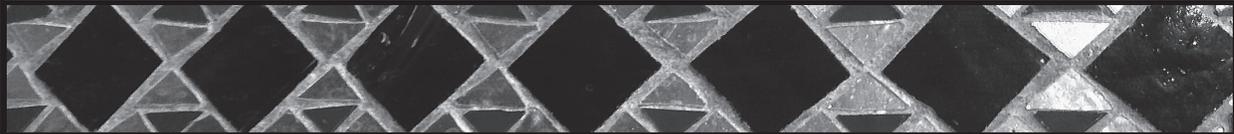


	<b>ACTIVITY</b> <b>7</b>	<b>Building Bridges between Advocates and Faith Leaders</b>
		

**ACTIVITY:**

Building bridges of trust and collaboration between local advocates and faith leaders and presenting information about local services.

**BACKGROUND:**

This activity will help faith leaders understand the importance of working together to address sexual and domestic violence.

Faith leaders and advocates haven't always worked well together on sexual and domestic violence. They have sometimes been suspicious of one another. Roles have been unclear. Victims sometimes "fall through the cracks": they can't talk to advocates about faith, and they can't talk to faith leaders about violence, assault, and abuse. Healing is impossible when victims can't be whole human beings. Partnerships between faith leaders and advocates can better support victims and survivors.

In addition to discussing possible difficulties in the past, this will be an opportunity to educate the participants about the services your agency provides and the roles of other responders in the community. You will need to prepare a 20- to 30-minute presentation about the services you provide as well as those available in your community. Plan to have business cards, brochures, palm cards, etc. available from all relevant community services.

## Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

### **GOALS:**

1. To acknowledge past differences between the two communities.
2. To build bridges of understanding between service providers and local faith leaders.
3. To learn more about local services and the roles they play in the community.
4. To build trusting, interdisciplinary partnerships that can better support victims.
5. To develop the ability to refer victims to community-based services.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of this activity, participants should be able to:

1. Be more aware of and knowledgeable about local services.
2. Articulate distinct roles of advocates and faith leaders.
3. More readily refer victims to domestic and sexual violence service providers.

**ESTIMATED TIME:** 45 minutes

**MATERIALS:** Presentation put together (by service provider) about services provided by agency.  
Brochures, business cards, flyers, etc.

## Facilitator Talking Points

- ❖ Advocates and faith leaders haven't always been on the same page.
- ❖ Background:
  - ❖ There have been few opportunities for faith leaders to acquire the tools, skills, resources, or training they need to respond effectively.
  - ❖ Family counseling classes often focus on "family systems theory," so faith leaders have often learned how to do couples counseling, family counseling, marriage counseling, etc. However, where abuse is involved, family counseling can be dangerous and is not recommended.
  - ❖ Victims struggle to talk to anyone about their experiences. Since they're not hearing from victims, people in the community may not think they need to learn about sexual and domestic violence.
  - ❖ Victims may struggle to talk about their experiences for a variety of reasons. They may want to shield others from the painful truth, or fear they won't be believed. They may live in fear of what the abuser will do if they tell anyone the truth about what's going on. Advocates have learned to "listen between the lines," but others in the community may think the situation isn't happening at all, or isn't as dangerous or desperate as it really is.
  - ❖ When faith leaders DO hear from victims, they don't hear the same things advocates hear. When talking to faith leaders, victims often "sanitize" because it is hard to use the ugly language of sexual and domestic violence in sacred space. This gives faith leaders an unrealistic view of what is going on and contributes to a "disconnect" between the advocate, who is hearing the brutal truth, and the faith community, which often hears a sanitized and minimized account of the experience. (Refer to Activity 6: The Ugly Language of Sexual and Domestic Violence.)
- ❖ Myths about Domestic and Sexual Violence Service Providers
  - ❖ There are myths floating around in faith communities about domestic and sexual violence services. One myth is that domestic violence services break up marriages.
    - ❖ The mission of the domestic violence service agency is to help to keep people safe.
    - ❖ Advocates are trained to provide options, empower survivors, and let them make up their own minds; they are trained NOT to tell people what to do.
    - ❖ It's not someone asking for help, or trying to be safe and keep their children safe that breaks up marriage. It's the violence and abuse that break up marriage.
  - ❖ There are also myths about rape crisis centers. One is that they will force a victim to file charges, or call a situation sexual assault when it isn't. Instead, rape crisis advocates are trained to provide all possible options for a victim and allow the victim to decide what he/she wants to pursue.

## Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

### ✦ Myths about Faith Communities and Faith Leaders

- ❖ And of course there are stereotypes of faith leaders as well: Faith leaders keep the marriage together no matter what the cost. Faith leaders don't understand safety concerns. Faith leaders don't "get" confidentiality. Faith leaders encourage victims of sexual assault to forgive and forget.

### ✦ Moving Forward

- ❖ If advocates and faith leaders can't get past these stereotypes, learn from each other, and learn how to partner with each other, it's the victims and survivors who suffer. Victims could go to an advocate, and feel like they can't talk about their faith, which may be the MOST IMPORTANT part of the equation for them. And they may go to their faith leader, but not talk about the violence, which may be the BIGGEST CHALLENGE they are facing.
- ❖ Violence and trauma affect people physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Violence may precipitate a crisis of faith, anger with God, questioning of long-held beliefs, a feeling of isolation, and many other confusing and frightening feelings. Survivors need help to uncover how their faith, traditions, and texts can be a resource and can support their need for safety and freedom.
- ❖ Each of us has an important role to play. Faith leaders can listen, bear witness to the abuse, provide spiritual and other forms of support, and refer victims and their families to services in the community. Advocates can listen, bear witness to the abuse, provide safety planning, support groups, counseling, hospital and court accompaniment, legal and medical advocacy, shelter, and other services.
- ❖ Police, sheriffs, community safety officers, district attorneys, and courts can also play important roles.
- ❖ Survivors need advocates and faith leaders and police and sheriffs and community safety officers and district attorneys and congregations and friends and families. Survivors need all of us working together in order to be safe.



◇ *Follow this with 20 – 30 minutes of information (presented by the service agencies themselves wherever possible) about the services that are available locally, how they can be reached, who to call, whether you can call confidentially, etc. Provide business cards, palm cards, contact information, and brochures for all services available in the community. For more specifics, please refer to the Presentation Guidelines on the next page. If possible, allow time for questions and answers.*

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## Presentation Guidelines

In Activity 7, you will have an opportunity to present about your agency's services for 20 to 30 minutes, including questions and answers. We developed the list below to help you prepare.

Faith leaders may know very little about your services, and even if you think they know a lot, they may not fully understand the breadth of services you provide. Below are some suggestions for covering the information.

**Introductions:** Provide the full name of the agency, the area that you serve (noting that you often serve people from outside the area who may not be safe in their own communities), and introduce all of your colleagues in the room.

**Explain the structure of your agency:** Are you a stand-alone non-profit or a program that is part of a bigger agency? Do you provide sexual and domestic violence services? If not, where would you refer someone? Do you provide services for those who abuse? If not, where would someone refer an abuser? Do you have major collaborations with other agencies in the community?

**Be sure participants know how to get in touch:** Bring brochures, palm cards, business cards, and even "swag" for everyone! Let them know that they can call you, your colleagues, or the crisis line with questions. They can call anonymously. Provide the hours of the crisis line and give some examples of when someone from the community might call. Offer to come to their faith community for a "meet and greet," a program, or just to leave information for the congregation. Make yourself and your agency available.

**Help participants understand how to connect with your agency:** How can people volunteer? Do they need training and what would that look like? Are there ways that congregations can get involved—like helping out at an annual event, organizing a backpack drive for the shelter, raising money. These are all ways the faith community can learn more about your agency and be supportive.

**Explain the services that your agency provides:** Many may expect to see that you offer shelter services or a crisis line, but not know that you help with housing, offer support groups for victims, provide economic empowerment programs, and run trainings for the schools. The more they understand the different ways that you are working to support victims and providing education in the community, the better the faith leaders will understand how to connect with you. Explain your services using plain language. Avoid acronyms. Talk about your shelter, tell them who can call the crisis line and how victims can get help with court advocacy. Explain how case management, lethality assessment, and safety planning work in your agency. Explain that the services are free of charge, whether or not a victim is actually housed or sheltered at your facility.

## Pieces of a Bigger Picture Training Model

**Make sure participants understand the empowerment model:** Explain how you offer options and information to victims and that they make up their own minds. Reassure participants that you never tell victims what to do, including “get a divorce” or “prosecute the sexual assault.” Explain how your primary goal is to keep people safe and that “safe” is defined in many different ways by many different people. Help them understand how the services your agency offers could help a victim stay safe—whether the victim leaves the abuse or stays in the relationship.

**Explain who you work with in the community:** The network of services can be confusing, so help participants understand the various services and their roles in the community. Explain how you work with law enforcement, the courts, and other services. Try to mention everyone in the community who could be involved, including hospital-based domestic and sexual violence services, batterers’ intervention programs, child witness to violence programs, children’s protective services, elder abuse services, etc. Explain that everyone tries to work together to support victims and keep families safe.

**Note:** If you are funded by the Office on Violence Against Women, please check in advance with your grant specialist for any approvals required if you decide to make a powerpoint presentation.

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