

Making decisions in cases where Domestic Violence is present

We make decisions everyday. Some are big and some are small, some impact others, some only ourselves. The problem in making a decision in a domestic violence case is that “going with the flow” may not work when the potential consequences are so high. When thinking about a potential decision in a domestic violence case ask yourself these questions?

1. Could your client suffer physical or emotional harm?
2. Could the decision hurt your reputation, undermine your credibility, or damage your position within the department?
3. Is your decision supported by policy or practice?
4. Did you make the best decision you could with the information you had at the time?
5. If the decision adversely impacts your client, what alternative resources have you offered them.

In preparation for making decision in domestic violence cases, you should:

Review the policy applicable to the program you’re working with.
Know the principles that the Department expects you to follow in working with DV cases.
Identify any personal conflicts you may have with these principles and resolve them before you work with the client. Any decisions you make should not be based on personal bias.

Tools:Family Service Manual

...TANF Section K

...TA-DVS Policy

...Multiple Worker Guide # 12 - Multiple Program Worker Guide

...Multiple Worker Guide #15 - TA-DVS Screening Protocols

Each person affected by a decision has a stake in the decision. Good decisions take into account the possible consequences of words and actions on all those potentially affected by a decision.

Decision Making Model in Case Planning

Identify the facts in the case. Gather information.

What happened to bring the client to our office?

What safety concerns might the client have?

What help has she accessed in the past? How did that work for her?

Tools:TA-DVS TRACS Addendum

Asking questions in cases of domestic violence

Asking about safety concerns

Multiple Worker Guide #15 - TA-DVS Screening Protocols

Clarify goals of the program with the client.

If the client is applying for TANF the expectations are different than if applying for TA-DVS and should be explained.

If something is required by law that may impact the clients safety, be sure to inform the client. Examples include: Mandatory child abuse reporting; Good Cause for Pursuit of Child Support; etc.

Identify various options. Think of alternatives.

What does the client want to have happen? Be open. Don't limit options to what you think is the "safest". Because the client has more information about the abuse or abuser, she is the best judge of what is "safe" or what the abuser is likely to do.

Avoid jumping to conclusions. If the client isn't clear or says something that contradicts previous statements, it doesn't mean that she is lying. She may be weighing the alternatives, just as you would if you had to make a difficult decision while under stress. She may also feel she has to tell you what you want to hear.

Stay open. Gather as much information as you can about various options.

Seek advice. Involve experts in helping outline options. Don't be afraid to admit you're not an expert.

If the client is leaning towards a decision that you feel increases risk to her safety, ask her about it. "What will happen if...?"

Consider consequences.

What option will produce the most good and do the least harm?

Think ahead, are there implications for the future? If there are, talk

with the client about them. For example: If you help her move into a house where the rent is higher than her income - What is her plan to meet her future needs?

Make a decision.

Does the plan put the client at greater risk?

Does the plan meet with the principles of the program?

Does the plan have any cultural or value conflicts from the clients perspective, from yours?

Will the plan or action deteriorate the confidence of the public?

Do you have personal conflicts with the plan? How will you address those conflicts?

Be practical. Make sure the plan can be carried out. If it is too long; too complex or has the client doing too many things in a time of crisis, shorten it and take small steps. Frame the plan in terms of short term and then longer term goals.

Monitor and modify the plan.

Recognize that the plan is not written in stone, it can be changed.

If the client does something that you feel is in violation with her plan or the program, talk with her about it. Be clear. "I received a community complaint about the abuser living at your house, can you tell me about that?"

Remember, that our clients are not always going to follow the plans we make with them. Especially, if they do not feel the plan meets their safety needs. Talking with the client about what didn't work in the plan is important. Listen, and then make any necessary changes. Changing the plan reflectively models good decision making and will increase the chances the client will consult with you if a future change needs to happen.