personal experience matching hers or otherwise interject features of your own life's journey into a discussion. Are you meeting your own needs rather than hers? Are you cutting unfairly into this time when she can talk about herself? Think about the message your words convey. Are you positioning yourself as expert, or as worse off than she is? Are you invalidating or contradicting her feelings or thoughts? Are you giving the message that your issues are more important than hers? Use personal information sparingly and strategically, like when a quick comment might minimize the social distance or power imbalance between you, break the isolation for her, or show how women can overcome great obstacles and end up happy.

3. Model non-violence, non-abusiveness, tolerance and respect for others

How you interact with women and your colleagues reflects your values as a person. Your choice of words and actions also reflects on the shelter as an organization and must be consistent with its philosophy. Obviously, violence or any form of abuse should never be used or tolerated. Be aware of how touch is intrusive or hyper-arousing for some women. Ask before hugging (also true of children). Appropriately challenge over-heard statements which are racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic, or sizist. Your silence suggests agreement. But challenge the belief, not the person. In other words, don't belittle the person for holding that belief.

4. Be aware of your own biases and do not impose them on others

Our own personal opinions on issues such as politics, religion, sexual orientation, etc. have no place in the empowerment process for women. For example, a woman might embrace a religion with which you do not agree. If she gains comfort and solace from that belief system or from prayer, we need to respect that. You may have little faith in a treatment approach that interests her, or a coping strategy that works for her. Weigh your comments carefully through this lens.

5. Be conscious of distributing your time and attention to all women

As human beings, we have greater affinity for some women than for others, perhaps those who share our social class or those of similar age. Make the extra effort to support the woman who is harder to embrace or relate to. Also, some women are more comfortable seeking out your time and attention than are others. Be proactive to check in with those who are reluctant to ask. Assume a stance of impartiality when mediating disputes and conflicts between or among women and let it appear that you are picking favourites.

TOOL BOX IDEA: The “Fairness Filter” to Aid Decision Making



Fairness and impartiality are important principles when called upon to make decisions. You may be asked for a special concession or exception to a rule. When asked to make a judgment, ask yourself these questions:

- Would I do this for every resident?
- Am I giving one person an advantage that the other women cannot have?
- Could I justify this decision to the other women?
- Will I be setting a precedent that might create difficulties for my colleagues?
- Will it appear that I have a special liking of one person?
- Am I meeting my needs or hers?
- Do I need to ask a supervisor or seek other input before I make this decision?

6. Do not pathologize a woman and her coping strategies

Women in abusive relationships must find ways to cope and some of those strategies might look from the outside like problems. When you look at “problems” through a lens of psychopathology, it’s easy to find evidence of psychopathology. Labels such as paranoia, borderline personality disorder, or social anxiety disorder categorize an abused woman’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour as illness. An alternate framework for understanding is to see her behaviour as evidence of coping. As we noted earlier, a woman may bring her most effective coping strategies into the shelter to help her adapt to this new environment and the uncertainty of her next steps. This is not to say we should ignore evidence of major mental illness. If a woman is suffering a psychotic break from reality or is suicidal, we must respond to those immediate needs.



In the Helping Hands guide called *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know Say & Do*, there is a discussion about coping in abusive relationships. “Coping” is how we react to situations exceeding our normal capacity to deal with, as when multiple stressors coming at the same time swamp our usual ability to manage. Living in an abusive relationship requires a woman to use her coping skills. Some abused women use active or engagement coping to try and stop the abuse and some women use disengagement coping such as avoidance or minimization of harm. All coping works to some degree at the time but there can be a cost in the long run. We can help a woman identify her effective yet costly coping strategies and replace them with effective, healthier ones.

7. Be aware of the power imbalance inherent in the helper/helped relationship

Even when working hard to be respectful and supportive, the nature of the role entails a power imbalance between a shelter worker and those she serves. The helper and the helped. It's her home but your workplace. Acknowledge the power inherent in your role and exercise it only as appropriate. Seek ways to minimize the impact in individual interactions and also when developing agency policies and procedures. Shelter workers are sensitive to power imbalances because abuse is a misuse of power. Being aware of the power differential helps the shelter environment be the opposite of life in an abusive relationship.

RESEARCH FILE: Balancing Empowerment and Control



"Shelter workers must attempt to appropriately balance the control necessary to run an efficient and comfortable shelter and the freedom necessary for women to feel empowered." This "dialectic of emancipation and control" is the tension occurring when one person tries to empower another person over whom she has authority or control. In-depth interviews with American shelter workers suggest four dimensions to the power imbalance. The authors suggest further research to uncover how shelter workers address power imbalances.

Circumstantial dichotomy

This occurs if staff are perceived by women as happy and economically comfortable. The women referred to in this study, on the other hand, tended to be depressed and economically marginalized. This social distance could be intimidating for women.

Contrasting experiences

This occurs if workers are in healthy, equal relationships or had no personal experience with an abusive relationship. In the extreme, women with experience of abuse are cast in the subordinate role of student when staff provide education about abuse dynamics and abusers.

Asymmetrical roles

Asymmetrical roles could occur because the role of helper or problem solver is usually one of superiority over the helped or holder of problems. This role can also be perceived as one of rescuer or approximate a parent/child interaction. For example, staff may enforce house rules or monitor chore completion.

Resource control

This occurs when staff control access to material goods such as groceries (e.g., food may be locked up) and, in the extreme, control access to the shelter itself by their power to ask a woman to depart or to deny a woman's admission.

Mary Vaughn & Glen Stamp (2003). The Empowerment Dilemma: The Dialectic of Emancipation and Control in Staff/Client Interaction at Shelters for Battered Women. *Communication Studies*, 54(2): 154-168.

STAFF MEETING DISCUSSION



Walk through your services with the eyes of a resident and list any policies or practices potentially triggering a sense of disempowerment vis-à-vis the staff or agency. Perhaps the policy is a sensible one, grounded in concern for safety. Maybe it was a reaction to a past tragic incident or is required by law. Some shelters keep a woman's medications locked up so she must ask for them, for example. Clarify the rationale for the policy and confirm the need for its continued use. What measures could mitigate the feeling of disempowerment for a woman? For example, is the rationale for the policy routinely communicated to women? Are house rules clear so women know the expectations?

RESEARCH FILE: Thinking About Staff/Resident Roles



This paper proposes six worker/woman roles that might develop when handling day-to-day tasks and conflicts. Are we modelling our own – and the organization's – core values with our response?

Parent / Child

This role is adopted when the staff overly focus on rules and consequences, conveying rules, and meting out discipline for infractions. This role is problematic when it is an exercise of power, especially when it creates resistance and power struggles with a woman trying to retain a sense of dignity when cast in the role of child. Messages conveyed to the woman include the possibility that the staff member does not believe she is responsible and capable. An alternative is to help the woman problem solve, take responsibility for infractions and communicate her opinions about the rules.

Teacher / Student

When a shelter worker assumes a woman's choices and actions reflect a lack of knowledge (about abuse, parenting, problem solving or whatever), the response might be to impart information through instruction. This dynamic is problematic when the worker does not hear the woman's expressed needs, does not access her existing expertise or fails to listen to what she and other women can teach us.

Drill Sergeant / Recruit

This role develops if a staff member aims to "remake" a woman through high expectations for self-improvement and staff-imposed standards of hygiene, self-care, diet, or other matters. A variation in this role occurs in shelters with overly controlling and rigid rules such as mealtimes and bedtimes. Structure is welcomed by some women but is humiliating for many. This role is problematic if assuming that our way is the best way rather than helping her identify and follow her way. The goal is conformity, not support.

Employer / Employee

This occurs if a staff member has plans and expectations which are reviewed and evaluated. The plan might involve chore completion or apartment searches. In the extreme, task completion becomes necessary for continued residency. Monitoring task completion is one-way rather than two-way communication that doesn't capitalize on opportunities for support or advocacy.

Rescuer / Victim

A worker in the rescuer role expects to have all the answers and be able to "save" the woman, which is impossible. Casting a woman in the innocent victim role can divert focus from her struggles and challenges and assume she is passive and unable to solve her own problems. A rescuer may expect gratitude and complete cooperation with all rules and expectations. The rescuing stance assumes people can't help themselves, but a shelter program should be about empowerment.

Team member / Team member

Here the staff and women are a team, each with different strengths. One goal is shared learning and requires the worker to see herself as a learner rather than a controller. Second, the mutual accountability and respect inherent in this role mean the woman can have expectations of the staff and hold them accountable. Third, the teamwork approach minimizes power differentials without erasing them (which is impossible). The worker and the woman develop a plan of shared goals and strike a balance between the worker as rescuer (bad) and leaving the woman to do it all herself (also bad).

Margaret Hobart (2006). *Changing the Script: Thinking About Our Relationships with Shelter Residents*. Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.



Domestic Violence Victoria (2006). *Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children*. Australia.

8. Take responsibility for self-care and monitoring your own emotional balance

In the next section, we talk about the stress of anti-violence work and how the effects of burnout and vicarious trauma could build up over time. Job-related emotional exhaustion has negative effects on a person, her loved ones and ultimately on the women and children she seeks to help. Be open to feedback from colleagues, monitor yourself for signs of burnout, and be proactive in asking supervisors and management for guidance and perhaps accommodations to your schedule or working conditions. There's no one-size fits all approach to self care so know yourself and be realistic. Running a marathon is a great goal, but maybe a 30-minute daily walk is a more manageable idea and one that is also effective.

9. Don't encourage a woman's dependence on you or on the shelter

Women experiencing crisis and transition will rely on you and your colleagues for a variety of practical and emotional supports. Ultimately, she will leave and embark on the next stage of her life so promoting her self-sufficiency is the best way to help her in the long run.

10. Avoid conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest occurs when a person in a position of trust or authority uses that position to benefit. Using the shelter residents as a pool of potential clients in a private counselling practice, selling them products, promoting your family's business as a potential supplier, these are examples of conflicts to be avoided. Conflict guidelines usually prohibit helping professionals from having romantic or personal relationships with clients. A conflict of interest need not be real to be problematic, if there is an appearance of conflict or the potential of conflict. If someone known to you enters the shelter, inform a supervisor and seek guidance on avoiding a conflict or the appearance of a conflict. Disclosure of the potential for conflict helps mitigate an actual or apparent conflict.

RESEARCH FILE: Don't Generalize Research Results to Individual Women



The highest imperative is to treat each woman as the unique person she is. Cross-sectional, quantitative research which is variable-oriented can be misleading by implying that abused women are all the same. It looks at relationships between variables, missing the variability of experiences and outcomes of women, the complexity of changes over time, and how different women can have similar outcomes after different paths. For example, a study examining depression scores of abused women and women in the general population might conclude that the average score in the group of abused women is higher. So the variables of depression and abuse are statistically associated. This finding does not mean that all abused women are depressed, or even that most abused women are depressed. Some abused women are depressed and some non-abused women are depressed. These authors describe the person-oriented research strategy that looks for patterns and assumes sub-groups exist in any group and can be used to generate data that is more informative for interventions.

Paula Nurius & Rebecca Macy (2008). Heterogeneity Among Violence-exposed Women: Applying Person-oriented Research Methods. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(3): 389-415.

Stress Reactions in Anti-Violence Work

Stress reactions are described by many names including burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary trauma and vicarious trauma. Whatever label used, be aware of how the work can change our assumptions and expectations of the world and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of our advocacy. As a person gains experience over time, her confidence increases along with self-efficacy for the work and sense of personal achievement. Burnout, on the other hand, is characterized by emotional exhaustion, low assessment of personal achievement, and ultimately depersonalization of the clients who need the worker's help.

1. Many features of shelter work are stressful

Job stressors inherent in the setting include chronic funding shortfalls, low pay, pre-occupation with danger and risk, and the daily reality of domestic violence. The intentional cruelty, the loss of dignity, the waste of human potential. You listen to women's stories and help them work through reactions that might include anger, sadness or self-harm. Another stress: being frustrated or angry with the response of broader social institutions such as the courts.

2. Anyone can experience stress reactions while doing anti-violence work

Some people believe training or experience or level of professionalism insulates staff from stress reactions and burnout. Don't think burnout can't happen to you, or to a co-worker who seems so competent and in control. Know the signs and monitor yourself for signals of work-related emotional exhaustion. Signs include diminished energy or motivation, a dread of going to work, calling in sick when you don't need to, cynicism, resentment, or apathy. Use the Internet to find self-assessments for burnout, job stress or vicarious trauma.

3. Cumulative stress reactions reduce our effectiveness as a support for women

When emotional exhaustion takes hold, depersonalization of women can be the result, meaning treating them in a detached and unfeeling way, being impatient and short-tempered, being easily drawn into arguments and responding with anger, avoiding certain tasks necessary for the job, and the like. In short, a person cannot be an effective helper if not in a healthy place herself.

RESEARCH FILE: Burnout Among Shelter Workers



One hundred American shelter workers were surveyed about burnout, perceived social support, job-related stress, and coping styles. The researchers examined shelter-specific job stressors, such as "feeling frustrated when a battered woman returns to the home when I suspect the abuse will occur again," "dealing with the overwhelming pain and horror of domestic violence," and "dealing with anger at the perpetrators of domestic violence." These workers as a group were not burned out. However, anyone scoring high on emotional exhaustion also scored high on depersonalization of clients and tended to use mental disengagement to cope. They felt less social support from supervisors compared with their colleagues. Workers using mental disengagement to cope were more likely to develop cynical and insensitive perceptions of women, co-workers and the shelter itself. Common suggestions for strategies to improve the job environment were to hire more staff, improve communication between supervisors and front-line staff, and raise salaries.

Chris Brown & Karen O'Brien (1998). Understanding Stress and Burnout in Shelter Workers. *Professional Psychology: Research & Practice*, 29(4): 383-385.

4. Numbing emotions is not the answer

Some people believe that shutting off the caring part of your personality – trying not to resonate with the pain of others – is the best way to avoid vicarious stress and burnout. This is not true and itself can be a symptom of burnout. Research with anti-violence workers as a group generally shows them to gain a high sense of personal achievement from their jobs. People seek positions in the field to help and make a difference. It's their ability to feel compassion, use that passion as a fuel for advocacy and not get sucked down into a place of despair that makes them effective advocates.

5. Shelter management have a role to play in addressing stress

It's a principle in our code of conduct that front-line workers self-monitor for signs of burnout and fatigue. It's equally true that the agency as a whole is responsible for creating working conditions to minimize the inevitable impact of the work.

- offer opportunities for staff to cycle through different roles, not all of them on the front line (e.g., public education, fund raising)
- build in peer supervision opportunities and time for team meetings
- where possible, make difficult decisions in a team context
- build breaks into the day for staff (and insist they are taken)
- offer (not require) critical-incident stress de-briefing after tragic incidents
- survey staff opinion about new initiatives or policy changes to alert staff to potential developments and solicit input
- consider paid or unpaid self-care days
- recognize vicarious trauma as a situation that can trigger short-term disability
- be clear on agency policies and expectations, roles, mandate, etc.
- acknowledge the importance of de-briefing at the change of shifts by compensating this time financially
- cultivate the concept of a staff "team" with clear communication across shifts
- provide occasions for celebration
- find meaningful opportunities for professional development
- work collaboratively with community partners so women with severe mental health needs or addictions have appropriate care in residential placements that better meet their needs



Jan Richardson (2001). *Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-violence Workers*. National Clearinghouse for Family Violence [Canada].

TOOL BOX IDEA: Healer, Heal Thy Self



Over the years, some great women – maybe you've known a few – have been unable to continue in the work because of the accumulation of emotional consequences. At the back of this guide, you will find some worksheets for women for a discussion on the importance of taking care of ourselves. There is a checklist for signs of stress, a discussion using a gas tank as a metaphor, and a list of 10 simple ways to take care of yourself today. Are you taking your own advice? Refer also to the material in *Helping an Abused Woman* related to coping and some of the less desirable forms of disengagement coping. If you feel signs of burnout, problem-focused or engagement coping are more effective. In her *Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma*, Jan Richardson made this wise observation: "Survival as a counsellor or anti-violence worker depends on the individual embracing a commitment to one's self with the same energy and passion dedicated to the work."

Issues With Which a Woman Might Want Assistance

The need profile of sheltered women will reflect three factors. First, a variety of issues are both consequence of abuse and put women at risk for abuse, including some mental health challenges like depression. A second factor is the adequacy of allied services for women. For example, in areas where the mental health system has deinstitutionalized and downsized, women with high mental health needs are left with limited options and may periodically seek admission to an abused women's shelter. Third, shelters do not serve a cross-section of abused women because most abused women do not seek shelter and/or they transition away from violent partners with the assistance of friends and family. Today's shelters tend to help women with few supports and available coping resources. The consequence of these factors is that sheltered women may seek assistance with a wide variety of issues, some of them reflecting long-term challenges.

RESEARCH FILE: What Women Want



In this American study of women exiting shelter, the most common need areas defined by them were accessing material goods and services (e.g., furniture), social support, health care, continuing education, securing employment, transportation, child care, legal assistance, and housing. In analysing the patterns of their help-seeking activities, one group focused primarily on housing, one group on education and employment, one group on legal issues (e.g., divorce, child custody, landlord/tenant issues), one group on several issues at once, and one group did not engage in help seeking. They concluded that "programs that focus exclusively on one domain of service delivery are unlikely to meet the full range of needs that women present." They recommended asking women to identify their priorities for help.

Nicole Allen, Deb Bybee & Cris Sullivan (2004). Battered Women's Multitude of Needs. *Violence Against Women*, 10(9): 1015-1035.



In the Helping Hands guide called *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know, Say & Do*, you will find on page 64 a worksheet for women to identify and articulate the areas with which they need assistance and the services to match their needs and those of their children.

1. Understanding the dynamics and consequence of abuse

Even though a woman sought admission to a shelter, she may have unanswered questions about her relationship and want help putting labels on her experiences and feelings. Discussions about abuse dynamics help her make decisions about the future of her relationship and also help her assess future partners.

RESEARCH FILE: Revictimization by New Partners



Over 700 women were contacted one year after seeking protective orders through the courts. One third were still involved with the partner from whom they sought protection. The vast majority of the remainder were involved with a new partner and 35% of them reported abuse in that relationship. Overall, about 55% had abusive partners.

Jennifer Cole, T.K. Logan & Lisa Shannon (2008). Women's Risk for Revictimization by a New Abusive Partner: For What Should We be Looking? *Violence & Victims*, 23(3): 315-330.



In the Helping Hands guide called *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know, Say & Do*, you will find some handouts to aid your work with women including the WEB Scale, a Power & Control Wheel adapted by the London Abused Women's Centre, a blank Power & Control Wheel so women can create a wheel matching their lives, the Equality Wheel, and a list of rights for women in intimate relationships.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Red Flags for Abuse While Dating



Although the precise reason is unknown, research suggests that some abused women will enter abusive relationships again in the future. Abuse education helps women process the past but it also helps them assess their next prospective partners. Find a list of red flags on page 62, taken from Dr. Lundy Bancroft's work with abusive men. He believes a woman can see red flags early, before she becomes highly invested in the relationship.

2. Housing

Unless planning and able to return to their residences (with or without the abusive partner), most women who approach abused women's shelters have no place to live. "Homelessness" can be chronic, episodic or related to situational factors causing a woman to be "house-less." This last category describes many women fleeing abusive relationships. Shelter workers will be familiar with local application procedures for subsidized housing. This is at once the easiest type of assistance and the most challenging because of wait lists for public housing and the high cost of market rents. Women in smaller towns and rural areas face additional barriers. With restrictions on the length of shelter stays in many areas, women may need a temporary place to stay until they get a permanent spot. Communicating this information early in her stay gives her time to develop a contingency plan.

3. Income support

Women in shelters as a group tend to have low levels of financial resources and may want your guidance on how to apply for welfare benefits or any pensions for which they qualify.

4. Health concerns

Some women need your help finding medical services and perhaps physicians who can monitor their use of medication and write prescriptions for new or previously prescribed drugs.

RESEARCH FILE: Health Antecedents of Abuse



The World Health Organization surveyed women in 10 countries representing a cross-section of developmental contexts (Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia & Montenegro, Thailand and Tanzania). Depending upon the country, physical or sexual abuse was reported by 15 to 71% of women who had ever been in a relationship. One quarter to one half of them reported severe injuries or serious health problems. Health consequences included abdominal and thoracic injuries, bruises and welts, chronic pain, disability, fractures, gastrointestinal disorders, irritable bowel system, lacerations and abrasions, ocular damage, and decreased physical function. The methodology of the study did not permit causal connections between abuse and illness.

Mary Ellsberg & others (2008). Intimate Partner Violence and Women's Physical and Mental Health in the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence: An Observational Study. *The Lancet*, 371 (April 5): 1165-1172.

5. Mental health concerns

The mental health profile of women in your shelter reflects in part the ways abuse compromises a victim's mental health, in part how women with mental health challenges are vulnerable to abuse, and in part the strength (or absence) of local supports available to women with mental health needs. It's important not to pathologize women and their coping strategies but it's equally important not to ignore or dismiss major illnesses which require medical care, medication and perhaps hospitalization.

RESEARCH FILE: Mental Health Profile of Sheltered Women



The self-reported health profile of 140 women in a large, urban shelter in the United States showed a rate of being on psychotropic medication (37.8%) that was almost nine times that found in the general population of American women (4.4%). These women as a group had sought mental health services at a rate 30 times the national average. The researchers found a high incidence of bi-polar disorder (23%), major depression (51%), personality disorders (14%), schizophrenia (3%) and paranoia/delusional disorder (8%) compared with the general population of women (0.7%, 2.4%, 0.6%, 0.1% and 0.3% respectively).

Christine Helfrich, G. Fujijura & V. Rutkowski-Kmitta (2008). Mental Health Disorders and Functioning of Women in Domestic Violence Shelters. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(4): 437-453.

6. Legacies of childhood abuse

Many studies document high rates of childhood physical and sexual abuse in shelter residents as a group. So some of the women you meet experienced childhood abuse and some of them continue to struggle with its legacies. Especially where the abuse was of a sexual nature, the long-term effects for an adult are complex and can include both physical and emotional issues that in the extreme impair her ability to be happy and attain her life's ambitions. Children can develop effective yet costly coping strategies such as emotional numbing, aggression, generalized hostility, or substance use and carry them forward into adulthood. Medical illnesses and health problems may also be legacies. Internalized shame, deep-seated inability to trust and the profound sense of betrayal may shape her core beliefs about herself as unworthy of being loved and powerless to affect her life in any proactive and positive way. Cascading from an abusive family into an abusive relationship (or relationships) before she has understood and processed these experiences will compound problems and delay healing. Specialized therapy is often needed to unpack the complex web of interconnected thoughts and feelings, but it only works when she is ready. When she is ready, help her find a supportive therapist.

7. Addictions

An active addiction will disqualify women from admission to some shelters and most shelters have rules against being intoxicated or high while on the premises. Even where those things are true, shelter workers will meet women in various stages of recovery from addiction, including the detoxing phase. It's too simplistic to see substance use solely as an effect of intimate partner abuse (i.e., a coping strategy, self-medication) or as a causal factor leaving women vulnerable to intimate partner abuse. The connection between abuse and addictions is complex and probably has roots in childhood or adolescence. In consequence, a high number of women in addictions treatment can report historical and current partner abuse. Increasingly, it is suggested that shelters develop expertise in screening and treating substance dependence or work in concert with addiction assessment and treatment agencies. To see women in all their complexity means accepting that they may have multiple struggles and needs, only one of which involves partner abuse.

TOOL BOX IDEA: The Power and Control Model for Women's Substance Abuse



A man may encourage a woman's drug use to foster her dependence upon him, create a buddy with whom he can do drugs, or because he can force her to do crimes to pay for drugs. At the same time, he may berate her for being an addict or justify his mistreatment with reference to her drug use. He may actively dissuade or prevent her from accessing addiction treatment. A woman actively using drugs may be reluctant to call police for help and she may be turned down for admission by some shelters. Use the Internet to find the "Power and Control Model for Women's Substance Abuse" if you are working with a woman with these or similar experiences.

RESEARCH FILE: How Shelters Respond to Substance Abuse Among Women



These authors surveyed 71 of the 84 domestic violence programs in North Carolina, 62 of which offer shelter services. One quarter of the shelters estimated that half or more of their residents struggled with substance abuse issues. In the shelters, 81% routinely question women seeking admission about their drug and alcohol use and 24% would not admit a woman who was noticeably impaired. Almost half (46%) had policies specifically about substance abuse including admissions and discharge policies. One quarter of shelters had memoranda of understanding with local substance abuse treatment programs about cross-referrals and for six of these 62 shelters that treatment occurred on-site at the shelter. A high proportion of programs overall (85%) had at least one staff member with addictions training but 94% of the programs desired this training if there was an opportunity. Barriers noted in getting appropriate treatment for substance abusing women include their denial about having a problem, their lack of funds to pay for treatment, and waiting lists for free treatment. Shelters reluctant to admit substance abusing women cited safety concerns for the women, safety concerns for other residents and staff because of propensity to violence, safety concerns of children (who might find hidden drugs, for example), exposing the shelter to risk from members of a drug culture (who might include her abuser), and the increased work load of staff to respond to their high needs. It was also felt that shelters have less success with substance abusing women who often return to abusive partners or other risky lifestyles. Some shelters asked women to sign a pledge of sobriety, attend a 12-step program or other type of treatment while at the shelter, or sign a waiver to permit police searches of their rooms and possessions if ever deemed necessary.

Sandra Martin, Kathryn Moracco, Judy Chang, Carol Council & Lisa Dulli (2008). Substance Abuse Issues Among Women in Domestic Violence Programs. *Violence Against Women*, 14(9): 985-997.

8. Debts and money management

Perhaps the greatest constraint on women's options is the lack of financial resources. More than this, women may be in debt. Owing back rent to public housing often disqualifies women from a future placement. The same is true for unpaid bills to utility companies or for a mobile telephone.

9. Legal issues

Sheltered women can have several points of contact with the criminal and family legal systems, most commonly as crime victims, mothers petitioning for child custody, or parties in child welfare cases. Advocates may assist women who were themselves charged with domestic violence offences. Some women use the legal system to seek protective orders or have landlord/tenant matters to litigate. Help women understand the legal system because most people have a limited understanding at the outset anyway, and advise about the availability of free or subsidized legal counsel (often called legal aid). Accompanying her to court, where possible, is also a helpful support.



Alison Cunningham & Pamela Hurley (2007). *"A Full and Candid Account": Using Special Accommodations and Testimonial Aids to Facilitate the Testimony of Children, Book 7: Children & Teenagers Testifying in Domestic Violence Cases.* Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.

10. Management of intense emotions and trauma reactions

A shelter stay is usually time limited and rarely provides enough time for in-depth therapy. However, a woman may express an interest in pursuing longer-term counselling. There in the shelter, perhaps deprived of her most effective coping tools, she may be flooded with thoughts and feelings. For example, people who use substances to regulate moods will find enforced sobriety somewhat overwhelming. Learning to manage intense emotions to permit daily functioning may be a key focus of therapy. For example, women are generally taught that feeling and expressing anger is bad. Anger is an emotion, not good or bad. It's healthy to feel angry when you have a right to be angry. The problem comes when anger is used as an excuse to hurt someone else or becomes a generalized response to every situation. People can learn to verbalize angry thoughts rather than acting them out. A portion of sheltered women will have post-trauma symptoms such as avoidance, arousal and re-experiencing a past traumatic event. They may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, or feel tense and irritable. Signs of avoidance include trying hard not to think or talk about it, trying to stay away from any reminders or triggers, or stuffing feelings down so she doesn't have to deal with them. Assist with a referral to a local trauma specialist.

RESEARCH FILE: An Integrated Shelter Model



By tracing the historical evolution of the shelter movement in the United States, these authors note how shelters emerged and evolved to meet the advocacy and empowerment needs of women, as reflected in their organizational structure, service priorities and principles. The reality of shelters today is that they serve women fleeing abuse but also women with acute and chronic mental health needs including trauma reactions. Seeing women's needs as mental illness is not a comfortable place for shelter workers, even using a trauma framework of injury and recovery rather than disease. However, an intervention focused solely on abuse education won't meet the needs of all women. This article describes the operation of a shelter that blends the legacy of advocacy with mental health care. The organizational structure involves a flattened hierarchy with collaborative leadership and efforts toward consensus building, and group problem solving. The multi-disciplinary staff team includes social workers and a psychiatrist. Services offered include traditional advocacy tasks such as housing applications but also psycho-social assessment of family functioning, if needed.

Paula Panzer, Marie Philip, & Anna Hayward (2000). Trends in Domestic Violence Service and Leadership: Implications for an Integrated Shelter Model. *Administration in Policy & Mental Health*, 29(5): 339-352.

RESEARCH FILE: Shelter Worker's Opinions of Women's Mental Health Needs



One decade ago, the changing profile of sheltered women was well apparent. Over 150 shelters workers in a Canadian province estimated that 56% of women evidenced symptoms of trauma, almost half may be abusing substances, and almost one third appeared to suffer from chronic mental health issues. The proportion of women with these serious issues was, in the workers' opinions, on the increase.

Leslie Tutty (1998). Mental Health Issues of Abused Women: The Perceptions of Shelter Workers. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 17(1): 79-102.

Potential Barriers Between Your Help and Her Needs

You have lots to offer. Women need your help and support. What factors might compromise your ability to be effective as a supporter and her ability to access what you have to offer?

1. Language

The most obvious barrier to communication is language, when one person speaks English and the other person speaks Chinese or Arabic or Spanish. People using sign language also speak English as a second language. Whenever possible, using a trained interpreter aids her comfort level and ensures mutual understanding, especially for explaining complicated issues, or if she is very upset. When using an interpreter is not possible, the responsibility is yours to assess her level of comprehension and adapt your speech accordingly. People learning English don't have extensive vocabularies yet, can't follow complicated sentences, and won't know most esoteric jargon or idioms. Listening to her speak gives a good indication of her level of English. Watch the pace of her conversation. Someone speaking slowly is struggling to find words. Give her time and don't jump in. Make note of the words she uses because they'll be safe for you to use as well. As with all women, listen more than talk.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Choosing Words to Speak with a New English Speaker



Have you ever heard someone speaking loudly at a new English speaker, assuming that volume aids comprehension? Another mistake is to assume that speaking slowly is enough. Speaking slowly is good, but also choose your words deliberately. If you ever learned a second language, remember the words and types of sentences you first learned and understood. Probably nouns, the present tense and basic verbs like to be, to have, to want and to go. Here are some other ideas to guide your choice of words:

- Clearly enunciate each word and avoid contractions (e.g., say "it is" rather than "it's")
- Avoid double negatives
- Avoid slang or jargon or any legal term you have not explained
- Use names of people rather than pronouns
- Keep sentence length to maybe five or six words until you get a sense of her receptive comprehension
- Use simple sentences (e.g., "did you go?" rather than "had you been able to go?")
- Use the simplest word to describe a concept, like "need" instead of "require" or "think" rather than "contemplate"
- Be careful using questions requiring a "yes" or "no" answer: people who don't understand a question tend to answer "yes"
- Avoid the question "do you understand?" because the person may believe she does understand or feel ashamed to admit that she doesn't
- Check her comprehension before you move on to the next issue
- If your question is not understood, re-phrase rather than repeat it

2. Literacy limitations

Some people have difficulty comprehending written material and prefer to receive information verbally. For others, their comprehension of the spoken word is affected by learning disabilities. What you say and what she hears might be different. Because people have different preferred styles of communication, presenting important information in multiple formats is desirable. Where possible, present information both verbally and in written form.

3. Culture

Be aware of the assumptions and biases you bring from your culture and from how you were raised. Her assumptions and viewpoint may well be different and the gap could impair communication. In some cultures, going to a shelter effectively terminates connections with her family or places her at risk for serious retribution. In many cultures, speaking about family problems with strangers is neither familiar nor comfortable.

4. Time constraints

In most but not all settings, a woman can stay for a limited period of time, or she may return to her partner soon after arriving. What intervention can have an impact in a short time? Link her to other services in your community, describe her options and legal rights, let her know your door remains open. Some shelters can offer transitional support and on-going services after a woman departs.

RESEARCH FILE: Life After Shelter



Follow-up interviews with 81 shelter “graduates” living independently showed that few were experiencing violence in intimate relationships but most were suffering financial hardship, 75% reported clinical levels of trauma, and 43% had clinical levels of depression. Many were dissatisfied with their housing and dissatisfied with their parenting. The authors concluded that continuity of care is needed for many women exiting shelters.

Kathleen Ham-Rowbottom, Erin Gordon, Kelly Jarvis & Raymond Novaco (2005). Life Constraints and Psychological Well-being of Domestic Violence Shelter Graduates. *Journal of Family Violence*, 20(2): 109-121.

5. Distrust and fear

Building rapport and trust takes time. It takes time to believe she won’t be judged for the past or criticized if she reconciles with her partner. Some jurisdictions have mandatory reporting of child exposure to domestic violence to child-protective services. Where this is true, she knows there will be consequences for acknowledging abuse in her relationship. Bad experiences in other services might colour her expectations of your service.

6. Age difference

Younger women may feel less comfortable speaking with the more seasoned and experienced staff because of the age difference. The same is true of women seasoned and experienced in life who might feel less affinity to the younger staff members. Having staff with a range of ages means that residents of all ages can find someone who shares their perspectives. The same principle applies to any personal characteristic potentially creating the perception of distance, such as race, social class, ethnicity, religiosity or religion.

RESEARCH FILE: Comfort Levels in Disclosing Personal Information



At intake into a large, urban American shelter, 140 women described their comfort with disclosing details of partner violence under various conditions. Women as a group were far more comfortable speaking with a woman than a man, more comfortable speaking one-on-one rather than with anyone else present, speaking with a person of their own race, and with a woman who was 30 to 50 years old.

Jonathan Thackeray, Sarah Stelzner & others (2007). Screening for Intimate Partner Violence: The Impact of Screener and Screening Environment on Victim Comfort. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22(6): 659-670.

7. A woman's coping response

Living with abuse requires coping but so might living in a shelter, especially in times of crisis and uncertainty about the future. Another barrier preventing her from accessing your help could be the coping strategies she uses to protect herself emotionally and maybe physically. These might include the appearance of bravado and "I don't care about anything" attitude, isolating herself and avoiding people, taking drugs, avoiding thinking about her plight, denial and minimizing the severity of abuse and the seriousness of her situation, procrastination ("I'll look for an apartment tomorrow"), complete confidence that God will rescue her, or sleeping excessively. If she's been drinking, she'll avoid you because of the alcohol on her breath.

8. Taking care of her children

A woman is the sole caretaker for her children while in shelter, perhaps the first time she's had 24/7 caretaking responsibility. Her partner may not have been a nurturing parent, but he probably watched the kids occasionally so she could slip out to the store or otherwise take a break. Being a sole parent in this context is overwhelming when she is exhausted and the children are cranky and upset at not being home. Discussions with children present are necessarily limited in both time and content and key issues go undiscussed. When her children are napping, you could be busy elsewhere and not available to speak with her.

9. The busyness of your role and multiple demands

Some women are proactive in seeking out support and others wait to be asked. Especially when the shelter is full, and in shelters with single staffing, a worker is pulled in multiple directions, attending to many women and children. A worker might be responsible for answering telephone calls and performing intakes and departures of women. Dealing with conflicts among residents is time consuming. Some women avoid approaching you for assistance because "you seem so busy all the time" or there simply isn't a chance to speak with you. When the shelter is busy, a shelter worker is limited to reacting to questions and situations and doesn't always have enough time to be planned and purposeful about touching base with each of the women.

10. Her readiness to accept support

A lot is written about "stages of change" and how major life changes involve a series of decisions and actions, not just one big step. People must be ready to change by recognizing a problem exists, accepting that change is necessary, deciding what to do, going forward with a plan, and sticking to it. This model is often applied to changes such as giving up cigarettes. People know smoking is bad but they struggle anyway with quitting. An abusive relationship is not exactly like smoking, but there is a process of thoughts that we talk about in the next section. We can match our efforts to her place in that process. Her readiness for help is also a factor in addressing other issues such as addictions.

RESEARCH FILE: Can She Find You?



Does your shelter publicize its address? A survey of 176 American shelters highlighted this as a controversial issue. Some shelters keep the location entirely secret and may move periodically to protect that information. A growing number of shelters are going public with the address or installing a sign out front. Motivations for this decision include that women would know where to go for help, that it creates greater awareness of the issue of violence against women, that it helps with fund raising, and that secrecy gives the unintended message that women must be ashamed or have done something wrong.

Albert Roberts & Sarah Lewis (2000). Giving Them Shelter: National Organizational Survey of Shelters for Battered Women and their Children. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 28(6): 669-681.

Matching Your Support to Her Stage in the Leaving Process

As shelter workers know, not all women entering shelters are there to end a relationship. It's true for some. But it's also true that women want mostly for the abuse to stop and would gladly return if it did. Entering a shelter may be a strategy used to meet this goal. For each woman seeking admittance to a shelter, ask yourself (or her) three questions. What are her goals for the relationship? What are her goals for her time in the shelter? What does she expect from you? The answers shape your strategy for intervention. She may return to an abusive partner. But she might arrive for a "time out" and leave as a "decision maker."

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Physically leaving an abusive partner can be dangerous. When in a shelter, she and her partner are physically separated but he may not be emotionally separated. When a man and a woman are out of sync like this in their leaving processes, his anger and feelings of loss of control could escalate to a dangerous level. There is a safety checklist in the Helping Hands guide called *Helping an Abused Woman* (page 62). Also, use the handouts on pages 47 to 48 here to help a woman determine if she and her partner are "out of sync" in the leaving process.

1. Time-out from an abusive relationship

A woman might be in your shelter as a respite from an abusive partner. Her goal for the relationship is almost certainly to return. Her goal for the time in shelter is for a break and some relaxation. She knows the relationship has problems but wants or needs to stay together with her partner. Her stay at the shelter could be brief and she may not be receptive to information questioning her decision or putting her partner in a bad light.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Helping the "Time-out" Woman



When supporting a "time-out woman," these strategies might match her needs:

- ensure she feels comfortable at the shelter, respected, not judged for her choice, and welcome to return to the shelter if she needs or wants to
- let her know it's okay to talk about her partner in a positive light because she may not talk at all if she believes you want to criticize him
- use supportive listening with careful, limited, gentle references to abuse education as appropriate
- explain the services you have to offer, especially any counselling your agency has for women in the community
- make referrals as needed to other agencies and services in your area for counselling or other programs (e.g., debt counselling, educational upgrading)
- let her know about local options for housing, income support and legal advice
- provide suggestions on self-care and have a conversation about coping
- if she has children, you may have to assess the need to involve the child protection system (depending upon the laws in your jurisdiction)
- offer information on basic safety strategies she might need to use

2. Leveraging power in an unequal relationship

Another woman might be at a different place in her mind. She recognizes problems with her partner and wants him to make a change, like stop drinking or start counselling. Her goal for the relationship is to return when he agrees to that change. Why is she in the shelter? Her past efforts to encourage change have failed. He doesn't take her concern seriously or for another reason has refused. Being in the shelter demonstrates her ability to leave and it highlights how seriously she contemplates an end to the relationship. She may also want to shock him with her sudden absence. Like a time-out woman, her stay in shelter could be brief and she may not be open to information questioning her decision or putting her partner in a bad light. She hopes for change and needs to preserve a sense of the relationship as salvageable.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Helping the Women Who is Leveraging Power



When supporting a woman who is in a shelter to leverage power, all the above-listed strategies might be helpful. In addition, you could gently introduce the Equality Wheel, the Power & Control Wheel and the Rights for Women in Intimate Relationship handout (found in the first Helping Hands guide). Validate any references to features of her partner's actions that she defines as inappropriate and help her think and talk about how it affects her. For example: When he takes your pay cheque and spends the money on himself, how does that affect you and the children? How does it make you feel? Why do you think he does that? In his mind, does he think that's okay? What do you think about that? The WEB Scale on page 57 in the first guide might also be useful. Provide information on local programs addressing the problem she sees in her partner, like addictions assessment and counselling services.

RESEARCH FILE: When Leveraging Power Works



These authors previously studied the process of leaving an abusive relationship and defined four phases: counteracting abuse, breaking free, not going back, and moving on. However, their literature review suggests that 70% of abused women who leave will reconcile. In this study, they interviewed 27 Canadian women who responded to advertisements for women in relationships that previously had been violent but no longer were. Among these women, their process was similar up to a point as the women who left. But they described reaching a point where they could take control, a turning point in the relationship that constituted a "wake up call" for the partner. It could take the form of threatening to leave, a circumstance that helped them firmly assert a limit or boundary, or physically separating by staying with family or entering a shelter. Some women who sought counselling at this point felt supported, but others felt judged and re-victimized if helpers contradicted their belief that an abusive man could change. These 27 women were able to "renegotiate the relationship" on new terms and "live together differently," either by his reinvesting emotionally in the relationship or their agreeing to separate co-existence in the home. A good outcome was most likely when addiction was not an issue or had been addressed, when there had been a close and loving relationship in the early days, and among women with a core sense of their own competence, derived either from family of origin or acquired over time through self-betterment efforts such as education. Compared to women who ended their relationships, these partners did not meet the shifts of control with an escalation of their own abuse and control. The authors conclude that supporting a woman to build capacity and increase autonomy is important, but so is helping her monitor her partner's responses to her increasing independence and efforts to take control.

Judith Wuest & Marilyn Merritt-Gray (2008). A Theoretical Understanding of Abusive Intimate Partner Relationships that Become Non-violent: Shifting the Pattern of Abusive Control. *Journal of Family Violence*, 23: 161-171.

3. Decision-making about the future of the relationship

This woman could be in the shelter after a serious assault where she was scared by a dramatic or sudden escalation of his abuse. Or maybe she's seen a slow deterioration of life at home and reached a crisis point. Her goal for the relationship is uncertain so she could stay away or she could return. Her goal for her time in the shelter could be to have space to review her options and see what it feels like to be apart. Maybe she's curious about his reaction to her absence. Maybe she hopes he'll beg her to return and will make promises of change. Her length of stay is unpredictable because she could leave in an instant if getting the messages she wants to hear from her partner. What does she want from you? Probably, help in understanding why she feels confused, validation that her relationship is not based on equality or isn't "normal" (she probably suspects this but is struggling to know if she is correct), and information on her options. As with the other women, she probably needs to describe his positive features but she might talk about the parts of the relationship she'd miss if she left permanently. That's why the decision is so difficult. If fear prevents her from making a final decision, help her appreciate the protections available to her.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Helping the Decision-making Woman



Any of the above-listed ideas could be used with a "decision-making woman" but she may be ready to hear some more forthright educational pieces about the dynamics of abuse. Provide information about control tactics and rationalizations and help her complete the "My Wheel" exercise described on pages 5 and 60 of the first Helping Hands guide. This exercise helps label her experiences and feelings. Parts of the Lundy Bancroft book, *Why Does He Do That?*, might answer some questions about her partner's behaviour. The handouts on pages 46 to 57 in this guide help her articulate what she is thinking and feeling about the leaving process. You'll also get an idea of the physical barriers she faces to leaving, to guide your practical support. Also important in her stay/leave decision, she wants to understand her legal options and what she can expect in terms of assistance with housing and other basic needs. Explain where to get legal advice about property division, child custody or other issues about which she is worrying. The resource *Helping Children Thrive* contains information about how her children were affected and how they might be thinking and feeling now.



Lundy Bancroft (2002). *Why Does He Do that? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*. Berkley Books.



Linda Baker & Alison Cunningham (2004). *Helping Children Thrive / Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers*. Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.

4. Transitioning away from the relationship

This woman is ending the relationship and enters shelter with this goal clearly in mind. Maybe she has pangs of regret and maybe she is jolted by the strangeness of it all. But she has worked through the pros and cons and is firm in her resolve to move on. Perhaps she's been thinking about this for months or years. Perhaps she's been waiting for the children to grow up and leave home or she's been saving up money. What she seeks from you is help in adjusting emotionally, validation she's on a good path, and practical assistance with issues such as housing. Another type of transition woman is one for whom returning to her partner is not an option, as in perhaps he's in prison. She has the practical needs of any transition woman but the emotional needs of a decision-making woman because she will have many unresolved feelings.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Helping Transitioning Women



It is arguably true that this group of women most closely matches the stereotype of shelter residents held by the average person. And this may be the group that shelters are best able to serve. The greatest limitation to helping this woman is likely to be any cap on the time she can stay. Re-grouping and finding a place to live can take a few months. In some areas, the emergency or crisis shelter options are matched with the concept of transitional housing or second-stage housing which permit longer stays. The transitioning woman will likely need assistance to find housing and secure other basic needs, legal advice, and a listening ear for all her thoughts and feelings.

5. Recognize other needs

Depending upon the shelter mandate, perhaps a matter dictated by the funding source, shelters may serve women who are not fleeing abuse. Perhaps the women are homeless or were recently released from prison. Maybe she had an abusive relationship in the past but is no longer preoccupied or worried about that partner. A woman whose life was destabilized by past abuse – in her childhood or with adult partners or both – is still a woman affected by abuse. However, she may not be interested in any educational information about the dynamics of abuse. Such women are looking for a different intervention than women who flee abuse. At the extreme end of this continuum, you may find women who move from shelter to shelter, and who seek no intervention beyond the opportunity to stay.

RESEARCH FILE: Historical Abuse Among Women Seeking Counselling



In a state-wide study of over 5,000 women attending 54 agencies for domestic violence counselling, 30% of the women were experiencing abuse when first approaching the program. In contrast, for 24%, there had been no abuse in the previous one year. At the extreme end of the spectrum, 6% of the women had last experienced abuse over 5 years previous to the time they sought counselling for abuse. The authors observed that the effects of domestic violence last much longer than the domestic violence itself.

Stephanie Riger, L. Bennett and others (2002). *Evaluation of Services for Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault*. Sage.

STAFF MEETING DISCUSSION



Have a discussion about this typology of women. What proportion of your residents falls into each group? Are your services better suited to one or two groups than to the others? Are you meeting the needs of all groups, or would women in some groups feel more helped than women in other groups? In what ways if any could you modify your service approach so it's not one-size fits all? What proportion of the residents are not exiting from abusive relationships? How is your service different for those women? Are the rules and expectations the same or different, or should they be the same or different? To aid this discussion, retroactively rate the previous 100 admissions on this typology, or start to record this information going forward with new admissions.



Jill Davies (2008). *When Battered Women Stay: Advocacy Beyond Leaving*. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Motivational Interviewing



Motivational interviewing is for people facing a difficult change in their lives, perhaps needing to quit smoking or stop drinking. It's more a counselling approach than a way to ask questions, designed to strengthen motivation to change. It's a non-confrontational, non-directive, non-judgmental way to move people closer to a decision about change.

The role of a shelter is absolutely not to convince a woman to end her relationship. That's entirely her decision. But her presence in a shelter usually means she sees a problem and contemplates change. She has options and reconciliation is one. If expressing ambivalence, help her talk about the factors pulling her towards reconciliation and the factors pushing her out of the relationship. Gently re-frame any distortions she voices about self-blame or if she minimizes the inappropriateness of abuse. When motivational interviewing is appropriate, there are four stages.

Express empathy

If you focus solely on the negative aspects of her partner, or speak only about control tactics, she could feel that you don't understand the pros and cons she is weighing. Demonstrate that you recognize this situation is difficult and give her space to express any positive features of her relationship:

- You were together a long time and probably had good times and happy memories
- Closing that door would be a big change in your life
- What parts of the relationship are you missing the most right now?

If a woman wants decisively to end the relationship, be careful in using this approach. You could appear to be minimizing the abuse, not listening to her concerns, or to be suggesting she forgive him.

Develop discrepancy

Once she's voiced her ambivalence, ask how she wants her life to be. Does she want to feel valued and respected? To be happier? Don't list the reasons she wants to change. Encourage her to tell you. Also, if you focus excessively on his faults, she may end up defending him or feeling criticized. If she's not ready to label his behaviour as "abusive," be careful doing so. She may in essence be reluctant to see herself as "abused." However, you can label his actions as unacceptable and not deserved.

Roll with resistance

Resistance in the MI framework is "counter-motivation," thoughts blocking people from believing change is possible. This is normal. Change is scary. Don't push or be critical.

Support self-efficacy

Women with abusive partners yearn for those men to recognize they need help and get counselling. Maybe they think sobriety or grief counselling is the answer or maybe women see a need for a batterers intervention program. Whatever type of counselling, the point is that a woman cannot force her partner to change or to become a different person. It took years to develop his personality and changing it is not easy for him, especially if he doesn't see a problem. She is responsible only for her actions and choices. Blame is not the issue so it doesn't matter who is at fault. Help her identify her choices. She can accept him as he is. She can hope he will change (perhaps with a time limit, like "I'll give it six more months"). She can end the relationship.



William Miller & Stephen Rollnick (2002). *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change*, 2nd. Edition. Guilford Press.

Challenges Faced by Women Living in Shelters

The unique environment of a residential service is supportive but also can present challenges.

1. Embarrassment and stigma

Her partner's decision about how to treat her is not a woman's fault, although she may feel to blame. A woman entering shelter may feel ashamed for being abused, for selecting an abusive partner, for having failed in her relationship, for having no other option but to seek shelter. She may hide her location from friends, family or co-workers out of embarrassment.

2. The pressures of communal living

Shelters are places of safety but also communal living environments where a diverse group of people come together at a time of crisis and transition. Not everyone will like each other. Not everyone will get along. Surveys of shelters residents typically identify the pressures of communal living as the most stressful part of shelter living.

3. Parenting in an unfamiliar environment

Shelters are difficult places to parent. Shelters are difficult places to be a kid. There are a lot of rules, not much to do, and all your familiar things are missing. Finding a quiet space for homework can be difficult. Children's school attendance and performance may suffer. The family's presence in a shelter may be cited by her ex-partner in a custody battle as indication of a woman's poor parenting and bad judgment.

RESEARCH FILE: Mothering in a Shelter



Seventeen mothers in homeless shelters described the stress of parenting in a context where they couldn't set and enforce their own rules with their own children. Shelter rules could be inconsistent with how they parented in the past. Aspects of communal living were difficult. For example, one woman noted how toilet training was impaired by the limited number of bathrooms needed by a large number of people. The women were continually aware of being monitored and judged by others. Other residents sometimes interfered with their parenting or gave unwanted advice. In this city (perhaps not others), attendance at parenting programs was mandatory and at least some of the women felt incompetent as a result, because of the assumption that sheltered women need parenting assistance.

Lisa Cosgrove & Cheryl Flynn (2005). Marginalized Mothers: Parenting without a Home. *Analyses of Social Issues & Public Policy*, 5(1): 127-143.

4. Self-recrimination and doubt

"Am I doing the right thing?" "Will the children be better off, or did I make a huge mistake?" "I must be a massive failure to have ended up here."

5. Uncertainty and confusion about the future

Some women enter shelter with a firm plan for the future, envisioning their stay as a purposeful step on that path. For most women, the next steps are far from certain. How long will she stay, where will she live after, how will her partner react to her being in a shelter, can her children go to school, and many other questions dominate.

Types of Coping You Might See in Shelter

Refer to the first Helping Hands guide for a definition of coping and a discussion of coping within abusive relationships. There, we suggest that coping requires survival skills that work at the time, but may look from the outside like a problem or become a problem over time. When entering a shelter, a woman brings her coping strategies into this new environment. A coping strategy is effective if it helps her to feel better. But a coping choice causes problems if she avoids her own needs, alienates others, or in the extreme is asked to leave the shelter.

1. Conflict avoidance

Swallowing opinions and backing down from arguments are necessary skills when living with an abusive partner. Maybe she did the same thing as a child, if she grew up with an abusive parent. In shelter, women might need support to voice their opinions and be appropriately assertive when there is a disagreement or conflict.

2. Self-distraction

One way to avoid thinking about our own problems is to immerse ourselves in the problems of others. You see women who listen well to the stories of other women (which is good if it's their choice to hear that information) but you may also see women who interject their advice where it's unwanted, who are pre-occupied with the lives of others, who are openly critical of the choices of others, or who share information inappropriately about women who are not present. When a woman is a good listener and tries to solve other women's problems, encourage her to re-direct those other women back to staff whose job it is to help. She shouldn't overwhelm herself with the problems of others or avoid identifying and addressing her own needs. This is coping through distraction. It's also a problem when pre-occupation with the business of other people is used for distraction. When a woman lists all the deficits of others, re-direct her to think about her own issues and the choices and decisions she faces (yet perhaps is avoiding).

TOOL BOX IDEA: Avoid Triangulation of Staff



You might see “relational aggression” or “triangulation” as women try to make friends. In this technique, she directly compliments and commiserates with one woman while denigrating another woman who is (usually) not present. It creates a bond, uniting the pair as friends who are in some way superior to the others. This dynamic creates cliques and, more seriously, isolates some women and makes them feel like outcasts. Obviously, this dynamic when observed must be addressed. It's inconsistent with the ethos of a shelter as a welcoming place of respect and non-judgement. However, recognize it as a strategy that worked for the woman in the past and as a technique she probably uses without intending to cause problems. It helps her feel good at some level, because being a member of the “in crowd” is satisfying. It's also effective at helping her make friends and to avoid loneliness.

Be also aware that triangulation can involve staff. One staff is complimented for her great skills while another staff is denigrated as less competent. It always feels good to get a compliment so pay attention to the larger dynamic. Women are permitted to take issue with staff and how they are treated but it's best to redirect her back to that staff member. Role play if necessary how she could approach the staff and phrase her feedback. When you suspect the complaint is an attempt to triangulate you and another staff, don't play the game. Unrecognized triangulation reduces the ability of staff to act as a team and be fair and consistent with women. It can create conflict among colleagues.

STAFF MEETING DISCUSSION



Does your shelter have a grievance procedure for women? For mutual accountability, women should be able to make complaints. The first step in the process is to help the woman voice her concerns to the person whose words or conduct she takes issue with. Use role play if this helps. Dealing with a grievance is a “reachable moment” for learning and growth and an opportunity to model the core values of your agency. Handle grievances in ways supportive to staff and use the information as evidence of training needs or opportunities for program modification. Find a model grievance procedure on the web site of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. It can form the basis of your discussions.

3. Caretaking of others

Another coping strategy you might see in shelter is the nurturing and caretaking of others (not her children). In essence, this is a form of distraction because women avoid identifying and taking care of their own needs. Here's one example. Some women obsessively tidy and clean the common areas of the shelter or offer to cook all the meals. This strategy looks on the surface like something to be encouraged and praised. Sometimes it is. But when a woman maintains a furious pace of cleaning or cooking, consider what's driving that behaviour. Maybe she's falling back on a strategy that helped her cope with abuse. To have a clean and ordered house might be a way of seeking control over a life that was otherwise out of her control. Perhaps she cleaned to ward off criticism by her partner, or she hoped a clean house would leave one less thing to lose his temper about. If a woman copes by cleaning and caretaking, encourage her to do only her fair share so she doesn't exhaust herself or get taken advantage of. She may eventually resent the other women who are less tidy or cannot live up to her standards of cleanliness.

4. Numbing the feelings and silencing the thoughts

This style of coping may manifest in self-injury or, more commonly, in drinking or using drugs. Alcohol or drugs, used as a coping strategy, controls mood, quiets disturbing thoughts, and numbs feelings of tension or worry. A self-help mnemonic sometimes used to avoid relapse is HALT. A person is most likely to drink or use drugs when **h**ungry, **a**lone, **l**onely or **t**ired. Except for the hungry part, these words well describe those initial days in a shelter when she doesn't know any of the other women and may feel hopeless and confused and have difficulty sleeping. Using intoxicating substances is typically against shelter rules. When forced to give up one coping strategy, she'll need to find other ways to calm herself and feel better. If actively using drugs or feeling strong pulls to do so, she may be reluctant to confide in shelter staff. An honest disclosure could trigger her being asked to leave.

5. Withdrawal and self-isolation

A woman who isolates herself in her room or who shuns interaction with others may assume no one wants to be her friend, may lack social skills, or she may be depressed. She will miss the benefit of sharing her story with the other women and will not likely access the assistance offered by the staff team. Self-imposed isolation could be a reflection of conflict avoidance, if there is a high level of tension in the shelter. You might see a woman sleeping all day and being awake at night, to be alone in the common areas when no one is awake. Some women who've experienced homelessness hoard food or collect personal items in a seemingly excessive and obsessive way and avoid others because that is their survival strategy on the streets. Some women isolate themselves for self-protection, worrying their presence will be communicated to their partners by the other women. She might seem “paranoid” but exercising caution and being suspicious is sensible if her partner is gang-involved or part of a criminal subculture like the drug trade. You cannot force women to interact with others, but check in now and again to see if she needs anything or wants to talk. Maybe pair her up with another resident for a social activity.

Strategies to Intervene with Women Living in Shelters

Shelter workers use a variety of strategies to help women as they transition to the next phase of their lives or as they struggle to make difficult decisions.

1. Facilitate her meeting of basic needs

As described in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (see page 37), human beings cannot address higher level issues until their basic needs are met. Basic needs include a roof over their heads and food, both things available in the shelter but which women must arrange for the near future. Some women come to the shelter with the clothes on their backs and may need help getting new identification and other basics. Help finding safe and stable housing and other necessities is an important service even if it appears simple and obvious.

2. Help her think pro-actively about safety

The second step in Maslow's hierarchy is safety needs. Again, these needs are met while she is in shelter but must be protected in the weeks and months to come. Some women benefit from an outside perspective to assess a partner's propensity to hurt her now that they are separated. You can provide that perspective and suggest options to minimize or neutralize his ability to be a threat. She can take precautions and make pro-active plans for how to respond if encountering him in a public place or if he makes contact with her. This process is generically known as "safety planning."

TOOL BOX IDEA: Assessing her Safety



In the first Helping Hands guide, you will find a checklist of attitudes and actions of her partner and also features of the present context. It helps start a conversation about her need to be cautious. Also ask her to complete the handouts on pages 47 and 48 in this guide, to assess if she and her partner are out of sync in the separation process. If he is adjusting poorly to the end of the relationship, he may do something that she considers "out of character" for him. She may benefit from an outside perspective on her safety, if she copes by minimizing the severity of abuse.



Sharon Agar (2003). *Safety Planning with Abused Partners: A Review and Annotated Bibliography*. British Columbia Institute Against Family Violence.

RESEARCH FILE: Stalking with Technology



These authors suggest that advocates for women become familiar with how technology can facilitate surveillance and harassment, what they call "stalking with technology," a term broader than cyberstalking to take into account techniques such as GPS, cell phones, and wireless video cameras. Someone can surreptitiously use keystroke logging software or spy ware to monitor computer use, e-mail, and chat-room discussions, for example. It is relatively easy to intercept conversations on older cell phones or cordless phones and also baby monitors can be used to eavesdrop. Web cams should be disabled when not in use.

Cynthia Southworth, Jerry Finn, Shawndell Dawson, Cynthia Fraser & Sarah Tucker (2007). Intimate Partner Violence, Technology, and Stalking. *Violence Against Women*, 13(8): 842-856.

3. Encourage her to advocate for herself within the legal system

There are no magic solutions to be found in the legal system but some options are available only there. It's perhaps the last thing she wants to do, but taking steps to legalize child custody is important, as is pursuing her children's right to financial support from their father. Having a formal custody document is especially important when child abduction is a possibility. If her ex-partner wants to see the children, a schedule for visitation with appropriate protections must eventually be negotiated or ordered by a court. Various types of protective orders or restraining orders can aid (but not guarantee) her piece of mind and safety. There are pros and cons to this decision, but she can make a police statement if her partner's abuse involved criminal conduct. The legal system is daunting for the uninitiated so have brochure and informational material on hand about her rights and responsibilities in the separation process.

4. Emphasize the importance of self care

As women, we sometimes take care of everyone else and avoid paying attention to our own health and well being. At the same time, the thought of starting a major health regimen is daunting. When you're going through a significant life transition, maybe it's not the best time to set goals unrealistically high. Must you train for a marathon when a 30-minute walk will suffice? In a shelter, a woman may be motivated to think more about self care, especially if you explicitly give her permission to do so. Be attentive to signs that she uses caretaking of others to avoid considering her own needs. Perhaps she has completely lost touch with what she likes and wants after years living with someone who made all the decisions. Offer her choice where possible and let her explore her preferences for issues such as what movie to watch or what foods to eat. Keep your suggestions for self-care simple and manageable, so self care doesn't become another onerous task to fail at or which creates pressure through high expectations. A cup of tea and ten minutes with her feet up is a great place to start. When women have children with her in the shelter, try and arrange for child care as respite from the 24/7 responsibility.

TOOL BOX IDEA: 10 Simple Strategies for Self Care



In the handouts at the back of this guide, there is a list of 10 ideas for basic self care, called "10 Things I Can Do for Me." Maybe doing all 10 in one day is more than she can manage, but encourage one or two or three. To do so is to reinforce the idea that she is worth a few simple indulgences and can be proactive in looking after her health. By introducing this list in a group intervention or at a house meeting, the women can encourage and reinforce them with each other.

RESEARCH FILE: Music and Mood



This review of studies concluded that music can change the mood of people with depression. More specifically, directing someone to think about a piece of music can be used to start a discussion about self-awareness and being aware of one's mood.

Anna Maratos, C. Gold, X. Wang & M.J. Crawford (2008). Music Therapy for Depression. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2008*, Issue 1. Art. No.: CD004517.

TOOL BOX IDEA: The Soundtrack of my Life



Music has a powerful effect on our mood, which is why it's used to such great effect in movie soundtracks. For women with access to MP3 players, loading it up with inspiring music may help invoke feelings of confidence. There are two handouts later with lists of ideas to get them started, but everyone has her own favourites.

5. Look for opportunities to apply the principles of strength-based intervention

Refer back to the first Helping Hands guide for a review of strength-based intervention with abused women. Among the assumptions underlying this approach is that pessimism creates helplessness and optimism feeds perseverance. People who believe they can solve their problems are better able to do so. It also involves looking for strengths in adversities which are often viewed as problems. For example, women who lived on the streets must have good problem solving skills. Someone who could kick injectable drugs has a lot of inner strength and someone who raised children with little money is resourceful and smart. Focusing on strengths doesn't mean ignoring problems. But everyone has strengths, even if they are difficult to see, and even if they don't themselves recognize it. Service providers can train themselves to recognize strengths even if their education or training was in a problem-oriented discipline. This approach involves more than giving positive feedback. It involves making the connection between her strength areas and her ability to succeed in solving a current problem. There are three steps. Comment on or observe something she did well (made a nice dinner, said something kind to another woman, set a boundary with her mother). Identify that action as a reflection of her skill at something or a core quality of her personality (e.g., capacity to be playful and organized, compassion, resolve to be happier). Then link that skill or quality to her likely success in addressing a problem she now faces. This approach is solution focused in that the end goal is a positive outcome.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Being Ready to Capitalize on "Reachable Moments"



Applying the strength-based approach means being on the lookout for "reachable moments," circumstances that arise unpredictably when a woman may be amenable to talking or anxious to solve a problem. They are chances to make a point in a strength focused way or deliver a message when she is open and ready to hear it. The shelter environment is well suited to this approach because you see her doing many things, including caretaking of children, and you can follow the sometimes up and down emotional roller coaster of her life. Many women continue to be in some degree of contact with their partners to negotiate the next steps in their relationships.

The time capsule

One potentially "reachable moment" is when she is upset after a telephone call with her partner. Ask her to set aside the content of the argument and focus on how she feels at that minute. She might feel un-listened to, misunderstood, insulted, or blamed. Make a list of her thoughts and feelings as she talks, or get her to make the list. Keeping that piece of paper, she can refer to it later if she starts to minimize the severity of his actions and the effects on her.

Talk is cheap

If her partner has recently broken a promise and she is voicing her frustration, ask her about other promises he made and didn't keep. Take a piece of paper and put in one column a list of what he says he will do. In the second column, list what he actually does in response to the promise. Help her de-focus from his words and promises and pay attention to his actions. Actions speak louder than words but we don't always listen.

TOOL BOS IDEA: The Story of my Life



When talking about a past traumatic event, some people describe themselves as a "victim" of those events and some people tell the story casting themselves in the role of "survivor." A woman might describe the situation with her partner using a victim stance. Ask her to repeat that story but instead casting herself as a survivor. This may involve making more "I" statements rather than "he" statements, searching for positive outcomes (e.g., "it was so bad that I realized he could kill me and I knew I had to get out"). Being in a shelter is a calamity if you see yourself as a victim or a great victory if you have a survivor frame.

RESEARCH FILE: 10 Categories of Strengths



This author reviewed the literature on strength-based approaches and culled 10 categories of strengths:

1. Wisdom

Wisdom is the most widely recognized human strength and is often related to age.

2. Emotional strengths

Insight, optimism, perseverance, putting troubles in perspective, finding purpose in life, and having the ability to endure. Hope, faith, and love of life are also emotional strengths.

3. Character strengths

The VIA (Values in Action) Institute of the University of Pennsylvania identified 24 character strengths: creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective, courage, persistence, integrity/honesty, zest, love, kindness/generosity, social intelligence, citizenship, fairness, leadership, forgiveness and mercy, modesty, prudence, self-regulation, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, optimism, humour, and spirituality. Five of them are key: gratitude, optimism, zest/enthusiasm, curiosity, and the ability to love and be loved. Use the Internet to find a number of on-line VIA questionnaires (e.g., the Signature Strengths Questionnaire) to get feedback on your character strengths.

4. Creative strengths

The ability to appreciate the arts and the ability to express oneself in writing, voice, and other art forms, having novel and productive thinking.

5. Relational and nurturing strengths

The ability to form relationships with others, to be cooperative, the ability to communicate, the capacity to nurture others and to have compassion and tolerance.

6. Educational Strengths

Having academic degrees, level of educational attainment, or informal education.

7. Analytical Strengths

Cognitive strengths, such as problem-solving and decision-making strengths and the ability to think and reason.

8. Work-related and provider strengths

The ability to secure employment, to provide for a family, and to generate income.

9. Social Support

Ability to secure or make good use of social support and community.

10. Survival skills

The ability to avoid pain and to maintain physical survival in a culture or society. Ability to provide for basic physiological and safety needs.

A person may have strengths in several categories at the same time, but not likely strengths in all. People can develop strengths over time, from exposure to adversity or ability to reflect on life experiences. This author argues that people live in either strength-building environments (producing people with a high sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem) or strength-limiting environments. Abusive relationships are strength-limiting environments so shelters should be strength-building environments.

Elsie J. Smith (2006). The Strength-based Counseling Model. *Counseling Psychologist*, 34(1): 13-79.

TOOL BOX IDEA: The Miracle Question



The miracle question is used by strength-based therapists to help people shift from a focus on what is wrong today to create a vision of a better tomorrow. There are many variations, but here is an example: "Say you went to sleep tonight and someone magically solved your problems in the nighttime but didn't tell you. When you wake up, how could you tell that your problem is gone? What would be different in your life or your relationship? What would you do or feel differently? What parts of your life today would continue to be there?" You can tailor the question to be more specific, like: "What if someone miraculously overnight freed you from the craving for crack. How would the world look and feel differently? What would be the first sign that the craving is gone?" You could set limits on the miracle, like the miracle fairy can't change your partner (only he can change himself). The idea behind the miracle question is that her description of a preferred future defines a goal to shoot for and maybe suggests some strategies to get there. The miracle question is absolutely not for everyone, but can help some people who are stuck in negative thoughts about the past and immobilized from moving forward emotionally. Some people find it too abstract to follow. Moreover, it should only be used when the power to change is within the person. It would not be appropriate for someone who would say "I'd like to wake up tomorrow and not have cancer" or "I'd like to wake up tomorrow and have a place to live." But it might be appropriate for a woman who could say, "I would know there had been a change if I could decide what I wanted to do today," or "if I wasn't afraid anymore."

6. Encourage the use and development of healthy coping

As we observed earlier, women bring their coping strategies into shelter. Coping worked while with her partner. But abuse-related coping can become problematic in a shelter environment, as women react to the stress and strangeness of the milieu and get drawn into conflict with others. Abuse-related coping may also be costly to her health or constitute a barrier to happy functioning. Some women have a strong repertoire of healthy coping skills and make positive choices to handle stress, like journaling, drawing or seeking the support of friends. Name that for them as good coping. For women who draw upon less healthy coping techniques, also help them understand the concept of coping and identify for themselves the strategies they use. Refer to the first Helping Hands guide for some tips on how to have a conversation about coping.

TOOL BOX IDEA: Coping Among Sheltered Women



When you see coping strategies applied in the shelter setting, it is a great opportunity to open a dialogue about coping. Look beyond the stereotypical examples of unhealthy coping. With the woman who cooks and cleans, ask if she developed this pattern in response to her partner. Was it her way to maintain control of her life or to ward off criticism, self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy? Encourage her to do only her fair share so she doesn't exhaust herself or get taken advantage of and start resenting the other women. Another woman may be a good listener and try to solve other women's problems. Encourage her to re-direct women back to staff whose job it is to help. She shouldn't overwhelm herself with the problems of others or avoid identifying and addressing her own needs. If conflict avoidance is an issue, encourage and model appropriate assertiveness. For example, use the tip sheet about saying "no" found later in this guide. Help her build a support system and experience the benefits of having friends to help out. Link her with addiction treatment if drug or alcohol use is getting in the way of her healing process.

7. Model respect for others and good problem solving

Everything you say and do reflects your values as a person and is also a potential intervention. How do you resolve conflict between or among women? You want to be effective but you also want to be respectful of everyone's viewpoint, not silence anyone who has a legitimate grievance, and not take sides or single out a blameworthy party. As a staff member, you are a role model.

8. Facilitate addictions assessment and treatment if necessary

A portion of sheltered women will be struggling with addiction issues, even in shelters that screen out women based on alcohol or drug use. We often ask about her partner's substance use, to assess the risk he poses to her. Many observers now encourage shelters to do the same for a woman's drug and alcohol use to better understand her struggles and to link her with appropriate services. Shelter workers don't want to embarrass women or erode their trust in the service, but much good progress cannot happen until substance use is addressed.

STAFF MEETING DISCUSSION



If your shelter prohibits admission for substance using women, is contemplating such a policy, or is unsure of how best to meet the needs of women with addictions, material in the following three documents – all available on the Internet – can form the basis for a staff discussion. What aspects of best practice for addiction treatment are inconsistent with the woman-centred orientation? Can the two approaches be reconciled? Consider a cross-training initiative with a local addiction program, so the shelter staff better understand addictions and the addictions-focused workers better understand abuse dynamics. You are serving many of the same women,



British Columbia Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs (2007). *Freedom From Violence: Tools for Working with Trauma, Mental Health and Substance Use*.

Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (2008). *Getting Safe and Sober: Real Tools You Can Use, Second Edition*.

Larry Bennett & Patricia Bland (2008). *Substance Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence*. National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women (VAWnet).

RESEARCH FILE: Assessment for Addictions Among Women Entering Shelter



In an American shelter, 102 women were screened for substance abuse at intake with a battery of standardized instruments. Nearly 60% were rated as alcohol dependent and 55% as drug dependent. There was a correlation between frequency of cocaine use in the prior 30 days and severity of reported abuse. The same was true for years of alcohol dependence and severity of abuse. Alcohol or drug "problems" had been noted in the files of 50% of the women at intake. Depending upon the category of drug, the standardized assessment uncovered from 5% to 18% of addictions unapparent during the intake.

Dawnoviose Fowler (2007). The Extent of Substance Use Problems Among Women Partner Abuse Survivors in a Domestic Violence Shelter. *Family & Community Health*, 30(1): S106-S108.

9. Harness the power of the group

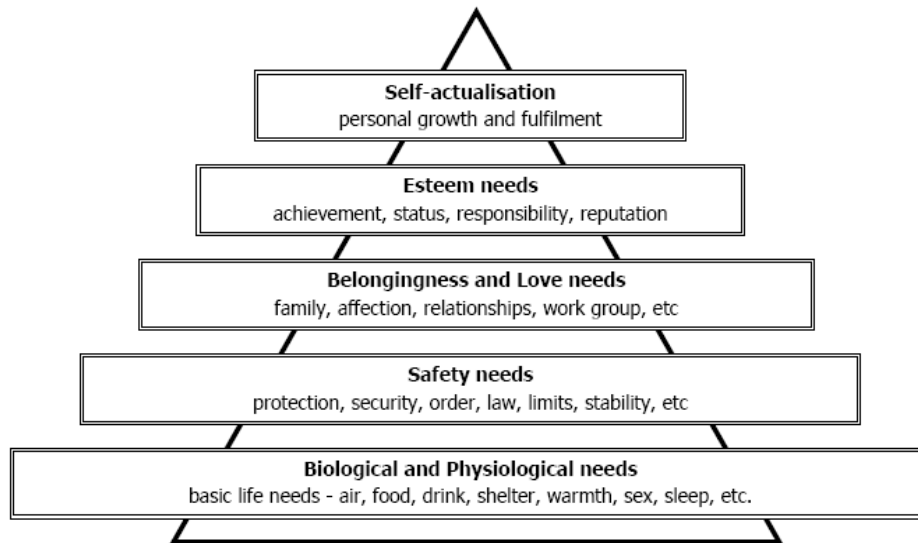
Making time for group discussions is often appreciated by women. They enjoy the opportunity to speak with others who've had similar experiences. Group work breaks the isolation so they know they're not alone with their thoughts and feelings. The more experienced women can provide insight for the younger or newer women. Some group manuals are available for this purpose, but you can also take a more informal approach and let the group select a topic. The handouts printed at the end of this guide can form the basis for group discussion.

10. Promote your own self-care

The women need you to be healthy, to come to work every day with an open mind, ready to listen without judgment and be in the minute with them. Take care of yourself.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow developed a model called the Hierarchy of Needs that some people find helpful. Maslow said that human beings must meet our basic physical needs (food, water, sleep) before we can do anything else in life. Without basic needs, everything else we might want or need is pointless.



If our physical needs are met, we can pursue our need for safety (shelter, security, income). If those are okay, we can address our need for love and belonging (friendships, relationships). The next step is esteem needs such as self-respect and, hopefully, being respected by others. Once these are in place, we might reach the top of the hierarchy, or the goal we strive for as humans. Maslow called this self-actualization but it essentially means being the best person you can be.

Maslow's model shows us several things:

1. Becoming the best person we can be is not accomplished over night. It's a journey with a series of steps.
2. We start the journey with practical things like meeting our basic needs and need for safety
3. The steps take us upward to something better. Like all staircases, the climb involves more effort than walking on a level surface.

The same principles apply to the **Journey of Healing**. Shelters help women start that journey and launch her in a good direction along her life's path.

Dilemmas Sometimes Facing Shelter Workers

This is challenging work and you may periodically find yourself on “the horns of a dilemma,” forced to decide between two options, neither of which seem fair or palatable. By definition, there is never a wrong or correct answer to a dilemma.

STAFF MEETING DISCUSSION



The presence of dilemmas or their frequency is linked in great measure to local context, including most especially the adequacy of allied services and supports for women. Maybe these five issues are not dilemmas at your shelter, but apply the concept to think about what dilemmas are faced locally. If one or more of these dilemmas sounds familiar, how do they manifest? Which are most common? How do staff make decisions in response to dilemmas? Is there consistency or consensus on how to respond? If not, would the staff team appreciate direction? Does resolving the source of a dilemma require discussion with other services and agencies in your area, or government?

1. Being woman centred vs. being women centred

Being *woman* centred is a crucial principle underlying work with abused women. But shelter staff must also be *women* centred, being responsible for the safety, comfort and interests of all women and children who live there. Statistics for North America at least suggest that sheltered women, as a group, experience higher levels of entrenched and severe addictions, aggression, health problems such as HIV/hepatitis C, mental illness, and chronic homelessness compared with abused women in the general population or even abused women in non-residential counselling. Here's an example. A woman is actively using drugs while in the shelter, possibly because an addictions treatment program is not available to her. Using a coping lens, it's easy to make a connection between abuse in her life and her use of drugs. If not able to stay at the shelter, she's vulnerable to return to an unhealthy relationship or at risk of exploitation while living on the streets. At the same time, her coping strategy will be a problem for other women and might compromise the safety and healthy development of children under your care. There may be other women in the early stages of detoxification and recovery who are triggered by her behaviour and tempted by the close availability of drugs. This woman may be offering drugs to other women. Even women without addiction struggles may be offended by the presence of drugs and concerned for their children's safety. For all these reasons, most shelters have rules against drug use or being under the influence of drugs. At its most problematic, the behaviour of one woman causes others to leave the safety of a shelter – perhaps to return to an abusive partner. Do you ask the woman to leave, or let her stay knowing she has no where else to go? This is a dilemma because there is no good answer to that question.

2. Using a strength-focused coping lens vs. proactive paternalism

You want to appreciate the sources of costly coping and see strengths in adversity and struggles. It's a key tenet of the woman-centred approach to avoid pathologization and stigmatizing labels such as psychiatric diagnoses. But sometimes the intensity of a woman's challenges is so severe that failing to take action is benign neglect. Suicidality is an example. We commented in the first Helping Hands guide that being strength-focused doesn't mean ignoring problems and hoping for the best. Sometimes psychiatric medication is clearly and absolutely the only way to help a woman, as when she is dangerously psychotic. There are times when hospitalization is the only way to keep her safe. The dilemma may come in knowing when to abandon the woman-centred principles and act in a proactively paternalistic way with which she might not agree. Making such a decision as a staff team or getting the viewpoint of colleagues is helpful.

3. Empowering to resolve conflict vs. abandoning women to conflict

In a shelter, individuals and families are brought together at a stressful time of uncertainty and transition. It seems inevitable that conflicts arise. True to the principles of empowerment, and wanting very much to avoid a paternalistic approach, shelter staff encourage women to resolve inter-resident conflicts among themselves. However, the climate of a shelter can deteriorate to unacceptable levels when conflict is intense, reproducing some features of abuse itself. At these times, to maintain a safe and comfortable environment, staff must take a firm role in resolving conflict, enforcing house rules, monitoring chore completion and, in the extreme, asking some people to leave. These are roles that a shelter worker may not be comfortable taking.

4. Encouraging mothers vs. protecting children

Depending upon the laws in your jurisdiction, this may not be a dilemma about what to do so much as a dilemma about how to do it. There are times when you must call child-protective services to report child maltreatment. It's easy to see a woman's parenting deficits as a response to the challenges and struggles of her life. She's probably exhausted and depressed and maybe the children are acting out and miserable. In your area, part of the dilemma may be knowing that the child-welfare response is unlikely to be helpful. When this step must be taken, explain to the mother what you will do and why. Encourage her to make the call herself.

5. Facilitating leaving for safety vs. the reality of finding housing

You want women to see shelter as an option if needed to end an abusive relationship, but they can't stay forever and affordable housing is hard to find. Many shelters have limits on length of stay, often dictated by funding, and women may not be aware of this fact when deciding to leave. If she must find a new apartment or house, how long will it take? Here's another way to phrase this dilemma. You want women to trust you and feel comfortable and empowered. But sometimes you have to ask women to leave sooner than they want.

RESEARCH FILE: Broader Dilemmas in Feminism



These authors reviewed recently voiced critiques of feminist thinking on violence against women. For example, focus on the patriarchal system and gender oppression fails to explain violence in same-sex relationships, maternal child abuse, or abuse by women of men. Core feminist values include choice, self-determination, and empowerment of women. Are mandatory charging and no-drop prosecution policies consistent with those values? Using a popular book to focus discussion, they convened a focus group with 33 staff members from eight agencies serving abused and sexually assaulted women. The book was *Insult to injury: Rethinking our Responses to Intimate Abuse*, by Linda Mills (2003). Participants voiced both their successes and frustrations with the traditional feminist model as applied in work with women. Through a process of reflection and critique, they identified four ways to expand the traditional feminist model while continuing to embrace core elements such as the power analysis and locating the roots of violence within gender oppression.

1. Acknowledging multiple causes of violence (e.g., substance abuse, life stressors triggering family conflict, psychopathology, ineffective couple communication skills), that violence could be multi-determined or that different people could be violent for different reasons.
2. Acknowledging that there are male victims and female perpetrators.
3. Recognizing client loss of choice and self-determination (e.g., with mandatory charging).
4. Acknowledging institutional failures such as the over-reliance on the criminal justice system to respond to violence against women.

Beverly A. McPhail, Noël Bridget Busch, Shanti Kulkarni & Gail Rice (2007). An Integrative Feminist Model: The Evolving Feminist Perspective on Intimate Partner Violence. *Violence Against Women*, 13(8): 817-841.

Suggestions from Women as They Exit Shelter

Exit interviews with departing women yield insights into the strengths and not-so-strong features of your service. Communal living attracts the most complaints. Here are some other ideas.

1. Stay overnight in your shelter

Here is an intriguing suggestion from a woman: “every new staff member should live for a week in this shelter.” Only by sleeping there, bathing there, taking meals and trying to relax and occupy yourself can you appreciate what it’s like to live in your shelter. You learn how noise travels through the building, how boring it is, and how you must shower before 9 a.m. or the hot water is gone.

2. Separate single women and women with children

Single women, often people who lost children to child welfare, can be frustrated with the noise and mess inevitably made by children. Mothers can be concerned about the appropriateness of the environment for children, if there are women using bad language, having adult discussions, or maybe using drugs.

3. Reflect the profile of residents in your staff team

Shelter residents are a varied group in terms of age, ethnicity, language, educational attainment and social class. Women inevitably make better connections with some workers than with others.

4. Tackle boredom

Some women want activities and distractions to alleviate boredom. Have a variety of books, board games, art projects and DVD/videos on hand.

5. Orientation at admission

Some women would appreciate having more information about what to expect and what is expected of them, perhaps in a package of informational material made available to read at their convenience.

STAFF MEETING DISCUSSION: An orientation manual for new residents



If you don’t already have such a thing, consider creating an orientation manual for women entering the shelter. Such a manual might include:

- agency description and list of services offered
- possibly a list of staff members with their training and experience
- shelter rules and expectations
- list of the safety features of the shelter and how security is assured
- frequently asked questions and their answers
- educational material on woman abuse or on how abuse affects children
- list of other material that can be provided upon request
- local map with shopping, parks, pools, library, coffee shops, Internet café, etc. clearly marked
- information on bus routes, ticket prices and where to find schedules
- list of local services shelter residents might use
- descriptions of local services her partner may find helpful (drug assessment agency, men’s treatment program, etc.)
- recipes for simple meals for when it’s her night to cook
- feedback form for suggestions / grievance form if available

TOOL BOX IDEA: The Exit Interview



An exit interview is an excellent way to harness the observations of women to understand your program's strengths and weaknesses. Questions might include these:

- Was the shelter experience what you expected before you came?
- In what way was it different from what you expected?
- What were you looking to get when you arrived here? Did you get what you wanted?
- What was the most difficult aspect of living in the shelter? Do you have any suggestions for how we can respond to that issue?
- How do you feel today about your decision to enter a shelter?

Whenever possible, have the most senior person in your shelter conduct the interview. Women might be more candid and candour is required to make the information useful. To refine your analysis, organize the answers according to different categories of women (e.g., using the typology on page 23 or women with and without children).

RESEARCH FILE: Measuring Satisfaction with Shelter Services



In addition to, or instead of, an exit interview, some shelters use a structured feedback form. In this Canadian research project, researchers used a form with these items, along with the response categories of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. You could also add a fifth response category for some questions: "I knew this already before coming here."

- During my shelter stay I felt safer from my abuser
- I was listened to
- I was believed
- I understand that I was not to blame for the abuse
- I understand that I deserve better
- I gained hope that I can make a better life for myself
- I know more about services in the community where I can get help for children in my care (if applicable)
- I know more about services in the community where I can get help for myself
- I know more about where to go for legal information and support
- I know more about the signs of an abusive relationship
- I know more about the effect of abuse on the children in my care
- I know more about the effect of abuse on me
- I am more able to keep myself (and the children in my care) safe from abuse
- The food was tasty and filling
- The shelter rules were fair
- The services/staff were sensitive to my culture
- The shelter was welcoming and comfortable
- The staff respected my privacy
- The staff were friendly and approachable
- The staff were helpful and supportive
- During my stay, the shelter met almost all of my needs
- I am very satisfied with the services I received during my shelter stay
- If a friend needed similar help I would suggest going to the shelter to her

The form ended with two open-ended questions: Do you have any suggestions or concerns? What did you like best? Almost all the 238 women completing this form indicated that they now "understood that I deserve better" and that they "gained hope that I can make a better life for myself." The lowest ratings were about the food.

Leslie Tutty (2006). *Effective Practices in Sheltering Women Leaving Violence in Intimate Relationships, Phase II Report*. YWCA Canada.

Celebrations of the Work

What is a shelter worker?

1. A problem-solver

She's a Jill-of-all trades who can unclog a toilet and effect household repairs. She deals with malfunctioning major appliances, blown fuses, fire alarms, and power failures.

2. A multi-tasker

She can answer a crisis telephone call, take a child's temperature, write concise and meaningful case notes, comfort a woman who's having the worst day of her life, and help a child do homework.

3. A team player

Perhaps she works alone at times, called upon to make quick and important decisions in the face of crisis, but she provides seamless service as part of a cohesive staff team.

4. An empathic listener

She is a dispenser of TLC and Kleenex, when the reality of the moment is too much for a woman to bear and she doesn't believe anyone will understand. She's there to listen, respectfully and without judgment.

5. A mediator of conflict

She helps women resolve their differences when they find the realities of communal living stressful.

6. A guardian

She oversees the security of the women and children who look to her for safety and reassurance that no will hurt them tonight.

7. An optimist

She looks at the world through a lens of compassion, to see "problems" as coping and boundless potential in children. When a woman vents her anger, she sees the wounded child she once was.

8. A role model

She is a strong and capable woman, who perhaps overcame great obstacles in her own life.

9. A dreamer

She dreams of a world where the shelter closes for want of business and she retires to run a flower shop, write a novel or sell pottery.

10. A sister in the struggle

She is an invisible, and certainly underpaid, soldier in the fight against violence in all its forms. She stands arm-in-arm with her sisters around the globe.

That is a shelter worker.

Final Thought

1. Complex issues have no simple solution

Societies evolve and shelters have evolved. Our challenge for the future is to stay true to our roots, grounded in a woman-centred focus, while matching and meeting the increasingly complex needs of the women who find their ways to us. We started several decades ago to shelter women fleeing abuse. We continue to provide that service and to do it well. That service will not be the service best matching the needs of all women. How do we avoid slipping into a purely clinical model? How do we draw from the clinical model as needed without abandoning our core principles? These are important questions facing shelters in the coming years.

RESEARCH FILE: Keeping Women Safe in their Own Homes



It is a common and absolutely legitimate complaint that women must enter a shelter while their partners continue to roam about the community unfettered. In this study, researchers spoke with 30 women who used a novel security device called bilateral electronic monitoring (BEM) while their partners were awaiting trial on bail or had been sentenced. Men chosen for the program had high rates of non-compliance with protective orders. He (the controlled party) wore an ankle transmitter while she (the protected party) had a security box connected to her telephone line. If his transmitter came within a set radius of her device, an alarm notified both her and the police. Violations are immediately detected and documented and responded to by authorities. The device also had a manual trigger (like a panic alarm) and she could carry a portable triggering device. It was described as being like an electronic moat, permitting the home to be a haven rather than the site of conflict. Women were better able to sleep, could leave the windows open at night, let children play in the yard and generally resume a “normal life.” Not being continuously focused on his whereabouts was a relief for many women. Some of the 30 women had previously been in shelters and others heard stories suggesting that the shelter option was not palatable for them. They preferred the BEM option and generally felt safer.

Edna Erez & Peter Ibarra (2007). Making Your Home a Shelter: Electronic Monitoring and Victim Re-entry in Domestic Violence Cases. *British Journal of Criminology*, 47: 100-120.

Ideas for Using the Handouts

Throughout this guide, you find “tool box ideas” about using the handouts that follow and also the handouts reproduced in *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know, Say & Do*. You can use them as appropriate in one-on-one work with a woman, perhaps to respond to “reachable moments” as they arise. If you want to integrate them into a group format, these are some suggested ideas for topics.

Topic: **What is Abuse?**

- Myths About Abuse in Relationships*
- The Power & Control Wheel*
- The WEB Scale*
- The Equality Wheel*
- Rights for Women in Intimate Relationships*
- My Wheel for My Life*

Topic: **Being Pro-Active About Self-protection**

- Thinking about My Safety*
- Where Are You in the Leaving Process? Where is He in the Leaving Process?

Topic: **Control Tactics**

- The Power & Control Wheel*
- The Equality Wheel*
- What “Entitlement” Looks Like*
- Red Flags in Relationships

Topic: **Rationalizations and their Messages**

- Excuses, Excuses*
- I’m not Crazy, I’m not a Liar, and I’m not Stupid*

Topic: **The Process of Leaving**

- Have I Left Yet?
- Barriers to Physical Leaving
- Thoughts and Feelings Maybe Blocking Emotional Leaving
- Reasons I Think About Leaving
- My Life in the Balance: The Stay/Leave Decision

Topic: **Stress and Coping**

- What is Coping?*
- S.O.S. Signs of Stress
- How Full is my Tank?
- My Life in the Balance

Topic: **Self-Care**

- The Power of NO: 10 Tips for Saying “N” “O”
- 10 Things I Can Do for ME
- The Soundtrack of My Life

* To be found in the first “Helping Hands” guide on *Helping an Abused Woman*.

Have I “Left” Yet?

The Process of Ending* a Relationship

There is an expression that says, “When one door closes in life, another door opens.” But that old door can be difficult to close, for a whole lot of reasons.

* or maybe one or more of these phrases is better for you:

- ☐ breaking up
- ☐ moving out
- ☐ moving on
- ☐ giving up
- ☐ getting out
- ☐ escaping
- ☐ running away from
- ☐ saying goodbye
- ☐ separation

☐ other : _____

Relationships end in many ways, not always with the woman loading her belongings into a moving van. She may kick him out. He might move out. She may go to a shelter. When there’s been physical violence, he might be taken away by police. He could go to prison for an unrelated crime. This is PHYSICAL leaving, a stage where two parties stop living together or having daily contact.

Have you physically left the relationship?

- ☐ Yes, I am in a shelter or living alone or with friends or family
- ☐ No, we are still living together or dating seriously (even if I am in a shelter)

Physical leaving is a big step and might entail lots of disruption, heartache, expense and plain hard work. But don’t forget about the other important stage: EMOTIONAL leaving, or disengaging from the relationship in a psychological way. You stop seeing your future with him in it, stop replaying past events through your head, stop thinking about how something could change to get you back together. Those familiar feelings are gone: the hope, regret, guilt, anger and the love. Emotional leaving happens when you know you’ll never go back and you feel at peace with that decision.

Have you emotionally left the relationship?

- ☐ Yes, I know I won’t go back and I’m okay with that decision
- ☐ No, I still miss him or hope the relationship can be fixed or improve
- ☐ I am not sure

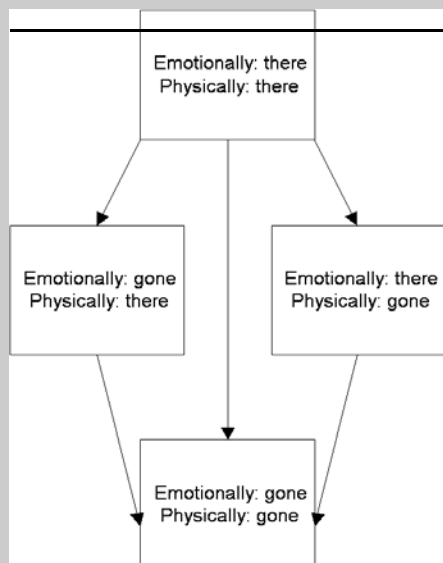
Where are YOU in the leaving process?

Emotionally there, physically there:

Sure, maybe there are problems, but they can be fixed and I want to stick it out. I'm in this relationship for better or worse. This is the worse but things could get better, like if he gets counselling or stops drinking or these other things happen:

Emotionally gone,

physically there: In my own mind I know this relationship is over but I want or need to keep living with him. I am going over the pros and cons of staying/ leaving. Things worrying me about leaving are:



Emotionally there,

physically gone: We aren't living together but I haven't closed the door on the idea of getting back together. I am weighing my options and reviewing the pros and cons of going back. I might go back with him if these things happen:

Emotionally gone, physically gone:

This relationship is over and I'm moving on to the next phase of my life.

Where are YOU right now?

Emotionally: ☐ there ☐ gone ☐ I'm not sure

Physically: ☐ there ☐ gone ☐ I'm not sure

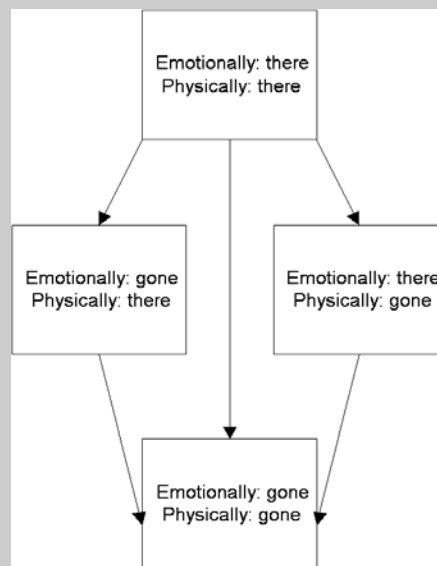
Where is HE in the leaving process?

Emotionally there, physically there:

He may see some problems in our relationship. He may sense that I have doubts about the relationship. But he wants to stay together. I am or he is willing to make some changes such as:

Emotionally gone,

physically there: We live together but he knows the relationship is over or he wants it to be over. We just have a few things to sort out, such as:



Emotionally there,

physically gone: We are separated but he wants to get back together. These are things he is doing or promising to convince me to reconcile:

Emotionally gone, physically gone:

He knows this relationship is over and is moving on to the next phase of his life.

Are you two “in sync” in the leaving process?

- ☐ Yes, we both understand emotionally that the relationship is over
- ☐ Yes, both of us are trying to figure things out about our future together
- ☐ No, I’m emotionally “gone” but he still wants to get back together
- ☐ No, he doesn’t want me back but I still love him
- ☐ I’m not sure

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

A man and woman are “out of sync” in the leaving process if one has come to the end of the relationship on an emotional level but the other one hasn’t. Talk with the shelter staff if you worry he might hurt you because you two are out of sync.

Barriers to Physical Leaving

What factors made it difficult or are making it difficult to separate from a partner you want to leave?

Place a check mark (✓) on any issue you faced (or still face) when thinking about separating to end your relationship. For items of extreme importance, underline the item as well.

Money and Financial Issues

- ☐ I don't have a job
- ☐ I don't think I could get a job
- ☐ I have no money of my own or access to money or any place to get money
- ☐ I believe he won't pay child support or help me financially with the children
- ☐ I owe money to the utilities, telephone etc. so could not get my own place
- ☐ I need his medical plan to cover health expenses for me and/or my child
- ☐ I would have to quit my job if I leave him
- ☐ Other:

A Lack of Support from Others

- ☐ If I don't live with him, I have no where else to go
- ☐ I don't know anyone who would take me and the kids in, even temporarily
- ☐ There is no women's shelter in the area I live
- ☐ All my family is back home in my country and I don't really know anyone here
- ☐ My family makes it clear that they won't take me in if I leave him
- ☐ I live in a remote or rural area and have no transportation
- ☐ Other:



An abusive man can cut a woman off from her family and discourage or prevent friendships. This control tactic isolates her from people who could recognize her situation or offer support.

Fear for Personal Safety or that of Others

- ☐ I am terrified of what he'll do to me if I tell him I'm leaving
- ☐ If I left, he'd seriously hurt me or maybe kill me
- ☐ He'll hurt our pets or animals if I'm not there to take care of them
- ☐ Where I live, a woman needs a man in the house or she's a target and vulnerable
- ☐ Staying with family is not a good solution because he knows where they live
- ☐ I'd be looking over my shoulder and living in fear every day
- ☐ If I got involved with a new man, he'd kill that guy or seriously hurt him
- ☐ In my culture, the "disobedience" of a woman gives her family the right to kill her
- ☐ Other:

PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION • PROCEED WITH CAUTION

If your gut instinct is to worry about his potential to hurt you, pay attention to that powerful feeling. Ask a member of the shelter staff to help you take precautions and to develop a safety plan.

Child-related Fears

- ☐ I can't take my children with me if I leave
- ☐ He'll harm the kids on weekend visits (I won't be there to protect them)
- ☐ He'll take our children back to our home country and I won't see them again
- ☐ I might lose custody because he can afford a good lawyer and I can't
- ☐ He'll use a personal problem of mine (e.g., drug use) against me in a custody fight
- ☐ I believe he will call child protective services and they would take my children
- ☐ In my culture, men get custody of the children after divorce
- ☐ Other:

Standing up for my (property) rights

- ☐ It's my house so he should leave, not me
- ☐ It's our house and I have as much right to it as he does
- ☐ I've begged him to leave but he won't get out
- ☐ If I'm the one to leave, the kids lose their home and must change schools
- ☐ I worry I'll lose my legal right to a fair share of our joint property if I leave
- ☐ Other:

Other Legal Factors

- ☐ My immigration status would be in jeopardy if we were no longer together
- ☐ If I leave, he might report my illegal status to immigration authorities
- ☐ If I leave, he might report my illegal job to authorities
- ☐ I can't afford a lawyer to help me get a fair settlement
- ☐ Other:

Are there other things that make it difficult to think about ending a relationship by moving out?

Thoughts and Feelings Maybe Blocking Emotional Leaving

Barriers to emotional leaving are thoughts and feelings making it difficult to disengage emotionally or get emotional closure after the relationship is over. A woman may stay in a relationship even after realizing she wants to leave. Barriers to emotional closure might draw her back into the relationship after she is physically separated.

Check off (✓) any items describing thoughts, beliefs or feelings that you had (or have) when thinking about the end of your relationship.

	Not a factor	Small factor	Big factor
Holding Out for Change			
Things will get better when he gets a job, stops drinking or some other stress factor goes away	☐	☐	☐
Things will get better if I lose weight, get a job, or improve myself in other ways	☐	☐	☐
Things will get better when we have a baby or have another baby	☐	☐	☐
Things will get better when the kids grow up and leave home	☐	☐	☐
I believe he loves me and is trying to change / trying to stop drinking	☐	☐	☐
I think if he gets counselling then everything will be okay	☐	☐	☐
I love him and am willing to change myself to keep him	☐	☐	☐
Other changes I hope for:	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
Investment in / Commitment to the Relationship			
I've devoted years to this relationship and it would all be lost if I left	☐	☐	☐
I've given him the best years of my life and am too old to start again with someone new	☐	☐	☐
I've put up with so much that he owes me / I deserve to be taken care of	☐	☐	☐
I've put up with him this long, I might as well just keep putting up with it	☐	☐	☐
I was raised to believe that marriage is a forever commitment	☐	☐	☐
I can't hurt his feelings by telling him I want out	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐

	Not a factor	Small factor	Big factor
Trade-off			
The kids need a father so I have to put up with him	☐	☐	☐
He's a good provider / good father / helpful around the house, etc.	☐	☐	☐
As long as the kids don't know about the bad things, I can put up with it	☐	☐	☐
The needs of my family are more important than my needs as an individual	☐	☐	☐
My family really likes him and thinks he's a great guy	☐	☐	☐
I'd rather be with an abusive partner than be alone	☐	☐	☐
He's a nice person much of the time and I enjoy the good times	☐	☐	☐
I'll stay as long as he never hurts me physically or injures me seriously	☐	☐	☐
Other trade-off:	☐	☐	☐
Anticipation of Loss			
I would miss having someone in my life / I'd be lonely	☐	☐	☐
We have such a nice home and I'm reluctant to give it up	☐	☐	☐
I would miss the physical affection and closeness / the sexual relationship	☐	☐	☐
He would turn me in to welfare or tell the police about some crimes I did	☐	☐	☐
I love him and would miss him if he were not in my life	☐	☐	☐
My standard of living will go down	☐	☐	☐
I can't stand the thought of him with other women	☐	☐	☐
He'll find a new partner in a second and I'd be the one alone	☐	☐	☐
I need his help taking care of the kids / around the house	☐	☐	☐
I like his family a lot and would miss them	☐	☐	☐
Other losses:	☐	☐	☐
Resignation			
This is the life God chose for me and I can't change it	☐	☐	☐
All men are like that so the next one wouldn't be any better	☐	☐	☐
I'm an unlucky person / have bad karma / nothing good happens to me	☐	☐	☐
No relationship is perfect so I should lower my expectations	☐	☐	☐

	Not a factor	Small factor	Big factor
Embarrassment / Concern with “How it looks” to others			
I’m embarrassed to admit that I am in an abusive relationship	☐	☐	☐
He left me or doesn’t want me back and I am ashamed of this	☐	☐	☐
There are people who will say “I told you so” if I leave him	☐	☐	☐
I don’t want to admit that everyone who warned me about him was right	☐	☐	☐
In my culture or religion, divorce is a very bad thing	☐	☐	☐
My divorce would bring great shame on my family	☐	☐	☐
In our culture, if I got divorced, marriage prospects for my sisters would suffer	☐	☐	☐
I’ve been divorced before so this would make me a two-time loser	☐	☐	☐
I’d be depressed or embarrassed to be “single” or without a man	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐
Child-related Guilt			
I believe children need two parents in the home	☐	☐	☐
I owe it to my children to do what it takes to keep him	☐	☐	☐
I don’t want to put them through another divorce / to lose another father-figure	☐	☐	☐
My kids adore him / would hate me if I ended this relationship	☐	☐	☐
If I left, he would abandon the kids / never see them again	☐	☐	☐
If I left, some or all of the kids might want to stay with him	☐	☐	☐
Other child-related issues:	☐	☐	☐
Circumstances Blocking Emotional Closure			
I want to talk about our relationship but he won’t discuss it	☐	☐	☐
He just left one day so I had no chance for talking it out	☐	☐	☐
I love him	☐	☐	☐
I’d go back in a heartbeat if he would take me back	☐	☐	☐
My image of the future is all wrapped up in him	☐	☐	☐

	Not a factor	Small factor	Big factor
Concern for Him			
I am the breadwinner in the family so he'd have no income if I leave	☐	☐	☐
I believe he would kill himself if I leave	☐	☐	☐
He has health problems and needs someone to take care of him	☐	☐	☐
He has a drinking or drug problem so I should be supportive	☐	☐	☐
He just needs counselling and then he'll be okay	☐	☐	☐
He's not a person who could live by himself or with no one to take care of him	☐	☐	☐
Other concern for him:	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Confidence in Myself			
I think this is the best relationship I could get / I can't do any better	☐	☐	☐
I don't know if I could take care of myself, without him	☐	☐	☐
I'm lucky to have him and should stop complaining	☐	☐	☐
I don't know if any other man could love me	☐	☐	☐
I need to find a new guy before I can think about leaving this one	☐	☐	☐
Life is just too hard on my own	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐

Here's something else women can feel: "If I tell people he was abusive to me, no one will believe me." Does that apply to you or did you ever feel that way?

Reasons I Think About Leaving

When a woman thinks about leaving a relationship, it's because of things that make her feel sad, scared, angry, betrayed, or other painful emotions. Do any of the items below apply in your case? If not, there is room to list your personal reasons.

- ☐ He criticizes everything I do or calls me names
- ☐ He does that even when other people are around
- ☐ He won't let me see my friends or really complains when I do
- ☐ When he is abusive or disrespectful, he makes me feel like it's my fault
- ☐ According to him, I can't do anything right
- ☐ It is not safe to leave him alone with children
- ☐ He doesn't help out around the house or help me take care of the kids
- ☐ He is mean to the children and hurts their feelings
- ☐ He turns every minor problem into a reason for a huge argument
- ☐ People are warning me about him, that he is not good for me
- ☐ He treats me like a servant or a piece of his property
- ☐ He puts me on an allowance, controls all the money or takes my money
- ☐ He can lose his temper and go crazy for no reason
- ☐ He is teaching our kids that anger and violence get you what you want
- ☐ He won't use a condom or let me use birth control
- ☐ He sometimes hits me or I believe he might hit me
- ☐ He has had sex with other women
- ☐ People tell me that my children are suffering emotionally
- ☐ My kids want me to leave him
- ☐ He blames me for everything that goes wrong in his life
- ☐ He forces me to have sex when I don't want to or do things I don't want to do
- ☐ He needs to know where I am every minute of the day
- ☐ Every man I even talk to, he thinks we are sleeping together
- ☐ He doesn't care about my opinion on anything
- ☐ He destroys things that are special to me, like family photographs
- ☐ I left before and he said he would change, but he didn't
- ☐ He quotes from religious books to justify treating me badly
- ☐ He gives me "the silent treatment" or sulks when he doesn't get his way
- ☐ "Forgets" to do things like come home to watch the kids when I need to go out
- ☐ In public, he can be so nice but when we get home, he's a different person
- ☐ He gets angry if I pay attention to the kids instead of him
- ☐ He tries to get me to do things I know will put the children at risk of harm
- ☐ He buys nice things for himself while the kids and I go without

Here is space to list other concerns and worries you have about the relationship:

His actions can affect you. Do any of these things describe you?

- ☐ My health is getting bad because of all the stress and tension
- ☐ My health is bad because of injuries from his hitting me
- ☐ I worry that the children are not safe around him
- ☐ I don't have any confidence in myself any more
- ☐ I only feel comfortable and relaxed when he is not home
- ☐ I am sad or nervous when he comes home
- ☐ I feel nervous or unsafe in my own home
- ☐ I realize that I am using drugs because of him
- ☐ I can't quit drugs as long as I am with him
- ☐ I have grown to resent him and can't stand to be around him
- ☐ I worry that my children are being badly affected
- ☐ He turned me against my family or won't let me see my family
- ☐ I don't love him any more
- ☐ I am always apologizing to the kids for things he does or says to them
- ☐ I beg him to get counselling but he refuses
- ☐ I fantasize about life with another man
- ☐ I'd like to work or go to school but he won't let me
- ☐ I don't dare tell him I am unhappy or wish things were different
- ☐ I live my life "walking on eggshells," waiting for him to explode or yell at me



Walking on eggshells is for the birds.

Origin unknown

Are there other things in your life causing you to think about ending the relationship?



Some women find the **Power and Control Wheel** helpful to summarize their experiences in a relationship. It shows that a man's need for control can be a good way to understand the behaviours and feelings listed above.

Life in the Balance: The Stay/Leave Decision



Deciding to end a relationship, or not going back, can feel like tension between things holding you there (or pulling you back) and things pushing you away. Review the barriers you checked off for emotional and physical leaving. Some of those things might go on the left side of the scale. They can be thoughts, feelings or practical matters like money. If you are already “gone,” both physically and emotionally, list the factors important in your final decision.



Factors pulling me to stay (or go back)	Reasons I left or reasons I want to leave

The Power of NO: 10 Tips for Saying “N” -- “O”

Can you watch my kids while I go to the movies? Will you drive me to the store? Will you do the chore I committed to so I can go out? Helping others is important, but so is taking care of yourself. You have the right to say “no” to a request you want to decline. When you want to say “no,” here are some pointers.

1. If you are uncomfortable saying “no,” ask for some time to think over the request: “Can I get back to you tomorrow?” or “I’ll think about it while I go have a smoke.” You can use the extra time to decide on a response or seek guidance from another person.
2. Make sure to use the word “no” or the person might not get your message. For example, saying “I can’t” invites the person to argue why you could.
3. Identify (to yourself) what worries you about saying “no.” Here are some examples:
 - the person will think I don’t like them or I am being rude
 - the person won’t want to be friends any more
 - the person will think I let them down and I’ll feel guilty
 - I might need a favour from that person in the future
 - I’ll hurt their feelings or the stress will force them to use unhealthy coping like drugs
4. Come up with a way of saying “no” that addresses your worry: For example, “I need to say no this time but I hope you ask me again some time” or “I like you. I hope you understand why I need to say no” or “I hope you don’t decide to do drugs again but that’s up to you.”
5. You don’t have to justify your decision, but a short reason helps the person not take your “no” personally (e.g., I have too much on my plate right now to do that for you)
6. When giving your explanation, use “I” rather than “you” (e.g., “I need to stay home tonight and relax” rather than “You go out too often anyway”)
7. Acknowledge the other person’s perspective (e.g., “I know you had your heart set on fresh baked cookies”) or suggest an alternative (e.g., “Here’s my cookie recipe so you can bake them yourself”) or make a request (e.g., “My fee for babysitting is \$5 per hour”)
8. You may have to say “no” several times before the person stops asking: hold your ground because they hope to change your mind by pestering. If the person keeps on asking, try changing the subject and start talking about something else.
9. Curb the guilt. Using “no” to keep your life manageable is not the same as saying you don’t like the person or don’t think the request is valid. A boundary is not a rejection. This works both ways. When someone says “no” to you, remember they have the right to make that decision. Don’t take it personally.
10. Don’t let a “no” cut you off from an activity that might be fun or rewarding. Sometimes a “yes” is the ticket to a new experience or opportunity.

S.O.S.: Signs of Stress

When you're under stress, it might be obvious. You feel stressed and you look stressed and you tell everyone that you are all stressed out. Sometimes, stress creeps up on us. First it's one thing you think you can manage. Then something else happens. Then something else. Added together, a bunch of small things can create a lot of stress. Dr. Hans Selye, who wrote the first popular book about stress, believed that the breakdown of a relationship was among the most stressful life events we can go through. Financial pressures and feeling trapped in an unhealthy relationship are also stressful.

Signs your body is telling you that you are under stress. Do any of these apply to you?

- ☐ inability to concentrate or focus on one thing
- ☐ trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep, sometimes called "insomnia"
- ☐ being irritable or having a short temper
- ☐ over-reacting to small problems / snapping at people for no reason
- ☐ feeling sad or hopeless
- ☐ changes in eating pattern (not eating or eating too much)
- ☐ feeling that your heart is beating too fast
- ☐ smoking more than usual or starting to smoke after you quit
- ☐ pacing or finding it difficult to sit down for very long
- ☐ having the urge to cry or crying at small things that usually don't upset you
- ☐ feeling anxious and afraid for no particular reason
- ☐ being easily startled by sounds
- ☐ drinking alcohol to try and calm down or relax
- ☐ abusing prescription or illegal drugs
- ☐ having a nervous, upset, or queasy feeling in your stomach
- ☐ finding it difficult to stop thinking about the thing that is stressful in your life
- ☐ trying to avoid things that remind you about what is stressful in your life
- ☐ having difficulty remembering things
- ☐ focusing on the negative and thinking negative things about yourself
- ☐ strong desire to run away or leave your life behind
- ☐ not wanting to be around other people
- ☐ grinding your teeth or clenching your jaw
- ☐ sore muscles, pain, headaches, etc.
- ☐ shortness of breath
- ☐ being accident prone
- ☐ feeling of weakness or dizziness or of life not being real
- ☐ others:

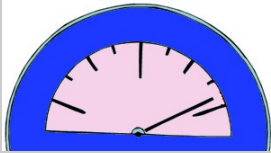
"It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it."

Hans Selye

How full is my tank?

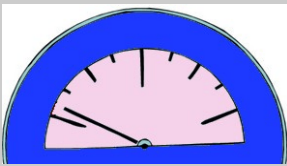
To meet the challenges of daily life, we need gas in our tank. Some good sources of “gas” are healthy foods, getting enough sleep, and feeling the support of those around us. Is your tank full, empty, or in between?

I’m on full



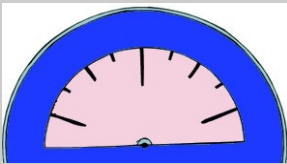
- ☐ I feel confident and in charge of my life
- ☐ I have the energy to meet the basic needs of my children
- ☐ I have ups and downs but am generally happy with my life
- ☐ I feel healthy

I’m on empty



- ☐ It’s a struggle to get out of bed in the morning
- ☐ I’m so tired I can’t think straight
- ☐ Things don’t get done or finished because I’m so tired
- ☐ I need cigarettes, coffee or drugs to get a boost of energy

I’m somewhere in between [draw the line to show the level of gas in your tank today]



This is how my gas tank feels today:

What can I do to get more gas in my tank?



Extreme fatigue can have medical causes: not enough iron in your diet, being on a crash diet, eating too few calories a day, sleep apnea, thyroid imbalance, arthritis, fibromyalgia, early pregnancy, or clinical depression to name only a few. If your tank is always on empty, see a doctor to rule out medical sources.

10 Things I Can Do For ME

Magazines are full of “helpful” advice about managing the stress in your life. Here’s a common tip: “Have a bubble bath, surrounded by scented candles.” Hey – if I had time for a bubble bath and could afford scented candles, I wouldn’t be so stressed out! To make our list of suggestions, the tip must be quick, easy and require (virtually) no money.

How many of these 10 things can you do today? Start with one and work up from there.

1. Eat breakfast, at least a little something.
2. Drink a full glass of water at some point during the day.
3. Eat an apple (loaded with vitamins).
4. Have a cup of tea or green tea (loaded with other healthy things).
5. Walk for 15 minutes.
6. Do something nice for someone, even a small gesture like opening a door or giving a compliment.
7. Tell someone how they helped you today, what they mean to you, or how glad you are to know them. Like tell your kids that you’re glad they are in your life.
8. Get as close to 8 hours of sleep as you can (you can include a nap).
9. Pet a dog or cat (or a plush toy if there are no animals around). It lowers your blood pressure.
10. ...and BREATHE

Breathing is something you do anyway. Take a few minutes to think about your breathing. Inhale for 5 seconds. As you breathe in, push your belly button forward so your stomach gets bigger. This pulls oxygen into the bottom part of your lungs and is better than a breath that raises your chest higher. Put one hand on your chest and one on your stomach to make sure your stomach is the part that’s moving. Then breathe out for 7 seconds. You can do deep breathing while sitting or lying down. Do this 10 times in the morning, 10 times at night and anytime during the day when you need to calm down or take a “time out.” Why? Deep breathing relieves stress, improves lung function, and removes toxins from your system.

Use the Internet to learn more about the benefits of breathing and to find detailed instructions. Try the search terms “deep breathing” or “diaphragmatic breathing.”

Red Flags in Relationships

Can a woman tell early in a relationship that a man who seems so attentive and charming may turn out to be abusive down the road? Psychologist Lundy Bancroft thinks you can. He has a list of red flags in his 2002 book called *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*.

1. He speaks disrespectfully about former partners

It's not uncommon for people to have hard feelings after a break-up but be careful if his anger toward a previous partner (or partners) is unusually bitter and you notice any of these things:

- ☐ He describes an ex-partner in degrading or insulting ways
- ☐ He starts this soon after you meet him
- ☐ He paints himself as a victim of abuse by her
- ☐ He claims she falsely accused him of abuse
- ☐ He sees all problems in their relationship as her fault and accepts no responsibility
- ☐ He admits he abused a past partner but has an excuse (like drinking) or blames it on her
- ☐ He praises you for being better than she was
- ☐ He claims you are the first woman who really understands him

How do you think and feel in response?

- ☐ You feel sorry for him because of how badly his ex-partner treated or treats him
- ☐ You compete to be a good partner and better than she was
- ☐ You don't believe her descriptions of him, confident that she is lying
- ☐ You never get together with her to compare experiences over coffee

2. He is disrespectful to you

You may be utterly perfect at first but he eventually finds fault with what you say and do.

- ☐ He insults you or puts you down
- ☐ He doesn't respect your opinions
- ☐ He is rude to you in front of other people
- ☐ He compares you to previous partners and says you are not as good as they were
- ☐ He blames you for things he himself does wrong
- ☐ He criticizes you if you protest against his disrespect

3. He makes you uncomfortable by doing favours or being generous

This sounds great at first, but pay attention to your level of discomfort.

- ☐ He insists on doing something for you no matter how much you protest
- ☐ He claims you owe him favourable treatment because of his favours to you
- ☐ He brings up his past favours and makes you feel guilty if you do something he disapproves of

4. He is controlling

This starts subtly and can initially be mistaken for his intense interest in you. These are some ways control can look early in a relationship:

- ☐ He has activities all planned out for your dates
- ☐ He is not interested in hearing your ideas for activities
- ☐ He has opinions on how you should dress
- ☐ He pressures you to spend all your time with him
- ☐ He gives you advice you didn't ask for

5. He is possessive

This characteristic is easy to mistake for love, at first.

- ☐ He calls several times a day to check in
- ☐ He is upset when you speak to other men
- ☐ He justifies this reaction because he is crazy about you
- ☐ He wants to spend every minute with you, when it's convenient for him

6. Nothing is ever his fault

This one explains itself. At first blame lies with other people such as co-workers or his ex-partner. Eventually, when things go wrong, it will be all your fault.

7. He is self-centred

While dating, you notice this when he monopolizes the conversation, talks about himself but never asks about you, doesn't listen when you speak or changes the topic of conversation to be about him again.

8. He abuses drugs or alcohol

Many men who abuse drugs or alcohol are not abusive to partners. But an enormous percentage of abusive men abuse drugs or alcohol. It does not cause them to be abusive but it is a common excuse for their bad actions. Be careful if he positions you as the force in his life to get him clean and sober and keep him that way. When he relapses, it will be your fault.

9. He pressures you for sex

He doesn't listen or respect your feelings about when to become intimate.

10. He gets serious too quickly about the relationship

He starts to plan out your future before you really know each other. If he won't respect your request to slow things down, what does that say about how he will respond to other issues?

11. He intimidates you when he's angry

Intimidation is a warning that physical aggression might be ahead. Watch for signs like these:

- ☐ he gets too close to you physically when he is angry, blocks your way or restrains you
- ☐ he tells you he is "just trying to make you listen"
- ☐ he drives recklessly or speeds up when driving
- ☐ he makes vaguely threatening comments, like "you don't want to see me mad"
- ☐ he punches walls, kicks door or throws things around even if he doesn't hit you

12. He has double standards

Is there one set of rules and expectations for him and another set for you? For example, he can talk with women but you can't talk with men.

13. He has negative attitudes about women

He sees women as inferior, as sex objects or as housekeepers. Maybe he says you are different than most women, at first. But if he believes that women are inferior, you can tell where things will end up in your relationship.

14. He treats you differently around other people

He treats you great when people are watching.

15. He appears to be attracted to vulnerability

Are you much younger than he is and does he like how you look up to him? Have you recently had a traumatic experience or had an abusive partner and does he position himself as your rescuer and protector?

My Life in the Balance

List the things in your life that weigh you down and the things that lift your spirits and make you feel good.



Things Pulling Me Down	Things Lifting Me Up

The Soundtrack of My Life 1: Positive Thoughts

In the movies, everyone walks around with soundtrack music playing in the background. The music makes you feel scared or sad or whatever the movie director wants you to feel. Be the director in your life. Make your own soundtrack of songs that make you feel happy and positive. Load up your iPod or MP3 player with “feel good” songs. This list gets you started but you have your own favourites.

It's a Beautiful Day	U2
Ain't Nuthin' But a She Thing	Salt-N-Pepa
Hand in my Pocket	Alanis Morissette
What Your Soul Sings	Massive Attack
Everybody Hurts	R.E.M.
Sisters are Doin' it for Themselves	Aretha Franklin (with the Eurythmics)
Fly	Celine Dion
Unwritten (Feel the Rain on Your Skin)	Natasha Bedingfield
Let it Be	The Beatles
I am Woman	Helen Reddy
Downtown	Petula Clark
Eye of the Tiger	Survivor
Add your favourites to the list...	

Here's another idea: find the song lyrics on the Internet so you can sing along.

The Soundtrack of My Life 2: Movin' On

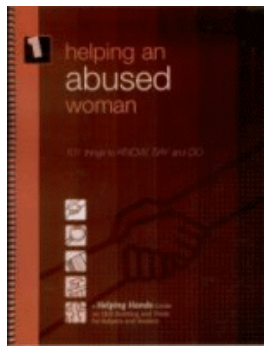
Listen to the radio and you hear lots of love songs. That's the last thing you want to listen to when you're going through a break-up! So load up your iPod or MP3 player with songs about "moving on." Here's a short list to get you started. Or find your own at **breakup-songs.com**. Try out songs you've never heard of and you may find some new favourites.

I Will Survive	Gloria Gaynor
Try Walking Away	Murray McLaughlin
50 Ways to Leave Your Lover	Paul Simon
I Love Myself Today	Bif Naked
My Life	Billy Joel
Hit the Road Jack	Ray Charles
Heart of Glass	Blondie
I Want to Know what Love is	Foreigner
No More Tears	Barbra Streisand & Donna Summer
Tainted Love	Soft Cell
Ex-Factor	Lauryn Hill
Bye Bye Bye	N'Sync
Here's a Quarter [Call Someone Who Cares]	Travis Tritt
Didn't Know my Own Strength	Lorrie Morgan
F.O.D.	Green Day
The One I gave my Heart To	Aaliyah

Eleven years out of my life/ Besides the kids I have nothing to show/ Wasted my years -- a fool of a wife/ I should have left your ass long time ago.

Mary J. Blige, "Not Gon' Cry"

About the First “Helping Hands” Guide



The Helping Hands guide for assisting women in shelters is designed to be used in close harmony with our first guide, called *Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know Say & Do*. The first guide represents the grounding of knowledge upon which the information in the shelter guide is based. It provides the helper and healer with the principles underlying our approach for working with women and some basic information about abuse dynamics. You'll find there 13 handouts to use in a one-on-one or group intervention along with dozens of concrete “tool box ideas” as suggestions for practice.

10 Assumptions About Abuse of Women in Intimate Relationships

5 Reasons All Helping Professionals Should Understand Abuse Dynamics

5 Destructive Consequences of Abuse for Women's Lives

10 Principles Informing Work with an Abused Woman

5 Paradoxes of Abuse

10 Features of Listening to Abuse Disclosures

10 Common Control Tactics

10 Points About Rationalizations

5 Common Characteristics of Controlling Men

10 Points about Coping with Abuse

10 Feelings and Thoughts Blocking “Emotional Leaving”

10 Promises Not to Make Women

1 Final Thought

You'll also find handouts to aid your one-on-one or group intervention with women.

Future “Helping Hands” Guides

We're looking for sponsors to support the development of guides on these topics:

- Helping an Abused Woman as a Mother
- Helping a Child who Lived with Violence at Home
- Helping a Child Living in a Shelter
- Helping an Economically Abused Woman

Let us know if you have any ideas or want to help with funding.

About the Authors



Alison Cunningham & Linda Baker work together at the Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System and have collaborated for a number of years on research about children living with violence against their mothers. Merging their respective – and very different – bases of experience and knowledge, they created a framework for understanding how mothering is impacted by partner abuse and how to help women to help their children. Together, they produced many research reports and training resources, including: *Little Eyes Little Ears: How Violence Against a Mother Shapes Children as they Grow* (2007) and *Helping Children Thrive: Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers* (2004) and *What About Me! Seeking to Understand the Child's View of Violence in the Family* (2004).

About our Centre

The Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System (formerly the London Family Court Clinic) is a non-profit social service agency. Families come to our Centre for many reasons but with one thing in common. They want or need some help through an emotionally difficult time in their lives. Our services help families facing a crisis bringing them into the courts or legal system: the arrest or incarceration of a teenager, criminal victimization of a child, acrimonious divorce and custody battle, the scrutiny of child protective services, or the need for a teenager to live in a correctional or therapeutic setting for a while. We also do applied research and develop and deliver training for helping professionals. Visit our web site for more information: www.lfcc.on.ca.



About the “Helping Hands” Guides



We have so far two “Helping Hands” Guides on Skill Building and Tools for Helpers and Healers. These resources can be used by anyone who supports abused women and their children. You’ll find assumptions and principles for intervention and support, concrete ideas for practice, reference to the latest research and trends, and handouts you can integrate as needed into one-on-one or group work with women. The neutral language makes them applicable anywhere. The women-centred approach reflects the best evidence for how to offer effective and respectful service grounded in an understanding of how abuse affects women as women and as mothers.
