

## Noticing Strengths

Most survivors have some sense of what has been helpful to them in the past, although they may need someone to remind them of what they do and have done "right".

- Ask questions that help you to learn about useful coping strategies and resources. Ask what the person has done in the past and what the outcome was.
- As the person tells her or his story, be sure to acknowledge out loud times he or she showed courage, resourcefulness, or strength. Note, for instance, how remarkable it is that, in spite of the abuse and how they might be feeling, they get up in the morning, take care of their children as well as they do, hold down a job, maintain friendships, or whatever "every day thing" the individual accomplishes.
- Ask specific questions about coping and self care—what activities, places, or people can and/or have functioned as an oasis for them, and is it possible to build on that oasis experience.
- Let them know that they have a right to feel the way they do, whether it is overwhelmed, terrified, angry, bitter, exhausted, tearful, desperate, or some other emotion.
- Let the person know that you know how much courage and strength it is taking for her or him to be talking with you about their situation.
- Ask specific questions about support people—does anyone in the individual's life know about the violence, can they think of even just one person whom they would trust to start talking to about their situation, how have the other people in their life reacted to the situation.
- When it is feasible, work with the individual on a plan to further develop the strengths that have been identified.

### **A word about anger:**

A survivor may be very angry, volatile, and demanding. It is important to remember that the rage that the person is expressing is a coping strategy and is justified, even if it appears misdirected at you. Anger is energy, and, by understanding the root of the anger, you can help the person channel this energy in a way that will help them take steps.

<http://www.simmons.edu/ssw/dvtraining/training>