

# Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Programs, Policies, and Partnerships

Some populations are more at risk of experiencing domestic violence than others; however, the abusive cycle can be seen among individuals of all cultures, genders, sexual orientations, and family structures. Worldwide, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men experience violence, including domestic violence, within their lifetime (Futures without Violence 2016). Though countries and customs encompass a wide spectrum of relationship dynamics, it is safe to assume that violence and control is used in every culture as a means of maintaining power, among other objectives.

Domestic violence is defined by U.S. Department of Justice as a “pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to **gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner**. ... It includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone” (2015).

While it is widely known that refugees coming from a war-torn or high conflict area are more likely to have experienced violence (Violence 2012), it is difficult to determine the percentage of individuals in abusive relationships after resettling in the U.S. Statistics may vary due to inconsistent reporting and ingrained cultural concepts, such as strict gender roles or definitions of sexuality, that accept violence as a part of life and inter-personal relationships. Furthermore, a lack of community dialogue about domestic violence among refugee communities and with service providers can lead to underreporting of violent acts and a wide knowledge gap of available services. To address this issue around not accessing help, it is important for agencies to build up and maintain a robust network of domestic violence shelters and mainstream partners who can provide culturally sensitive services.

For additional information on types of domestic violence, barriers refugee clients face when accessing services, and safety plan considerations, please see our previous Information Guide **Domestic Violence in a Refugee Context** on our website [here](#).



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This information guide is based on an NPCT webinar on this topic presented by Elena Dineen of Futures without Violence and Limia Obadi of Tapestry Inc.. The webinar is archived on our website, [www.gcifcs.org/refugee](http://www.gcifcs.org/refugee) under [Webinars](#).



# Culture of Safety

Clients ought to feel safe enough to reach out to their resettlement agency, hospital, mental health facility, local law enforcement, or school. In order to accomplish this end goal, perceptions and actions of an organization and its staff need to be in line with an overall culture of safety. **A culture of safety includes but is not limited to honoring confidentiality, developing policies, providing safe spaces, and incorporating training and ongoing dialogue into staff professional development.** The emphasis on an office culture of safety also highlights the impact of individual interactions between refugees and service providers. Even with a policy in place addressing confidentiality, refugee clients may only recognize the way in which a case manager or therapist reacts during a disclosure of past violence. That interaction may also determine whether the survivor will reach out to that staff member for help in the future.

## Confidentiality

Confidentiality plays a vital role when promoting a culture of safety within an organization serving refugee clientele. Often, domestic violence and accessing services for abuse carries a negative stigma within refugee communities. In fact, the negative association can also be experienced as an acceptance of violence as a means of maintaining order and control within a household or community. In order to gain trust and ensure those who need help will reach out, confidentiality must be discussed and adhered to at every level. This includes **regularly reviewing confidentiality protocols** and specific settings where confidentiality is assumed in the U.S. (hospitals, therapy appointments, etc.).

## Policy

Each resettlement agency, hospital, and mental health clinic should have a policy in place that addresses confidentiality in an abusive situation, including **roles of agency staff (specifically when it is ok and necessary to break confidentiality)**. Underscoring the importance of addressing abuse by creating agency policy will help staff and clients understand the severity of domestic violence and positively influence the way abusive situations are addressed.

## Training

**Staff at every level of an organization will need training on definitions, types, and examples of domestic violence** (see Pages 4 and 5 for training tools). Providing detailed education for those working directly with refugees who may be survivors of domestic violence will help in effectively identifying and assisting those in need. As part of staff training, clients should know very specific examples of the consequences and benefits of disclosing domestic violence, especially when it concerns a child. Know your state's mandatory reporting laws and who is a mandatory reporter (see resource link at the end of this guide).

## Ongoing Dialogue

Once staff have completed a comprehensive training, information retention can increase through **periodic refresher courses with highlights from the initial presentation**. One way to complete this is to have regular staff meeting conversations about domestic violence (perhaps request one or two staff members to provide a case example) or individual supervisory discussions.

An ongoing discussion regarding the cross-sections of domestic violence and religion, sexuality, culture, community, and other identities is important to understand how staff and clients are thinking and reacting to this topic and potential violent situations. **As each culture and individual has its own beliefs and thinking surrounding abusive relationships and domestic violence, it is key to evoke those assumptions to allow for honest conversations** and address any misconceptions.

## Safe Space

Create safe space for staff and clients/patients alike to disclose. In many instances, an abuser is a close friend or relative of the survivor, which can create a complicated dynamic between clients and staff, especially if staff are part of the client's community or extended family. **A safe space means staff members will remain professional with clients** (refraining from giving advice, based on previous family conflict) and keep all information private (only sharing with relevant supervisors and legal personnel).

## Individual Interactions

**Model respectful and autonomous language when referring to any client or staff member who is a survivor of domestic violence.** Your staff and your clients will observe the way you discuss and react to violence; and, your behavior may factor into whether they will view you as a viable resource in a time of crisis.



# Partnerships and Community

As with all refugee services, partnerships with mainstream providers and refugee communities is vital to continued success. Without the input of every party involved and affected, it is likely that misinformation will spread throughout refugee communities and service providers. Diversifying the type of partnerships your agency makes gives a comprehensive pool of services for clients to access. Once partnerships have been identified, maintain those partnerships through ongoing education to ensure efficient and culturally appropriate services are being offered to survivors of domestic violence.

## Identify Potential Partners

### Mainstream Partners

Some mainstream organizations include all of the following, though each service may be a separate entity with individual contact persons.

- Domestic Violence Shelters or Temporary Housing
- Legal Services
- Holistic Mental Health Counseling
- Batterer/Perpetrator Classes

### Refugee Communities

Refugee communities will be most familiar with the current perceptions of domestic violence and how to address any service or knowledge gaps.

- Ethnic Community Based Organizations (ECBO)
- Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA)
- Refugee Community Leaders
- Faith-Based or Spiritual Organizations

## Initiate Educational Opportunities

### When Offering Expertise

- Highlight historical and current events that have shaped the culture of each refugee population within your community
- Address common barriers refugees face (comprehensive list available on NPCT's InfoGuide [here](#)) when accessing services for domestic violence within their home
- Include specific examples of ways your agency has provided support to individual clients who experienced violence within their home; and illustrate how the provider can do the same to help eliminate barriers

### When Accepting/Requesting Expertise

- Evoke common interactions (both positive and challenging) providers have had with refugee clients to gauge past reactions and any cultural gaps that can be addressed
- Gather resources partners can provide for survivors, including materials translated into multiple languages
- Appreciate the expertise within the partner's organization, recognizing commonalities of domestic violence that span all cultures

### When Offering Expertise

- Consider separating men and women during trainings, as some cultures are uncomfortable discussing sensitive information in front of genders other than their own
- Replace a title like "Domestic Violence Education" with "Healthy Relationships" to embrace a positive, holistic view of relationships
- Inquire about the types of words or phrases used in reference to domestic violence in participants' native languages

### When Accepting/Requesting Expertise

- Acknowledge each culture's and individual's thinking around family dynamics and relationships\*
- Appreciate the diversity of family structures, such as close connections with extended family or high respect given to matriarch, and celebrate those as a group
- Validate concerns, struggles, or frustrations refugees have faced on the topic of relationships and domestic violence in the U.S.; and, offer to provide their feedback to appropriate parties

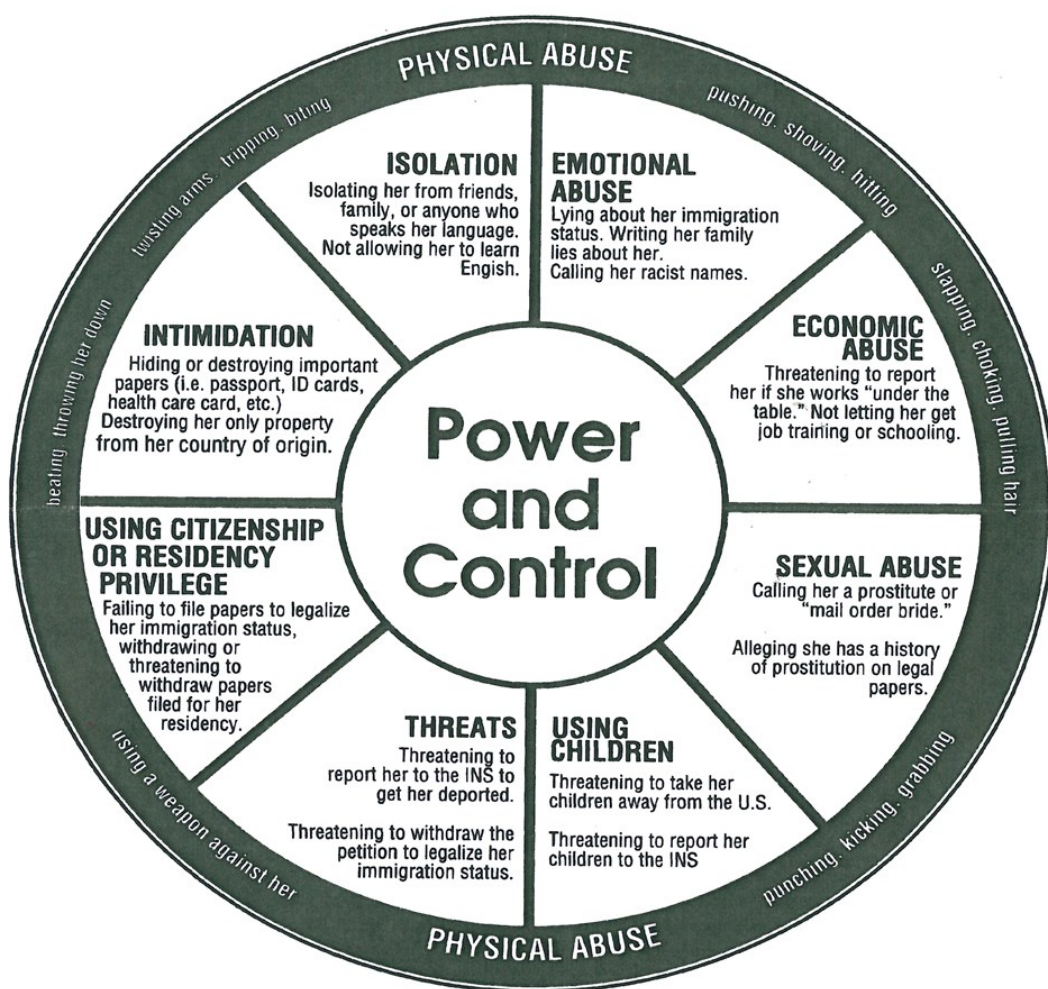
\*Abusive or controlling behaviors/thinking should always be addressed. Providing an alternative way of thinking or interacting with family members can be a helpful way of approaching this issue.

# Implementation Tools

Consider the tools on the next two pages when working individually with clients, training staff, or out-reaching partners. The Power and Control Wheel reveals various modes of violence often seen within refugee and immigrant populations. The Advocacy Wheel reveals specific ways in which resettlement staff and service providers can assist survivors of domestic violence. **Utilizing both wheels provides ways in which individuals can help survivors and raises awareness of specific struggles refugees may be facing.**

Consider using both wheels as part of your agency's training and/or outreach efforts. Paired with each wheel are discussion questions, activities, and examples of advocacy that can help facilitate conversations and evoke previous interactions with clients to inform future programming or partnerships.

## Power and Control Wheel



The Power and Control Wheel was developed by Futures Without Violence, an adaptation of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota.

## Training Discussion Questions and Activities

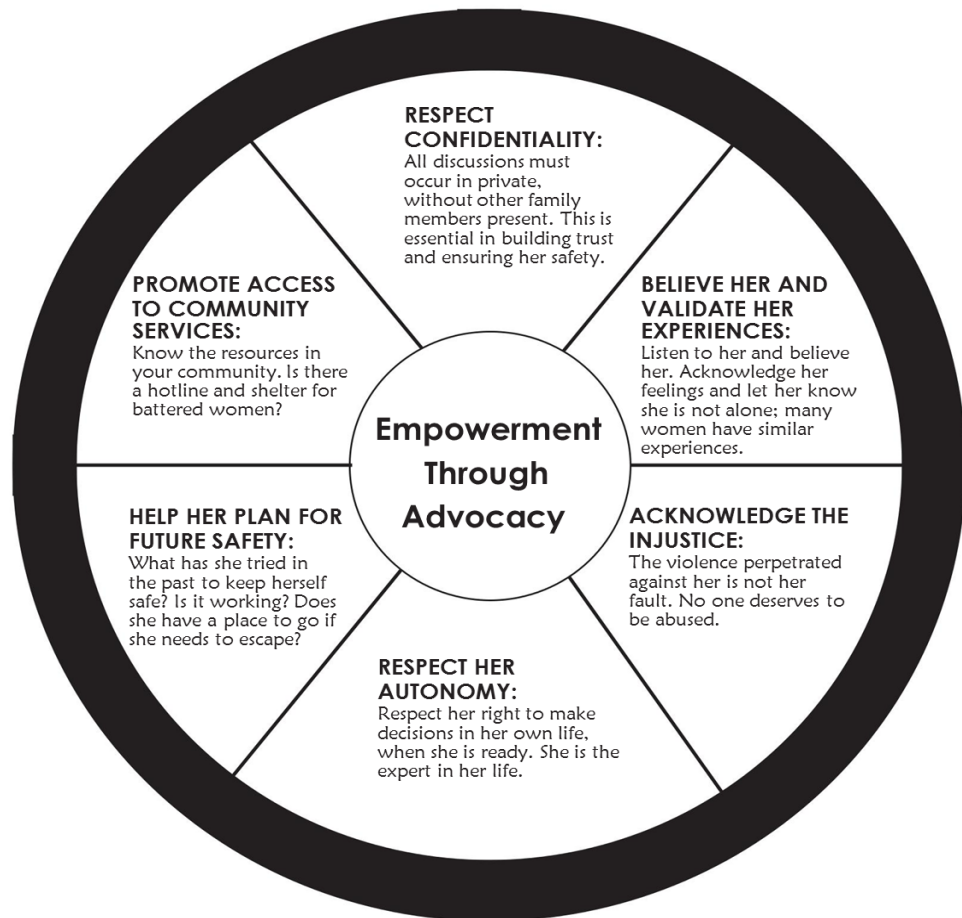
- 1) Have you noticed these types of abuse among your clients or patients?
- 2) What were your initial thoughts or assumptions when you noticed the abuse?
- 3) If a client has disclosed this type of abuse, what was your initial reaction?
- 4) What type of infrastructure would help support staff in identifying abuse and clients seeking help?

# Implementation Tools

## Training Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Which of these action steps have you used in your interactions with survivors of abuse?
2. List three scenarios in which one or more of the wheel's pieces could be used.
3. What community partnerships would be helpful to implement each empowerment piece?

### Advocacy Empowerment Wheel



Developed by:  
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www.mocadv.org

 **NATIONAL CENTER**  
on Domestic and Sexual Violence  
training • consulting • advocacy

### Advocacy Wheel Examples

**Respect Confidentiality:** Review agency's confidentiality policy. Have policy interpreted and ensure interpreters have agreed to and signed policy before conducting services. Identify a secure office room for confidential client discussions

**Believe and Validate Experiences:** Share awareness of the challenges and client's resiliency. Example: "This is a very difficult situation and you have shown much strength to share your experience with me today. You deserve to feel safety and security. Let's work together to identify options that work for you."

**Acknowledge the Injustice:** Know your state's statistics on the impact of domestic violence. Invite a local DV advocate to train staff on laws and policies.

**Respect Autonomy:** It can be difficult to see a client identify experience with DV/IPV and not leave the situation. Remember change takes time and that your client is the expert of the situation. Be patient, present, and prepared.

**Help plan for future safety:** Identify resources such as emergency numbers, address of local shelter, name of local social worker, and/or hotlines

**Promote Access to Community Services:** Did you know [TANF](#) has emergency funds for domestic violence cases and offers a waiver of program compliance if participation would compromise family safety?

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## References

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## Resources

### [USHHS ACF State Law Search](#)

Search subjects such as “Child Witnesses to Domestic Violence” and “Mandatory Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect” to see your specific state’s respective laws

### [Futures Without Violence Fact Sheets](#)

Many fact sheets and graphics useful for individual enrichment and outreach tools

### [Tapestri Inc.](#)

Includes various programming for refugees and immigrants, including interpretation training, engaging young men and boys to become allies, and anti-human trafficking programming

### [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)

Advocates are available 24/7 at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) in over 170 languages. All calls are confidential and anonymous

### [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)

Comprehensive resource list for various populations including refugees, elderly, men, and LGBTQ

### [National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)

### [National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health](#)

The [National Partnership for Community Training](#) is a program of Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services. NPCT is a training and technical assistance program which supports refugee resettlement workers and service providers through national capacity building and collaborative efforts. This publication was funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. For more information on this document and for research purposes, please contact [partnership@gcjfcs.org](mailto:partnership@gcjfcs.org) or (305) 349-1220. For more details about **individual interactions with survivors of domestic violence**, please see our information guide “Domestic Violence in a Refugee Context” on our website [gcjfc.org/refugee](http://gcjfc.org/refugee), under [Information Guides](#).