

## **Process of working with domestic abuse – the three-step approach : receive, reassure, respond**

### **1 Receive**

- Listen, do not look shocked or disbelieving.
- Do not be judgmental.
- Take what they are saying seriously and believe them, tell them you are glad they told you, that they are not alone and it is not their fault.
- Don't make the child or victim feel bad, for example, by saying something like, "You should have told me earlier."

### **2 Reassure**

- Stay calm, tell them that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Acknowledge how hard it must have been to tell you.
- Tell them that they are not to blame.
- Empathise – but don't tell them how they should be feeling.
- Don't promise confidentiality – explain that only those that need to know will be told.
- Be honest about what you can and can't do.

### **3 Respond**

- Don't interrogate – let them tell you as far as possible.
- Record the date and time and any information given to you.
- Always use the words said to you; never interpret what was said and put it in your own words (this information could be used as evidence).
- Make a note of any injuries you have seen or been shown; this is very important as bruises, cuts, marks, etc tend to heal and this could be used as evidence.
- Record what you did next and with whom you shared the information – ensure that all this is in line with your organisation's policies and procedures.
- Sign and date everything that you record.
- Don't criticise or judge the abuser – the child or young person may have feelings for him or her; remember, abuse often happens by someone known and trusted by the child or young person.
- Try to follow things through yourself so they don't need to repeat their story to other staff – again, only if this is in line with your child protection policy and procedure.
- Explain what will happen next – who may want to speak to the child/young person further; if it is safe, the non-abusing parent or carer might also be informed (but always take great care where there is domestic abuse) – the police might also be informed.

## **Practice Tips**

When talking to the non-abusive parent, it can help to ask:

- Do you think he/she will seriously injure you or the children? Why do you think that?
- When were you most frightened or injured by him/her?
- Are things getting worse? Describe the pattern of the abuse (frequency, type, severity, escalation). The first, worst and last time the abuse took place? What happened leading up to this?
- It is also useful to discuss any protective strategies that the victim or children may have used in the past. Try to recognise and highlight the strengths that she/he is already taking to protect herself/himself and the children. Instead of asking “why don’t you leave”? ask why she/he stays. This can help you build a picture of the barriers she/he faces to leaving.
- It is really important to examine the power, control and coercive dynamics of a relationship to avoid focussing solely on the incidents of violence.
- Remember – many victims will feel totally trapped and not see any realistic escape from their situation. They are often too scared and exhausted to have the belief they can do anything about it. Be aware of that and build their hope.
- Be aware that the majority of people will minimise what is happening, it is important to build up trust with them so they can open up more.
- Many victims feel blame, shame and guilt; as practitioners we need to be mindful not to openly shame or blame or retraumatise.
- Abusers are often very convincing and charming and can take people in; this has the effect of making the victim believe it is their fault.
- Bring it back to the child; children living in a household with unhealthy relationships and violence do a lot of “worry work”, can often experience secondary trauma or alternatively they learn what they live and violence becomes their “normal” currency in their relationships.