

Keeping your hands and feet inside the ride: Successfully riding the victim services rollercoaster

PLEASE NOTE:

- (1) Victims and witnesses come in all shapes, sizes, ...and smells, and
- (2) The majority of victims of domestic violence are female. For this reason and for ease in this presentation, victims will be referred to as female. However, it is important to recognize that there are men who are abused and their needs are as critical as those of the women and children.

The obvious:

- Working with witnesses is hard
- They either care or don't care about the case and either way they feel strongly about their level of caring/not
- Working with victims who are emotionally invested is the hardest!
- They span from total recantation bc the perp is wonderful to wanting the perp sent to prison for the rest of their life!
- Both are incredibly unpredictable and transient

How do YOU feel about....

18 year old boy steals from a store, or...

Abuser is arrested for the third time for strangling his wife but she still stays with him

PROFESSIONALISM = Your Job

You are going to have feelings about every victim and every witness

They are going to have feelings about you too!

You = the system

You = their opponent

You = their hero

You = a pain in their a.....neck!

Professionalism involves getting the job done and behaving well in the process -- Didn't our mothers tell us to 'be nice'?

Witnesses

What to expect from those who care:

- Self initiated contact

- Volunteered information
- Volunteered insight and/or concerns
- Appearance at court as needed
- A new best friend/ally

Witnesses

What to expect from those who don't care:

- Disconnected phone numbers
- Hostility
- Loss of memory
- You and the case are the least important things in their life
- A diminishing list of safe places to eat

Witnesses – Best practice tips

- Make phone contact as soon as it appears a trial or evidentiary hearing is to occur
- Send subpoenas out as early as possible
- Be willing to advocate with employers for time off (Start with the 'thank you' approach)
- Empathize with them in not needing ONE more thing to do in their lives
- Appreciate their willingness and sacrifice
- Set and maintain boundaries

"We know nothing of the trials and sorrows of those around us, of pillows wet with sobs, of the gut wrenching pain hidden behind a smile, of the secret cares and desires, struggles, and worries that leave a scar on one's soul. Let us not DARE to add to the burden of another the pain of our judgment."

--William Jordan

Working with Victims

- You don't get to pick them
- This is where you hand your ticket to the ride master!
 - o The bully
 - o The darling(?) tyrant
 - o The helpless
 - o The unstable
 - o The manipulator

- The cycle victim

Helping a battered woman is a process that may take a long time. We have to realize that she needs to move according to her own timetable and not ours.

-- Erin Clark, Hotline Coordinator
Austin Center for Battered Women

The revolving door...

Dangers of:

- leaving too soon
- 'telling' victims what to do
- The likelihood of death increases by 75% once the victim decides to leave.
- Respect their journey as dangerous as it may appear because it could get worse!

Best practice tips

- Don't victim bash - if needed discuss weakness in the case because of his/her behavior but don't attack the victim
- Give notice in advance if hearing dates or dispositions change
- Resolve cases as quickly as possible
- Give notice of plea negotiations and offers
- Speak to the victim if needed or wanted but its okay to limit the conversation
- Communication is key!
- Know your resources and provide in written form: brochures, contact information, inspirational, shelter, CVR, etc.
- Encourage to not bring kids to the office/CT
- Develop a rapport with an advocate
- *Contact Christine Watters at UOVC re grant funding for an advocate

You can't help them if you're part of their life... (there's a reason airlines have parents put on their oxygen masks before children)

Court preparation tips

- Provide V/W with copy of their statement in advance for review
- Have V/W view recording if available
- Meet and go over questions to be asked, or

- Provide list of questions
- Take V/W to courtroom and let sit in the W chair
- Explain exclusionary rule (V are exempt!)
- Stress the need for honest answers!
 - If don't know answer, then say I don't know
 - If can't remember, then say so
 - Explain how to refresh recollection

Boundaries !!!!

- Know your role – not atty/jury/etc.
- Do not take your work home
 - Redirect victims to contact during work hours
- **Never** give out personal information!
- It is not your life
 - Karma – nature has its own sense of justice so don't get hung up on the losses or cases that have to be dismissed for lack of victim or witness cooperation

At the end of the day *people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel.* - Maya Angelou

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