Introduction to Domestic Violence

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Presented by CEUSchool
Author Information

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COURSE SUMMARY

This course gives the student a broad overview of how to recognize symptoms of domestic violence, outlines the various aspects of relationship abuse, and provides treatment ideas for working with individuals who are experiencing abuse by an intimate.

After completion of this course, participants will be able to:

1. Enhance their ability to recognize symptoms of domestic violence.

2. Effectively use a ‘Power and Control’ wheel tool to assist clients experiencing domestic violence identify aspects of their abuse.

3. Work with survivors of abuse in a manner that seeks to reduce shame and stigma.

4. Implement a safety plan to use with survivors of abuse.

5. Speak to the special considerations given to the LGBT community in relation to domestic violence issues.

6. Identify other costs of domestic violence in our culture.

7. Find established commonalities that survivors of violence all share to enhance the participant’s ability to treat this community on all levels and from all orientations.
SECTION I: SYMPTOMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

*Domestic abuse*, also known as *spousal abuse*, occurs when one person in an intimate relationship or marriage tries to dominate and control the other person. Domestic abuse that includes physical violence is called *domestic violence*.

Domestic violence and abuse are used for one purpose and one purpose only: to gain and maintain total control. An abuser doesn’t “play fair.” Abusers use fear, guilt, shame, and intimidation to wear the other person down and keep him/her under his or her thumb. An abuser may also threaten, hurt or hurt others around the abused.

Domestic violence and abuse does not discriminate. It happens among heterosexual couples and in same-sex partnerships. It occurs within all age ranges, ethnic backgrounds and economic levels. While women are more commonly victimized, men are also abused—especially verbally and emotional; although sometimes physically as well.

In their literature, the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic Violence (MCADV) identifies four different types of abuse that constitute domestic violence and divides them into the realms of: physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. In this section of the training, we will delve more deeply into each category for a better understanding of identifying domestic abuse.

**PHYSICAL ABUSE**

Physical abuse can be easier to recognize, but is only one of the many forms that domestic violence can take. It can be indicated when the batterer:

- Scratches, bites, grabs, or spits at a current or former intimate partner.
- Shakes, pushes, shoves, pushes, restrains or throws their partner.
- Twists, slaps, punches, strangles or burns their partner.
- Throws objects at their partner.
- Subjects their partner to reckless driving.
- Locks their partner in or out of the home.
- Refuses to help their partner when she is sick, injured, or pregnant, or withholds medication or treatment from their partner.
- Withholds food as punishment.
- Abuses their partner at mealtimes, which disrupts eating patterns and can result in malnutrition.
- Abuses their partner at night, which disrupts sleeping patterns and can result in sleep deprivation.
- Attacks their partner with weapons.

There are many signs of an abusive relationship. The most telling sign is fear of the partner. If a person feels like he/she has to walk on eggshells around the partner—constantly watching what he/she says and does in order to avoid a blow-up, it may be a relationship that is unhealthy and abusive. Other signs that someone may be in an abusive relationship includes a partner who belittles the other, tries to control them and the person has feelings of self-loathing, helplessness and desperation.

**RAPE AND SEXUAL ABUSE**

This form of abuse can be very challenging for the survivor to talk about because of the unimaginable ways in which this type of violence is often perpetrated. In addition, sexual abuse can be confusing for the survivor who may not understand that even if you are married or otherwise partnered/committed to someone, it never gives them the right to abuse you in any way – sexually or otherwise. Sexual abuse or rape can be indicated when the batterer:

- Is jealous, angry and accuses their partner of infidelity in a harassing manner despite no evidence to support this accusation.
- Withholds sex or affection as punishment.
- Calls their partner sexual names, or refers to their body parts in a derogatory or insulting manner.
- Insists that their partner dress in a manner that is more provocative then they are comfortable with or harassing their partners for their manner of dress.
- Coerces sex by manipulation or threats.
- Physically forces sex, is violent during a sexual assault or makes the survivor have sex after a physical altercation.
- Coerces their partner into sexual acts that they are uncomfortable with.
- Inflicts injuries that are sex-specific.
- Denies the survivor contraception or protection against sexually transmitted diseases.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

It is the abuser’s use of physical and sexual force or threats which gives even more power to acts of emotional abuse. Psychological abuse becomes an effective weapon as the survivor may fear a more physical retaliation or have difficulty putting into words what is making them feel so bad in their relationship. This type of abuse can often feel confusing to the survivor, especially if it is not accompanied by physical abuse and therefore can be more difficult to define or recognize. Some examples are:

- Breaking promises, doesn’t follow through on agreements, or does not take a fair share of responsibility.
- Verbally attacks partner in public or private.
- Attacks a partner’s vulnerabilities, such as language abilities, educational levels, skills as a parent, religious and cultural beliefs, or physical appearance.
- Plays mind games, such as denying requests that have been made previously to undercut the survivor’s sense of reality.
- Forces their partner to do degrading things.
- Ignores or minimizes their partner’s feelings.
- Withholds approval or affection as punishment.
- Regularly threatens to leave or tells their partner to leave.
- Always claims to be right.

**ECONOMIC ABUSE**

Economic abuse can be indicated when the batterer:

- Controls all the money.
- Doesn’t let their partner work outside the home or sabotages their attempts to work or attend school.
- Refuses to work and makes their partner support the family or ruins their partner’s credit score.
Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill the threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the victim's life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.
SECTION II: UTILIZING THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL WITH CLIENT SYSTEMS

Some History

The Power and Control Wheel was developed from the experience of battered women in Duluth who had been abused by their male partners. It has been translated into over 40 languages and has resonated with the experience of battered women world-wide.

In 1984, staff at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) began developing curricula for groups for men who batter and victims of domestic violence. They wanted a way to describe battering for victims, offenders, practitioners in the criminal justice system and the general public. Over several months, they convened focus groups of women who had been battered and listened to heart-wrenching stories of violence, terror and survival. After listening to these stories and asking questions, they documented the most common abusive behaviors or tactics that were used against these women. The tactics chosen for the wheel were those that were most universally experience by battered women.

How to use this Wheel with clients

Due to the shame, stigma and denial often faced by those recovering from domestic abuse it can be very effective to use a Power and Control Wheel with client systems. Rather than asking a potentially afraid or overwhelmed client to specifically identify behaviors that they has been experiencing, showing them this wheel gives them the language to describe the range of abusive behaviors. Using the Power and Control Wheel also allows you as the practitioner to have more of a neutral role in assisting your client in identifying possible abusive behaviors; as you can reflect back on the Wheel as a point of reference to guide your conversation. Asking clients directly if they
feel they are being abused may cause them to experience a host of feelings that could lead to them denying or minimizing their experiences, and showing them the wheel really allows them to identify and claim the full scope of their experience(s).

Section III: WORKING TO REDUCE AND ADDRESS THE SURVIVOR’S FEELINGS

Domestic abuse often escalates from threats and verbal abuse to violence. While physical injury may be the most obvious danger, the emotional and psychological consequences of domestic abuse are also severe. Emotionally abusive relationships can destroy one’s self-worth, lead to anxiety and depression, and make one feel helpless and alone. No one should have to endure this kind of pain. The first step to breaking free is recognizing that the situation is abusive. Once a person acknowledges the reality of the abusive situation, then one can get the help one needs.

It is often very difficult for the survivor to work through their feelings of embarrassment (“How could this happen to me?”) guilt (“I can’t believe I am putting my children through this”) and state of shock and denial about their current situation (“Maybe I am exaggerating things, it has not always been this bad, everyone has their rough times, etc.”) It is important for the clinician to approach a client with a non-judgmental attitude and will improve the chances at being able to develop a true rapport with them. Making statements to this affect can be helpful, such as “I am not here to judge you or your experiences.” or “This seems like a really hard situation and I am here to talk to you about your options and feelings.”

It can also be very helpful to refrain from making value laden comments about the client’s abuser, but instead stick to the facts when talking about the abuse. For example, making the statement “It sounds like your spouse really scares you when they do x,y, and z.” It is not OK for someone to treat you in those ways.” This helps with building trust with the client rather than making an alternative statement such as “Your spouse is an abuser and you need to get away from them.” It may help to
introduce the following concepts for discussion when working with those who have been battered. They may have guilt/shame around not leaving and can benefit from gaining clarity about the reasons they have maintained this relationship.

**Why A Partner Stays…Or Returns**

**Low Self Esteem**

The individual may feel that he/she has failed as a spouse/partner or parent because they cannot seem to avoid the abuse. The batterer reinforces this feeling as a means of control.

Psychologist Lenora Walker, who has been an expert witness at the trials of many abused women, has characterized the feelings of many victims/survivors as “learned helplessness”; an acceptance of themselves as powerless to change their situations, self portraits of ‘stupid’ creatures of no value or influence and no control over their lives (1986). The devastating and long lasting psychological impact of domestic violence should never be underestimated.

**Economic Dependence**

The degree to which the individual is economically dependent upon their spouse/partner can be a final factor in whether or not they feel they can exist independently.

**Keeping the Family Together**

The partner may often feel that having both parents in the home is more important than anything they can independently offer their children. In addition to this, the spouse/partner may also consistently threaten to take the children away if the individual attempts to leave.

**Guilt**

The partner often assumes the blame for the abuse and will expend energy uselessly trying to determine how to avoid provoking the abuser. Societal factors tend to hold women especially responsible for the
well-being of all the family members. Thus, a partner can feel responsible for holding the family together in times of crisis.

**Promises of Change**

The individual may hope their partner is going to follow through when he/she promises (over and over) that they will never do *it* again. The individual often still loves their partner and wants very badly for the relationship/marriage to be successful.

**Emotional Dependence**

The individual often has little experience in independent decision making or in being responsible for themselves. The abuser has reinforced this dependent relationship as a means of retaining control of the partner so that they are available to abuse.

**Fear of Insanity**

The individual may be told by their partner that they are “crazy”, and may at times certainly feel as if this is the case. Being dependent upon their abuser increases the individual’s chances of accepting this perception. The survivor may be increasingly unsure of their ability to navigate the *outside world* and this increases the fear of insanity.

**Isolation**

The individual is usually isolated and has few friends and sources of support. The more isolated the survivor is, the more dependent upon their partner they become for any input about their value as a person or their options in life.

**No Place to Go**

The individual is often unaware of community resources and their rights to use them, especially if the survivor is in a same sex relationship or does not speak English as a first language.
Learned Behavior
Abused individuals may come to regard abuse as a normal part of relationships or marriage, and may even grow to be hesitant to accept forms of relationship that do not involve the abuse they have come to equate with love. Often, the survivor has witnessed violence in their family of origin for years.

Societal Attitudes
An abused individual may have feelings of loneliness and inadequacy when facing the blank wall of misunderstanding, unsupportive friends, relatives and community members. The attitude can be that family problems are private to any extreme, which increases the sense of isolation and fear.

Traditional Value Systems
Traditional family roles often deny the options of separation and divorce for abused women. Strong religious convictions and the stigma of receiving public assistance (if she leaves) often effectively force her to remain in their situation.

Fear of Death
Quite simply, an abused individual may be told they will be killed, their pets or children will be killed, or the batterer will kill themselves if they leave and refuse to return. Past violence has taught the survivor that threats often translate into action. Taking the time to openly and honestly discuss these experiences with survivors of abuse can reduce their own sense of confusion, shame and stigma about their role in their relationship. This way create avenues to explore solutions for how to leave the relationship.
SECTION IV: CREATING AND USING A PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN

A safety plan is a powerful tool that we as clinicians can introduce to our clients at any stage in their work with us. This is effective whether they have committed to leaving their abusers or not. It encourages the individual to plan and think ahead about how they might best escape a dangerous or life threatening situation ahead of time, rather than forcing them to problem solve and remember things at a moment of crisis. Safety plans can be written out and kept in the clinician’s files if the individual feels uncomfortable taking such a document home. They can be hidden at the individual’s home should they choose to do so or even just verbally discussed in session. The following is an example of what a safety plan can look like:

Personalized Safety Plan

Your safety is the most important thing. Listed below are tips to help keep you safe. One of the best resources you possess is your intimate knowledge of your abuser – his or her moods, their schedules, their patterns. Trusting your own gut instinct is another powerful tool that you always possess that can help keep you safe as well.

If you are in an abusive relationship, think about...

1. Having important phone numbers nearby for you and your children. Numbers to have are the police, hotlines, friends and the local shelter.
2. Friends or neighbors you could tell about the abuse. Ask them to call the police if they hear angry or violent noises. If you have children, teach them how to dial 911. Make up a code word that you can use when you need help.
3. How to get out of your home safely. Practice ways to get out.
4. Safer places in your home where there are exits and no weapons. If you feel abuse is going to happen try to get your abuser to one of these safer places.
5. Any weapons in the house. Think about ways that you could get them out of the house.
6. Even if you do not plan to leave, think of where you could go. Think of how you might leave. Try doing things that get you out of the house - taking out the trash, walking the pet or going to the store. Put together a bag of things you use everyday (see the checklist below). Hide it where it is easy for you to get.
7. Going over your safety plan often.

If you consider leaving your abuser, think about...

1. Four places you could go if you leave your home.
2. People who might help you if you left. Think about people who will keep a bag for you. Think about people who might lend you money. Make plans for your pets.

3. Keeping change for phone calls or getting a cell phone.

4. Opening a bank account or getting a credit card in your name.

5. How you might leave. Try doing things that get you out of the house - taking out the trash, walking the family pet, or going to the store. Practice how you would leave.

6. How you could take your children with you safely. There are times when taking your children with you may put all of your lives in danger. You need to protect yourself to be able to protect your children.

7. Putting together a bag of things you use everyday. Hide it where it is easy for you to get.

**ITEMS TO TAKE, IF POSSIBLE**

- Children (if it is safe)
- Money
- Keys to car, house, work
- Extra clothes
- Medicine
- Important papers for you and your children
- Birth certificates
- Social security cards
- School and medical records
- Bankbooks, credit cards
- Driver's license
- Car registration
- Welfare identification
- Passports, green cards, work permits
- Lease/rental agreement
- Mortgage payment book, unpaid bills
- Insurance papers
- divorce papers, custody orders
- Address book
- Pictures, jewelry, things that mean a lot to you
- Items for your children (toys, blankets, etc.)
8. Think about reviewing your safety plan often.

If you have left your abuser, think about...

1. Your safety - you still need to.
2. Getting a cell phone.
3. Getting an Order of Protection from the court. Keep a copy with you all the time. Give a copy to the police, people who take care of your children, their schools and your boss.
4. Changing the locks. Consider putting in stronger doors, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, a security system and outside lights.
5. Telling friends and neighbors that your abuser no longer lives with you. Ask them to call the police if they see your abuser near your home or children.
6. Telling people who take care of your children the names of people who are allowed to pick them up. If you have an Order of Protection protecting your children, give their teachers and babysitters a copy of it.
7. Telling someone at work about what has happened. Ask that person to screen your calls. If you have an Order of Protection that includes where you work, consider giving your boss a copy of it and a picture of the abuser. Think about and practice a safety plan for your workplace. This should include going to and from work.
8. Not using the same stores or businesses that you did when you were with your abuser.
9. Someone that you can call if you feel down. Call that person if you are thinking about going to a support group or workshop.
10. Safe way to speak with your abuser if you must.
11. Going over your safety plan often.

WARNING: Abusers try to control their victim's lives. When abusers feel a loss of control - like when victims try to leave them - the abuse often gets worse. Take special care when you leave. Keep being careful even after you have left.
SECTION V: WORKING WITH THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDERED POPULATION IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic Violence in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender Relationships

Domestic violence is a serious issue in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) relationships. Domestic violence occurs in same-gender relationships at the same rate as heterosexual relationships (about 1 in 4). As in heterosexual couples, the problem is extremely underreported. Because LGBT individuals face a society oppressive and hostile towards them, LGBT individuals are often afraid of revealing their sexual orientation or the nature of their relationship. Abuse in LGBT relationships happens for the same reasons as in heterosexual relationships, to maintain control and power over ones partner. Although LGBT relationships do not look like heterosexual relationships, the abusive behaviors used by a LGBT batterer are similar. The weapons used by a gay or lesbian abuser/batterer include all of the weapons a heterosexual batterer uses and more.

- He/she may use homophobic myths in society, for example ...
  "the abuse is because you are lesbian/gay"
  "this behavior is normal in a lesbian relationship..."
  "you are just going to have to toughen up"
  "no one will help you or believe you because you are lesbian (or gay)"
  "you really are worthless and flawed because you are lesbian (or gay)"
  "the relationship is not real/doesn't mean anything"
  "if you leave there is no one else for you"

- He/she may not allow their partner to go to the few places safe and comfortable to be "out"
- A batterer may exploit the myth that abuse in same-gender relationships is always mutual abuse.

Fact: There is almost always a primary aggressor/controller. Abuse is rarely mutual.
A batterer may threaten to "out" their partner to friends, boss, parents, children, ex- wife or ex-husband.

Fact: The threat of being "outed" is a very serious threat. It is as serious as a death threat. For someone who has not disclosed this personal information, the threat of being outed is a threat of losing all security in her/his life. She/he could lose her/his job, children, apartment, house, family and friends.

Utilizing existing services (such as a shelter, attending support groups or calling a crisis line) either means lying or hiding the gender of the batterer or having to "come out"; a major life decision.
Additional training, sensitivity and expertise is needed to adequately recognize and address the specific needs of LGBT domestic violence victims.

**Fact:** There are few domestic violence shelters specifically for lesbians or gay men in the United States. Lesbians are often welcome in shelters for heterosexual women, however it is important that staff in those shelters obtain training to help meet the specific needs of lesbians who have been abused. Staff who lack of knowledge of LGB issues or present homophobic can re-victimize the victim.

**Fact:** Receiving support services to help one escape a battering relationship is more difficult when there are also oppressions faced. Battered lesbians and female bisexuals encounter sexism, homophobia and heterosexism. Gay and bisexual men encounter homophobia and heterosexism. Lesbian or gay people of color who are battered may also face racism. These forms of social oppressions make it more difficult for these individuals to get the support needed (legal, financial, social, housing, therapeutic, medical, etc.) or to escape the abusive relationship.

**Fact:** LGBT victims/survivors of abuse may not know others who are LGBT, meaning that leaving the relationship could result in total isolation.

**Fact:** LGBT batterers can manipulate partner’s connection with others by claiming that a friend or family’s concern about the relationship is really motivated by the friend or family’s homophobia.

**Fact:** The support system for the abuser may be the same support system of the abused individual.

**Fact:** Children may be a significant factor to consider when working with lesbians /gay men who are domestic violence victims. If the biological mother/father is being abused there is the fear of losing her/his children to the ex-husband/ex-wife or family because they are lesbian or gay. If the non-biological parent is being abused there is fear of losing the children because she/he has no legal parental rights; unless a second-party adoption is done. Batterers may postpone or deny the second party adoption as a way to control partner.

**Fact:** In hospitals or counseling waiting rooms a woman sitting with the female victim may NOT be a support person but may be the batterer.
Fact: Regardless of how healthy the relationship or how long a woman or man has been out, LGBT individuals may still be kept marginalized at work, with family, at community functions, in churches or organizations by being allowed to participate, (by the group) as long as they keep silent about their relationships, their lives with their partners and their involvement with all things perceived as lesbian/gay.

Fact: You can not tell a batterer by sight. Size, strength and appearance have nothing to do with who the batterer is in a lesbian/gay relationship.

Fact: In lesbian and gay relationships few if any follow male/female roles, in other words, one partner is not more masculine & one more feminine.

It is frequently incorrectly assumed that lesbian, bisexual and gay abuse must be mutual. This is the opposite of heterosexual relationships where it is not assumed to be mutual. Victims often believe that in order to use existing services, such as a shelter, attending support groups or calling a crisis line, they must lie or hide the gender of the batterer to be perceived (and thus accepted) as a heterosexual. Reporting abuse can mean "coming out" which is a major life decision. If lesbians, bisexuals and gays come out to service providers who are not discreet with this information, it could lead to the victim losing their home, job, custody of children, etc. LGBT victims are often not as financially tied to their partner, which can be a benefit if they decide to end the relationship. However, if their lives are financially intertwined, such as each paying a rent or mortgage and having "built a home together", they have no legal process to assist in making sure assets are evenly divided, a process which exists for their married, heterosexual counterparts. Telling heterosexuals about battering in a LGBT relationship can reinforce the myth many believe that lesbian, bisexual and gay relationships are dysfunctional. This can further cause the victim to feel isolated and unsupported. The LGBT community itself is often not supportive of victims of battering because many want to maintain the myth that there are no problems (such as child abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence, etc.) in these relationships. As long as the community continues to put priority in pretending gays and lesbians don't experience abuse, resources will remain scarce and outreach will continue to suffer.

Receiving support services to help one escape a battering relationship is especially difficult when there are also oppressions. Battered lesbians and female bisexuals often encounter sexism and homophobia while gay and bisexual men encounter homophobia. Lesbian or gay people of color who are battered may also face racism. These forms of social oppressions can make it more difficult for these groups to get the support needed (legal, financial, social, housing, medical, etc.) and escape and live freely from an abusive relationship.
Lesbian, bisexual and gay survivors of battering may not know others who are lesbian, bisexual or gay, meaning that leaving the abuser could result in total isolation. The LGBT community within the area may be small, and in all likelihood everyone the survivor knows will soon know of their abuse. Sides will be taken and support may be difficult to find. Anonymity is not an option, a characteristic many heterosexual survivors can draw upon in "starting a new life" for themselves within the same city. Taking all these factors into account is critical when treating the LGBT population, using our cultural competence as clinicians to adequately serve an under represented community while paying attention to our own biases/predispositions to ensure that we are able to fully be client centered when working with those outside of our usual client base.

SECTION VI: OTHER COSTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Federal officials estimate that “domestic violence” costs United States firms four billion dollars a year in lower productivity, staff turnover, absenteeism and excessive use of medical benefits. One New York City study of fifty battered women revealed that half of them missed at least three days of work a month because of abuse, while 64 percent were late for work and more than three-fourths of them used company time and company telephones to call friends, counselors, physicians and lawyers whom they did not dare call from home.

SECTION VII: HEALING FROM TRAUMA

A traumatic experience
Domestic violence is a traumatic experience for its victims. Traumatic experiences produce emotional shock and other psychological problems. The American Psychiatric Association has identified a specific
type of mental distress common to survivors of trauma called post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD.

Common reactions to trauma include:

- **Fear and anxiety** — While normal responses to dangerous situations, fear and anxiety can become a permanent emotional state without professional help. Memories of the trauma can trigger intense anxiety and immobilize the survivor. Children may express their fears by becoming hyperactive, aggressive, develop phobias or revert to infantile behavior.

- **Nightmares and flashbacks** — Because the trauma is so shocking and different from normal everyday experiences, the mind cannot rid itself of unwanted and intrusive thoughts and images. Nightmares are especially common in children.

- **Being in “danger mode”** — Jitteriness, being easily startled or distracted, concentration problems, impatience and irritability are all common to being in a “heightened state of alert” and are part of one’s survival instinct. Children’s reactions tend to be expressed physically because they are less able to verbalize their feelings.

- **Guilt, shame and blame** — Survivors often blame themselves for allowing the abuse to occur and continue for as long as it did. Survivors feel guilty for allowing their children to be victimized. Sometimes others blame the survivors for allowing themselves to be victims. These emotions increase the survivor’s negative self-image and distrustful view of the world.

- **Grief and depression** — Feelings of loss, sadness and hopelessness are signs of depression. Crying spells, social withdrawal and suicidal thoughts are common when grieving over the loss and disappointment of a disastrous relationship.

**Recovery**

To recover from domestic violence, the survivor must:

- Stop blaming herself for what has happened — take responsibility for present and future choices.
- Stop isolating herself — reconnect with people in order to build a support network.
- Stop denying and minimizing feelings — she should learn how to understand and express herself with the help of a therapist.
- Stop identifying herself as a victim — take control of her life by joining a survivors’ support group.
• Stop the cycle of abuse — get herself and her children counseling to help heal psychological wounds and to learn healthy ways to function in the world. (Karen S. Dickason, LCSW, CEAP 2003-2004)

SECTION VIII: SUMMARY

Listening, informing and educating can lead to empowerment for a survivor of domestic abuse when the LIFE process of assistance is used. Through this process, survivors gain knowledge; and knowledge is power. This process happens in gradually, but it can happen.

LISTEN

Provide a safe place for the survivor to talk and tell her story in a non-judgmental environment. Pay attention to afford the individual sufficient time to develop rapport and become comfortable, thereby becoming more willing to share the details of their experiences. Utilize a personalized safety plan and encourage your client to always draw on their own unique, inherent strengths to help them survive their situation. If the individual you are working with is from the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered Community, pay special attention to details that may be important in their story by helping them identify who they are ‘out’ to, and who they may feel safe coming ‘out’ to so they can build a network of support. Many communities have specialized resources for LGBT survivors of abuse and there are numerous support groups and resources on line that can be utilized as well.

INFORM

Tell your client about available resources and help them explore their own specific circumstances. Discuss the best and worst case scenarios to de mystify their situation, and help them clearly think through all the available options available to them.

FACILITATE

Help your client critically assess their chosen course of action and be flexible and allow for them changing their minds regarding their course of action. Schedule specific times for follow up and ongoing contact and explore all contingency plans.
EMPOWER AND ASSIST

Educate your client so they may become their own best advocate, thereby taking control of their lives and making their lives safer for themselves and their family.
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