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ADVOCACY BEYOND LEAVING:

By Jill Davies

Helping Battered Women *in Contact* With Current or Former Partners

A Guide for Domestic Violence Advocates

I invite you to understand – not judge – my family and the contact with my partner. My life is my business, filled with my joy to celebrate, my hardship to endure, and my decisions to make. I ask that you listen, support me, and offer help that makes things better for me and my children.

Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to the women who shared their stories and wisdom in focus groups. Their perspective and voice defined this Guide's tone and content. Advocates from Rhode Island and Minnesota also participated in focus groups and provided important context and insight. A special acknowledgement is due to all those advocates, and particularly those advocates of color, who stand with and help victims in contact, often with little recognition and few resources.

We also want to thank Laurie Holmes for her help in the development of the focus group questions and for providing a supportive environment so that the stories could be told. Many others contributed their ideas by commenting on the drafts, including: Sara Elinoff Acker, *Men's Resource Center for Change*; Barbara Bellucci, *Domestic Violence Services of Greater New Haven*; Miriam Berkman, *Yale University Child Study Center*; Jacquelyn Boggess, *Center for Family Policy and Practice*; Lisa Nitsch, *House of Ruth Maryland*; and Julia Perilla, *Caminar Latino.* Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Marylouise Kelley, *Director of the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program at the Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services.*

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This Guide was supported by Grant # 90EV0377/03 and Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. Points of view or opinions in this document do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Most battered women are in contact with current or former partners, sometimes by choice and sometimes by necessity. Their children, even if their parents' relationship is over, are likely to see their father. All victims – not just those who've left a relationship – deserve the resources and protection of domestic violence intervention and advocacy.

If you work directly with victims, you already work with victims in contact and their children. You may talk to them on the hotline, do an intake for a shelter stay, offer information in a community outreach session, discuss protective orders in court, or listen as they tell of their struggles to the support group. Their children might be a focus of your advocacy. The abusive partners may be in programs that your agency runs. As with all family violence victims, adults and children in contact with an abuser can benefit from the information, resources, and support that advocates provide.

Advocates are skilled and effective in helping victims to limit contact or leave a relationship. It is a primary safety strategy and one of the things we do well. Yet, when a victim's focus and goals are to remain in contact, to remain in the relationship, or to improve her children's relationship with their father, we may quickly move out of our comfort zone. We might struggle to identify safety strategies, to find resources, to know what to do and what to say.

This Guide provides information that will help advocates with these challenges. In an easy to read question and answer format, this Guide offers practical suggestions to assist advocates working day to day with victims. Using the familiar and concrete framework of woman-defined advocacy, the Guide explains advocates' important role in safety planning when victims are in contact with current or former partners. *This Guide offers basic and general information and does not provide the detailed knowledge or skilled judgment necessary to advocate effectively. It is not a substitute for quality training and supervision for advocates.*

Advocacy with victims in contact may change our advocacy and our agencies. For example, when you work with a victim in contact you might change the focus and order of your discussions, how she contacts you, some of the information you provide, the referrals you make, and the connection you have with her. Our traditional focus on helping victims leave their relationships leads many victims in contact to believe our agencies have nothing to offer them. They might think we don't understand their lives or needs and so they never seek our help. The more we work with victims in contact and the greater our connections to their community, the more likely our agencies will be able to reach and assist these victims. We will serve as their gateway to other services.

Our fundamental principles, however, will not change. Advocacy with victims in contact does not change our mission to end family violence and to enhance the safety of victims until we achieve that goal. Advocacy beyond leaving reinforces our commitment to support every victim's right to make decisions about her relationship in the context of her life, culture, and assessment of what is best for her children. It does not say that victims should stay, nor does it abandon the important option of leaving. Similarly, the work to improve children's connections to their fathers does not mean that it is always good or safe for children to have contact with a father who is abusive.

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Violent behavior remains the responsibility of the person who is violent and not the fault of the victim, even if she remains in contact. We've seen the pain, the chaos and suffering caused by those who batter. We know well the devastating effects of family violence. Adult victims may be seriously injured, their lives and families destroyed, their hope for happiness trampled. The children are also affected, some physically hurt, some coping with emotional injuries and some with compromised chances to grow up to be healthy adults. We will not silence our voices about the destructive effects of family violence, the suffering it causes adult and child victims, or the way that it continues to devalue and disrespect women and children in society. Yet, as we continue to expand and enhance our advocacy to serve all victims, we may change how we do our work, the language we use and the collaborations we build.

For more information about the importance and challenges of advocacy with victims in contact see: *When Battered Women Stay… Advocacy Beyond Leaving* a BCSDV paper by Jill Davies, available at: VAWnet.org.

Terms

In Contact - Refers to an adult victim who is continuing a relationship with a current partner OR a victim who interacts in some way with a former partner. When a victim is in contact, her children are also likely to be in contact, particularly if their mother continues the relationship or her former partner is their father.

Battered Woman/Victim - Although current labels are inadequate descriptions of those experiencing domestic violence, this Guide uses the terms "battered woman" or "victim" because they are commonly used and understood. The term "victim" is used instead of "survivor" to serve as a reminder of the violence and control faced by women in contact. Keep in mind that most women experiencing abuse do not like or relate to many of the terms advocates use, including "victim," "battered woman," or "batterer." Because most domestic violence victims are women abused by a male partner, this Guide will use "she" and "woman" when referring to a victim of domestic violence and "he" and "men" when referring to those who batter. All victims deserve safety, financial security and advocacy, including those in same-sex relationships and male victims abused by female partners.

Who are victims in contact?

They are women who continue relationships with their abusive partners or who interact in some way with former abusive partners. They come from every culture, class, race/ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation, community and situation.

If the victim has children, then the children are likely to be in contact with a partner, whether or not he is their father. Children are also likely to be in contact with their father, even if he is no longer their mother's partner.

Why do some victims remain in the relationship?

The reason will be unique to each victim. In general, victims remain if leaving will make their lives or their children's lives worse, they have no real option or resources to leave, or there are enough positives in the relationship to make it worth putting up with some level of violence and control. When a victim remains in the relationship, her children do too. Even if she leaves their father, the children are still likely to have at least some contact or relationship with him and his family.

Leaving is often a high risk decision. For some victims, leaving makes their lives worse (even though remaining is difficult and painful). Leaving may mean an escalation of her partner's violence, increased risks for her children, the loss of her home, income, job, health insurance, immigration status, her faith community and even the support of family and friends. Usually, leaving also means a significant loss of financial stability. For many victims, leaving means that they will not be able to properly feed their children, get them health care, or keep them from being homeless. Many families struggle to support one household; supporting two is not an option. For many victims living in poverty, there is no real option to leave.

Victims who are parents also worry about the impact of leaving on their children."How will leaving affect their relationship with their father? Will my children be better off if I leave?" Some children are better off, when no longer exposed to the violence and abuse of their mother's partner. Yet for some battered mothers, leaving may make it difficult or impossible to keep their children emotionally or physically safe. For example, a mother will not be there to intervene if her children face poor or violent parenting from their father. Or, their father may simply have little ability or willingness to cooperate regarding parenting and contact, making visitation exchanges difficult and frightening for children, and often for their mothers as well. Although many children continue beneficial contact with their father after their parents' relationship is over, many battered mothers worry about what it means for their children if they no longer live with their father. Some victims suffer the violence and disrespect to ensure their children have an "intact" family, believing that is what is best.

To understand why a victim remains with a partner who is abusive, we have to put ourselves in her shoes. We have to understand the violence and control in the context of her life circumstances, her family and her culture. For some victims, their relationship means shared lives, children and extended families. Their commitment to keeping their family

together and keeping their promises is part of who they are. This is particularly true for victims with cultural backgrounds that include rigid rules regarding marriage and hold women responsible for the well-being of the entire family. They might see it as their "duty" to give their partner a chance to change. For some victims, the violence is horrific and life-threatening, for some painful and dangerous, yet for others the violence is minor and the control minimal. Some live in constant fear and others are not afraid. Victims also have a complex and complete view of their partners – they see the good along with the bad.

Victims are not masochists bent on suffering, nor are they living in a fantasy world. Victims do what we all do – deal with what life hands us. For some, remaining or leaving is a formal decision, a weighing of the pros and cons. For others it is informal, simply coping with the current situation because it seems tolerable or there are no better options or alternatives. Most victims cope with the bad and hope for the better, living with the status quo, making the decisions they must, and doing what they can to make things better along the way. Leaving is not a simple decision, nor one easily made.

Why do victims remain in contact?

For many victims (as with most people), it is not realistic or even beneficial to break all connections made during a relationship. If a victim has children with her former partner there are parenting and financial reasons to continue contact. Many victims will remain in contact so that their children can see their father. Similarly, his friends and family may have become her friends and family. She may just simply "see him around" the neighborhood, at work, at church, or elsewhere in the community. He might be a resource she turns to if she's in trouble and he too may seek her out for help. This is particularly true if they are both living in poverty. For example, a victim might "take him in" for a few days so her children's dad isn't living on the street. The contact may reflect an "on again, off again" relationship, one in which one or both partners are looking for the other to change.

Some victims have no choice about contact, ordered by a court to share decision-making about the children and to see him each time he picks up the children for visitation. Even if visitation exchanges are made through a visitation center or third party, a victim will still be in contact through her children as she monitors how they are doing and listens to them talk about visits with their father.

Contact might also be part of a safety strategy. It might be better to stay in touch to be able to assess his behavior and risk—"keep an eye on him." He might also just keep "coming around" and it is safer to just let that happen.

This section has three parts:

A. *Approach to Advocacy*
B. *Advocacy and Safety Planning with Adult Victims*
C. *Advocacy for Children's Safety and Well-Being*

A. Approach to Advocacy

Effective safety planning and advocacy requires a victim-defined approach, whether victims leave, stay in contact, remain in the relationship, or come and go. Victim-defined advocacy begins with an understanding of the needs, resources, perspectives and culture of each victim. As part of that process, a working relationship or partnership is built in which the victim's perspective and the advocate's information, resources, and assistance are combined to enhance the victim's safety strategies. The advocate and victim will then work together to implement those strategies, modifying them as the victim's life and circumstances change. Victim-defined advocacy is not simply listening and doing what a victim wants. Rather, it requires the advocate to participate in an active, dynamic and culturally responsive information and resource sharing process that creates and improves options for each victim.

Victim-defined advocacy is a straightforward and comprehensive framework; in practice, it requires a wide range of skills, knowledge, and judgment. That level of information is beyond the scope of this Guide. For more information read the book *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices,* by Jill Davies, Eleanor Lyon, and Diane Monti-Catania, Sage Publications, 1998. See also Appendices 1 & 2.

What is the goal of advocacy with victims in contact?

To increase victim and child safety – the same goal we have for victims who leave or have no contact. Safety is broadly defined. To be safe, victims need to be free from the violence and control of their partners, but they must also be able to meet their basic human needs. Reducing the risk of physical or sexual violence but leaving a victim and her children with no long-range financial support is not making her safe. Nor will it make her or her children safe to ignore mental health symptoms, substance use, or trauma issues.

Safety requires the reduction of all risks of a partner's control, "batterer-generated risks" not solely physical violence. It also requires the reduction of "life-generated risks" or those circumstances of victims' lives over which they have little control, such as physical or mental health, poverty, or bias and discrimination. [1]

Advocates' role with victims in contact includes safety planning to reduce the violence and control of a violent partner and strategies to prevent harm to the children – those plans, however, will use strategies other than leaving.

What is success?

What each victim defines it to be. A victim will form that definition based on her partner's level of violence and control and her life circumstances and culture. Victim-defined advocates, respectfully exploring risks and options with a victim, may also influence her view of success. For a victim in contact, the definition of success may not prioritize the reduction of physical

violence; it is still important, but not necessarily the first or most important concern to address.

One measure of success is to ask each victim if she thinks things are *better, the same, or worse* for her and for her children. For example, a victim tells you things are *better* because her partner no longer hits their children as punishment and stopped spending his paycheck on non-essential items, two areas of behavioral change she valued and prioritized – her definition of success.

A note about advocates' view of success - For us, success means no one is hurt or controlled by a partner and no child is injured or traumatized by violence in her/his family. Because we want every victim to be completely and permanently safe right now, we may struggle with individual victim's relative view of success. Simply making things better might not feel successful enough for us, particularly if victims are still experiencing violence and control. We needn't give up our view of success. Although each victim's relative view of success will guide our advocacy, we will continue to support each victim's right to be free from violence and control (our view of success). As victim-defined advocates, we will do this respectfully, taking care not to replace a victim's judgment and decisions with our own. On a systemic, society-wide level, we will also continue to demand and work toward the end of violence for all victims.

B. Advocacy and Safety Planning with Adult Victims

What is included in a safety plan when victims are in contact?

The safety plan remains an individualized plan that victims develop to reduce the risks they and their children face. These plans include strategies to reduce the risk of physical violence and other harm caused by an abusive partner and also include strategies to address basic human needs for income, housing, health care, food, child care, and education for the children. The particulars of each plan vary depending on the victim's life circumstances and resources, her partner's level of violence and control and his abusive tactics, whether they have children, and whether the victim remains in the relationship or in contact. To be effective, safety plans must be comprehensive, address basic human needs and provide a life plan, not just strategies to respond to physical violence. [2]

The safety plans of victims in contact may include options that are different, or used differently, from the plans of victims who leave. For example, strategies that rely on physical separation, such as no contact orders or moving out of the home, may have limited or no use for victims remaining in the relationship or in contact. However, a victim remaining in the relationship might find that moving out temporarily –sending a clear signal to her partner that he will lose her if he doesn't change – might increase her power in the relationship and reduce his control and violence. Similarly, a victim who is still in contact with her children's father might find moving from down the street to across town reduces his unannounced visits and demands to know what she is doing. An advocate might also help a victim explain to her children's school why two separate parent-teacher conferences would offer a better opportunity for the teacher to talk with the victim about her child's progress and issues, and might also make it safer for the victim to participate.

Safety plans for victims in contact will focus on strategies that meet each victim's definition of success, as well as her individual goals. If her partner is a key factor, and for most victims he will be, then it is likely her safety plan will include information and referrals

for him. These might include options that offer him services and interventions to help him change his violent and controlling behavior; programs to enhance his parenting or facilitate safer visitation; and employment or health services. If options for her partner are part of the discussion, make sure to explore with her how she might safely approach him with the information. See also Section IV.

Are victims' risk analyses accurate?

Yes, although there are a small number of victims who do not have the ability to form an accurate view.

Victims know their partners. They know what he's done in the past and what he is capable of. They know what they fear. Victims also understand the other risks they face, such as the chance they'll lose custody if they leave the relationship, that they're about to be evicted, or will lose their jobs. Most victims also worry about the risks faced by their children, although some may not understand the full extent of the effects. A victim's analysis is subjective, relative to her situation and options.

When advocates view eliminating physical violence and control as the priority, they might think a victim's analysis is inaccurate if she does not share that priority. Many victims have greater concerns than the violence and control of their partners, particularly if that violence is at the lower end of the spectrum. This does not mean that victims accept the violence or that they are not hurt or affected by it. Rather, violence is just not the first or most important thing they must deal with at the moment. In addition to differing priorities, many victims have good reasons not to share with an advocate their very accurate view of their risks. For example, a victim might share little information if she thinks that an advocate will judge her, report her, fail to understand because of cultural differences, or can't help her unless she leaves the relationship.

Sometimes advocates explain their different view of a victim's risks by inaccurately labeling the victim's analysis as "minimization and denial." The label is often used as a negative judgment, one that says the advocate's views and priorities are more accurate than the victim's view. This is not victim-defined advocacy and unfortunately feeds misperceptions about victims' abilities.

There are some victims who are so beaten down by their partners' violence and their hard lives that it is difficult for them to see how the violence is affecting them and their children. These victims need advocates' gentle support. They also need information that is paced to meet them where they are and does not overwhelm them with a harsh outside perspective. Advocates must also offer comprehensive services and options, because helping a victim to understand the harm without providing a meaningful way to make it better is not helpful. Sometimes advocates try to break down "minimization" because they think the victim doesn't understand how dangerous her partner is. This is usually done in good faith with the goal of encouraging the victim to take some action (usually to leave). As advocates, we want to support victims and build up their confidence and power in the relationship. A delicate balance is therefore required of us. We must ensure that our efforts to provide information about domestic violence and to help a victim understand that she deserves a violence-free life does not undermine her judgment or overwhelm her ability to cope.

It is also essential to distinguish these victims from another significant group of victims – those who understand their circumstances but have no real option to escape the violence and their life circumstances. It is understandably difficult for advocates to accept that many victims just don't have reasonable options, and particularly those victims who are poor or undocumented. With few resources and many other life issues to deal with, domestic violence is less important. It is the reality, it is coping – it is not minimization or denial. These victims don't need messages about how bad their lives are. They already know. They need resources and options for themselves, their children, and most likely for their partners as well.

Another challenge for advocates is managing their own views and judgments of adult victims' risks analyses when children are hurt. Understandably, we are all moved by harm and risk to children. Yet even in these circumstances, it is still essential for effective advocacy to begin by understanding the adult victim's perspective and to do a thorough and respectful risk review, as described in the next question.

What if my view of a victim's risks is different from her view?

Try to understand why your view is different. What is influencing your perspective? Is your view accurate? Do you understand what her view really is? A key element of safety planning is to review risks with each victim. This ensures that the options and resources you offer are relevant to each victim's risks and life circumstances. Risk review, described below, is a part of safety planning that takes skill and a delicate approach.

Why do victims change their risk analyses and safety plans?

Victims constantly modify their view of risks and their safety strategies because their life circumstances, options or partner's behavior changes. For example, advocates and others often do safety planning with victims after an assault, arrest or other emergency. Frightened and angry, a victim might easily go along with an advocate's, or other party's suggestion that she leave her partner and ask for legal protections. A day or two later, the adrenaline is drained, and reality sets in. The protective order won't pay the rent, her partner will lose his job if he's convicted, and her children miss their father. Although understandable and rational, shifting decisions can be frustrating for advocates and others responding to family violence. Victims – like all of us – change their minds. Understanding why victims change plans and helping to share that insight with others is an important part of advocacy.

How do I review risks with a victim?

The following provides an overview of this complex topic. For more information read Chapter 6 in the book *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives Difficult Choices.*

A risk review has three components:

1 *Understand the victim's perspective*
How does she view the violence? What other risks/issues is she worried about? How does she perceive the risks? What do they mean to her? What priorities does she have? What scares her? Why? Why not? When? How does she think the children are doing? What decisions has she made about contact with her partner? Why has she made those decisions?

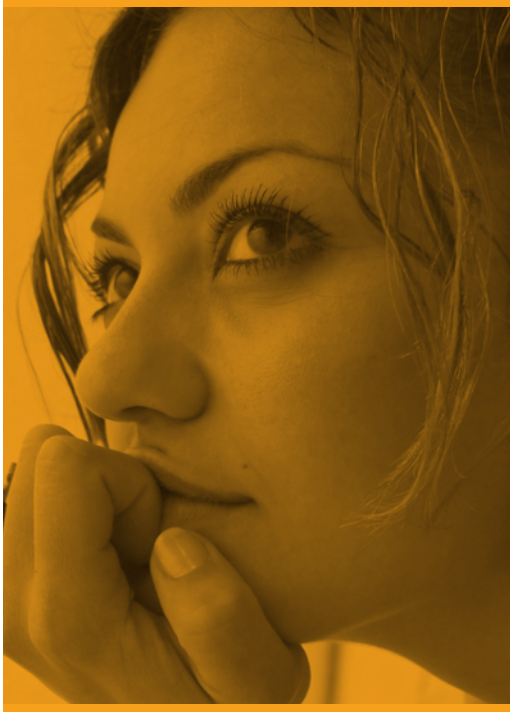
2 *Check your own perspective*

Advocates may have a lot of knowledge and experience understanding the risks that victims face. However, due to time limitations, lack of trust, cultural differences or other reasons, advocates often have limited knowledge of a particular victim's situation. Therefore, when your view is different from a victim's, it is essential that you check the accuracy of your own view. Ask yourself, why is my view different? Always check for cultural bias and blind spots, particularly if you have power in society or in relation to the victim. For example, always think about your privilege if you are white and the victim is a woman of color, or if you have more formal education or financial resources than she does.

3 *Try to form a shared perspective*

A risk review respects each victim's perspective, yet offers information and an outside perspective. It is very important that the review be done with care. Information must be provided in a way that supports each victim's culture, decisions and coping mechanisms.

Your conflicting perspective may be caused by your fear. You may be more afraid for a victim than she tells you she is for herself. We are often afraid for victims and want to make sure we've "done all we can" for them, particularly those in serious danger. Traditionally, doing all we can means helping them to leave the relationship and limit contact. For victims in contact, however, pressure to leave or eliminate contact is likely to undermine the trust and relationship necessary to do effective safety planning and might result in our losing a working relationship with them. We need to manage our fear for victims in contact, just as we must do for victims who are in danger or in greater danger when they leave.



Two topics must be part of every review:

◗ *Possibility of lethal / life-threatening violence*

In general, believe a victim if she tells you she thinks her partner is capable of killing her or the children. If you think it is possible but she doesn't, explore it further with her. Ask yourself if you have enough rapport and are offering enough help so that she'll speak openly. If you have concerns, follow up and provide "enhanced advocacy." This means more time and services, advocate-arranged referrals and contacts (make the phone calls with/for her), follow through and follow up. Always assure the victim that she can contact your agency for help. A thorough discussion of lethality assessments or enhanced advocacy is beyond the scope of this Guide. See Resources in Appendix 2.

◗ *Possibility of serious risks to the children*

Children are a central focus of most victims' safety plans and children deserve and require our advocacy. Every review must consider what is happening with the children. What are the effects of their exposure to whatever violence and abuse is occurring or has occurred? Are they being hit or sexually abused? [See Section C for more information about children] As with life-threatening violence, serious risks to children require enhanced advocacy, which may include a mandated report to CPS.

How do I figure out what strategies will enhance the safety of a victim and her children and build her power in the relationship?

As with all safety planning, the process involves matching safety strategies to each victim's particular risks and talking through those options with her. Ask the victim what she's

already tried to make things better and the result of that effort. Incorporate what you learn about those past experiences into your discussion.

For victims in contact, it is important to find out what – if anything – is safe for her to do and then build strategies from there. You might ask: "What does he control? What does he allow? Where can you go without him bothering you?" For example, her partner may not control her going to work, church, or maybe a doctor's office or her children's school. Advocates can then identify services or support that build her options and power in the relationship and are connected to or available at those locations. Maybe job training is a possibility, a woman's group at the church, or better health care to address the effects of the violence. Explore who is already a source of support for her and develop strategies to increase and protect the victim's access to that person and support. Keep in mind it may be someone you wouldn't expect, such as a member of his family or circle of friends. In turn, don't assume that her family or friends will be supportive. It is important to ask each victim who is a support and who is tearing her down or "on his side." Remember to plan safe ways for you to communicate with her.

Some victims actively resist their partner's abuse, control, and lack of respect for them. They may talk about it as not liking how he treats them or how it feels. Some victims are already setting limits, confronting his treatment of them, "speaking up to him" or fighting back. Advocates should be sure to support victims' efforts to be independent and treated with respect, while encouraging the use of constructive approaches and exploring the potential consequences of less constructive ones.

Physical and sexual violence will, of course, be part of the discussion. "Do you know when he is about to be violent? Are there circumstances that set him off?" For example, is it more likely to happen when he's drinking or when he thinks the children are too loud? Discuss safety strategies she might try to protect herself and her children. For example, she might have an "escape plan" to go to her sister's house when he is about to get violent, or maybe she can send the children to her mother's home on weekends when he's drinking the most, or maybe her brother can come live with them for awhile because her partner isn't violent when he is around. If she's left the relationship but is still in contact, she may try to avoid him when she thinks he might hit her. If part of the abuse is sexual and you've established the necessary rapport, explore safer sex options and how a victim might control decisions about pregnancy and birth control. Make this safer sex and reproductive information available to all victims. All strategies will need to be crafted with each victim to address her particular situation and the level of her partner's violence. Some victims face high levels of violence and completely unpredictable violence. Leaving the relationship and further limiting contact is always an option that can be offered.

Children are often a primary consideration in the decision-making process of victims, and many craft plans around their children's needs. Strategies to enhance the safety of children should be discussed and included in their mother's safety plan. See Section C for a discussion of safety strategies specific to children.

Which options, services, and resources should I explore with victims?

All options that match her risks and may enhance her safety plan should be explored. Options can be placed into two broad categories. Formal social service, government, or legal systems options and the victim's informal network of family, friends, faith institution, and community contacts. To offer relevant referrals, advocates will need broad community contacts that include grassroots organizations, faith institutions, programs that serve particular racial/ethnic groups, or particular populations, such as immigrants or the LGBT community.

Strategies and options currently used to assist victims as they leave a relationship may be adapted to protect victims in contact. For example, a protective order without the "no contact" provision might help some victims. Support groups, hotline support, and counseling are likely to build victims' strength and power in their relationships and make life better for some victims. To make these services and resources safely accessible to victims in contact, it may be necessary to give them names with no apparent connection to domestic violence and to offer them in locations not typically associated with the domestic violence program. For example, a support group could be called a "discussion group for women" or "a mothers' group" on topics relevant to women in that community and could be held at the library. In addition to using current options, new tools, strategies and resources need to be developed. For example, bank accounts, payment methods, and/or advocacy that build victim's control of the money she receives from work, child support enforcement, or benefits programs should be explored.

Note about mental health, substance abuse, and trauma:

Many victims may also have mental health, substance abuse, and/or trauma issues. These can be caused by victimization or by other reasons. It can be difficult for advocates to identify what treatment or intervention needs victims may have, particularly if these issues go beyond their training, experience, or supervision. However, trying to avoid these topics all together is unlikely to be successful and misses an opportunity to guide victims to services and interventions that will help. See Appendix 2 for resources.

What might I have to do differently to advocate for services for victims in contact?

You may have to explain why a victim in contact needs and would benefit from particular services or resources. Domestic violence priorities and programs often require or assume that the victim will leave the relationship and no longer have contact. Therefore, additional advocacy will be needed to make current options available to victims in contact. For example, advocacy may be needed to help a victim to access health care, receive an extension of time-limited government assistance, qualify for shelter or child care assistance, enroll her children in certain programs, or to be allowed to remain in her current housing even if her partner comes around. Advocates will need to explain why contact often makes sense for family violence victims and – with proper attention to confidentiality – why contact makes sense for this victim in particular, and how the services will make things better for this victim and her children.

It may also be helpful to acknowledge that offering services for victims in contact may be a new message and conflicts with commonly held views about victims, domestic violence and safety plans. Helping victims in contact may conflict with the strategies and messages you have been telling colleagues and collaborative partners. Acknowledge the change. Explain

the shift in the field is a result of lessons learned from victims and many years of victim-defined advocacy experience.We can take pride that domestic violence advocacy is part of a vibrant and flexible movement built on our ever growing understanding of victims' needs and perspectives.

It is also likely that we'll need to make changes in our own services, approaches, and rules to better meet the needs of victims in contact. See Section V for more discussion.

When should I talk about ending the relationship or limiting contact?

- *When a victim wants to explore those options,*
- *When there is a possibility of life-threatening violence that she identifies or you identify, or*
- *When the children are not OK and face serious risks and leaving/less contact would help.*

You can also discuss leaving along with other options as a way to show victims you will respect their decisions. Talking only about ending a relationship or limiting contact may lead some victims in contact to believe that you "don't get" their life situation and might lead them to believe you are no longer a resource.

As advocates, we want every victim to know that they have the right to live free from the violence and control of an abusive partner. Since leaving is the strategy we rely on to accomplish this, we want every victim to be able to leave. Although a life-saving and important option for many victims, we know from experience and listening to victims that leaving does not make things better for some victims or for their children. So, with the best intentions, when we approach the "leaving" conversation with a victim we must take care to offer information and help her to assess her options without crossing the line into pressuring her to leave.

C. Advocacy for Children's Safety and Well-Being

How can I help a victim know how her children are doing?

In general, this will involve understanding the strengths and resources of each child, their family, and their community in combination with the effects of domestic violence, possible child abuse and other risk factors. Every child is unique. Each has different strengths, resources, risks and cultural contexts. All children face some risk to their development that might include factors such as domestic violence, poverty, family dysfunction, disability or other health issues, child abuse, inadequate schools or parenting challenges. To understand how a child is doing, we must help parents understand their children's behavior, feelings, and interactions with others at home, at school and in the social community. The effects of a range of risk factors must be viewed together and considered with the benefits of positive aspects of the child's life. How a child is doing depends on more than just the effects of domestic violence.

As with all advocacy, our work with parents must be done in partnership with them, partnerships built through understanding their perspectives and culture. It is important to connect with her as a mom/parent. Battered parents make decisions for their children in the context of their lives, considering all risk factors – not just domestic violence. For example, a battered mother might decide her child will be OK, even though he witnesses

her boyfriend's controlling behavior, as long as she can put food on the table, a roof over his head, and keep him in his current school – a decision that means she'll need to stay with her current partner. [3]

Most parents are sensitive about their parenting and can shut down if the discussion tries to "guilt them" or seems too critical. A conversational tone that supports her parenting works best, particularly since so many victims are subjected to their partners' relentless put downs and criticism of their parenting. Maintaining a positive and open tone can be challenging, particularly when advocates have their own concerns about a victim's parenting. If the children are old enough and your agency is working with them, then you might also talk with them.

The following questions can help move the conversation about children along:

{Note: Not all the questions will be relevant to each victim. Use the ones that will encourage conversation and give you the information that you need to help the victim and her children. Don't go through them all like a checklist.}

- *Tell me about your kids. How are they doing? What do you love about your kids? What about them makes you happy? What do they like to do? What are they good at? Does anything worry you about them?*
- *What's their relationship like with their dad? With your partner (if he's not their dad)?*
- *Other moms have told me their partners are sometimes mean to their children, do you ever worry about that?*
- *Has your partner ever hurt your children? If so, can you tell me more about that?*
- *Has he ever threatened to take them away? To call child protection? To keep them from you? Has he ever used the kids to control you? Or get to you?*
- *Do you ever worry about leaving them alone with him?*
- *Is there anything about your relationship with your children that you don't like or want to improve?*
- *How can I help you?*
- *Does he treat your other children (from a different father) differently than he treats the children you have together?*
- *What do you want for your children?*
- *Is there anything else you want to tell me that we haven't talked about?*

What if my view of risks to her children is different from their mother's view?

Check the accuracy of your view and talk to the mother about the differences. Talking to a mom about a different view of her children's risks is challenging. It is more likely to be successful if you have her trust, respect her culture, and demonstrate that you understand and value her view of parenting. Advocates sometimes start conversations about the children with a warning about mandated reporting, so that victims are informed about the risks of talking to the advocate. If you begin a discussion about children with a mandated reporting

warning it may scare victims and keep them from speaking honestly with you. Raise reporting issues when necessary and relevant to your discussion. The best way to foster discussion with the victim is by connecting with her view of parenting and how she sees her role as a mom, and offering to work with her to help her children.

As with the risk review described in an earlier question, the review around children's risks will have 3 parts: 1) Understanding the mother's perspective, 2) Checking your own view, and 3) Respectfully working to get on the same page. When reviewing children's risks, it is likely that "your own view" will include information from sources in addition to the children's mother. For example, you may talk to the children directly, or get the information from a child advocate, teacher, law enforcement staff, or even the children's father. Of course, such information must be judged for accuracy and should be used in a way that does not alienate the children's mother or make her distrust you. As with all information sharing, confidentiality rules should be followed.

What can I do to support a victim's parenting?

- *Help her find the support and resources she requests.*
- *Encourage her to listen to her children.*
- *Respect and build strategies within the cultural context of her family and parenting approach.*
- *Validate how challenging it can be to be a parent, particularly if she is dealing with violence and living in poverty.*
- *Listen to her concerns and challenges, as well as her hopes and dreams for her children.*
- *Offer information about child and adolescent development that helps her understand her children's needs and behavior.*
- *Understand what contact her children have with their father and understand how she views that contact. Encourage her to listen to her children when they talk about their father and to understand what it is like for them to be around him.*
- *Help her to understand how her children may respond when they witness domestic violence and what she can do help them.*
- *Support her understanding that her children have their own needs and concerns (separate from her).*
- *Talk about conflict/challenges with her partner around the children – explore strategies to reduce them.*
- *Include resources and supports for her parenting in her safety plan.*

What advocacy can I offer to support children's safety and well-being?

As with adults, safety strategies for children should respond to the specific risks each child faces and make use of available resources. For example, safety strategies for a child still living with an abusive father will be different than those for a child visiting at a specialized visitation or exchange center. One child's paternal grandmother may be a great supervisor, while another child may have unsafe visits with an abusive father whose extended family hates and

disrespects the child's mother. It is also important to remember that some children need little or no advocacy in order to benefit from contact with their fathers. If the children are old enough, advocate a safety plan directly with them – making sure to coordinate strategies with the mother's safety plan. Advocates might talk to older children about how contact with their father is going, if anything worries them, and to make sure the children can talk to their mother or another safe adult if they are concerned about anything. See Appendix 2 for resource information.

It is important to understand what contact the children have with their father or with their mother's partner if he is not their father. For adult victims who've left the relationship but remain in contact, these interactions won't be limited to the divorce and custody/visitation context. "In contact" often includes lots of informal connections. The children may still be living with their father or their father's family. This might be a fairly permanent or very temporary situation. Contact with their father may be regular or irregular, scheduled or unscheduled, wanted or unwanted. The children may also be seeing their father, or their mother, in jail.

Whatever the situation, our advocacy for the children will include helping their mother help them to be OK. Other advocacy strategies might include:

- *Advocacy to address basic human needs. Work with a parent to enhance her ability to provide her child adequate nutrition, shelter, health care, emotional support and education.*

- *Plans that allow children to have respite from violence and to explore their interests (other family members, faith institution, sports, hobbies, school, etc.).*

- *Parenting support for battered mother.*

- *Parenting/fatherhood programs for the children's father, along with information about the programs for their mother (See Section IV).*

- *Referrals to child advocacy programs, child behavioral health and other community children's programs.*

- *Advocacy in schools.*

- *Mentoring programs for children and youth.*

If contact with their father is not safe, pursue legal and other strategies to ensure safe contact, such as supervised contact by a trusted adult/family member or in the protected setting of a supervised visitation center.

What if the children aren't OK or safe?

If our work with parents is not enough, then those children should also be able to count on us to take steps necessary to protect them from serious harm. This might mean involving other family members, social services, developing parenting intervention plans, or in some circumstances may even require involvement of child protection. It may also include an exploration of leaving as a strategy and advocacy that helps the battered parent obtain court orders that only allow safe contact. [4]

Victims in contact want their current/former partners to stop their violent behavior. Their children want their fathers to be competent and supportive parents. For advocates, it can seem just too scary, too risky to even try to change violent behavior. We don't want to take the chance – but some victims do (or have no other good option). As victim-defined advocates, our role is to provide information, options, and resources to enhance the safety of victims and their children, no matter what decisions victims make about their relationships or giving their partners a chance to change.

Do those who batter reduce or stop their violent and controlling behavior?

Some don't. Some do. Those who do change, reduce their violence and control in varying degrees. There are critiques and limitations of the research and evaluations of batterer intervention programs and other efforts to reduce violent and controlling behavior, yet some trends are clear. Some men change for the better and some remain violent, controlling and dangerous to their partners and to their children.[5] There is hope and there is a warning. To help victims in contact, we need to be better able to determine those who might change from those who won't. We also need to learn more about what made it possible for some abusive partners to change.

What should I say to a victim about her partner changing his violent and controlling behavior?

Begin by understanding what she thinks, and what changes and efforts her partner has already made – if any. Advocates have important general information about domestic violence and those who batter, but they do not know a victim's partner like she does. It is essential to understand what she thinks about her partner and what he is capable of – both in terms of violence and the possibilities of change.

Keep in mind that despite our understanding of domestic violence as intimate partner violence for the purpose of power and control, in practice there is a broad range of behavior that falls under programs, laws, and services for domestic violence. These behaviors might include a wide range of domestic violence, family violence or child abuse, violence without control, sexual violence or sexual abuse, violence in self-defense, control without violence, or the actions of a mean-spirited or incompetent partner. Advocates may be working with women facing only one or several of these behaviors. Get a sense of what the victim is facing before talking about behavior change or identifying safety strategies.

As advocates, our goal is to help inform a victim's view of her partner's violence and what might happen if he has a chance to change. On the practice level, there are three categories advocates can use when talking with victims in contact about their partners:

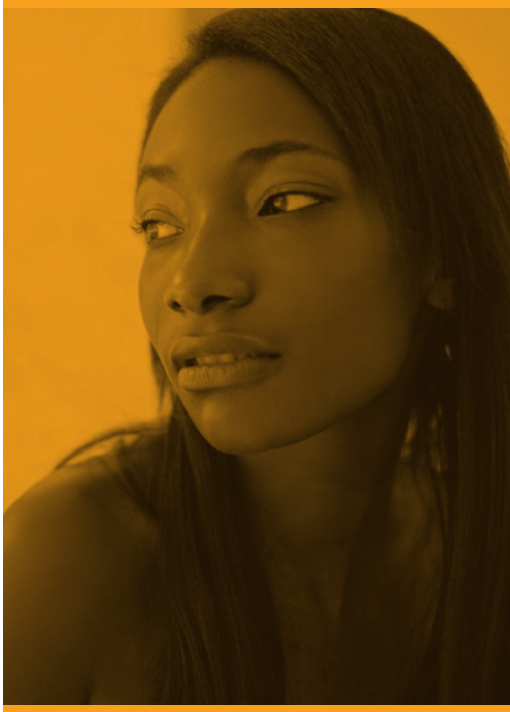
- *He poses the possibility of lethal or life-threatening circumstances to her or the children.*
- *He won't change for the better.*
- *He might/will change for the better.*

It would be very helpful for a victim in contact if an advocate could help her to make sure she's accurately placed her partner/former partner in one of those three categories. Unfortunately,

our ability to predict human behavior is limited and not always accurate. Sometimes, to "err on the side of safety", we tell victims that every batterer is capable of lethal violence and that no batterer will change. This approach does not provide helpful information to the victims whose partner is not life-threatening or may change for the better, and could even be alienating to the many victims who hold a different view of their partners/ex-partners and the level of violence that they face. We need to listen to victims in contact, continue to test and improve current assessment tools, and learn from providers working with those who batter in order to offer information that will help victims.

What types of services, intervention, and strategies for change should I talk about with victims in contact?

The types will depend on what change in her partner/former partner will make things better for the victim and her children. Keep in mind that her priority might not be physical or sexual violence. Advocates might ask,"What would make things better?" She might be worried about how he interacts with the children, his attitude towards her and how he treats her, his jealousy or cheating on her, or maybe his inability to help financially support the family. Once you understand her priorities, the next steps are to identify potential resources and then talk through with her which ones he'd use voluntarily and which ones he'd have no choice in (e.g. she calls the police). Also discuss whether there are ways to "encourage" him to try the programs, for example, having an influential person in his life talk with him. Resources might include: batterer intervention programs, community services, faith-institution programs or groups, substance use programs, responsible fatherhood programs, counseling, workforce/employment services, supervised visitation programs, and marriage or couples programs. Of course, advocates would explore with each victim how her partner's involvement with any of these might impact her safety and her children's safety.



Note about mental health, substance abuse, and trauma: Mental health and substance abuse are factors in behavior and in violence – although not the sole cause or an excuse for violence. Some men who batter, particularly those who are poor, have experienced hardship and trauma in their lives, in ways both different and the same as victims. Effective intervention and/or treatment for these issues may make a difference for him and make things better for the victim and her children.

What if reducing her partner's violent and controlling behavior is her priority? What strategies should I recommend?

Start by learning more from the victim about his use of violence and control. Ask about what she's tried and if he's made any attempts to change. Reinforce that it is his decision to be violent, his responsibility to end the violence, and that only he can decide to change. Talk with her about what she thinks might push him and/or support him to make that decision.

Here are some of the questions an advocate might ask:

- *What does he do that you want him to stop?*

- *What has she tried? How did that work? If it didn't, does she have any idea why? What has he tried? Has he ever tried to change? Has he ever sought help to reduce his abuse? How did that work?*

- *What does she think will work?*

- *Does he have any awareness of the effects of his behavior? Does he realize that his behavior isn't good for the children?*

- *Has he changed any behavior for the better? Does he have any willingness to change? Does he take responsibility or blame others? Do you think he wants to be a better/good father or father figure?*

- *What does he say he needs?*

- *Is he working with or connected to anyone now? Who is influential? Who in his support system does he listen to? Whose opinion does he respect?*

Your discussion may identify options and a plan that offers him a chance to change. It is also likely that with some victims the discussion will lead to a conclusion that there is nothing he will voluntarily use. Advocacy will then shift to discussions of safety strategies to protect the victim and her children and the potential use of more coercive interventions, such as the legal system.

What should I say to victims about batterer intervention programs?

Accurately describe the programs that are available in your community. Talk about the details and approach (see list of key issues below). Ask victims if they think there's a chance it might make things better for them or the children. THEN, be sure to point out that there is no guarantee it will work for her partner or that a change for the better will last. Always develop safety strategies with each victim.

There is a wide range of programs designed to reduce battering behavior. Advocates should be well-versed in the ones available in their community, including any that are not connected to the criminal legal system. There are many potential sources of information, including victims whose partners have attended, victims who have attended (victims get arrested too), program facilitators or funders, and there may also be information from reports, assessments or oversight committees. Advocates may not like or trust the programs that are available in their community. It is important to make sure your view of the program is accurate, not just based on a few stories or on outdated information.

Key things to know about your local batterer intervention programs:

- *Program approach, philosophy, and cultural relevance of program to participants. "How do they go about getting those who batter to change?"*

- *Eligibility requirements, cost, length, waiting list, process to enroll, and any other eligibility criteria (e.g. domestic violence only or any violence).*

- *What does the participant have to do to successfully complete the program? Is there any evaluation or research component? What are the results?*

- *Interactions with victims: Do they contact victims? Can victims contact them? Is the victim's information confidential? Will they disclose information about a participant to his partner? Do they contact victims if they identify danger for her or the children? Do they help victims assess their partner's progress or lack of progress?*

- *Will they talk to an advocate?*

- *How do they handle re-assault, threats?*

- *Is the program involved with the criminal or civil legal system? How?*

- *Does the program deal with parenting issues? How do they respond to risks to children? Do they make reports or get involved with custody or child protection issues?*

What about changing his behavior as a parent? What should I talk about with battered mothers?

Talk about her children's relationship with their father (or her partner if he is not their father). In general, victims in contact want their children to have a safe and better relationship with their fathers. Some children whose fathers are abusive to their mothers, may benefit from the support and attention their fathers provide. However, some children are afraid of their father, some need protection from him, and all would be better off if they were not exposed to his abuse and control of their mother, or see their father abuse a new partner, if he is no longer involved with their mother. Try to talk about the good parts of her children's relationship with their father, and talk about the more difficult parts too.

Talk to her about his parenting. Does he spend time with the children? Does he show interest in them? How? What things do they do together? Discuss what would make him a better parent. Does she think that it is possible for him to change? What does she think would help him to do that? Did he have any role models for being a father? What does he think fatherhood means?

Also, always talk to victims about how they support their children and encourage them as mothers. [See Section III C for more information.]

What about fatherhood or community programs for men? How can I know which ones to talk about?

Find out what the programs are about and what they have to offer. For example, most "responsible fatherhood" programs work with men living in poverty and try to help them to find a job or a better job, pay child support, and have a healthy involvement with their children. Some might offer services to men that make things better for a victim and her children. They might offer concrete resources and may also help to support change in her partner and encourage him toward more positive actions and behavior. Other programs, particularly "fathers' rights" or "men's rights" organizations, will not be helpful to victims in contact as their typical goals are to dispute reports of domestic violence or child abuse, reduce child support, and gain an advantage in custody and divorce cases. [6]

Community programs for men tend to be focused on employment and/or child support enforcement, and some are for men "re-entering" the community from prison.They have varying levels of resources. Since the priority for most of these programs is economic issues, they are unlikely to have policies or protocols for responding to a participant who is violent toward his partner. Still, some of the programs may be open to it or are encouraged by funders to develop plans to respond to domestic violence.

All these programs are typically voluntary, so advocates will need to emphasize that the victim's partner will need to want to go and see it as having some value. Advocacy will include explaining what the program has to offer, talking with the victim about the best way to let her partner know about the program, and – as always – safety planning with her about possible risks/dangers of his participation.

Key issues to know about fatherhood / men's programs and to talk to victims about:

- *What resources and other services they have to offer the man, the woman, the children.*
- *Eligibility criteria and process.*
- *Approach to offering services, including cultural responsiveness.*
- *Do they offer the chance for men to talk? Do they offer support? If so, it is more likely that they are not just an employment or child support enforcement program. They are also more likely to acknowledge the whole family, including the children and their mother.*
- *Do they have a policy or position on domestic violence? How do they respond to domestic violence by a participant? What process do they have for partner contact?*

See Appendix 2 for more information.

When and how should I refer victims to fatherhood or community programs for men?

Advocates should talk about these programs whenever they might offer what a victim's partner or her family needs. The program may not help reduce domestic violence or control but may make some other part of her life and/or her children's life better. Advocates should also explore whether his participation could make the domestic violence worse for her or her children. If so, help the victim weigh the possible benefits and consequences or risks for her or the children. If there is a chance his participation will make things worse for her, develop strategies to prevent that from happening or to limit the negative effects. Always make sure she knows how to contact you and that you will welcome that contact.

Some advocates worry that a father's attendance in a fatherhood program will give him an unfair or unwarranted advantage in a custody case or might lead a court to increase visitation, even if there is still danger for the children or their mother. If advocates know this to be the practice in their community, they can describe the potential legal risks and refer a victim to a lawyer for legal advice. Advocates should also explore with the victim the potential for the program to help make a particular father's contact with his children safer and better.

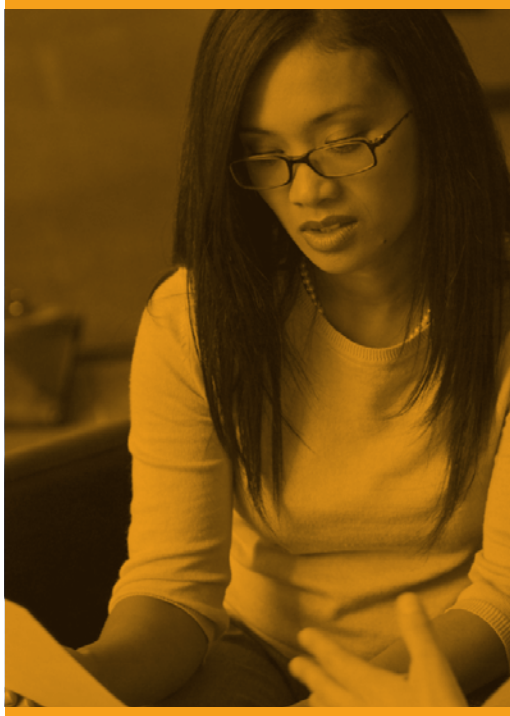
Important reminder:
As victim-defined advocates, we follow the needs, perspectives and culture of each victim. This may require us to refer a victim or her partner to a program that is not in line with our culture or that we disagree with politically or philosophically.

It is up to the victim whether or not to use a program or to tell her partner about a program. Our job is to make sure it is an informed decision based on her particular situation, not our own views. For example, a victim tells us that she wants her partner to get sober and get a job. We know that there is a faith-based substance abuse and employment program in town. One of the messages used by the program is that men need to be sober in order to meet their responsibility as the head of the household (a view in conflict with our view that women are equal partners in a relationship and should not be subservient or controlled by their partners). Rather than not tell her about the program, we can explain that his participation might make him more convinced than ever that he has the right to control all aspects of the family, including her. We should also talk about the possibility that he might also stop drinking and get a job and support her decision if that is OK with her. Even if it is uncomfortable for us personally, our role is to be a gateway to - not gatekeepers from - potentially helpful services.

What safety strategies should I suggest for victims whose partners are participating in community programs?

Advocates can help a victim learn as much as she can about the program and tell her how to get more information. Information that would be helpful includes:

- *Length of program, when it meets, cost and approach.*
- *Whether they will give her information about her partner.*



- *Whether they will contact her; how they will use information she gives them.*
- *If they can help if there is violence or the threat of violence.*
- *If the program is court-related, then how it interacts with the court.*

Advocates can also help a victim decide how she'll know if "it is working," if it is making things better. For example, advocates might develop with a victim a list of questions or observations that will indicate her partner is making a change for the better. The list might include: "Does he share what he's learned? Does he complain about attending? Does he express pride or enthusiasm about his accomplishments in the program? How has his behavior changed?" Advocates should also talk about what the victim can do if things are the same or worse. As always, talk about safety strategies and develop an escape plan, with particular attention if there is a high risk of violence or the possibility of life-threatening violence. Also offer information that enhances her emotional support of the children and helps her keep watch of how the children are doing.

How can I keep myself safe?

By considering your own safety and by having advocate safety considerations be a regular part of staff and agency discussions. As we continue to expand our advocacy to all victims we'll have more contact with the abusive partners of the victims with whom we work. Some current advocate safety strategies, such as confidential agency locations and requiring our clients to have no contact with their abusive partners, will need to be assessed for effectiveness and for their impact on accessibility for all victims.

Although we all have contact with those who batter in our lives and in our work, it is in the context of supporting their partners' independence that we face an increased risk. Many advocates already have regular contact with those who batter, including those who provide court advocacy requiring contact with an abusive partner, offer community services that may be attended by those who batter, or run batterer intervention programs. It may be helpful to understand how these advocates assess and plan for their own safety. We can also learn from colleagues working in child protection or in community programs that work with a population that includes those who batter. When it seems appropriate and necessary, we can ask a victim if her partner has ever hurt anyone who has helped her or has threatened to hurt anyone who tries to help her. These threats can be assessed and safety strategies put in place. Obviously, direct threats or stalking require immediate and thorough strategies.

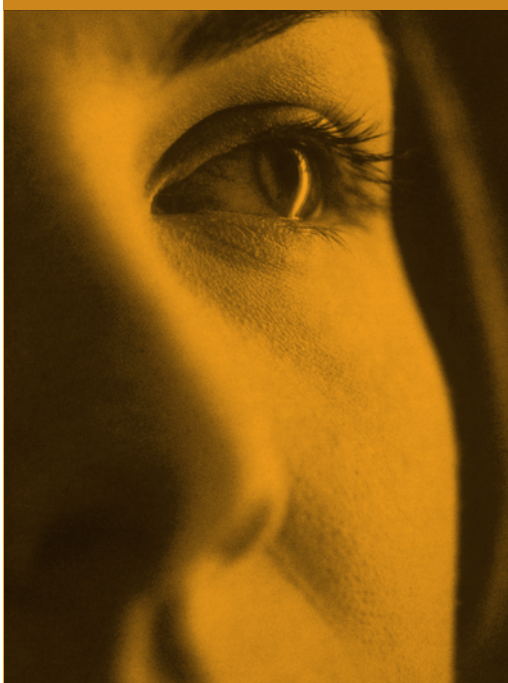
What information and support do I need to work with victims in contact? Where can I get it?

Advocacy with any victims, but particularly those in contact, requires a lot of different kinds of knowledge. For example, advocates need to know about domestic violence dynamics, effects on children, child development basics, parenting, culturally responsive advocacy, services and interventions to change violent and controlling behavior, assessing lethality and level of risk, community services, government benefits, and legal system options. Applying all that knowledge also requires good judgment, people skills, and the ability to creatively identify relevant responses to each victim's unique situation.

In addition to the training and supervision of your agency and coalition, advocates can learn from victims, as well as other advocates, through community connections and collaborations.

Key Resources Advocates Need to Work with Victims in Contact

- *Training that builds knowledge and skills on key topics including:*
  - *Domestic violence and family violence.*
  - *Victim-defined safety planning.*
  - *Effects on children, child abuse, child development basics, and parenting.*
  - *Cultural competence and responsiveness.*
  - *Community services, legal system options and government programs.*
  - *Services and interventions for those who batter.*



- *Support of other advocates and supervisors, because this work is difficult and, at times, scary. Violence and advocacy with victims of violence affect us.*

- *Ongoing supervision is routinely provided around difficult cases such as those with the possibility of life-threatening violence and serious risks to children.*

- *Process to continually build cultural responsiveness skills and knowledge.*

- *Flexibility in agency rules for staff and for victims.*

- *Collaborative partners in the community, including other social services and legal services, such as family or immigration representation.*

- *Process to discuss and plan for the advocates' own safety.*

- *Leaders offering autonomy and resources for staff to grow as advocates and leaders.*

What if my agency doesn't offer what victims in contact need? How can I try to change my agency?

Advocates should use constructive ways to raise awareness of the needs and perspectives of victims. Making our programs more responsive to all victims, including those in contact, is an ongoing process that requires us to learn from victims – those we currently serve and those we've yet to serve. You may be a supervisor working to change the advocacy of those you supervise or you may be an advocate working to convince positional leaders of the need to make changes in the organization. Positional leaders should not get in the way of growth or change, but rather facilitate it.Whatever your role, your leadership is important. See *BCSDV Leadership and Organizational Guide* by Deborah Linnell for more information about facilitative leadership and building programs that offer comprehensive advocacy to all victims.

Here are some key early steps in the process of expanding advocacy:

- *Identify the needs of victims in contact in your community. Raise awareness of those needs by discussing them at staff and board meetings.*

- *Discuss how your agency currently serves victims in contact.*

- *Explore what other agencies have to offer.*

- *Ask your state coalition to help you get more information.*

- *Start a new priority setting process and identify the gaps between what victims in contact need and what is available.*

- *Identify easy changes that can be made immediately. For example, flexibility in eligibility rules that screen out victims in contact.*

- *Explore how to initiate or expand collaboration with your local responsible fatherhood program or batterer intervention program.*

{See Collaboration and Partnership: Fatherhood Practitioners and Advocates Against Domestic Violence Working Together to Serve Women, Men, and Families: A Guidebook, by Jacquelyn Boggess, Rebecca May, & Marguerite Roulet, CFFPP, 2007. }

What kinds of agency or organizational changes might be necessary to better serve victims in contact?

Ones that remove barriers to services for victims in contact and increase flexibility and options for advocates to provide what these victims need. In a victim-defined process, any agency-wide review would begin with learning more from victims in contact about what they need, how they perceive the agency, why they have or have not tried to use the agency's services, and what the agency could do to better serve them. A next step is to then use the information from victims to assess current services, rules, practices, and policies.

The following are some of the key areas for an agency assessment:

- *Any rule or practice that prohibits or prevents victims from voluntarily having contact with a current or former partner.* For example, a victim flees to a shelter to deliver a strong message to her partner that she will leave him if he does not improve his behavior. What better place than a shelter to safely assess his reaction to this strategy and to have readily available the support and information advocates can offer? Obviously, this well-conceived and reasonable strategy will not work if a shelter has a policy prohibiting residents from contacting their partners. A flexible policy that encourages a victim to work with an advocate to plan for safe contact with a partner would be more effective.

- *Eligibility criteria for services, programs, and advocacy. Analyze the impact on diverse victims in contact. Intake and application process, including the format, length, questions asked, and language used. Are victims in contact or particular groups of victims in contact automatically screened out?*

- *Perception of the agency in each of the diverse groups that make up the community. Does each group see you as relevant to their needs?*

- *Criteria for ending or limiting services and the process for making these decisions. Does the process unfairly limit services to victims in contact?*

- *Staff training and supervision. Do staff have the information, skills, and support they need to advocate with victims in contact?*

- *Coordination or collaboration with other social service organizations that regularly work with victims in contact, their children, and their partners.*

- *Coordination or collaboration with batterer intervention programs and fatherhood or community programs for men.*

CONCLUSION

It is time to bring the full force of our knowledge, creativity, resources – our movement – to advocacy with victims in contact and to the many children in contact with a father who is abusive to their mother or to them. Some advocates, and in particular advocates of color, have continued to raise up the perspectives of victims in contact and have already begun to meet their needs. Let us all follow their lead. We can and must make the personal, organizational, and movement changes necessary to serve all victims and their children.

END NOTES

1 For more information about batterer-generated and life-generated risks see, *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices, by Jill Davies, Eleanor Lyon, and Diane Monti-Catania, Sage Publications, 1998.*

2 This paragraph and other language and concepts in this Guide are derived from the writing and speeches of Jill Davies.

3 These paragraphs are from *When Battered Women Stay….Advocacy Beyond Leaving, by Jill Davies, BCSDV Paper #20, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.*

4 This paragraph is from *When Battered Women Stay….Advocacy Beyond Leaving, by Jill Davies, BCSDV Paper #20, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.*

5 See for example: *Programs for Men who Batter: Intervention and Prevention Strategies in a Diverse Society, by Etiony Aldarondo and Fernando Mederos, Civic Research Institute, 2002. Batterer Intervention Systems: Issues, Outcomes, and Recommendations, by Edward W. Gondolf, Sage Publications, 2002.*

6 *Collaboration and Partnership: Fatherhood Practitioners and Advocates Against Domestic Violence Working Together to Serve Women, Men and Families, Jacquelyn Boggess, Rebecca May, And Marguerite Roulet, CFFPP, June 2007.*

7 *©GHLA, 2007.* Used with permission.

Appendix 1
Sample Outline for Safety Planning with Victims in Contact [7]

Overview:

Use of an outline rather than going through an "intake" form allows advocates to let the victim share her information in the sequence and way she chooses. It also serves as a tool to ensure advocates gather and offer necessary information. This approach encourages advocates to ask open-ended questions, listen as the victim shares information and then ask follow-up or clarifying questions. A "her first/then you" mindset helps to establish the rapport and information sharing necessary to safety planning and effective advocacy.

Safety Planning Approach Summary:

1. Understand the victim's perspective, including her risk analysis and current safety plan for her and her children. The plan might be for her to leave the relationship or to remain in the relationship or in contact. It may also include safety strategies for her children's contact with their father.

2. Build a partnership with the victim to respectfully review her analysis and to explore resources and options that will strengthen her plan for her safety and the safety of the children.

3. Work with the victim to implement the enhanced safety plan.

Sample Outline for Safety Planning with Victims in Contact

This outline is only an example. It does not include every important issue and is not a script. An advocate should develop an outline that works for her/him and covers the issues relevant to her/his advocacy and victims' needs. Each interaction should be customized to be relevant and respectful based on each victim's individual circumstances, risks, resources, and culture; as well as the purpose of the interview and the legal and other options available.

Possible Topics to Cover	Sample Prompting Questions / Advocate Notes
1. Introduction	
◗ Introduce yourself	◗ I'm Janice. I'm an advocate with the Family Peace Center. My job is to…
◗ Explain purpose of the discussion from advocate's perspective	◗ I'm here to listen to you, to try to find the help you ask for, and to offer information that might make things better for you and your family.
◗ Logistics	◗ Interpreter needed? How much time do you (the advocate) have? Does the victim have? If in person and the children are with her, are the children old enough and is it OK with her if they wait in the play area? Make sure the children know where their parent is and how to find her or be brought to her.

Possible Topics to Cover	Sample Prompting Questions / Advocate Notes
2. Victim's perspective, her risk analysis and current safety plan	Ask open-ended questions, listen to the answers and as the victim shares information, ask clarifying and follow-up questions. Ask how the victim responded to threats and risks, what strategies and services she's tried to use in order to identify her past and current safety plans for staying, staying in contact, or leaving. Explain your confidentiality policy. Some sample prompting questions to foster discussion are included. Do not go through them as a checklist.
	Start with open-ended questions such as: What brings you to an advocate? How can I help?
◗ **Relationship, partner**	◗ Tell me about him/her. What's he/she like? What's it like to live with him/her? What's it like when you see (have contact with) him/her?
◗ **Children** Inform parent of mandated reporting issues when necessary and relevant to your discussion. Explain your reporting procedure. Inform parent about the resources, support, options, and advocacy you will offer if mandated reporting is necessary.	◗ Tell me about your kids. How are they doing? What do you love about your kids? What about them makes you happy? What do they like to do? What are they good at? Does anything worry you about them? ◗ How can I help you? ◗ What's their relationship like with their dad? With your partner (if he's not their dad)? ◗ Other moms have told me their partners are sometimes mean to their children, do you ever worry about that? ◗ Has your partner ever hurt your children? If so, can you tell me more about that? ◗ Has he ever threatened to take them away? To call child protection? To keep them from you? Has he ever used the kids to control you? Or get to you? ◗ Do you ever worry about leaving them alone with him? ◗ Is there anything about your relationship with your children that you don't like or want to improve? ◗ Does he treat your other children (from a different father) different than the children you have together? ◗ What do you want for your children? ◗ Is there anything else you want to tell me that we haven't talked about?

Possible Topics to Cover	Sample Prompting Questions / Advocate Notes
◗ **Money, housing, job**	◗ How's your financial situation? Are you able to pay the bills? How does your partner help or hurt your finances?
◗ **Violence**	◗ What happens when things get bad? What do you do when your partner is like that?
◗ **Health/mental health, including effects of violence**	◗ How are you doing with all this? Is there someone you talk to for support?
◗ **Family/friends**	◗ Tell me about your family. How is your partner's relationship with your family? With your friends? How is your relationship with his family? With his friends?
◗ **Legal-Criminal, civil, legal status, immigration**	◗ Have the police ever gotten involved with your family? How'd they get involved? Did you call them? Did your partner call them? Has anyone ever been arrested? Would you ever call the police? When? Are you or your kids involved with any court cases right now? How long have you/your partner lived in the U.S.?
3. Risk Review	
◗ **Understand the victim's perspective**	◗ What is she worried about? How does she view the violence? How does she perceive the risks? What do they mean to her? What priorities does she have? What scares her? Why? Why not? When? How does she think the children are doing? What decisions has she made about contact with her partner? Why has she made those decisions?
◗ **Check your own perspective**	◗ What risks to the victim and to her children do you identify? Are they different from her view? Why?
◗ **Try to form a shared perspective**	◗ Respect victim's perspective, offer information in a way that supports each victim's culture, decisions, and coping mechanisms. Include review of possible life-threatening danger or serious risks to children. If present, offer enhanced advocacy.

Possible Topics to Cover	Sample Prompting Questions / Advocate Notes
4. Explore victim's resources and other options and safety strategies relevant to victim's needs and safety plan	
Victim's Resources Some of this information will come out as you explore a client's past and current safety plans.	
◗ **Knowledge, skills, training, life experience**	
◗ **Family, friends, neighbors**	
◗ **Home, money, financial assets, insurance**	
◗ **Job, employer**	
◗ **Religious institution, faith**	
◗ **Partner**	Her partner may offer resources as well as risks. Always analyze with client the potential risk of using partner as a resource
Social Service, Community, Legal, and Government Options Ideally, a separate resource list would be developed ahead of time and include up-to-date information and contacts. You will also need to explore with the victim whether she is eligible for certain programs and options. For example, she and her partner would need to be income eligible for means-tested programs.	
◗ **Domestic violence programs**	advocacy, shelter, support groups, children's programs, hotline, programs that work with those who batter
◗ **Housing**	rental assistance, housing advocacy, homeless shelters, homelessness prevention programs, advocates responding to housing discrimination
◗ **Employment, financial**	job training programs, employee assistance programs (EAPs), community colleges, worker's compensation, unemployment compensation, employee benefits, asset development programs (IDAs), banks/loans

Possible Topics to Cover	Sample Prompting Questions / Advocate Notes
Children	emotional support and connection from an adult consistently in her/his life, schools, child welfare programs, pediatric counseling/programs, parenting support, fatherhood programs, supervised visitation, children's groups, behavioral health programs for children
Community Services	soup kitchens, food banks, religious institutions, fatherhood programs, re-entry programs, couples and marriage programs
Culturally-Specific Programs, such as African-American, Latino, persons with disabilities, same sex couples	immigrant/refugee programs and advocates, programs focusing on particular populations or cultures, social support, legal representation, programs that respond to discrimination, religious institutions
Health, mental health, and substance abuse programs	community clinics, school-based clinics, AA/NA, Alanon, therapists, programs for trauma survivors, suicide hotlines, clergy, support groups
Legal	arrest, protective orders, divorce, custody, child support, financial orders, batterer intervention, police, VAWA immigration provisions, victim compensation, restitution, legal services representation, defense counsel/public defender, if arrested
Government benefits	TANF, WIC, SSI, SSDI, Medicaid/Medicare, housing programs, unemployment compensation, worker's compensation
5. Develop mutual understanding of plan and identify next steps for implementation.	
Next steps	What will you do, what will victim do Coordination with other advocates/interveners - Informed consent to talk with them and coordinate advocacy/services Referrals based on her priorities and eligibility
Contact	How and when to contact you and for what reasons; other assistance options if you are unavailable or not the person who can help; How you can safely contact her
Enhanced advocacy steps if serious risks to children, and/or life-threatening danger	Follow through and follow up on key safety strategies.

Appendix 2
Resources

Websites

- Family Violence Prevention Fund – *www.endabuse.org*
- MINCAVA: Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse - *www.mincava.umn.edu*
- VAWnet: National Online Resource Center on Violence Against -*www.vawnet.org*
- Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence Publications -*www.vawnet.org (click NRCDV Publications)*

Safety Planning/Woman-Defined Advocacy Approach

- *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*, by Jill Davies, Eleanor Lyon, and Diane Monti-Catania, Sage Publications, 1998.
- For more information about the importance and challenges of advocacy with victims in contact see: *When Battered Women Stay…Advocacy Beyond Leaving* a BCSDV paper by Jill Davies, available at: VAWnet.org.

Children and Mothers

- *Advocacy Matters: Helping Mothers and their Children Involved with the Child Protection System*, Family Violence Prevention Fund
- *Supervised Visitation Programs: Information for Mothers Who Have Experienced Abuse*, by Jill Davies, FVPF, 2007.

Partners, Fatherhood, Batterer Intervention

- For more information on BIP research, visit *www.biscmi.org/aquila*
- Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community – *www.dvinstitute.org*
  - Safe Return Initiative – prisoner re-entry and domestic violence
- CFFPP: Center for Family Policy & Practice – *www.cffpp.org*
  - *Collaboration and Partnership: Fatherhood Practitioners and Advocates Against Domestic Violence Working Together to Serve Women, Men, and Families: A Guidebook*, by Jacquelyn Boggess, Rebecca May, and Marguerite Roulet, CFFPP, 2007.

Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Trauma

- National Training and Technical Assistance Center of Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health (NTTAC): *http://www.dvmhpi.org*
- *Helping Sexual Assault Survivors with Multiple Victimizations and Needs: A Guide for Agencies Serving Sexual Assault Survivors*, by Jill Davies, available on *VAWnet.org*

Your Agency

- *Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence: A Leadership and Organizational Guide*, by Deborah Linnell, NRCDV, 2008.

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The Family Violence Prevention Fund works to prevent violence within the home, and in the community, to help those whose lives are devastated by violence because everyone has the right to live free of violence.

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