

PROTOCOL FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONTACTS

(Revised September 2025)

GOALS

1. Assess the situation to determine any immediate danger
2. Listen to the client and express empathy throughout the contact as appropriate
3. Offer information about the local domestic violence agency, including services they provide beyond the hotline and shelter, when appropriate
4. To debrief by talking with a supervisor or a colleague when needed
5. Annually review crisis protocols

ASSESS FOR IMMEDIATE DANGER

As soon as it is established that the client (this could be the caller or someone they know) is in a domestic violence situation, assess for safety. Ask the following questions:

1. Are you safe right now?
2. Is your partner there with you?
3. Are you able to speak freely?
4. Do they have access to any weapons right now?
5. Do you need me to contact 911?
6. Do you need emergency medical care?

If the client is in immediate danger, follow the procedure for engaging police and EMS. Use the Tip Sheet entitled “Engaging Police and EMS” that is in the Marker section of the database.

EXPRESS EMPATHY AND PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT

Clients in domestic violence situations will present in a variety of ways: some will clearly be in extreme distress, some will be calm and explain their situation in a matter of fact way and others will be somewhere in the middle. No matter what their demeanor, explicitly express empathy and make encouraging statements throughout the contact as appropriate. You may use some of the sample language below or use your own words that expresses a similar sentiment:

1. I am sorry you are going through this.
2. This is not your fault.
3. You don't have to face this alone.

4. This could happen to anyone, regardless of gender.
5. There is help available.
6. I am so glad that you called.

USING THE TAXONOMY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINES VS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER

In most cases when looking for services for a survivor, it is best to use the taxonomy “DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINES.” In the counties where we provide 211 service, the domestic violence hotline is the number for domestic violence shelter intake. The hotline workers have extensive training and experience working with survivors. They are in a better position to assess the situation and determine if shelter placement is appropriate.

You may have a client you conferenced in to a hotline call back saying the hotline could not help them. The hotline may determine that domestic violence shelter would not be appropriate. If you have a client reach back out saying they were refused service, start by asking them why. If the reason they were refused seems reasonable (for example, the abuser is no longer a threat) provide referrals to other programs that would be relevant to their situation, such as homeless shelters. If the reason they were refused does not seem reasonable, offer to conference in the hotline and advocate for them.

TALK ABOUT ALL OF THE SERVICES OFFERED AT THEIR LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CENTER

Many people are not aware that domestic violence centers generally provide more services than just a hotline or shelter. Some clients will be reluctant to contact their local domestic violence center because they do not want or need immediate shelter. If a client is reluctant, take time to tell them a little bit about other services offered. If the client is interested in any additional services, provide the appropriate amount of detail. The “appropriate amount of detail” will vary based on the situation. For example, someone who is extremely distressed may get overwhelmed if you share too much information. In those situations, it may be more appropriate to offer to email information (if they can safely receive email) or when conferencing to the domestic violence center, tell the hotline worker what additional services the client is interested in receiving. Learning about services offered beyond shelter may be what ultimately makes the client decide to connect with their domestic violence center.

Depending on the county where the person lives, additional services may include:

1. Case Management
2. Legal Assistance
3. Support/ Education Groups
4. Trauma Focused Counseling
5. Supervised Visitation Services

The types of programs offered at each domestic violence center will vary and may periodically change. Read the database carefully when describing services. We do not want to provide anyone, particularly someone in crisis, with incorrect information.

PROVIDE ADDITIONAL REFERRALS AS NEEDED

If caller is not in immediate distress, provide additional referrals as needed.

DISCUSS THE OPTION TO HAVE REFERRALS EMAILED OR TEXTED

Keep in mind, this may not be safe for some clients. The abuser may have access to their email or phone. Ask the client if it would be safe for you to email or text the information to them. You can offer to text or email the information to a safe, trusted family member, friend or other person, if they prefer.

INITIATING A CONFERENCE CALL TO A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

1. Ask the caller if it is okay to conference in the appropriate hotline. Preferably this would be their local hotline, however if they are outside our 211 service area, use the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Tell the caller that if you connect them, their phone records will not show that they called a domestic violence hotline, only that they called 211. *It is mandatory that you offer to conference in the appropriate hotline. The caller may decline, and that is okay, but you must offer them the choice.
2. Let the caller know they will experience a very brief hold during the conference.
3. When connected with the hotline and the caller is on hold, tell the hotline worker you are calling from 211 and you would like to conference in a caller who is in a domestic abuse situation.
4. When conferencing, announce when everyone is on the line. Introduce your caller to the hotline worker. Remind the caller they can call 211 any time, 24/7 to be safely connected to the domestic violence hotline without the hotline showing on their phone records.

WHEN THE DV CONTACT IS A CHAT

Tell the client you would like to connect them to a domestic violence hotline. Preferably this would be their local hotline, however if they are outside of our 211 service area, use the National Domestic Violence Hotline. *It is mandatory that you make this offer. The caller may decline, and that is okay, but you must offer them the choice.

1. Let them know that you can either call them and then connect them to the appropriate hotline or you can provide them with a link that they can click to reach the appropriate hotline.
2. If they would prefer for you to call:

- a. Let them know you will have to disconnect the chat in order to make an outbound call. Tell them their caller ID will display (216) 436-2000. Let them know that this will allow them to safely connect to help without a phone number to a domestic violence hotline appearing on their phone records.
 - b. Once you have the client on the line, proceed with steps 2-4 above.
3. If they would prefer to chat:
- a. Tell them internet usage can be monitored and is impossible to erase completely. However, clearing their browser history may make it a little more challenging for their abuser to discover they have visited a domestic violence website. Ask if this would be safe for them before proceeding. Quick Replies have been added to inContact to help you relay this information. Type “Domestic Violence” in the search box to find them.
 - b. If the client says that this would be safe, provide them with the appropriate link in the chat.
 - c. Tell the client you will wait with them until they confirm someone from the hotline has begun chatting with them.
 - d. Obtain the client’s permission before disconnecting the chat.

DEBRIEF

Contacts relating to domestic violence can be stressful or triggering for some Navigators. If you need to take some time before handling your next contact, put yourself in “me time” and reach out to the Supervisor Line or trusted colleague. You can use our employee assistance program, Assist Now for further support. Go to <https://www.assistnow.org/> for more information about Assist Now.

TIPS

Domestic abuse is more than just physical violence. It is about control. The client may be experiencing emotional abuse, financial abuse, digital abuse, sexual abuse, reproductive abuse and/or stalking.

Many survivors are ashamed due to the stigma of being a victim. This is especially true for men. Reassure them that their situation is not their fault.

Domestic violence can happen in any intimate relationship, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, income level, religion, education, or sexual orientation. Abuse may occur between a married couple, an unmarried cohabitating couple or other dating relationship. It can happen in heterosexual relationships and in relationships where one or both persons identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The most dangerous time for a survivor is when they choose to leave or end the relationship. (This may be when they are speaking with you.) It is also particularly dangerous when they are pregnant.

Acknowledge they are in a difficult/scary situation

Be supportive and listen

Be non-judgmental

Ask permission to connect them to a domestic violence hotline

Do not share your personal stories of abuse with your client in an attempt to build rapport. Your role as a Navigator is to listen, be supportive and offer referrals as needed.

Do not tell them what to do. Offer options and allow the client to make their own decisions. Abuse is about power and control and making decisions for them can only add to the disempowerment they're already experiencing from their partners.

It is not uncommon for there to be domestic violence in households where one or both partners have a problem with gambling. The gambler could be either the abuser or victim. If a Problem Gambling client discloses they are a domestic violence survivor, assess for their safety and refer as appropriate. Provide the National Domestic Violence Hotline for those outside of our 211 service area.

ANNUAL EDUCATION

ADP will prompt staff to read, review and sign off on this crisis policy to promote successful handing of crisis contacts.