



Women's  
Support  
Center

# Strategies for SURVIVORS





## What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is when one person **CONTROLS OR COERCES THE OTHER** in an intimate relationship whether they are married or not. Types of abuse include **PHYSICAL, VERBAL, EMOTIONAL, ECONOMIC AND SEXUAL AS WELL AS INTIMIDATION AND THREATS OF VIOLENCE**. Most victims are women abused by men in a relationship but it can also be by mother-in-laws, or by same sex partners or by a sibling. In Armenia, **1 IN 4 WOMEN IS ABUSED AND WE HAD 40 DEATHS** (that we know of) due to domestic violence.

### *A Note to the Readers*

*We created this brochure as a resource for survivors who want to explore strategies of healing and survival. Some pretty heavy feelings might come up for you as you read this. We can help you deal with issues of safety but also with feelings of being overwhelmed. Based on Zine of Philly Survivor Support Collective.*

## Let's Talk About Safety

**YOUR SAFETY IS VERY IMPORTANT.** Are you currently in a situation or do you want to get out of a situation where you can be hurt or do you feel unsafe? Do you have a plan for what to do to keep yourself safe? Do you have an escape plan? If you can predict the situation that might happen, **YOU CAN THEN CREATE A PLAN NOW TO DEAL WITH THEM AS THEY ARISE. THIS IS CALLED A SAFETY PLAN.** It is very helpful to make a safety plan before a dangerous situation occurs. When a dangerous situation or crisis occurs, it is normal that we will not be able to think clearly or make decisions on how to get to safety.

**SAFETY PLANS CAN BE SIMPLE OR AS ELABORATE AS YOU NEED THEM TO BE.** They can address physical or emotional safety concerns. Healing happens most effectively when you are safe. Finding a way to feel safer may be a good way to start the healing process.

**FOR IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO CREATE A SAFETY PLAN CALL**

**099-88-78-08**



## What Do You Need?

We have learned a lot from survivors who came to us for support. Here are some lessons from our work and our experiences that we hope will be useful for you to know. Use whatever is helpful for you.

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**1 YOU MAY NOT KNOW AT FIRST WHAT YOU NEED IN ORDER TO HEAL.** That's normal! These needs can keep changing throughout your healing process. Talking to someone you trust about what you are going through may help you figure out what you need to begin your healing process.
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**2 SET SOME GOALS FOR YOURSELF TO HELP YOU GET WHAT YOU NEED.** Setting goals for what you would like to accomplish and what healing will look like in your life may help you focus your energy and figure out what steps to begin taking.
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**3 THINK ABOUT WHAT ALREADY WORKS FOR YOU.** If you are thinking about starting to heal from DV or sexual assault there are probably already things you do in your life that are healing for you. For example, what are some actions, activities or practices that you already have in place that feel healing for you?



**ASK FOR HELP FROM PEOPLE YOU TRUST.** Dealing with DV or sexual assault can feel isolating and lonely. Being isolated and not having someone to talk to, can cut you off from important resources for safety, emotional support, and collective action. It's important to **ASK FOR SUPPORT FROM PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE OR FIND NEW PEOPLE WHO CAN SUPPORT YOU**- like the staff at Women's Support Center. We understand that it feels scary to ask for help, try starting now: **CALL 099-88-78-08. YOU DON'T HAVE TO GIVE OUT YOUR NAME**, nor do you have to tell anyone all the details, just as much as you feel comfortable with. **WHAT YOU ARE COMFORTABLE TELLING PEOPLE MIGHT CHANGE OVER TIME.**



**LET THE EMOTIONS OUT.** The emotional impact of an assault can be really overwhelming. It's normal to close down those feelings in order to protect ourselves from having to go through them. When we focus on healing, those emotions may come flooding back in over-whelming ways. **HAVING A PLACE TO GO WITH THOSE EMOTIONS AND LEARNING HOW TO LET THEM OUT IN SAFE AND MANAGEABLE WAYS CAN BE VERY IMPORTANT.**

- **SOMETIMES GIVING YOUR BODY A PHYSICAL RELEASE MAY HELP YOU DEAL WITH BUILT-UP EMOTIONS AND SENSATIONS LIKE TENSION, ANXIETY, ANGER, PANIC, ETC.** What are physical activities you like to do? Maybe walking fast, screaming, yoga, breathing deeply, gardening, having a shoulder rub or even aerobic dancing can be very calming. Find few activities that work for you when you are overwhelmed.
- Sometimes **TALKING TO ANOTHER PERSON, VENTING TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST, OR EVEN TALKING IT OUT TO YOURSELF** in front of the mirror may help you release some of your feelings.

*“Once I was totally overwhelmed and feeling like if I told anyone I knew they would just judge me or say some dumb thing to make me feel better, so I called the Hotline. I didn’t really want their advice – I told the woman on the phone not to try to solve my problems and that I just needed to tell someone what happened. I cried a lot as I was saying it, which was terrible super embarrassing, but I’ll never have to know what that woman was or talk to her again so it was ok. Afterward I was calm enough that I was able to fall asleep and sleep through the night. That was a relief.”*

- Some people feel that **WRITING IN A JOURNAL, WRITING POETRY , PAINTING, DRAWING OR PLAYING MUSIC** can be healthful to process difficult emotions.

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**FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR TRAUMA TRIGGERS ARE AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM.** Many survivors experience trauma triggers related to their experience of sexual assault or DV. Trauma triggers may bring about vivid memories, flashbacks or intrusive thoughts, and can be unexpected or seem illogical. **GETTING TRIGGERED CAN BE TERRIFYING AND DISORIENTING; SO AS SURVIVORS, WE OFTEN TRY TO AVOID THINGS THAT TRIGGER US.** That avoidance can and does help us get through some really hard times, but there may be times when we can’t (or don’t want to have to keep working so hard to try to) control whether or not we come into contact with some of the things that trigger us.

Do You?

- PANIC? LOSE TIME?**
- FORGET WHERE YOU ARE?**
- SEE/EXPERIENCE THINGS THAT YOU ARE UNSURE ARE REAL?**
- RE-EXPERIENCE THINGS THAT HAPPENED TO YOU BEFORE?**
- FEEL OUT OF CONTROL?**
- CHECK OUT/DISSOCIATE?**

Feeling a way to explore, understand, and move through trauma triggers can also be helpful. What's key is being in a space that feels safe and having strategies to regain control after getting triggered.

## When You Are Triggered Does Your

**HEART RACE? HANDS AND FEET GET COLD?**  
**MIND RACE? CHEST FEELS TIGHT?**  
**BODY PARTS GO NUMB?**  
**MIND GOES BLANK? VISION GETS BLURRY?**  
**HEAD OR MUSCLE ACHE? MOUTH GOES DRY?**

**EVERYONE'S TRAUMA TRIGGERS ARE UNIQUE**, and so are their experiences of being triggered. It's normal to respond to different triggers in different ways. Although navigating responses to triggers is ultimately a personal task, **SHARING IDEAS WITH OTHERS MAY HELP YOU DISCOVER RESPONSE STRATEGIES**. Here are some examples of things that work for us:



**GETTING UP AND DRINKING A GLASS OF WATER**

## BRINGING YOURSELF BACK INTO YOUR BODY- THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO DO THIS INCLUDING:



- Using breathing
- Moving or touching parts of your body to bring your awareness or that part of you into your consciousness
- Focusing on the feeling of your limbs against the chair you are sitting on
- Focusing on a specific sensation- like imagining the taste of strawberries
- Rubbing your ears between your forefinger and thumb
- Chewing gum
- Drinking tea



**SPEAKING OUT LOUD OR WRITING DOWN  
WHATEVER THE TRIGGER BROUGHT UP**



**LEAVING/CHANGING YOUR PHYSICAL  
LOCATION TO GO SOMEWHERE YOU  
FEEL SAFER**

CALLING A FRIEND OR SOMEONE YOU TRUST



GOING FOR A RUN, DOING EXERCISE, ETC.

TURNING OFF THE RADIO/TV/LIGHTS TO  
REDUCE STIMULI AND GIVE YOURSELF  
SOME QUIET



TURNING ON TV/RADIO AND ALL LIGHTS  
TO DROWN OUT UNWELCOME QUIET OR  
OUTSIDE NOISES



REASSURING YOURSELF THAT YOU'RE SAFE

## Setting Goals For Yourself

### SOME IDEAS

Accomplishing goals may help you feel like you are taking concrete steps towards healing. **EVERYONE'S SITUATION AND NEEDS ARE DIFFERENT**, and depending on where you're at, you may find that **DIFFERENT TYPES OF GOALS MAKE MORE OR LESS SENSE TO YOU**. Goals that seem out of reach or totally uninteresting at one point in your healing process might make a lot more sense later.

It helps to have some **GOALS THAT ARE SMALL, CONCRETE, STEP-BY-STEP** and that you can finish.

### SOME EXAMPLES:

- Ask two people for support
- Find a support group and go to a meeting – WSC has them
- Identify one trauma trigger
- Identify one thing you can do when you feel triggered that helps ground you, calm you down, or bring you back to yourself
- Tell one person you trust what happened and what you are feeling about it in the moment. Ask for their support

- Write down a memory that's stuck in your head and then burn it (or tie it to a stone and throw it in the river-or garbage)
- Talk to another survivor about your experience with trauma and healing
- Read some brochures about DV
- Do things that make your body feel good each day or every week
- Learn about herbs that help with trauma symptoms like anxiety or insomnia and have them when you need them
- Learn to use breathing to deal with flashbacks, panic episodes, or anxiety
- Find a way to address your anger or grief that works for you



**OTHER GOALS MAY SEEM HUGE, UNCLEAR AND UNACHIEVABLE.**

They might be the kinds of things you wish for but you know **WILL TAKE A LONG TIME** and you may be sure you're totally there.

For Example:

**SLEEP THROUGH THE NIGHT WITHOUT NIGHTMARES**

**BE OPEN ABOUT YOUR DV HISTORY WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY. FIGURE OUT HOW THIS FEELS IN YOUR DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS**

**SPEAK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE PUBLICLY- AT AN EVENT OR ON TV**

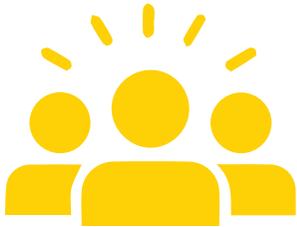
**RECONNECTING WITH YOUR EMOTIONS IN YOURSELF AND YOUR RELATIONSHIPS**

Your goals will probably change over time, and that's ok. If you find yourself holding onto goals that don't seem to be going anywhere, ask yourself if they still feel useful. Read just your goals and focus on things that are more important and helpful to this moment in your healing.



*“If you have a lot of sadness related to your experiences of being abused or assaulted, but have trouble feeling anger, think about how you could give yourself permission to feel angry. Or if you find it hard to cry or feel sad, you might want to explore whether something is cutting you off from those feelings.”*

## Engaging Your Community



**HAVING OUTSIDE SUPPORT IS REALLY HELPFUL IN HEALING AFTER DV OR A SEXUAL ASSAULT. COMMUNITY MAY HELP YOU COME OUT OF A SPACE OF ISOLATION, SHAME, FEAR AND HELP YOU FEEL LESS ALONE.** There are many

ways that outside support people can contribute to your healing process. For example, you can come to our center and ask for support as we have a team and others who can help you work on your personal goals. We can offer you support with counselling and also with free legal support as you may want legal procedures against the person who caused you harm.

### ASK FOR SUPPORT

Think about the different types of people and organizations you have in your life and what types of things you might be able to ask them for. **WE CAN WORK WITH YOU TO FIND RESOURCES SO YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH YOUR GOALS.** Also, our team can offer you emotional support to vent out emotions and help you heal your body and mind.

### HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU WANT

Many people are willing to support you, but might now know how. It's ok to give feedback about what kinds of support are and

aren't working for you. **TRY TO GIVE THEM CLEAR SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO SUPPORT YOU EVEN IF YOU FEEL LIKE THEY SHOULD BE OBVIOUS.**

### KNOW THAT NOT EVERYONE WILL BE ABLE OR WILLING TO SUPPORT YOU

Others can support you but not exactly the way you want or need. **THE PEOPLE SUPPORTING YOU MIGHT HAVE LIMITS TO WHAT THEY CAN OFFER – ESPECIALLY IN ARMENIA WHERE NOT TOO MANY RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE.** However, they may be able to help in little ways. For example, the job you are offered might not be ideal but is a good beginning. Patience can be hard when you are scared or hurting, but it is necessary to allow people to try to support you in a sustainable way.

*“It was really helpful when you let me know that he was at the party I was planning to go. But it doesn't feel great when you text me every time you see him or hear about him. I know you mean well but I don't like being reminded of him in the middle of my day. In the future just let me know if he is going to be at a place I'm planning to be.”*

**YOUR EXPERIENCES ARE YOUR OWN; NO ONE CAN DEFINE THEM FOR YOU**

Your support people should respect that you are the ultimate authority on your experiences and not try to interpret what you need or how you feel without asking permission. **NOT EVERYONE WILL AUTOMATICALLY UNDERSTAND THAT THEY CANNOT TELL YOUR STORY FOR YOU.** It can be helpful to be explicit about how and when you want people to talk (or not talk) about your experience. If people are talking in ways that make you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to speak up and tell them to stop. **NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR YOU OR FORCE YOU TO DO ANYTHING.**

**BE AWARE THAT FEELING FULLY SUPPORTED IN YOUR COMMUNITY MAY BE A LONG-TERM PROCESS**



We live in a world that actively silences and shames survivors. **EVEN IN A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTERS, YOU MAY COME ACROSS PEOPLE WHO TRY TO MAKE YOU FEEL BAD FOR TALKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED.**

When you involve a lot of people or when you are seeking some form of accountability, your story could live on in a public way for a long time.

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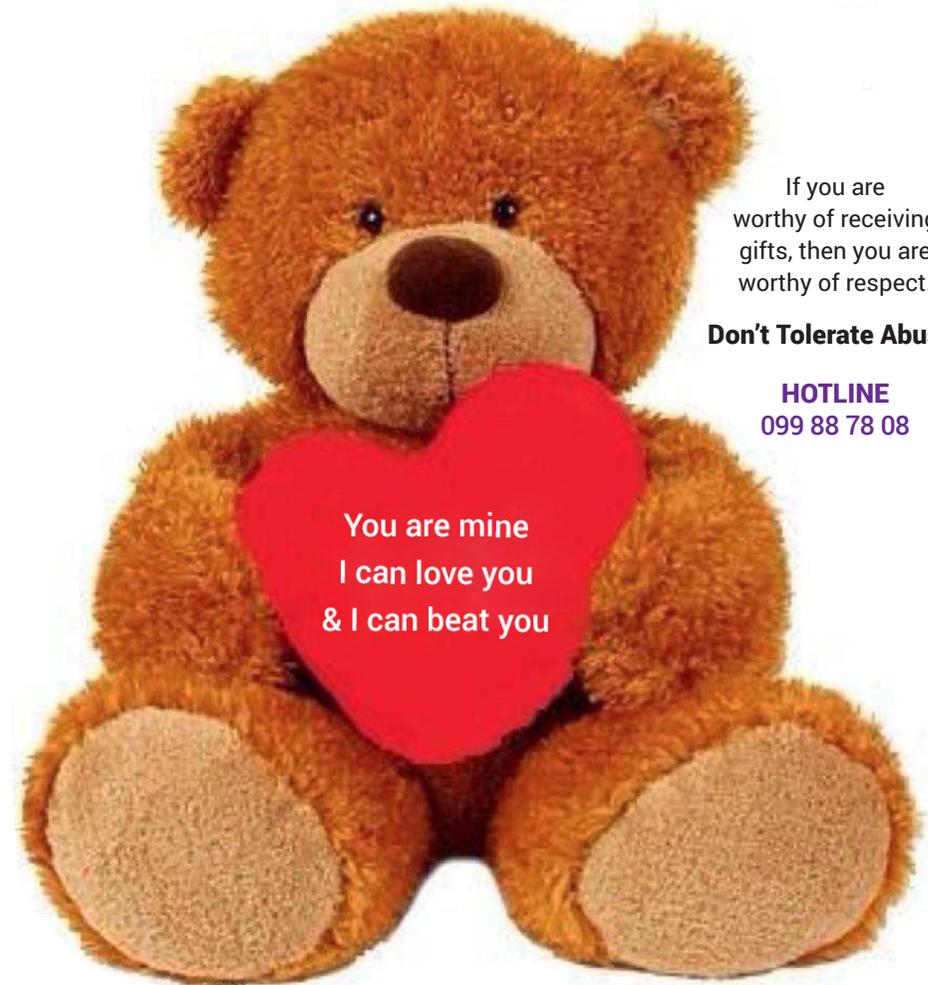
*“I don’t want my ex-husband not to have friends. But it makes me feel sick and invisible when people pretend like nothing happened. I think if people would just acknowledge the harm that he caused and try to send them to therapy to work on their denial about what they did, then I’d feel ok with everyone still talking to and being friends with him.”*

**Where to Go From Here**

At the Women’s Support Center we annually receive hundreds of women who have survived domestic violence. **WE DO SURVIVOR SUPPORT WORK. THIS CAN BE A GREAT WAY TO CONNECT WITH OTHER SURVIVORS, SHARE YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES WITH PEOPLE WHO MIGHT NEED SUPPORT, AND DEVELOP SOME STRATEGIES TO PUT IN PLACE FOR OTHER SURVIVORS IN YOUR COMMUNITY.** Our center is a safe space to share experiences and information.

We welcome you to connect with us to exchange ideas and receive support, build community, or offer feedback so we can serve you better. **WE OFFER SOCIAL SERVICE ASSISTANCE , PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING TO HELP YOU HEAL, LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND REPRESENTATION AS WELL AS SHELTER FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN IF YOU FEEL THE NEED TO BE SAFE.**

*“It was so difficult to call the center and take that first step. What could I say, where could I start. But they listened and told me that I can talk as much as I want and whatever I want. They understood the effects 13 years of abuse had on me. I felt comfortable opening up and I was not judged. I understood that best is to take one day at a time until I could overcome the effects of trauma and find my equilibrium. When I look back I can see that I came a long way and I did not think I can achieve so much to be able to live on my own without fear and violence. I wish other women get their courage like me and call the center. It was the best thing I did for me and my children.”*



If you are worthy of receiving gifts, then you are worthy of respect.

**Don't Tolerate Abuse.**

**HOTLINE**  
099 88 78 08



**Contact:**

-  (+374) 60 525 535
-  [wsc.armenia@gmail.com](mailto:wsc.armenia@gmail.com)
-  [www.womensupportcenter.org](http://www.womensupportcenter.org)
-  <https://www.facebook.com/WomenSupportCenter>

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