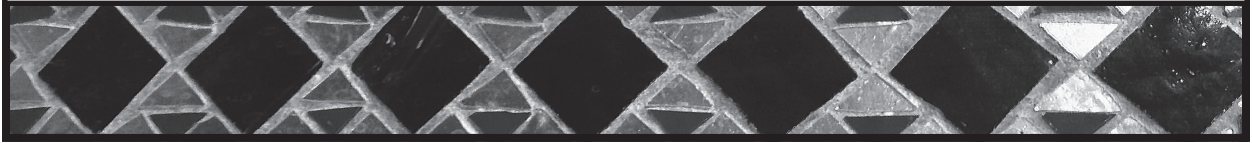




ACTIVITY

9

Developing Response Skills



ACTIVITY:

Exploring safe and effective responses to the trauma of sexual and domestic violence.

BACKGROUND:

Many people struggle with what to say when a victim of sexual or domestic violence turns to them for help. Although there is no “magic formula” for how to respond, Safe Havens has developed response guidelines that can help keep clergy and lay leaders who are first responders on track. This activity will introduce these guidelines and provide participants with the opportunity to wrestle with how to correct course when a response is not helpful.

GOALS:

1. To introduce and explore guidelines that can increase the safety and effectiveness of participants’ responses to survivors of sexual and domestic violence.
2. To provide participants the opportunity to analyze what makes a response helpful or unhelpful.

OBJECTIVES:

After this activity, participants should be able to:

1. Assess the safety and effectiveness of responses to survivors.
2. Use guidelines to strengthen responses to survivors.

Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

ESTIMATED TIME: 45 minutes

MATERIALS:

Flip chart and markers

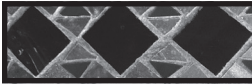
Tape

Safe Havens' toolkit: Pieces of a Bigger Picture. Provide copies of the faith-based resources in the toolkit for every participant. (Safe Havens can mail printed copies of the toolkit to you. Call us at 617-951-3980/3981 or email info@interfaithpartners.org. Also, all the resources in the toolkit can be downloaded in color or black and white from the Safe Havens website at www.interfaithpartners.org.) There is a place on the toolkit resources for you to use a sticker to add your local contact information!

Scenario scripts (see below) and someone to help you act them out. (You can either ask someone else from your staff or identify a willing participant.)

One-page handout, "Initial Responses to Disclosure."

Copies of the scenarios for each small group to work on in the "re-writing" section. At the end of this exercise, we have included facilitator versions of the scenarios that include questions to prompt discussion and points for the facilitator to reinforce, followed by participant versions of the scenarios to hand out to attendees.



Facilitator Talking Points

- ❖ Many of us, even if we are experts, have said things in the past to survivors that we wish we hadn't said. We are all learning! We can begin by forgiving ourselves for what we've done that wasn't so helpful, learning more (which is what you're doing now), and working to be more helpful in the future.
- ❖ One of the things that you listed as helpful in the helpful/not helpful response exercise (if they did) is simple listening.



◇ Write "LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN" at the top of a flipchart page.

- ❖ Many, many survivors say that what they most need when they first reach out for help is someone to listen. This could be called a "ministry of presence," but it's also called "active listening," or "engaged listening." This is where you listen to someone with your heart and soul as well as your ears. There are lots of resources online about this deep listening. We've put together a handout called "Initial Responses to Disclosure" for you that's based on tips from actual survivors about what makes them feel listened to.



◇ Refer participants to the handout for more information, and then move on.

- ❖ Once we have listened, we need to know how to respond as well, and how to support the person over time.
- ❖ It would be great if we could tell you exactly what to say or do, but each situation is so different that there really isn't a single approach that works all the time. So, we've come up with 5 guidelines that you may find helpful.
- ❖ We didn't just make up these guidelines. We are trying to be the anti-abuser, in other words, to do the opposite of what the abuser is doing. So each guideline is meant to undo something the abuser is doing.



◇ Write each guideline on the flip chart (under LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN) as you talk about it.

- ❖ Be victim-centered

- ❖ One survivor commented "I knew what kind of night it would be by the way he drove into the driveway." Another said the same about the way her abuser put his keys down on the counter when he came in. Victims have often had to focus almost exclusively on the abuser or perpetrator in order to protect themselves.

Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

If you are that aware of the perpetrator, you don't have much time to focus on yourself and your own needs. To counteract that, we're going to focus on the victim and their needs.

- ❖ This means that we're not talking about ourselves, we're not trying to distract the victim from what's going on – we're just staying focused on the victim's agenda.

❖ Prioritize the victim's right to safety and confidentiality

- ❖ The abuser or perpetrator has been making the victim as unsafe as possible, through threats, attacks, destruction of things that are important or sacred to the victim, etc. The abuser's message is: "you don't deserve to be safe." Many victims of sexual assault fear they will be killed during the attack.
- ❖ Victims need the affirmation that they deserve to be safe in their own homes and families. Affirm that domestic and sexual violence can be scary. Ask if there is anything you can do to help the survivor feel safe and secure.
- ❖ Review your confidentiality protocol, and any limits on your confidentiality (for example, if you are mandated to report child abuse).

❖ Don't tell the victim what to do

- ❖ Victims of domestic violence are often heavily controlled and monitored. One victim reported that she had to ask permission to go to the bathroom. Victims are often not allowed to write checks, use money, drive the car, make decisions, leave the house, talk to certain people, etc. Abuse is fundamentally about control, and that control can often function at a very granular level. The abuser has been controlling the victim's daily activities.
- ❖ Victims of sexual assault are often told not to tell, not to report, not to seek medical help.
- ❖ By NOT telling survivors what to do, we communicate that we believe that they are experts in their own lives and more than capable of making good decisions.
- ❖ This means that the most helpful thing we can do is to provide resources, options, and referrals and let the victim decide what to do next. Support that decision. Let the victim know that this can be a confusing and rapidly changing situation, so if they change their minds about what's best to do, you'll support that decision too.
- ❖ This is called the "empowerment model": it empowers victims to regain control over their own lives, which is what any of us want to do after a trauma.

❖ Don't blame the victim for the abuse or assault

- ❖ Perpetrators blame victims for the abuse and assault.
- ❖ Victims internalize this and blame themselves.
- ❖ We want to counteract that. So, no matter what the victim has done or not done, said or not said, we can continue to remind the victim that there is NO excuse for sexual or domestic violence. No one deserves to be abused or assaulted.

Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

- ❖ Welcome everyone who asks for your help
 - ❖ Sometimes, perpetrators force victims to do things they don't want to do, such as shoplift or take drugs. Also, many of us have made bad decisions and taken wrong turns when we are traumatized.
 - ❖ Since there are no perfect people, there are no perfect victims of abuse. Sometimes, victims self-medicate, self-wound, or do things they are forced to do by the perpetrator.
 - ❖ Victims will do things and make decisions that you don't approve of.
 - ❖ Since they've been living with the perpetrator's judgment and blame, victims don't need to hear that from us. Don't judge.
 - ❖ These guidelines seem pretty straightforward, but it's amazing how fast things can go off the rails.
 - ❖ So, we are going to act out some scenarios that will give you a glimpse into how easy it is for those well-meaning friends and helpers to be unhelpful.
 - ❖ You might think these scenarios are extreme, but they are all based on things that have actually happened, and often happened in faith communities.
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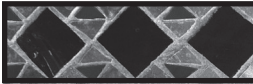
- ◇ *Ask for a volunteer to help you act out the first scenario.*
 - ✧ *After the scenario, ask the group to tell you which guidelines were broken and how. For example, if they say, "this wasn't safe," ask them to tell you specifically why it is unsafe or dangerous.*
- ◇ *Ask for volunteers to act out (or help you act out) the remaining four scenarios. After each scenario, pause to discuss which guidelines were broken. Give the participant volunteers only the scenarios marked "participant version."*
- ◇ *In addition, for each scenario, highlight the discussion points that are included on the "facilitator" copy of each scenario.*
- ◇ *After acting out and discussing the scenarios, break the group into 5 smaller groups or teams and give each one a "participant" copy of a scenario. Ask them to re-write the situation in a way that picks up on the red flags, respects the guidelines, and would be helpful and safe for the survivor of abuse.*

Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

- ◇ *Ask each group to assign someone to report back to the larger group. Give them 7 to 8 minutes to discuss and re-write the scenario. Call the group back together, and allow 3 minutes for each group to report on their new version of the scenario. Intervene if anything is still unsafe or counter to the guidelines.*
 - ◇ *If time permits, ask for questions or concerns, and thank the participants for their time and attention.*
 - ◇ *Re-affirm that the work done in the training today will make a difference in the lives of victims going forward.*
-

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Scenario 1: Facilitator Version

Victim: Hi, Alina, I've been wanting to talk with you. Things aren't so great at home and I'm not sure what to do.

Alina: I'm so glad to see you! I've been meaning to talk to you too. I want to invite you to join the choir.

Victim: Thank you so much, but I'm not so sure. Anthony doesn't like it when I'm not home in the evening.

Alina: Oh, but we really need you in the choir! You have such a great voice! Well, promise me you'll think about it. Now, what did you want to talk about? (Looks at watch.) Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't realize the time. I have a meeting clear across town. See you soon -- and don't forget to think about the choir.

Questions:

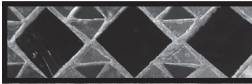
- ❖ What does it mean to be victim-centered?
- ❖ What are the red flags that Alina could have picked up on?

Points for facilitator to reinforce:

- ❖ Victims sometimes "hint" at what's going on with comments like, "things aren't so great at home," or "Anthony doesn't like it when I'm not home in the evening." These are "red flags," and invite the hearer to actively listen.
- ❖ It's always good to ask follow-up questions if you are not sure.
- ❖ If Alina had really heard those red flags, she might have decided to postpone her meeting and stayed to talk to the victim.

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Scenario 2: Facilitator Version

Victim: Janet, I've been coming to you for pastoral counseling for more than a year now. We've worked on a lot of faith questions and childhood issues, and it's been great, but nothing is better at home. Last night, Bob did it again. I can't take it anymore. I think I might call that hotline.

Counselor Janet: Don't do that! They don't have the counseling skills that I have. Heaven knows what they'll say. Why don't you come in with Bob tomorrow so we can talk about the situation together? I can give you my "emergency" appointment slot at 9:30.

Questions:

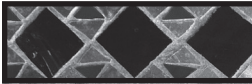
- ❖ What does it mean to support the victim's right to safety?
- ❖ What do you think Counselor Janet's fears about the hotline might be?
Are those fears justified?
- ❖ Is Counselor Janet putting her own needs before the victim's safety?
- ❖ Does Janet understand the seriousness of the situation?
- ❖ Is Janet's suggestion to come in the next day for couples' counseling safe?

Points for facilitator to reinforce:

1. Couples' counseling is unsafe!
2. Confidentiality is critical. By suggesting that the victim reveal to Bob that she has talked to someone outside the relationship about the abuse, Counselor Janet is putting the victim at great risk.
3. Victims often know best what to do; they are the experts in their own lives.

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Scenario 3: Facilitator Version

Victim: I just don't know what to do. Alan is always so mean to me. He hits me, and it seems to be getting worse and worse.

Luis (a friend): How long has this been going on?

Victim: Well, we've been married almost 18 years....

Luis: Good heavens! I never realized! You need to get out of there right now! Go home, pack your stuff, get your kids together, and go to your mother's. You need to leave immediately!

Questions:

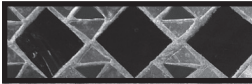
- ❖ Do you think Luis's advice is well meant? Would it be safe for the victim to leave right now? To go to her mother's house?
- ❖ How is the victim feeling after she hears Luis's advice?

Points for facilitator to reinforce:

1. The batterer is always telling the victim what to do. The goal is to be the anti-batterer, to empower rather than disempower the victim. Don't tell the victim what to do, even if the victim ASKS you what to do. Reassure him or her that you think they are very capable of making a good and safe decision.
2. This can be especially difficult for faith leaders, who are often expected to tell people what to do.
3. In cases of sexual assault, victims often feel that their lives are "out of control." Making their own decisions and having those decisions honored is a way for victims to regain control.
4. In cases of domestic violence, leaving is often the most dangerous time. Going to the home of a relative, or another place where the victim may be easily found, may not be safe.
5. Leaving without a safety plan is not safe.
6. Victims know a lot about their abuser and are experts in their own lives.
7. There are no "quick fixes." If there were an easy answer, the victim would have thought of it by now.
8. It has taken a lot of courage for this victim to disclose. She probably hasn't thought past her disclosure. It would be best to start by affirming the courage it took her to get this far, to take the significant step of telling someone what's really going on.

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Scenario 4: Facilitator Version

Victim: Brian gets so mad when I mess up dinner... to the point that I'm scared of him. Last night, he threw his plate across the room, and that's not the first time. He can be so Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde. Maybe if I were a better cook—I'm sure that would help. That's why I stopped by. I wanted to know if you could help me learn how to cook better.

Paula (a friend): Sure! What a great idea! I'm sure that after a couple of cooking lessons, he'll see that you've changed, and everything will be fine at home.

Questions:

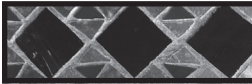
- ❖ What is the assumption behind the victim's first comment? Did Paula make the same assumption?
- ❖ Why do you suppose Paula responded the way she did?
- ❖ Do you see any "red flags" here?
- ❖ Could Paula's response be more effective?

Points for facilitator to reinforce:

1. Perpetrators blame their victims for the abuse. When we fall into that trap, we are reinforcing the perpetrator's power and control.
2. Victims often internalize blame and shame for sexual and domestic violence. Victims often try to change something about themselves to stop the abuse.
3. Victims go to elaborate lengths to appease their perpetrator.
4. It is unhelpful to suggest that there is something that the victim can do to change the abuse or the sexual assault. The victim is not responsible.

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Scenario 5: Facilitator Version

Victim: I am so worried about Peter. He can't control his temper. And he is trying to control everything I do—last night he forced me to watch this awful porn with him online.

Co-worker Jermaine: Oh, no, pornography is terrible! Shame on you! You can't do that and still be MY friend!

Questions:

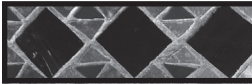
- ❖ Did you hear any red flags here?
- ❖ Why do you suppose Jermaine responded like he did?
- ❖ Did this response help the victim?
- ❖ How could Jermaine have been more helpful?
- ❖ What assumptions did you make about the gender of the victim or the perpetrator?

Points for facilitator to reinforce:

1. Victims are human beings, and no one is perfect. Therefore, there is no such thing as a "perfect victim."
2. No matter where victims are in their lives, our responses are more helpful if we focus on the immediate problem (the domestic or sexual violence).
3. Perpetrators often make victims do things that isolate or alienate them from their friends and family.

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Scenario 1: Participant Version

Victim: Hi, Alina, I've been wanting to talk with you. Things aren't so great at home and I'm not sure what to do.

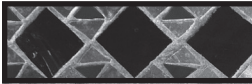
Alina: I'm so glad to see you! I've been meaning to talk to you too. I want to invite you to join the choir.

Victim: Thank you so much, but I'm not so sure. Anthony doesn't like it when I'm not home in the evening.

Alina: Oh, but we really need you in the choir! You have such a great voice! Well, promise me you'll think about it. Now, what did you want to talk about? (Looks at watch.) Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't realize the time. I have a meeting clear across town. See you soon -- and don't forget to think about the choir.

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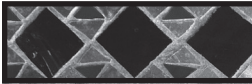
Scenario 2: Participant Version

Victim: Janet, I've been coming to you for pastoral counseling for more than a year now. We've worked on a lot of faith questions and childhood issues, and it's been great, but nothing is better at home. Last night, Bob did it again. I can't take it anymore. I think I might call that hotline.

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Scenario 3: Participant Version

Victim: I just don't know what to do. Alan is always so mean to me. He hits me, and it seems to be getting worse and worse.

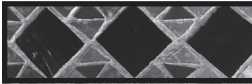
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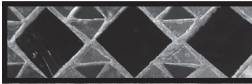
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Victim: Brian gets so mad when I mess up dinner—to the point that I’m scared of him. Last night, he threw his plate across the room—and that’s not the first time. He can be so Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde. Maybe if I were a better cook—I’m sure that would help. That’s why I stopped by—I wanted to know if you could help me learn how to cook better.

Paula (a friend): Sure! What a great idea! I’m sure that after a couple of cooking lessons, he’ll see that you’ve changed, and everything will be fine at home.

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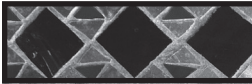
Scenario 5: Participant Version

Victim: I am so worried about Peter. He can't control his temper. And he is trying to control everything I do—last night he forced me to watch this awful porn with him online.

Co-worker Jermaine: Oh, no, pornography is terrible! Shame on you! You can't do that and still be MY friend!

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Initial Responses to Disclosure

First, use attentive body language.

1. DO sit upright or lean forward and nod to show you are engaged.
2. DO maintain consistent, not constant or darting, eye contact.
3. DO NOT make inappropriate facial expressions. (Examples: looking shocked, offended, smiling at something sad, rolling eyes, raising eyebrows in judgment.)
4. DO NOT move your body too much by fidgeting or checking phone or watch.

Second, use verbal skills that encourage the speaker to continue.

1. DO allow silence and convey that you are listening by using encouraging words like “hmmm” and “uh-huh” periodically.
2. DO state/name/reflect back the emotion being described. It might also help you to imagine yourself in the speaker’s place and look at the situation from his/her perspective. (Examples: “Wow – sounds like it was scary for you.” “It seems like you feel really sad about that.” “I feel like that must’ve made you angry.”)
3. DO ask questions if you are confused, and try to ask questions that require more than one word answers. (Instead of “Was that scary?” or “Do you mean it wasn’t that bad?” ask questions like “could you tell me a little bit more about that?” or “What was that like for you?” or “What do you mean when you say _____?”)
4. DO NOT change the topic or ask off topic questions. This may seem like a way to decrease your anxiety or make the other person more comfortable, but it often has the opposite effect.

Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

Third, use words to convey support.

1. DO validate the person's emotions in a genuine tone. (Examples: "If that happened to me, I can imagine I'd feel overwhelmed too." "Given that experience, it makes sense you'd feel/say/do ____." "I think many people with that experience would have felt similarly.")
2. DO point out the person's strengths. (Examples: "I'm amazed at how much courage that took." "You've done a great job at keeping everything in perspective." "I really admire your strength." "You've coped well with this.")
3. DO focus on their experience rather than your own and only give advice when it is requested.
4. DO NOT reassure the person in a way that might minimize their experience. (Examples: "That happened so long ago, maybe it would help to move on." "It's not worth the energy to keep thinking about it." "Don't be scared." "Don't cry.")
5. DO NOT make judgments or evaluations about their responses or decisions. (Examples: "Couldn't you do/say ____ instead?" "I don't think you should worry about it any more." "I think it'd be better for you to ____." "Why don't you ____?")

Melissa Ming Foynes and Jennifer J. Freyd, "Skills Training Materials for Experimental Condition" (2010), adapted with permission by Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence (www.interfaithpartners.org, 617-951-3980, info@interfaithpartners.org). See Melissa M. Foynes and Jennifer J. Freyd, "The Impact of Skills Training on Responses to the Disclosure of Mistreatment," *Psychology of Violence*, 2011, Vol. 1, No. 1, 66-77.

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