

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF TREATMENT FOR SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE (IPV)

Survivors of IPV make up a large segment of the therapy population. Often the effects of their abusive relationships are misinterpreted, with attention being paid to symptoms of pathology as evidence of individual problems instead of looking at them within the context of trauma. Consequently, their particular needs may not be noticed or addressed in therapy.

The following features and treatment components are important in survivor treatment:

- 1) Opportunities to tell about abuse and to receive recognition that their feelings and opinions are valid
- 2) Clear definition of what abuse is, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and its effects on their emotional, mental, physical, behavioral, and spiritual well-being
- 3) Safety planning, including:
 - a. Assessment of dangerousness
 - b. Provision of safety information options, including for emotional safety
 - c. Separating the abuser and survivor treatment until abuser has successfully completed according to survivor reports
- 4) Process any abuse that has occurred and its impact on them. Common issues are grieving, shame and embarrassment, emotional overwhelm, responsibility misperception, battered self-esteem, altered beliefs, boundary confusion, assertiveness blocks, post-traumatic stress symptoms
- 5) Clearly defined treatment goals that are strengths based and focus on what the individual wants to change and can be responsible for changing
- 6) Group treatment when appropriate and possible
- 7) Facilitation of individual decision-making that makes sense for them
- 8) Exploration of how cultural influences on partner beliefs and behavior, connecting IPV with all forms of oppression and violence
- 9) Coordination with community domestic abuse shelters and other services
- 10) Coordination with abuser treatment if any when they are still in the relationship or have contact because of children