

Strategies for Working with Immigrant Domestic Violence Survivors



- Learn about special challenges facing immigrant domestic violence survivors, including:
 - Lack of knowledge regarding the American legal system
 - Lack of immigration status
 - Cultural issues
 - Economic barriers
 - Language barriers
- Develop multi-lingual, multi-cultural staff
- Learn about dynamics of domestic violence
- Make your office a safe place
- Set aside a significant amount of time for your interview
- Assure your client that anything you discuss is confidential
- Recognize that domestic violence dynamics may affect your client's ability to get to interviews on time or to gather documents
- Ensure that she has enough time to tell her story
- Always use a disinterested interpreter
- Never use a child as a interpreter
- Start the interview by listening, rather than explaining the law or domestic violence
- Listen attentively and respectfully. Let her know she should expect to be respected.
- Learn about services for immigrant domestic violence survivors in your community and refer your client to appropriate one.
- Empathize when you can, but remember that the focus is hearing HER story
- Do not criticize her partner
- Stay optimistic
- Be supportive, understanding
- Never insist that your client speak about what she does not want to share
- Concepts like "abused" or "battered" may not be effective. Instead, ask specific questions described below. Talk with her about the Cycle of Violence.
- Do not question her decisions or make them for her
- Explain why you will be asking questions that may be painful and intrusive
- Do not rush the interview
- Do not force the client to share what she doesn't want to
- Realize that you will not get all information in the first interview
- Help client divide problems into separate pieces so they will not seem overwhelming
- Ask very specific questions
 - Don't ask: did your husband beat you?
 - Ask: did your husband ever slap you, punch you, kick you, shove you, bite you, choke you, poke his finger in your chest, raise his fist at you, grab you, pull your hair, throw things at you, destroy your property, use a weapon during an argument?
 - Don't ask: did your husband ever rape you?
 - Ask: did your husband ever make you have sexual relations when you didn't want to?
 - Don't ask: Did your husband ever threaten you?
 - Ask: Did your partner ever tell you he would call INS and have you deported, tell you he would hurt you physically, tell you he would take your children from you, tell you he would hurt your family?
- When your client tells you about an incident, go over the incident asking specific questions (for a few incidents)
- If you don't understand, restate what you think and ask for clarification
- Explain your client's legal alternatives clearly and let her make the decisions