

# Developing and Implementing Domestic Violence Protocols

## WHERE TO START?

This short checklist identifies key steps in the process of developing and implementing an effective domestic violence protocol for your Healthy Marriage project.

### Important first steps

- Identify domestic violence experts at the local or state level with whom you can partner.** If you do not have a pre-existing relationship with a domestic violence program, contact your state domestic violence coalition for information about local programs in your area or check community resource directories. For a listing of state coalitions, see: <http://www.vawnet.org/StatesMap/index.php>.
- Spend time sharing information about your program and the specific healthy marriage activities you plan to provide (or are providing).** Do not assume that domestic violence programs in your area are familiar with your healthy marriage project. Take time to answer questions about your plans and to respond to questions and concerns they might have.
- Spend time learning more about the services provided by the domestic violence program(s) with whom you hope to partner.**
- Define the types of guidance and support you hope to receive from the domestic violence agencies you are partnering with.** For example, domestic violence experts can be helpful in any and all of the following areas:
  - ◆ Reviewing and enhancing current responses to domestic violence within your agency or system, including policies, procedures and written materials designed to identify and respond to the needs of domestic violence victims and address confidentiality issues;
  - ◆ Reviewing marriage education activities to ensure that safety and confidentiality issues are addressed for domestic violence victims and those at risk;
  - ◆ Identifying appropriate responses when past or current domestic violence is disclosed during recruitment or intake, or by program participants; and
  - ◆ Providing training of program staff on domestic and sexual violence issues.

All of these can be incorporated into the protocol development process or handled as discrete activities.

- Identify the types of financial or other resources needed and available to support the involvement of domestic violence experts in your program design and implementation.**

## Laying the Groundwork for Domestic Violence Protocol Development

- **With your domestic violence partners, describe how your program will work -- how will individuals and couples find out about, enter, and move through the program? Begin to identify where domestic violence issues will arise.**

The following questions will help get these discussions started:

- ◆ How will potential participants for your program be identified? Are these families you already know a lot about (because you are already working with them) or are they new to you? How will couples hear about the programs you are offering?
- ◆ Are you relying on referrals from other community agencies?
- ◆ How and by whom will the healthy marriage project be introduced to individual clients?
- ◆ How do individuals and couple “get into” the program? Can they just show up, or is there a formal intake process? If intake into the healthy marriage project will be conducted by partner agencies, what is their current experience identifying and addressing domestic violence issues among clients?
- ◆ What happens when disclosures of domestic violence occur? How are defining “domestic violence”?
- ◆ What happens when a disclosure of domestic violence is accompanied by interest in participating in the healthy marriage activities you are providing? When might it be appropriate, if ever, for a domestic violence victim to participate in a healthy marriage program, with or without the partner who has been abusive? When might healthy co-parenting be a more appropriate goal than healthy marriage?
- ◆ What types of domestic violence training will staff need to respond to disclosures, whenever they occur?
- ◆ How will domestic violence disclosure information be shared among the project partners? How will the confidentiality and privacy of domestic violence victims be maintained?
- ◆ How do the healthy marriage curricula and other program materials to be used in the project address domestic violence issues? Is domestic violence addressed directly in course material? Is there any content that might increase risks for someone in an abusive relationship (such as scenes/scenarios involving emotionally or physically abusive couples)?

## Developing and Implementing Your Domestic Violence Protocol

- Working with your partners, and using the DV Protocol “Blueprint” as a guide, describe in detail how you will identify and respond to domestic violence issues within your project.** The domestic violence protocol developed by each Healthy Marriage initiative should be *site-specific* and tailored to reflect the particular characteristics of the community and project. Develop a draft for review and comment by all project partners.
- Clarify the role(s) that domestic violence experts will play in the design and implementation of marriage education activities, as well as in any evaluation activities.**
- Critique your protocol for how well it answers these two questions:**
  - ◆ How will your healthy marriage initiative ensure that there are safe, confidential opportunities to disclose domestic violence and that the decision to participate in a marriage education program is voluntary and informed?
  - ◆ What steps will be taken to ensure that domestic violence issues are safely and routinely identified and appropriately addressed by well-trained personnel?
- Finalize the protocol and distribute it to program partners and staff.**
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers (including those at partner agencies) who have a role in implementing the protocol receive adequate training on domestic violence issues and the domestic violence protocol itself.**
- Use staff or project meetings to support implementation of the protocol and identify implementation issues.**
- Review the protocol at 6 months (and annually thereafter) to identify areas in which the protocol might need to be modified or enhanced.** Key partners should be included. The protocol should also be reviewed and modified as necessary if new program components are added or the program is significantly changed.