



It takes two.

Domestic Violence Protocol

A woman is beaten every 15 seconds. Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between ages 15 and 44 in the United States...more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined. Domestic violence is not something that happens only to women, many men are subjected to abuse as well.

CRE recognizes that domestic violence is a complex problem and that physical and emotional abuse is a serious obstacle to stable and healthy relationships. An important message to convey in all aspects of NWA Healthy Marriages is that individuals involved in healthy relationships do not engage in violent, abusive, or coercive behavior.

We believe that all people are entitled to the right to live free from violence or the threat of violence from current or former partners. To end the cycle of domestic violence, services must be provided to victims and perpetrators with victim safety and key priority.

We understand that disclosing domestic violence can be very difficult for many victims and that a safe environment and trust are important to that process. Every effort will be made to assure individuals that the information they share with us about domestic violence will remain confidential. Additionally, all healthy marriage activities and programs will be provided in a manner that does not compromise the safety of any family member.

What is Domestic Violence?

For the purposes of the NWA Healthy Marriage Initiative, the term “domestic violence” describes a pattern of abuse and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse as well as economic coercion used against an intimate partner. Domestic violence often involves the use of a combination of tactics aimed at establishing control of one partner over the other.

Scope and Purpose of Protocol

In a professional and respectful manner, NWA Healthy Marriages seeks to foster love and trust among married and potentially married people of every ethnicity, faith, and socioeconomic status.

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message to convey in all aspects of this initiative is that individuals involved in healthy relationships do not engage in violent, abusive, or coercive behavior.

This protocol is designed to ensure that domestic violence issues within premarital and marital relationships are safely, routinely, and consistently identified and appropriately addressed and that adequate supports and safeguards are in place for individuals dealing with domestic violence.

Providing Safe Opportunities to Disclose Domestic Violence

The decision to disclose domestic violence is a difficult one for many domestic violence victims. Survivors have identified a number of important factors that affected their decisions to tell someone about the abuse they were experiencing. Domestic violence victims are more likely to disclose abuse when they:

- perceive that the individual asking is actively listening and truly concerned;
- understand the reason they are being asked about domestic violence; and
- feel assured that the disclosure will not be reported to the abuser or make their situation more complicated or dangerous.

Before a Marriage Champion meets with a couple to go over their Prepare/Enrich Assessment Report, please check the sections entitled:

- Abuse between parents
- Abuse by parent
- Abuse by spouse
- Abuse by anyone

If there has been abuse by a spouse, be careful not to disclose this information in front of the perpetrator when you meet. Instead, mention during your feedback session that you will be calling them from time to time to ask questions and give feedback that will assist in the strengthening of their relationship. During your first meeting, you should be able to ascertain a time that you could call to talk to the spouse that has reported abusive information on the assessment report.

The Marriage Champion may observe other indications that abuse might be occurring, such as jumpiness or nervousness around a partner, signs of controlling or abusive behavior by one of the parties, or indications of distress or injury. If such indicators are present, the Marriage Champion may say the following (again, taking care that the conversation is private): “I noticed [you seemed very uncomfortable earlier/the bruises on your arms/your partner speaking harshly to you before class/other indicator]. I am concerned about you, and I wonder if there is something I can do” or “If you’d like to talk about anything now, or at some other time, I’d be happy to listen.”

When disclosures of domestic violence occur as a result of screening or at any point during participation in a healthy marriage program or activity, an appropriate response must follow. The purpose of screening for domestic violence is twofold: to ensure that referrals to and participation in marriage and relationship education activities are appropriate and to identify and provide assistance to abuse victims.

What Should I Do If Someone Discloses Domestic Violence?

If current abuse is disclosed, these follow-up questions should be asked to assess whether the person is in immediate danger:

- “Are you in danger right now?”
- “Are you afraid that your partner will hurt you today?”
- “Are you afraid to go home?”
- “Does the abuse seem to be getting worse?”

If the abused spouse answers yes to any of the above questions, respond by asking:

- “Do you have somewhere safe to go right now, or do you need help finding a safe place?”

If they say no, respond by asking:

- “Do you want to talk to someone about all of this and who can help you figure out ways to keep yourself safe?”

If the participant is in immediate danger (e.g., the perpetrator is on the premises or the victim cannot safely return home), the Marriage Champion should call the local Police.

For any participant who has disclosed abuse (whether or not she or he is in immediate danger and whether the abuse is past or current), the Marriage Champion should do the following:

- If they are in immediate danger, offer to assist them in making a call to the emergency domestic violence hotline or the police.
- If they are not in immediate danger, encourage a victim to get support in dealing with domestic violence, whether past or current, by providing information from the local domestic violence partners about safety planning and how to contact community resources.
- Provide a victim with meaningful assurances of confidentiality and privacy. Perpetrators who discover that a victim has told someone about their abuse may retaliate with further threats and violence. For this and other ethical reasons, it is important that information related to disclosures of domestic violence is handled with utmost care and that the privacy and confidentiality of victims receive the highest priority.
- Report the situation to the Center for Relationship Enrichment (CRE) immediately and together make a determination about whether the couple should continue in the program and/or whether other services and supports should be provided.

Marriage Champions should practice the following at all times as they respond to disclosures of domestic violence:

- Be knowledgeable about intimate partner violence and its risk factors.

- Talk with the victim privately. Asking about domestic violence in the presence of the perpetrator or in a way that alerts the perpetrator to the conversation, can put the victim at risk.
- Explain why you are exploring the issue of abuse and tell the individual being screened that she or he does not have to answer any of the questions being asked.
- Pay attention to the language of the screening questions and explain any terms that may not be easily understood.
- Listen patiently; be open to what is being said, and do not appear judgmental or apathetic.
- Help victims and survivors understand their situation and the options available to keep them safe, providing written materials when appropriate.
- Be knowledgeable about community service specialists (e.g., spouse abuse/rape crisis centers and area counselors) and connect victims with them, consistent with laws, regulations, and policies, when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Providing Regional Cultural Sensitivity

Salient cultural issues for both marriage education efforts and domestic violence awareness programs, include the following:

- Ethnicity
- Literacy level and educational attainment
- Religious affiliation
- Socioeconomic status

NWA Healthy Marriages values sensitivity to these issues. To ignore diversity is to risk developing programs and activities that fail to meet the needs of the regional population.

Maintaining Confidentiality

Perpetrators who discover that a victim has told someone about their abuse may retaliate with further threats and violence. For this and other ethical reasons, it is important that information related to disclosures of domestic violence is handled with utmost care and that victims' privacy and the confidentiality of their information receive the highest priority.

Review of Protocol

A 6-month protocol review meeting, with NWA Healthy Marriages and local domestic violence professionals, will be conducted to assess implementation strengths and weaknesses and make modifications as necessary. Stew Grant will contact NWA Marriage Champions for input prior to the meeting.

Domestic Violence Core Partners

Benton County Women's Shelter
(479) 273-0730 or 800-775-9011 (24-hour Crisis Line)
(479) 273-5702 (Business)
www.bcws.org

Peace at Home Family Shelter
P.O. Box 1923, Fayetteville, AR 72702
(479) 442-9811 or 877-442-9811 *toll free* (Crisis Line)
(479) 444-8310 (Business)
www.peaceathomeshelter.org

Who Do I Contact At CRE If We Need Help?

For support and other questions, please contact:

Stew Grant, M.Div.
Marriage Champion Coordinator
(479) 524-7351
sgrant@jbu.edu

or, visit our website:
www.nwamarriages.com