

They tell me I wouldn't make decisions on the job without somebody's OK. I could not make decisions on my own. That's the biggest drawback that I've had, learning how to make decisions and feeling comfortable with what I can do. That I, that I'm allowed to make a decision and I don't have to check with someone to make sure that this is the way it should be. The people in the office say I was afraid to do anything without making sure that somebody said it was OK for me to do so.

— SURVIVOR OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Unfortunately, the labels that are applied to women who have been battered in particular moments in their lives do not reflect the total context and complexity of their experiences. People who work with survivors should keep in mind that these individuals can and do harness the enormous power of their own experiences to move beyond the violence that subdues the spirit within.

THE LIFE PROCESS OF ASSISTING WOMEN VICTIMIZED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Listening, informing and educating can lead to empowerment for a victim when the LIFE process of assistance is used. Through this process, victims gain knowledge, and knowledge is power. This process happens in degrees, but it does happen.

LISTEN

- ▶ Provide a safe place for a woman to talk and tell her story.
- ▶ Afford sufficient time for her to become comfortable and able to discuss the details of her abuse.
- ▶ Begin with her story, history, concerns and questions. Affirm her experience and what she is saying. Clarify anything you, or she, do not understand.
- ▶ Identify her hopes and fears and the resources she is currently using or might need.
- ▶ Help her create a personalized safety plan.

INFORM

- ▶ Tell her about available resources.
- ▶ Explore her circumstances and discuss the worst- and best-case scenarios as they relate to each of the remedies available to her.

FACILITATE

- ▶ Help her to critically assess her chosen course of action (including her safety plan) and to understand the likely consequences of each action.
- ▶ Schedule specific times and dates for ongoing contacts or follow-up.
- ▶ Explore all contingency plans.

EMPOWER AND ASSIST HER

- ▶ Educate her so she can advocate for herself, thereby taking control of her life and making it safer for herself and her children.