

Strategies for Effective Victim Engagement to Increase Safety
Praxis International audio conference training
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Trainer bio:

Ellen Pence, Ph.D., Executive Director of Praxis International, has worked for over 30 years in efforts to end violence in the lives of women and their children. She was one of the founders of the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, an inter-agency collaboration model used in all 50 states in the U.S. and over 17 countries. She is the chief author and architect of the Praxis Institutional Audit, a method of identifying, analyzing and correcting institutional failures to protect people drawn into legal and human service systems because of violence and poverty. Ellen has worked with supervised visitation centers in over thirty states to assess and redesign policies and practices that centralize safety for battered women and their children. She recently worked with the Center for the Study of Social Policy to conduct an assessment in the State of Michigan to identify the sources of racial disparity in the child welfare system. Currently she is working with a national team of experts to examine custody determination practices within family courts to improve protections for battered women and their children, and is co-leading Praxis' new Advocacy Learning Center initiative to strengthen advocacy programs' skills and capacities in their work toward ending violence against women. Ellen is well-known for her skill in helping administrators and practitioners re-evaluate their conceptual and administrative practices in order to close the gap between what people need and what institutions provide. A leader in both the battered women's movement and the emerging field of institutional ethnography, she is the recipient of numerous awards including the 2008 Society for the Study of Social Problems *Dorothy E. Smith Scholar Activist Award* for significant contributions in a career of activist research. She is the author of two books, five educational curriculums, three organizing manuals and over a dozen scholarly articles on institutional change and advocacy on behalf of battered women and their children.

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Audio conference training outline

Introduction;

1. Practitioner frustration in working with DV victims who do not want to fully engage in using the criminal justice system
2. Advocates' attempts to decrease practitioner frustration without increasing victim response
3. Advocate frustration and need to step back to consider how their strategies may exacerbate problems
4. Victim frustration in losing any sense of control over their "case"
5. The perfect storm scenario results... frustrated practitioners.... Victims who are not acting as partners with practitioners trying to "help" them; advocates who don't have a skillful approach to bridging the gaps

Principles of victim engagement ;

1. Work with victims to see overall patterns of coercion; not just the event prompting intervention. Introduce the concept of "*continuous engagement*"
2. Minimize the need for the victim to confront the abuser directly
3. Treat each interaction with a victim as an opportunity to build a collaborative relationship
4. Be mindful of complexity of each victim's situation. Understand the power of the practitioners in either protecting or further endangering the victim. No intervention is neutral in terms of victim safety
5. Be aware the one of the fundamental purposes of battering is to control what the victim says, thinks, believes, and feels. Interact with this understanding.
6. Engage in dialogue with the victim where both parties add to what is discussed, how it is discussed and the meaning of what is being said.

Applying principles to different practitioners;

1. six principles of victim engagement using examples 911 operator; prosecutor charging ; prosecutor writing presentence investigation; judge at a protection order hearing.
2. Case scenarios
3. Questions after each case

Conclusion; it is the role of each advocate to teach these skills to practitioners in their system, and help them to understand the reasons of how victim engagement increases victim safety .

Victim Engagement Guidelines
St. Paul Police Department Policy and Protocol

1. Work in collaboration with victims, cognizant of the principles of “continuing engagement,” as addressed in the training memo accompanying this protocol.

- Whenever possible, minimize the victim’s need to confront the offender.
- When using information provided by the victim, protect her or him from retaliation.
- Treat each interaction with the victim as an attempt to build collaboration over multiple interventions.
- Be mindful of the complex and often dangerous implications of a victim’s cooperation with the legal system.
- Be aware that the fundamental purpose of battering, which characterizes the majority of domestic violence criminal cases, is to control what the victim says, thinks, feels, and does. Victims are rarely in a position to “tell all,” although they may do so in unguarded moments. Take great care to not endanger victims with what they have shared about the offender, the abuse and their situation.
- Engage in dialogue with the victim , thereby avoiding inadvertently treating her or him simply as an information source.

In order to avoid unintentionally replicating or reinforcing the actions of the abuser, offer a clear alternative to messages that the victim is crazy, at fault, unbelievable, and unable to make decisions and that the abuser is unstoppable.

2. Victim engagement guidelines for patrol officers: In responding to domestic violence–related calls, conducting the on-scene investigation, and interacting with victims and suspects, take the following specific actions, as appropriate to the circumstances of the case and victim safety:

- Do not tell the perpetrator what the victim has told officers.
- Do not ask the victim if she or he:
 - Wants the suspect arrested
 - Will testify in court
 - Will sign a citizen’s arrest form
- Remain at the scene until the likelihood of further imminent violence has passed.
- Recognize that remaining calm and professional even if the victim is upset or hostile will enable officers to obtain better information.
- Recognize that the need for assistance may continue beyond the current incident and that the officer’s response will influence whether the victim will view law enforcement as a resource for ending the violence in the future.
- Reassure the victim that he or she can continue to call law enforcement if necessary. This is especially true for victims who seem hostile to intervention.
- Be cognizant of the victim’s need for privacy and dignity by allowing her or him to change clothes if needed, shielded from on-lookers.
- Obtain a phone number of someone who will always know how to reach the victim and record that number on the Victim Information Form in accordance with department procedure.

- Provide victim with the Victim Information Card that contains information about shelter, orders for protection and other community resources; provides notice of the domestic abuse victim's rights (Minn. Stat. § 629.341 subd.3).
- Recognize that for a variety of reasons a victim may appear hostile to officers even if she or he asked for help. If officers are patient and calm in the face of that hostility it will often dissipate over time; that is, initial hostility is likely to dissipate three or four calls later, but probably not five or ten minutes later.
- Recognize that victims are most likely to disclose abuse to the responding officer immediately following an assault. Most of the information on lethality and risk will be disclosed at this point in time.

3. Victim engagement guidelines for investigators: In conducting the investigation and interacting with victims and suspects, take the following specific actions, as appropriate to the circumstances of the case and victim safety.

- Do not tell the suspect what the victim has told you.
- If circumstances allow, do not tell the suspect you have spoken to the victim.
- Treat each contact with the victim as an opportunity to build a continuing relationship.
- Be patient with victims who may be hostile and less than appreciative of your efforts. Overtime, if treated well, most victims will participate in a collaboration to stop the violence.
- Ensure that the victim knows who you are and how to contact you.
- Encourage the victim to report contact, abusive behavior and/or violations by the suspect.
- Request that the victim report any threats made by the offender for cooperating with the investigation.
- Inform the victim of the importance of keeping a record of mail, voice mail, e-mail, text messages, and other communication and contact from the suspect or others acting on the suspect's behalf.
- Inform victim of the availability of periodic "welfare" checks at her or his residence by officers.
- Problem solve with the victim around enhancing safety as the case proceeds through the legal system.
- If the victim is willing to talk about the full scope of abuse and violence, ask for details and record all credible reports of violence, stalking, coercion, intimidation, and related acts of abuse.
- Inform the victim of the availability of community services that will support and enhance safety.
- Ask open-ended questions, which are more likely to produce information than narrow questions.
- Provide the victim with the phone number of the local advocacy program for safety planning and services. (See appendix, Interventions with Victims of Battering as Suspects or Defendants, for referrals involving victims who are suspects.)
- If the victim and/or witnesses do not speak English, contact appropriate interpreter services
- For follow-up interviews, do not use neighbors or family members (specify local procedures for interpreter services).
- Provide messages of help, reassurance, and protection, using the guidance provided by the training memo accompanying this protocol.