

# SUPPORTING SURVIVORS ACCESSING HIV CARE

## YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXPERT

When a survivor comes to you for services, they may not want or need to be connected to a domestic violence resource or advocate. While advocates can provide survivors with support, resources and other community services, some survivors may not feel like the services are for them, may only be focused on getting support for their immediate needs around HIV/AIDS, or be fearful of the services.

Survivors have to make incredibly difficult decisions in their lives. They may decide to stay or leave but we must respect survivors wishes in whatever they choose.

You don't have to be a domestic violence advocate to provide them support and access to resources. Sometimes the most important thing can be to just be there for them. So how can you help?

**Start by Believing.** This sounds easy, but it's one of the most important parts. A survivor is entrusting you with the details of the violence they are or have experienced. Trauma can manifest in many different ways. Providing reassurance, no judgement, and validating their experience will be key in building trust and rapport, should someone disclose what they are experiencing.

**Ask Them What They Want.** Many times, survivor's right to choose what's best for them and their lives is taken away by the abusive person. Ask the survivor what they want to do moving forward. It could be that they just wanted to share what they are experiencing, or looking for further help. Our job is to not fix the situation, but to let the survivor decide what is right for them.

**Provide Resources.** Again, you don't have to be a domestic violence advocate to provide support or resources. These resources could mean the difference between someone leaving and getting the help they want or someone finally understanding what they are experiencing.

## SAFETY PLANNING

A safety plan is actions the survivor can take to help lower risks in their relationships. For survivors who live with HIV/AIDS this could be important. These tips can include, keeping medication, copies of important health records, and documentation of the abuse in a safe location. This may also include basics items such as talking through who is a safe person they can go to if they decide to leave or phone numbers to memorize. The survivor is the expert in their life and working with them on creating a safety plan will give them tips and strategies to help manage risks. *Contact NNEDV for more on Safety Planning.*