

KEY MESSAGES TO SHARE WITH IPV SURVIVORS¹

Providing survivors with accurate information about intimate partner violence (IPV) and its impact can help reduce their self-blame and shame, and can help them better cope with what happened. It will be helpful to provide the following information:

- An explanation of IPV is and the dynamics of it
- How survivors may feel after the incident(s), common reactions and normalizing these reactions

Key messages you may want to share with survivors are provided below. **Remember that this is just suggested language; you will have to adapt the messages according to your context.**

What intimate partner violence is and the dynamics of it:

- Intimate partner violence is a pattern of behavior in an intimate relationship (for example, in a marriage or dating relationship) that is used by one person in the relationship to gain or maintain power and control over the other person in the relationship.
- This type of violence or abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, reproductive, economic or psychological. It includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure or wound you.
- Intimate partner violence is all about power and control. Abusers (who are usually men) find different ways— physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, reproductive and economic—to control and dominate their wives/girlfriends and exploit the power they have as men in society and in the family. An abuser makes threats, uses intimidation, coercion and often physical violence to instill fear in their wife/girlfriend so that they can continue to control her.
- While it may seem like the abuser's use of alcohol or the stress that he is under are what is causing the abuse, they are not. Drinking alcohol may contribute to or escalate a violent episode, but it is important to remember that this is also a part of the abuser's methods to terrorize you. There are many men who drink alcohol and who are under stress that DO NOT abuse their wives.
- All types of women experience abuse from their husbands/boyfriends. It does not matter whether you're rich or poor, educated or not educated, old or young, or what ethnicity or religion you are.
- Women who have gone through what you are going through often blame themselves for the abuse and violence that is happening to them. It is common to think that if you changed your behavior or your appearance the abuse would stop. You may put the blame and responsibility on yourself. But it is important to know that the abuse does not happen because of anything that you did or anything you need to change. It is never your fault.
- This is really important to remember because the abuser will tell you things to make you think that it is your fault, but he is doing this to further control you and stop you from

¹ This handout has been taken from the Interagency Gender-based Violence Case Management Guidelines <https://gbvresponders.org/response/gbv-case-management/#InteragencyGender-basedViolenceCaseManagementTrainingMaterials>

getting help. You may find that you are trying to change what you do to avoid an episode of violence. The reality is that there is nothing you can do to change his behavior and actions towards you. The abuser is the only one that can control his behavior.

How survivors may feel (common reactions):

- Women have many different feelings when they are in an abusive relationship. The different feelings are confusing and hard to understand. You can often feel opposite feelings at the same time. It's ok to have a lot of different feelings about what happened and about the person who has been abusing you or assaulting you, especially if it is your husband, or someone you knew well and trusted.
- It is common to feel a sense of shame, guilt and helplessness. You may feel that you cannot trust anyone anymore, and your view of the world and feeling of safety in it may have changed. These feelings can be really difficult. It makes sense that you feel them given what you have gone through.
- You may be feeling scared for your life and your children's. You may feel a lot of stress from living with this fear all of the time, and this can be harmful to your body and your mind.
- Because you may be in a constant state of fight, flight or freeze, it can become more difficult to make decisions and believe in your own ability to find safety. You may feel like you are unable to move. This is normal.
- Living with abuse all of the time may also make you feel badly about yourself. You may feel sad and not trust yourself anymore. You may feel isolated and that you do not have others in your life that love and support you. These are normal feelings to have because the abuser's words and actions are meant to make you feel this way.
- All of the feelings you have—whether anger, guilt, fear, love, hope, hopelessness, sadness, shame, confusion—are common and okay for you to feel.
- Sometimes these feelings affect how you behave. You may feel scared all of the time and feel like you cannot trust anyone. You may feel sad all of the time and want to cry. You may feel nothing or feel 'numb.' And you may not want to talk to anyone. All of that is ok.
- Talking about the feelings you are having and how they are affecting you with someone who is a good listener and can comfort you can be helpful.