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## *Do's and Don'ts of Handling Domestic Violence Victims*

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### DO

- Explain the services available in a simple and direct manner.
- Prioritize the victim's needs.
- Express concern for their safety and that of their children. Empower the victim with information that increases their choices.
- Be aware of your own attitude, experiences and reactions to abuse. It is appropriate to disagree with the victim's behavior and/or attitude while remaining objective, empathetic and understanding.
- Help the victim understand the danger and repetitiveness of the violence.
- Encourage the victim to take small steps, which will promote independence and build self-confidence.
- Take into consideration cultural values and beliefs.
- Challenge any efforts on the victim's part to justify the abuse through religion.
- Convey fears for the victim's safety and respect their reasons for staying. Separation from the abuser can be the most dangerous time for the victim.
- Define your role as a court official; be realistic about what you can and cannot do with regards to the relationship.
- Recognize that the victim's reactions and responses may change frequently and be unpredictable. Reactions will range from resistance to cooperation.
- Express your concerns if the situation is lethal and take appropriate action.
- Be patient and honest with the victim.
- Emphasize the abuser's responsibility for his/her own choices.
- Expect the "honeymoon" period to emerge following an abusive episode.
- Challenge the victim's explanation of the incident and openly ask if their partner is hurting them. The approach must be sensitive and not threatening in nature.
- Be honest with the victim, especially about confidentiality issues.

### DON'T

- Assume that battered women know about their options and the services available.
  - Overload the victim with services and decisions.
  - Ever ask the victim why they stay. This is a shaming remark, which insinuates the victim is at fault. Leaving does not always solve the problem.
  - Impose your own values and make quick judgments. Your reaction to the victim's responses will be communicated strongly.
  - Expect the victim to exaggerate or invent the violence.
  - Try to rescue the victim.
  - Lump all victims into one category.
  - Reject the woman's religion or ignore references to religious beliefs.
  - Convey disappointment if the victim chooses to stay. This can elicit feelings of failure and worthlessness.
  - Get caught up in the role of marriage counselor, mediator and/or referee.
  - Become cynical with the victim's failure to take the action or respond the way you believe they should. Your frustration can result in victim blaming and impact your ability to intervene effectively.
  - Ignore or minimize the potential dangerousness of the situation.
  - Expect instant decision-making by the victim or contribute to unrealistic expectations.
  - Let the victim blame themselves or other factors for the abuse.
  - Delay in responding to a reported incident of violence. Timing is a key factor in gathering evidentiary information.
  - Accept unexplained injuries accompanied by implausible reasons.
  - Make a promise you can't keep.
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