

Family Violence Awareness A Response Protocol Manual

Includes:
**Final Research Report
Bibliography**

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Abstract:

This protocol document is to serve as a response guideline for organizations that may need to react to the disclosure of women abuse, but who are not professional counselors. Thus, it is meant to be used in conjunction with a variety of other professional tools and local services. The protocol offers questions that can be used for broaching the subject with women suspected of being abused. It details the verbal acknowledgement and type of atmosphere you should create to reassure and make abused women feel comfortable. The guide also outlines how to respond if it is suspected that children are implicated in the abuse, or if the child is reporting a women's abuse case. In addition to providing a supportive, safe environment and referrals to other resources, the protocol guide provides additional options for dealing with abused women. For instance, the organisation's staff can help an abused woman develop a safety plan of action for her own protection and the protection of her children. The staff can also provide a Self Assessment Questionnaire so that the woman can evaluate and reflect on her own safety.



**Responding to Women Abuse
Protocol**

(April 2002)



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Purpose

It is important to consider that not all women's experiences of abuse are the same; therefore, the responses to the disclosure of women abuse may differ.

Peterborough Family Resource Centre (PFRC) Staff act as advocates on behalf of women. PFRC staff are not specially trained counsellors in dealing with women abuse, and for that reason they refer women to agencies where they can get professional help. Thus, this procedure serves as a general guideline for PFRC staff in responding to the disclosure of women abuse, and is to be used in conjunction with the Wife Assault manual.

What do you do if you suspect a woman is being abused?

Many women do not get asked about the situation of their relationship and may feel relieved to express their distress (if any) when asked. A woman may feel ashamed or shy to ask for help if she needs it. It is important to ask clear and direct questions. Try to be receptive to the way she may be feeling, let her know that the reason why you ask her questions is because you are concerned for her well being, and the well being of her children.

If you are concerned about a woman who hasn't shown up at the PFRC in awhile you may wish to take a proactive approach by calling her at home to see how she is doing. By doing this PFRC staff show that they are genuinely concerned about a women's well-being, and if a women is distressed she may feel more comfortable talking to PFRC staff.

These are some types of questions that may help to identify the existence of abuse:

1. How are you doing?
2. You seem (distracted, anxious, worried), has something happened to upset you?
3. How are things at home?
4. How is your relationship with your husband/boyfriend/partner going?
5. Has he ever hurt you or your children?
6. What happens when you argue with you husband/boyfriend/partner?
7. How do the arguments usually end?
8. Does he ever hit you?
9. Does he throw things?

10. Do you feel safe at home?¹

If a woman hesitates or is reluctant to talk, let her know that your concern is for her safety and well-being, and that of her children.

Response to Disclosure of Abuse

- Ensure a safe, private and supportive environment.
- Acknowledge her response:
 - Tell her you believe her and that it is safe to talk about it here.
- Reassure her by letting her know (FAH)
 - It is not her **Fault**; she does not deserve to be hurt, no matter what the issue was; assault and threats of violence are crimes.
 - She is not **Alone**; abuse is a problem for many women.
 - **Help** is available - there are safe places to stay, legal help, and people to talk to who have helped other women experiencing abuse at home.

It is important to let a woman know that you are not a professional counsellor. You can give her a referral number if she wants, and let her know she can make phone calls from the centre.

You can also offer to call on behalf of the woman in order to make sure she talks to the right person without having to repeat her story over again with different people.

Reassure her that you are there to support her if and when she wants to talk.

Please consult the "Local Resources for Abused Women" for the appropriate referral numbers depending on the kind of help a woman needs.

¹ MacDonald, V. Wife Assault: A Guide for Family Resource Centres. Toronto: The Macaulay Child Development Centre, 1999.

Questions to ask an abused woman to identify the safety risk of her children

1. Where were your children the last time you were hit?
2. Do your children try to stop the violence or help you in anyway? How?
3. Have your children been hurt "accidentally"? What happened exactly?
4. How do the children feel about what is going on between you and your partner?
5. Have you talked to your children about what is happening?
6. How do you protect your children from the violence?²

Assessing Children's safety

PFRC staff, by law are required to contact the Children's Aid Society (CAS) if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has or may suffer from physical, sexual, emotional harm or neglect.³

If a Child discloses Wife Abuse

- Listen. Be aware of the child's age and skills. Use the child's language.
- Ask Questions that let the child tell the story in his/her own words, i.e.,
 - Can you tell me what happened?
 - What happened next?
 - How did you get that bruise?
- Do not ask questions because you want to try to prove child abuse (see *Assessing Children's Safety* above).
- Let the child know that this has happened to other children, without minimizing the child's own experience.
- Reassure and support the child using phrases such as:
"I'm glad you told me. You did the right thing";
"I believe you"; "it's not your fault".

² MacDonald, V. Wife Assault: A Guide for Family Resource Centres. Toronto: The Macaulay Child Development Centre, 1999.

³ Peterborough Family Resource Centre. Policies and Procedures. *Policy: Child Abuse Reporting*, PGM-1-10. April 2001.

Most children are protective of their parents and may be reluctant to disclose abuse or neglect. When they do disclose abuse, it is likely to be at a time of crisis (i.e. police intervention, admission to a shelter or extreme trauma).

Do not show horror, shock or disapproval of the parents, the child or the situation. Stay calm. The child may be expressing their feelings with you because they feel safe to do so. Explain to the child that you want to get help for his/her parents, and that you want to ensure his/her safety.

Tell your team leader about the disclosure so that staff can be supported, when calling CAS and in the writing of the Serious Occurrence Report to the Ministry of Community and Social Services as outlined in the reporting Child Abuse Policy (PGM-1-10).

Meanwhile, you can work on building a positive relationship with the child's mother. When she feels comfortable talking to you about the situation, her comfort gives the child permission to talk about it too.

Additional Options

1.) Safety plan information

As stated earlier the role of PFRC staff is to act as an advocate on behalf of women who are abused. PFRC staff provides referral numbers, support, and a safe environment to talk. However, if an abused woman is uncomfortable or not ready to get professional help PFRC staff may provide her with safety plan information.

The safety plan can help a women begin to develop a plan of action to protect herself and her children. Please refer to page 25 of the Wife Assault Manual for a sample plan.

2.) Self-Assessment

The Self Assessment Questionnaire provides an opportunity for an abused woman to consider and describe her particular safety issues. Through the questions, she can identify issues of critical importance to managing her current situation and creating a safer life for her and her children. It can assist the woman to reflect on her situation, organize and articulate her feelings as well as, to clarify her strengths, needs and opportunities.

If she contacts a community agency, this process may help her to be as clear as possible about what she needs. Even if there is no contact with an agency, using the self-assessment questionnaire can help women plan and organize steps for the future.⁴

****See the Appendix for a copy of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire.**

⁴ Women Abuse Council of Toronto. Creating Safety: Tools to Promote a Safe and Coordinated Response to Women's Safety. Toronto, 2000.

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Appendix
-Self-Assessment Questionnaire-

Personal Safety

1. How do you feel about yourself?
2. Do you feel safe?
3. Are you still with your partner?
4. What happens when your (ex) partner gets angry?

Is there physical abuse/violence?

Is there verbal and/or emotional abuse?

5. What do you do when you feel unsafe around your (ex) partner?
6. What are you scared about in relation to your own life and situation?
7. Are you involved with the Criminal Justice System?

Other Aspects of Personal Safety - Independence and Decision Making

13. Describe your feelings of independence. Do you feel you are independent?
Mostly? Sometimes? Never?
14. Describe decision making within your family.

How does it happen?

Is there any negotiation?

Does one person make all the decisions?

If so, who and for what?

Impact and Concerns about Children

15. What are you concerned/worried about in relation to your children?
16. Do you have on-going contact with the abuser?
17. Do you have to deal with access visits with your (ex) partner?

Knowledge

24. Do you feel you know about your rights?
25. Do you feel you have adequate information to be safe and/or make the necessary changes?

What information do you need?

26. What do you need to get on with your life?
27. Has there been a change (or changes) in your life?
28. What positive and negative experiences have you had due to the changes in your relationship with your partner?
29. If you are involved with a new partner, do you have any concerns about his safety because of your relationship?