

# Victim Defined Advocacy with Victims in Contact

California Partnership to End Domestic Violence

Webinar

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Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence - a key initiative of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence in collaboration with Greater Hartford Legal Aid.

# Topics

1. Who
2. Victim Decision Making
3. The “Answer” to Domestic Violence
4. Victim-Defined Advocacy Overview
5. What is the Goal?
6. What Makes Victims in Contact Safer?
7. Key Advocacy Issues
  - Children’s Safety
  - Role Regarding Partners who Batter
8. What Advocates Need

# Nellie

- Strong woman
- Daughter - Emma (6 years old)
- Left Emma's father when he became abusive
- Struggling to make ends meet
- Has a boyfriend - Jesse
- Been with Jesse for four years
- Son - Ryan (2 years old)

# Nellie & Jesse

- For financial & emotional reasons, Nellie asked Jesse to move in
- Jesse is “Dad” to both Emma & Ryan. Happy family.
- Jesse gets laid off and works low wage temp jobs he hates.
- He drinks more, yells and complains about everything.
- Nellie works less because she worried about leaving Emma & Ryan for long periods with Jesse
- They’re behind on the rent and utility bills
- Nellie has enough. She tells Jesse, “you’re a good man, but you need to stop this, to get some help.”
- Jesse tells her to never disrespect him like that. He slaps her and shoves her to the ground to “teach her a lesson”

# 1.

## Who are Victims in Contact

- Person in a relationship w/ abusive partner
- Person who interacts w/ abusive former partner
- Children in the care of adult victims
- Children who interacts with an abusive parent
  - even if parents are “not together”

# 2.

# Victims' Decision Making

# Victims' Decision Regarding Relationship

Complex process occurs and changes over time

Factors include risks analysis and other complex considerations, including:

- Culture
- Family responsibilities
- Social & financial resources
- Personal attributes & values

# Victims' Risk Analysis Regarding Relationship © GHLA 2012

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## Stay

## Leave

Same, Better, Worse? Not sure?

### Batterer-Generated Risks

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| • Physical Violence    | • Physical Violence    |
| • Sexual Violence      | • Sexual Violence      |
| • Psychological Harm   | • Psychological Harm   |
| • Risks to Children    | • Risks to Children    |
| • Financial Losses     | • Financial Losses     |
| • Risks Family/Friends | • Risks Family/Friends |
| • Legal Risks          | • Legal Risks          |

### Life-Generated Risks

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • Financial/Poverty                                 | • Financial/Poverty                                 |
| • Physical and Mental Health                        | • Physical and Mental Health                        |
| • Inadequate Responses by Major Social Institutions | • Inadequate Responses by Major Social Institutions |
| • Discrimination                                    | • Discrimination                                    |

\*Each victim may face some, all, or different risks than those listed.



# What's Nellie thinking about

- Jesse's behavior
  - Change since he lost his job, drinking
  - How Emma & Ryan see him as Dad but also how he now acts around her and Emma & Ryan
  - Slapping and shoving her
  - Not the same as Emma's father
- Money
  - Rent, utilities
  - Income
- Other issues....

# Why Some Victims Stay

- Leaving doesn't guarantee safer, better life
- “Staying bad, leaving worse”
  - Leaving makes life more difficult, dangerous
- Worried about impact on the children
  - Not there to protect them,
  - Not enough food, shelter, health care, etc.
- Commitment to family, the relationship
- Can't afford to leave

**Other Factors:** Partner generated risks; Life generated risks (poverty); Life circumstances (culture, family responsibilities, social & financial resources)

# 3.

## The “Answer” to Domestic Violence

# Common Assumptions about Leaving

- Victims should leave
- Victims can leave
- Primary safety strategy for victims & their children
- Central to most responses, resources, legal remedies
- Victims “solve” domestic violence by leaving

# Pop Quiz

- $635 + 12,849 \div 425 \times 6 + \frac{1}{2} = ?$
- How do race and gender income disparities impact economic growth?

Choose one to answer the questions above:

- A. Blue
- B. 24 Miles
- C. Finland
- D. A and C

**Options to address complex human issues can be oversimplified.....**

**How is domestic violence solved?**

- A. Victim leaves**
- B. Victim calls the police & leaves**
- C. Victim gets a restraining order & leaves**
- D. Victim.....& leaves**

**Victims who can't or don't leave.....somehow seen as "responsible" for not ending the violence...**

# Assumptions About Victims Who Can't or Don't Leave

- **Judgment & Labels**
- **Consequences for not leaving**
  - Fewer safety options
  - Ineffective implementation
  - Harmful responses
  - Pressure to leave without the necessary resources - Asked to do the impossible
  - Ineffective safety strategies for children

Is having no option  
to leave,  
making a decision to  
stay?



There is no single “answer” to domestic violence

## **Leaving as an answer.....**

Some victims:

- Can and want to
- Are safer
- Don't have real options to
- Are not safer
- Decide not to
- Face more danger & risks

A victim leaving does not stop the violent partner from moving on to the next relationship, the next victim.

# 4. Victim-Defined Advocacy Overview

# Victim-Defined Advocacy

1. Understand the victim's perspective and priorities.
2. Work with the victim to strengthen her comprehensive safety plan.

## Victim-Defined Advocacy:

### 1. Understand Victim's Perspective and Priorities.

- **Risk analysis**
  - Partner who batters-generated risks
  - Life-generated risks
  - Effect of staying/leaving
  - Her main concerns
- **Life circumstances**
  - Parental responsibilities
  - Resources
  - Cultural factors
  - Her most important considerations
- **Plans**
  - Past plans and effects
  - Current decisions and plans
  - Her first/most important risks/issues to address

## Victim-Defined Advocacy:

2. Work with a victim to strengthen her comprehensive safety plan.

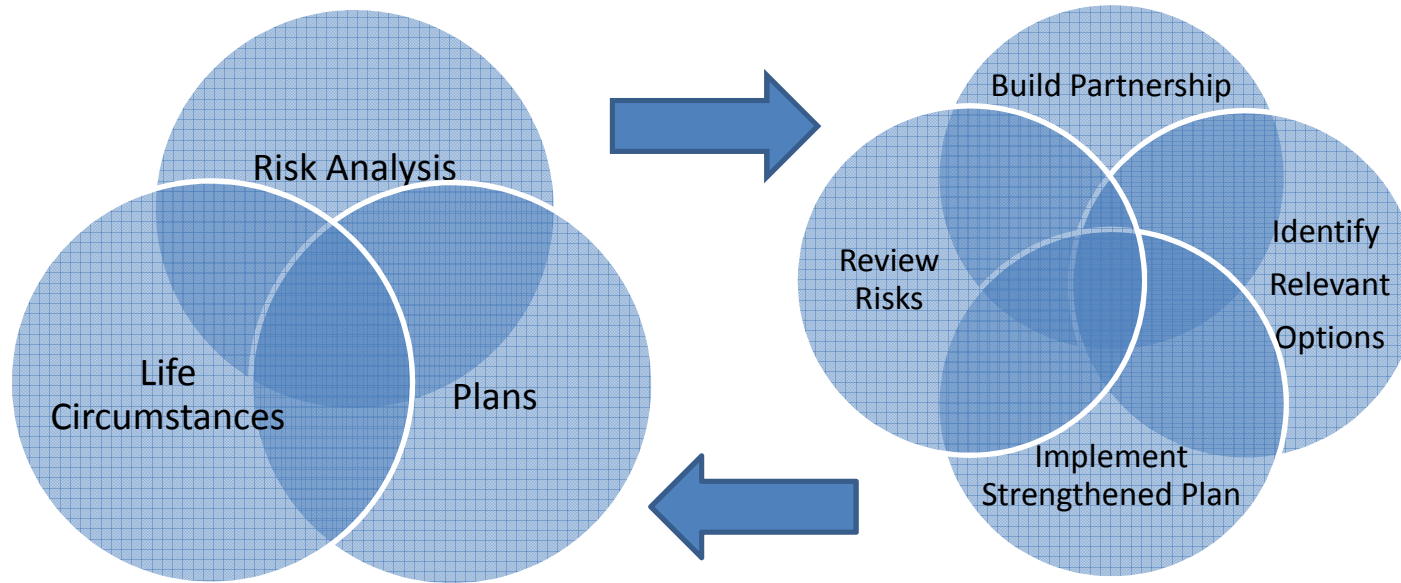
- **Build a partnership**
- **Respectfully review risks**
  - Life-threatening & risks to children
- **Identify relevant options & resources**
  - Analyze with her
- **Develop & implement strengthened plan**
  - Enhanced advocacy when needed

# Victim-Defined Individual Advocacy Overview

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**Understand Victim's Perspective and Priorities**

**Work with Victim to Strengthen Safety Plan**



# 5.

# What is the goal?

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# Safety

**No Violence**

**Basic Human  
Needs Met**

**Social and  
Emotional  
Well-Being**



## Victim-Defined Success

- Relative to her perspective & priorities
- Broad concept of safety
- May not focus on physical violence
- May not focus on domestic violence
- Might include incremental improvement, change. Better. Safer.

# Safer

## Less Violence

- Reduced level
- Less frequent
- Less control

## Economic Stability Increased

- Fewer gaps in meeting basic human needs
- More financial resources

## Well-Being Strengthened

- More resilience to effects of violence
- Emotional healing
- Increased social supports
- Reinforced cultural strengths

# 6. What Makes Victims in Contact Safer?

## VDA with VIC is same/different from leaving focused advocacy

### Same

- Matches safety strategies to risks
- Determines what she can do safely
- Builds from strengths, resilience, and positive cultural models
- Advocates for her access to services, resources
- Includes strategies to support well-being and safety (child & adult victims)
- May include batterer intervention

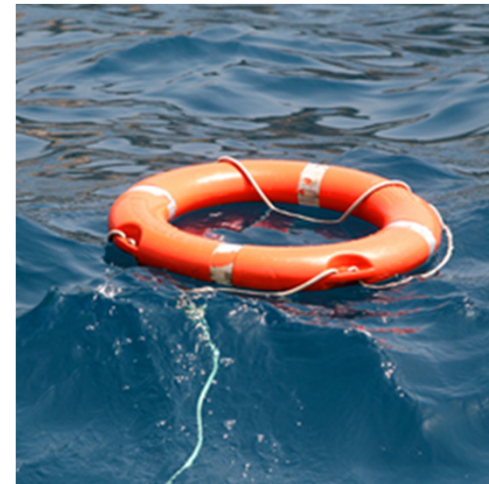
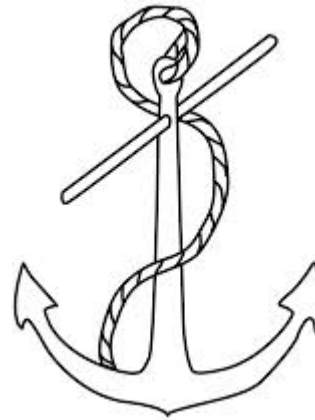
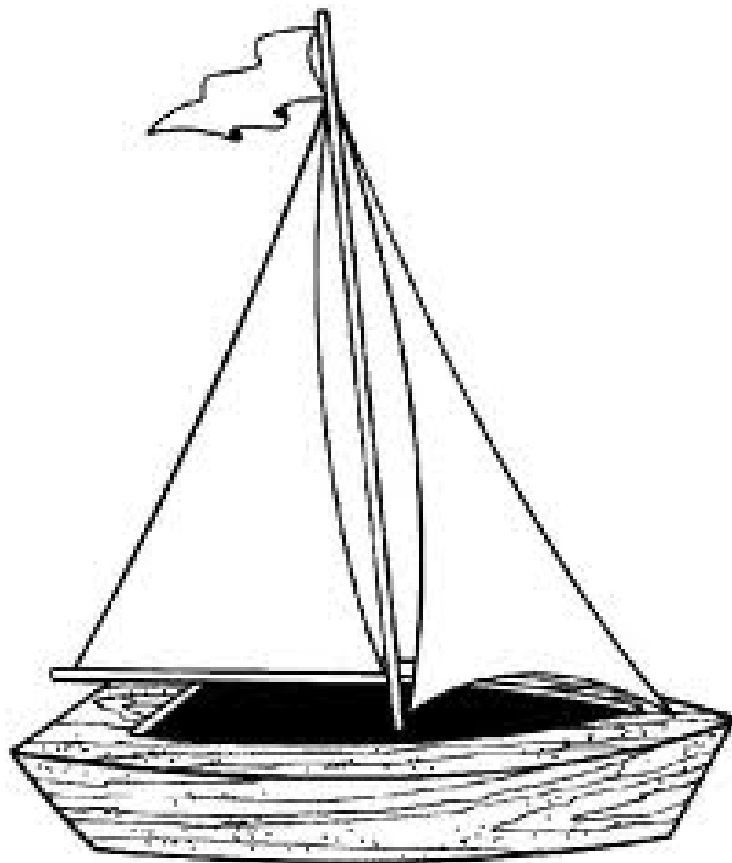
### Different

- Victim in contact may be able to do fewer things safely than a victim who leaves
- Options that rely on no contact/leaving may have limited or no use -- or be used differently
- Will need to explain to systems why victim is in contact
- May include range of victim-defined options and interventions for partner/father (E.g. reduction of violent and controlling behavior, financial, health, parenting)

What Makes Victims in Contact Safer?

**Relevant Options**

# Boat analogy





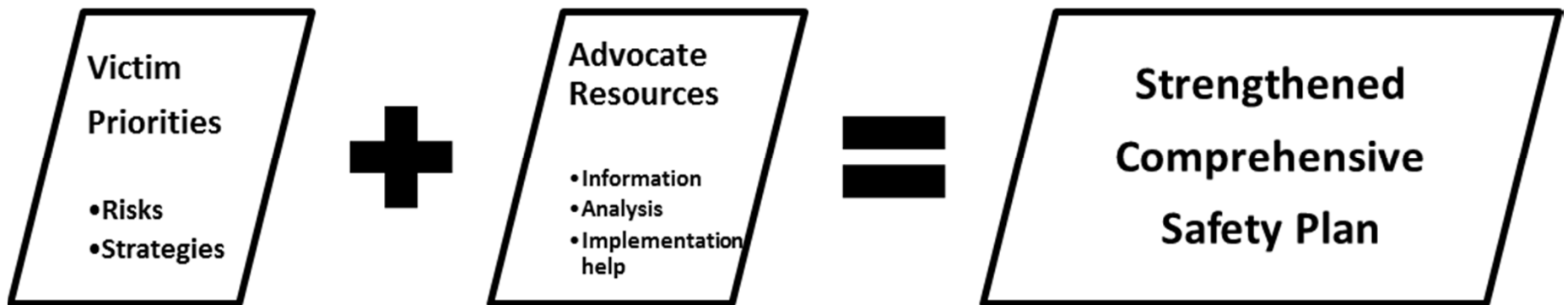


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## Victim Defined Advocacy with Victims in Contact Does NOT

- Say that victims should stay
- Abandon the important option of leaving
- Mean it is always good or safe for children to have contact with a father who is abusive

It is advocating for all victims (adults & kids).

# 7.

# Key Advocacy Issues

- Children's Safety
- Role Regarding Partners who Batter

# Key Advocacy Issues

*Children's Safety --  
Advocacy For Children in Contact*

## Key Advocacy Responsibilities for Children (including those in contact)

- **Review risks - Are they “safer enough?”**
- **Support parenting of victim-parent**
- **Offer strategies to improve safety**
- **Take steps necessary to protect them  
from serious harm**

# Know how the children are doing -- Risk review

- Understand victim-parent's risk analysis
  - Main concerns for children
  - Current plans & responses regarding those risks
- Understand child's behavior, feelings & interactions
  - At home, school, & in the community
- Remember that every child is unique
  - Different developmental stages, strengths, resources, risks, & cultural contexts
- Consider benefits of positive aspects of child's life
- Consider effects of all significant risks -- not just DV

## Emma, Ryan --- and Nellie

- From what we know about them
  - Jesse is a father/father figure to both kids
  - Nellie's worried about how Jesse's behavior is affecting Emma & Ryan
  - A part of her plan is to reduce the time Jesse is alone with them
    - This is also reducing her income to the point of not being able to pay bills....
- Lot more to learn about Emma & Ryan ...and Jesse & Nellie as caretakers/parents

# What Makes Children Safer

Violence Prevention and Reduction	Economic Stability & Educational Opportunity	Well-Being Strengthened	Capable Caretaker/s	
			<u>Battered</u> Parent Safer & Supported	<u>Battering</u> Parent Less Harmful & More Helpful



# When Risk of Serious Harm

- **Take steps necessary to protect children**
  - Involve other family members, social services
  - Parenting intervention plans
  - Limited contact
  - Court orders that require safe contact
- **Work with victim-parent, when possible**
- **Match intervention to level of risk**
- **Some circumstances will require child protection**
  - **Report may be warranted**
  - **Continued advocacy is essential**
    - Child and victim-parent's safety
    - Prevent ineffective interventions
    - Ensure strengths-based responses

# Key Advocacy Issues

*Advocate Role*

*Regarding Partners Who Batter*

## Role with Individual Victims

- **How does she see him?**
  - Get the whole picture, not just the violence
  - Understand her view of him as a parent
- **What change does she want from him?**
- **What strategies, IF ANY, will support that change?**

## How does Nellie see Jesse?

- Asked him to move in
- Acts like a Dad to Emma
- Son together - Ryan
- Were a happy family
- Saw his behavior change after losing a job
- She tells Jesse, “you’re a good man, but you need to stop this, to get some help.”
- Experienced the behavior change, the slap & the shove to the ground
- Other aspects we don’t yet know.....

## Advocate Role

### Changing violent behavior 1 of 2

- Help victim assess possibility of change in partner's behavior
- **Categories that may be helpful:**
  - Life-threatening
  - No chance for change
  - Might/will change
- **Predicting behavior is difficult**
  - Could be wrong - tell her this
  - Working with victim to assess change is new work for many advocates....need to learn more

## Advocate Role - 2 of 2

- **Offer change strategies for partner/father that will make things better for victim and her children**
- **Plan with victim how to make change strategies safely “available” to her partner**
- **Explore safety strategies for victims**

# Change strategies for Jesse

- **WHAT:**
  - Nellie says he “needs help”
  - What does that mean to her?
  
- **HOW:**
  - Must consider Jesse’s violent reaction to Nellie’s suggestion he get help
  - What does she think would help?
  - Who does he listen to?

# Partner in Program - Some Safety Strategies

- Information about the program
- How she'll decide if it is working (making things better)
- What to do if things are the same or worse
- Develop escape plan if high risk/lethal violence
- Talk about the children
  - Know how they're doing
  - Provide emotional support



## Some considerations about violent partners

### **Not all the same:**

- Some batter (dominate), some don't
- Use different levels of violence--pose different risks
- Some change for the better, some don't

### **Interventions:**

- Need to know more about what supports change and for whom
- Need to consider violence in context with other factors, such as substance abuse, culture, mental health issues, poverty, and attitudes regarding women & children

**8.**

**What about us?**

**What do advocates need?**

# Feasible Expectations About

- Leaving as a safety strategy
- Options available to victims
- Advocate role
- Safety → → → Safer

# Where we work is where victims get help

How does the  
advocacy  
environment  
feel to victims?

How does the  
advocacy work  
environment feel  
to us?

## Expand who can help

- **One agency/advocate can't do it all for all victims in contact**

### How:

- **Nurture existing network**
  - Explain work with victims in contact
- **Build new alliances**
  - Maybe one victim at a time - Who can help her?
  - People/programs that offer options for safer
  - People/programs that work w/ men, not just BIPs

## Build Institutional Support to Work with Victims in Contact

- Agency commitment/at least permission
- Feasible job assignment
- Skill & knowledge development
- Supervision
- Response to effects of this work
- Flexibility (rules for victims and staff)

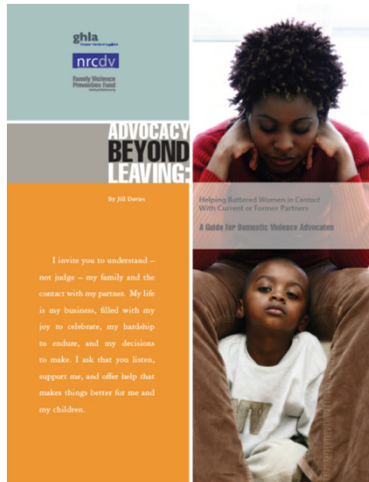
Building  
Comprehensive  
Solutions



## Principles for Expanding Advocacy

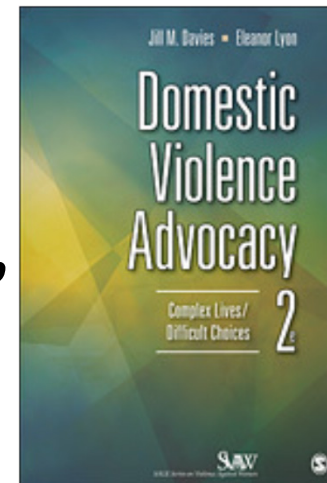
- 1. Victim-defined advocacy**  
What do victims in contact need?
- 2. Collaboration**  
Who can help meet the needs of victims in contact?
- 3. Advocate-defined information, technical assistance**  
What do advocates need to expand to advocacy?

## Resources



*Advocacy Beyond Leaving Guide*  
 By Jill Davies, Futures without Violence (2009)  
 Available on [VAWnet.org](http://VAWnet.org)

*Domestic Violence Advocacy:  
 Complex Lives/Difficult Choices,*  
 By Jill Davies & Eleanor Lyon,  
 Sage Publications (2014)





# Resources - [www.bcsdv.org](http://www.bcsdv.org)

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*Supporting critical thinking, learning and victim-defined advocacy...*

## Building Comprehensive Solutions



BCSDV provides a victim-defined framework for creating solutions to domestic violence. We offer analysis, information and tools. We work in partnership with victims and with advocates. We collaborate.

“ I have a better plan...I have options... ”  
— Shelter Resident

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# Presenter Bio

Attorney Jill Davies is the deputy director of Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc. (GHLA) and directs Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence, a key initiative of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, in collaboration with GHLA. Her advocacy on behalf of family violence victims spans three decades. One aspect of her work is the conception and continued development of the victim-defined approach to advocacy. She has written and consulted extensively on issues of importance to family violence victims, including advocacy and safety planning, poverty, and legal issues. The author of numerous articles and materials regarding violence against women and family violence, her writing encourages critical thinking and supports improved practice. She is co-author of the book, *Domestic Violence Advocacy: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*, Sage Publications (2014).