

A GUIDE FOR ANTI-TRAFFICKING PROGRAMS WORKING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTERS

Domestic violence (DV) shelters are places of refuge, and typically intended as a short-term, crisis response for individuals fleeing intimate partner violence. DV shelters offer immediate lodging, safety, and supportive services, such as case management, counseling, and legal assistance for survivors and sometimes their children. DV shelters may also be able to serve survivors of human trafficking, especially those who have experienced both human trafficking and intimate partner violence.

Developing a collaborative partnership between your organization and a DV shelter prior to referral is essential. As an advocate you can help facilitate a trauma-informed process by ensuring informed consent and providing ongoing services while the survivor is in shelter and after they have exited to the community.

Advocates can help a survivor assess if a domestic violence shelter may be a good option for them by discussing potential expectations, such as shelter rules. If the survivor has children, verify with the DV shelter if there are any age limitations, as some shelters only house children up to 18 years of age. Additionally, some shelters prohibit any use of drugs or alcohol. Some survivors may have been introduced to substances by their trafficker as a form of control and subsequently developed an addiction. Alternatively, survivors may utilize substances as a coping mechanism. Although shelters may have guidelines around substance use, federally-funded DV programs cannot withhold services from persons using alcohol or drugs off the program property.

POLYVICTIMIZATION

Survivors of trafficking may have experienced other forms of trauma and violence, such as family violence, child abuse, domestic violence, or sexual assault. The trafficker may be an intimate partner or family member. It is important for service providers to be aware of the intersections of human trafficking and other crimes. Survivors may be eligible for additional services due to their polyvictimization. Service providers can explore available options with the survivor and allow them to choose what services they would like to access.

FIND YOUR LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM

Each state has a domestic violence coalition that can share information about local DV shelters. Find your coalition at: <https://nnedv.org/content/state-u-s-territory-coalitions>.

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WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE PRIOR TO MAKING A REFERRAL?

It is important to keep in mind that shelter may not be a good fit for every survivor of trafficking. Some shelters may have rules that can be re-traumatizing for trafficking survivors, such as curfews and chores which may resemble their trafficking situation. Additionally, domestic violence shelters may not accept, or be prepared to serve, survivors of labor trafficking, male survivors, or transgendered survivors.

As you consider making a referral, you can ask questions such as:

- **Does the shelter have bilingual staff?**
 - Survivors of trafficking, especially those who are foreign nationals, may have limited English proficiency and may require services in their preferred language.
 - If bilingual staff are not available, are telephonic or in-person interpretation accessible?
 - Are there limits to the interpretation, such as offered languages, limited hours or only available telephonically?
- **What kind of specific services are needed by the survivor after moving in; what services could I, as a service provider, make available for the survivor?**
 - As an anti-trafficking service provider, you and the survivor may find that it would be beneficial to continue to provide case management and support while the survivor is in shelter.
- **What services are provided by the DV shelter (either in-house or by referral)?**
 - Identify which services are provided through the shelter and which services you can continue providing.
 - Communicate with the shelter staff to prevent duplication of services and understand what the shelter's expectations are.
 - Many shelters provide programs in house. Some services include:
 - Case management
 - Counseling/mental health care
 - Health care (including vision and dental)
 - Legal services (immigration, family law, employment law, post-conviction relief, criminal representation, etc.)
- **What rules and policies will the survivor have to abide by during their stay?**
 - Some common policies include:
 - Maintaining a curfew
 - Mandatory support group or individual therapy participation
 - Assigned chores within the shelter
 - No visitors
 - Will survivors want to comply with these expectations? Can the shelter be flexible to accommodate survivors with different needs or circumstances?

- **Have shelter staff received training on working with survivors of trafficking? If not, can your organization provide that training?**
 - It is important for DV shelters to have a basic understanding of human trafficking. If your organization is able to provide training for shelter staff, the shelter will be better suited to meet the needs of the survivors you refer. Consider establishing a collaborative relationship that allows for cross-training between the anti-trafficking program and the DV shelter.
- **What is the average and maximum length of stay at the shelter? Does the shelter assist residents in finding their next housing location before they leave?**
 - It is helpful for survivors to be aware of what to expect during the length of their stay. This can help them have a timeframe to plan for and prioritize next steps.
 - Some shelters may have case managers or housing coordinators that can support survivors in identifying and securing longer-term housing.

LANGUAGE ACCESS

Not all shelters are prepared to accommodate the language needs of survivors. Some shelters have been known to refuse placing an individual because they can't accommodate a survivor's language. Service providers can connect with local language access program(s) to ensure that a survivor is served in their preferred language.

If the shelter is receiving government funding, they are obligated to provide language interpretation services under Title VI. While the practicality of navigating through this is difficult, it must be noted that survivors have protected rights.

CONSIDERATION AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Special considerations and cultural needs such as food may be identified before the survivor enters shelter. Many domestic violence shelters provide meals for the residents, however, a survivor may want to prepare their own food. Some shelters have kitchens available to residents to prepare their own meals. It is also important to address religious preferences with the shelter to allow survivors to continue religious practices.

Survivors from the LGBTQ+ community may experience barriers such as misgendering or feeling unsafe in certain settings. As an advocate, you can discuss the needs of the survivor and find opportunities to collaborate with the shelter to address these.

POTENTIAL SHELTER POLICIES

Each shelter will have its own set of policies, therefore it is important to contact the local shelter to understand what those entail. Some of these rules may re-traumatize a survivor of trafficking. The following are examples of potential rules:

Confidentiality

Some shelters may not disclose their locations to protect the safety of the residents. This means that individuals staying in the shelter may not have visitors at the shelter or may be restricted to visitors who agree to not disclose the location of the shelter. Additionally, shelters may have restrictions around cell phone use inside the shelter.

Safe Location

A survivor may feel safe in a given location, but shelter staff may believe that proximity to the location where trafficking occurred may compromise the site's confidential location. This could lead to an administrative discharge or may prevent a survivor from being admitted into the shelter. Anti-trafficking service providers are encouraged to develop relationships with DV shelters in the area to ensure that the survivor's wishes are respected. As an advocate you can engage with the shelter to provide training and case consultation on meeting the survivor where they are at and identify additional safety planning steps that can allow the survivor to reside where they feel the most comfortable.

Curfews

Some shelters have strict curfews which may feel re-traumatizing to survivors since it may feel familiar to control utilized in their trafficking situation. If a survivor needs to stay out later than the curfew, they should communicate with shelter staff.

Absences

Depending on the program, one absence from shelter might mean an administrative discharge. Anti-trafficking providers can help inform survivors of these policies and develop a relationship with the shelter to advocate for the needs of trafficking survivors.

Shared Spaces

Many shelters have a shared bedroom and/or communal setting. It is important to speak with the survivor about shared space. Will it affect them and do they have any concerns?

Programmatic Expectations

Some shelters require that survivors be involved in shelter activities, such as chores or case management. Service providers can work with the shelter to provide support to survivors during their stay and reduce potential re-traumatization. Addressing practices such as mandatory mental health treatment, mandatory protection orders, required sobriety, or restricted communication with family/friends/community supports may be helpful in advocating for the survivor's needs.

TIPS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Networking is key. It is important to familiarize yourself with the shelter and its staff. Start by participating in your state's domestic violence coalition. Building rapport can lead to long-term collaborative partnerships.
- DV shelters are typically able to take referrals any time of the day or night. If the survivor has an urgent shelter need, a domestic violence shelter may be a good option. DV shelters may require the survivor to call and request housing versus receiving a referral from an anti-trafficking program case manager.
- Service providers can advocate for trauma informed practices by providing training for shelter staff. Consider conducting trainings on an ongoing basis due to staff turnover and use of volunteers. Additionally, the DV program can provide training to your team.
- DV shelters do not specialize in working with survivors of human trafficking. However, service providers have an opportunity to collaborate and form partnerships with shelters which can serve as cross-referrals and provide an opportunity to train on screening for domestic violence and human trafficking accordingly.
- Consider developing a partnership that allows for joint case collaboration between the human trafficking agency and the DV shelter. This supports the DV shelter's expertise in meeting the survivor's basic needs such as housing, food, and clothing, while acknowledging that there are human trafficking-specific services that can be best provided by the human trafficking agency.
- Shelter staff may not be aware of triggers when it comes to serving victims of human trafficking. Human trafficking case managers can inform shelter staff about potential triggers, such as assigning chores to a victim of domestic servitude or setting curfews.
- A survivor may need longer than the established shelter stay due to immigration status or other needs. If a survivor feels comfortable sharing this information, you can advocate to have an extended stay. Although there is no guarantee that the shelter will be able to accommodate an extension, it is helpful to flag for the DV shelter.
- The DV shelter will likely have their own intake process, requiring a survivor to retell their story. Service providers can explore having a release of information signed by the survivor that provides necessary information for the intake and minimize potential re-traumatization.