

ADVOCATE SAFETY POLICIES

I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to increase the safety of advocates who work with women who have been sexually assaulted and/or battered, and their children. These policies provide guidelines for advocates based on the reality that advocacy to end violence in the lives of Native women often result in the targeting of individual advocates for other violent crimes by batterers and/or those who collude with them.

As advocates, we routinely work with women to develop safety strategies based on the array of tactics and violence their batterers use to maintain power and control over them. Advocates realize it is often difficult for women to name and face that harsh reality. As advocates, developing our own safety strategies requires us to face a similar reality, without undermining our advocacy work. Advocate safety strategies are responses to specific tactics a particular batterer uses and are similar to the options we advocate battered women use.

Advocate safety policies prioritizes the safety of women who have been sexually assaulted and/or battered, and the safety of advocates. Violence against advocates is a violent crime and a red flag signaling increased danger to the women we advocate for.

II. ADVOCATE SAFETY POLICY

All situations involving the batterer should be considered as potential or apparent threats to the advocate's safety in the same manner that advocates consider them threats to the battered woman. Advocates must consider the same options as the women we work with.

1) Home phone numbers and addresses of advocates are to be kept confidential. It is not uncommon for advocates to bring women and their children home with them under certain circumstances. These situations must be discussed with the program director ahead of time, if the situation allows, i.e., snowstorms, downed phone lines etc. The women we work with are our sisters and welcoming women who have been battered into our homes is the herstorical foundation of the shelter movement: *the issue is the safety of everyone involved.*

2) Batterers who call the shelter/program or advocates homes shall be responded to briefly – “As an advocate I can not talk with you. You can call your probation officer/men’s group facilitator/attorney to discuss your concerns.” Hang up. If the battered woman involved has a protection order, a call from her batterer may be considered a violation through third party contact. Document and report all calls to your supervisor, the probation department coordinator and/or men’s program director.

3) If a batterer comes to the shelter/program, do not open the door. Call the police and report the instance to your supervisor immediately. Document the occurrence. The supervisor reports to the Director, who determines if a restraining order and/or filing trespassing charges is necessary.

4) If a batterer approaches an advocate out in public, respond as you would if he called the shelter. Do whatever is necessary to stay safe at that time. Do not feel obligated to talk to him. Be aware that he is using you to get to the woman you are working with. Call the police and/or get a restraining order, if necessary. Document and report the event to your supervisor probation officers and prosecutors, as appropriate. It may be necessary for the Director to get a restraining order that covers all program advocates. Consider traveling with other advocates. Try not to be in situations where you are isolated.

5) If a batterer comes to or calls your home, consider filing a restraining order and/or pressing stalking or harassment charges. These instances are to be documented and reported to your supervisor, police, probation officers and prosecutors, as appropriate. These instances indicate a high level of risk to the advocate. It may be necessary to stay with family or friends or stay at the shelter until safety is assured.

6) Increase building security. This applies to courtrooms, hospitals, attorney offices and any other place advocacy occurs – everywhere. Assess safety levels of buildings you go to in the course of your work: alarm systems, escape routes and exits, window visibility, door locks, “panic buttons,” speed dial to police, police presence etc. Make sure the waiting room does not allow you to be isolated by the batterer or those that collude with him. Consider police escorts in public places.

7) When transporting and in courtroom situations arrange for a “police presence” – in and around the courtroom, police escorts or transport to and from court and other locations. Arrange check-ins with other advocates and possibly law enforcement, giving departure and arrival times. Include travel routes and description of vehicle. Carry a cell phone.

8) “Ride-alongs” with law enforcement are strictly prohibited. Have an officer transport the woman to a safe meeting place if the woman wants to meet with an advocate immediately. Avoid having officers drop women off at the shelter, if possible (safeguard against the advocate or woman being served at the program).

9) Avoid transporting women to their homes, if the batterer is not in jail or there is risk from third parties. Officers can transport and standby while women get their belongings from their home. At the very least, get a police escort.

10) Do not respond to a woman’s home if the batterer is not in jail or you can not confirm he is out of the area and is not coming back. Arrange to meet the woman elsewhere, and/or have police transport her to a safe location to meet with you.

11) Confirm with dispatchers and officers that names of women, advocates and locations are kept confidential. This includes making calls on secured phone lines only, so scanners can’t pick up the calls.

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