

THE **DO'S** AND **DON'TS** OF COMMUNICATION: WORKING WITH SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Do:

- ❖ **Validate the victim/survivor's experiences/feelings:** Let her/him know that what they are experiencing is normal and that they are not "crazy".
- ❖ **Provide the Correct Information:** Admit not knowing the answer to a particular question, if you do not know it. This builds trust between you and the victim/survivor.
- ❖ **Use a moderate rate and volume of speech:** This will make a calm and clear impression on the victim/survivor.
- ❖ **Assume that you do not know the victim/survivor's sexuality:** Ask non-leading questions such as "Do you have a partner?" or "What gender is your partner?" This will reduce the victim/survivor's fear of you judging them if they are not heterosexual. If a victim/survivor is transgender, use the pronoun preferred by the victim when referring to him/her.

Don't:

- ❖ **Don't talk to someone else while meeting with the victim:** This behavior may make the victim/survivor feel unimportant. Instead, give your undivided attention as much as possible.
- ❖ **Don't minimize the abuse/situation:** Regardless of what we may think of the situation, we are not experiencing it. By minimizing the abuse, we reinforce the victim/survivor's belief that either they or their problems are not important or serious. Instead, validate their experience and feelings.
- ❖ **Don't blame the victim for the abuse:** Do not say things like "What did you do to make him/her hit you?" or "Why don't you break up with him/her?" Do not make the victim/survivor feel like you think they are stupid for staying with their abusers, because you will risk wounding their self-esteem even more and reinforce what their abusers are probably already telling them.
- ❖ **Don't offer too many referrals:** Too many referrals may leave victim/survivor's feeling overwhelmed and confused. Referrals should be selected carefully and service providers should explain their reasons for giving a particular referral. Follow up when you give the victim/survivor a referral, as they may not follow through with referrals.

Excerpts taken from *Working with Teenagers Involved in Abusive Relationships: A Curriculum for Training Service Providers Who Work with Teenager*. Victim Services., NYC Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence