

EMPOWERMENT IS THE CORE OF ADVOCACY



In the empowerment model, a woman seeking help is assumed to be a basically healthy person who needs understanding, concrete information, support and resources to make changes.

You should consciously reinforce the expectation that a woman who has been battered can—and will—take charge of her own life.



This is an adaptation of the “Empowerment Wheel” developed by the Domestic Violence Project, Inc., in Kenosha, WI, and is based on the “Power and Control and Equality Wheel” developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, MN.

A GUIDE TO WORKING WITH WOMEN IN CRISIS



The written Japanese *kanji* expression for “crisis” is composed of two characters. Taken separately, one means “opportunity,” the other means “danger.” Crisis can thus be a time of danger or vulnerability that offers an opportunity for change and growth.

► REMAIN CALM

Fear is contagious, and many women in crisis have enough fear bottled up to last a lifetime. By emotionally reacting to a woman’s fear you might limit your own ability to think clearly. The best ways to combat your fear are to be well-informed on procedures and resources, know yourself and learn to gauge your own emotional reactions, and get to know the woman you are working with so you can help her separate objective reality from her immediate sense of fear.

► LET WOMEN DECIDE THEIR OWN PACE FOR CHANGE

Allow women you are helping to decide on their own plan of action. Some women in crisis have never recognized their own resources. Others have lost touch with their resources. Respect and believe in a woman’s capacity to change and grow.

► EXPLAIN ALL KINDS OF INFORMATION THOROUGHLY

Don’t assume that women know about their rights or available services. Don’t talk down to women, but do be thorough in explaining information about your services and other community resources. If a woman looks or sounds confused, ask if she has any questions. Listen to her. Remember that she is the expert on her situation.

► DO NOT IMPOSE YOUR OWN VALUES

This does not mean you cannot express concern about a woman’s choices if you believe she is in danger, but it does mean you must be careful not to reject her even if you disagree with her behavior. Understanding the dynamics of domestic violence can help you avoid anger and despair when women struggle with decisions about ending a violent relationship or “giving it one more try.”

► ENCOURAGE EACH WOMAN TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR HER FUTURE

There might be a tendency for you to want to do things for her that she can do for herself. Even though you can and should help her, she will become stronger and more self-sufficient as she assumes responsibility for her own life.

► DON’T CONVEY DISAPPOINTMENT IF A WOMAN RETURNS TO AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

She will have enough conflicts about her decision. She might feel like she is failing you. You can point out your concerns about her safety while still accepting her. Respect her decision and remind her that you are available if she needs you in the future. Always work with her to create a safety plan.

► BE ABLE TO TOLERATE YOUR OWN ANGER AND THE WOMAN’S ANGER

Have some personal outlets for your anger, anxiety and frustrations. You will be better equipped to help women in crisis if you can avoid “burn out” and overwhelming stress. Talk to other staff members or domestic violence program advocates if you need help dealing with your anger or a woman’s anger about the violence she has survived.

► MINIMIZE EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

Avoid focusing on your own personal history. If you are distant, however, the woman you are trying to help might feel hurt. Strive for a comfortable balance. Answer her questions about you with minimal detail and turn the conversation back to her life. Convey warmth, respect and concern.