

Domestic Violence Screening and Response

Domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual and psychological attacks that adults and adolescents use against their intimate partners. Without intervention, the violence usually escalates in both frequency and severity resulting in repeat visits to the healthcare system.

People affected by abuse can be of any age, gender, race, socioeconomic status or sexual orientation. A disproportionate amount of abuse is directed toward women, children and vulnerable people by male abusers.

1. Screen Patients for Domestic Violence:

- Talk to the patient alone in a safe, private environment. Privacy is paramount, do not screen without it.
- Ask simple direct questions such as:
 - ➔ Because violence is so common in many people's lives, I've begun to ask all my patients about it routinely.
 - ➔ What happens when you and your partner argue?
 - ➔ Have you ever been threatened, hurt, made to feel afraid or humiliated by your partner or someone close to you?
 - ➔ Have you ever been hit, kicked, punched, slapped or choked by your partner?
 - ➔ Are you ever forced or coerced to have sex against your wishes by your partner?

2. Send Important Messages to Patient:

- Offer information and resources about domestic violence to all patients.
- Avoid blaming the patient for abuse. Be non-judgmental.
 - ➔ I am sorry to hear this, I would like to help in any way I can...
 - ➔ You are not to blame.
 - ➔ There is help available.
 - ➔ You do not deserve to be treated this way.

3. Assess Safety:

- ➔ Are you afraid to go home?
- ➔ Have there been threats of homicide or suicide?
- ➔ Are there weapons present in your home?
- ➔ What resources have you used in the past?
What has been helpful?
- ➔ Can you stay with family or friends?
Would you like to go to the shelter?
- ➔ Would you like to talk with the police?

4. Respond to a Positive Screen:

- Provide a list of shelters, resources and hotline numbers for patient to use in the future.
- Offer to allow patient to call the local or national hotline from your office or clinic.
- Involve a domestic violence advocate or social worker if available.
- Provide **National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-SAFE;**
National Sexual Violence Center: (877) 739-3895
- Schedule follow-up appointment.

5. Document Findings:

- Use the patient's own words regarding injury, physical and sexual abuse.
- Legibly document all injuries; use a body map.
- Document screening and referrals offered/provided.

6. Refer to Local Resources:

- If patient is interested and willing, connect to local domestic violence or sexual assault agency
- Make referral to health care entity social worker or employee assistance program, as appropriate.



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