

# Serving Male Survivors in Shelter

Tennessee Domestic Violence Shelter Best Practices Manual / Section I



## Laws Regarding Services to Men

### **VAWA:**

The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, which President Obama signed on March 7, 2013, amends the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994 by adding a grant condition that prohibits discrimination by recipients of certain Department of Justice funds.

*The grant condition reads as follows:*

*No person in the United States shall, on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity (as defined in paragraph 249(c)(4) of title 18, United States Code), sexual orientation, or disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity funded in whole or in part with funds made available under [VAWA], and any other program or activity funded in whole or in part with funds appropriated for grants, cooperative agreements, and other assistance administered by the Office on Violence Against Women.*

### **FVPSA:**

To be in compliance with the federal FVPSA Reauthorizing Legislation, 2010, programs that receive FVPSA funding must be accessible. Accessible services will ensure that effective interventions are in place to build skills and capacities that contribute to the healthy, positive, and productive functioning of victims, children, youth, and families. This means services have to be delivered without discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender, race, color, national origin, or religion. Barriers to accessing shelter, such as requiring participation in supportive services and rigid program rules, are not allowed. Accessibility is a broad requirement that includes offering shelter and all core services to victims regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

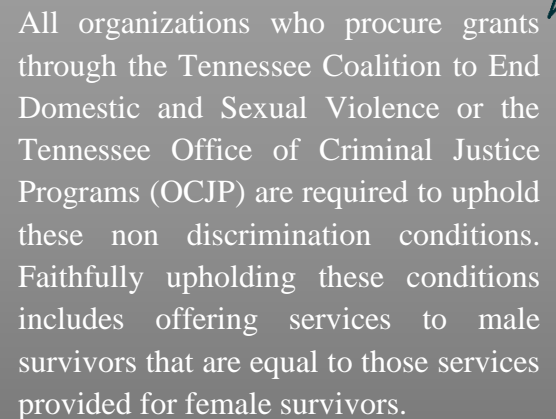
### **VOCA:**

Section 1407 of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) of 1984 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, or disability in VOCA funded programs or activities (42 U.S.C. § 10604). No

person shall on the ground of race, color, religion, national origin, handicap, or sex be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, subjected to discrimination under, or denied employment in connection with, any undertaking funded in whole or in part with sums made available under VOCA.

### **Rules of Department of Finance and Administration Chapter 0620-3-6 Tennessee Family Violence Shelter Standards:**

People who meet the individual eligibility requirements for family violence shelter and/or shelter services set forth in section 0620-3-6-.02 should receive services regardless of sex. The eight core services as listed in the Shelter Standards must be provided for victims of family violence in a family violence program regardless of the victim's sex or gender identity. Those eight core services are: shelter, telephone crisis hotline, referral, counseling for family violence victims, advocacy for family violence victims, transportation arrangements, follow-up, and community education.



All organizations who procure grants through the Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence or the Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP) are required to uphold these non discrimination conditions. Faithfully upholding these conditions includes offering services to male survivors that are equal to those services provided for female survivors.

### **Equitable Services**

The non discrimination guidelines of the four funding sources listed above require that all programs receiving this funding, which includes any funding from federal agencies, state agencies, or the Tennessee Coalition, provide equitable services to all survivors regardless of actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability or gender identity. These protections include male survivors. Providing equitable services means that each service provided by your organization should be available to all clients, including shelter services.

The VAWA nondiscrimination grant condition provides that a recipient may offer sex-segregated or sex-specific programming when it is “necessary to the essential operation of a program.” The Department of Justice requires any program that receives a complaint of discrimination based on sex-segregated or sex-specific programming to justify their use of this type of segregate services as essential to the operation of the program.

*eq-ui-ta-ble*  
*adjective*

1. fair and impartial.  
**"an equitable balance of power"**

synonyms: fair, just, impartial, even-handed, unbiased, unprejudiced, egalitarian

“DOJ expects the recipient to support its justification with an assessment of the facts and circumstances surrounding the specific program, and to take into account established best practices and research findings, as applicable. The justification cannot rely on unsupported assumptions or overly broad sex-based generalizations... A recipient may not provide sex-segregated or sex-specific services for reasons that are trivial or based solely on the recipient’s convenience... A recipient should not assume that, because services have been sex-segregated or sex-specific in the past, continued sex segregation or sex specificity is “necessary” to its programming.” (*Nondiscrimination Grant Condition in the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 FAQ’s*,

## Providing Equitable Services

Should a program decide that segregating a service, such as its shelter, is necessary to the operation of the program, then it must be able to offer equitable services to clients of all genders.

For example- many programs have chosen in the past to shelter male victims in a hotel, rather than on their shelter property. This is not an example of equitable services, for a variety of reasons. In order for a male survivor's hotel stay to be equitable to a female survivor's shelter stay the following factors must be considered:

**Length of stay.** For example, if the program offers female clients an initial stay of 45 days with potential for extensions the male survivor's hotel stay must offer an equal time period.

**Access to supplies.** If the program provides female clients in shelter with access to meals, food pantry, toiletries, clothing items, or other supplies during their shelter stay, these same concessions must be made for male victims in a hotel.

**Access to services.** If the program offers additional services to female shelter clients, such as support groups, case management, parenting classes, employment assistance, housing assistance, etc., these same services must be offered to male. Further, attention must be paid to the ease with which clients access services.

For example, if support group is offered within the walls of the shelter, what transportation is available for male victims to access this service? If advocates are available to assist shelter clients 24-7 with advocacy, referral, crisis intervention, or case management, what steps are being made to ensure a male victim in a hotel receives this same level of access to services?

**Privacy.** Shelter is a challenging environment, characterized by the need for communal living and a loss of privacy that is present by a shelter's very nature. Hotel accommodations give male victims access to a level of privacy and autonomy not necessarily available to women in shelter spaces. This is then, at its base, not an equitable solution to emergency shelter.

2014)

## Dynamics of Abuse in Male Victims

Advocates should know that domestic violence knows no gender, race, age, or socio-economic boundaries. While it is true that the majority of victims are women, many men around the world experience violence at the hands of intimate partners. Often, male victims are reluctant to report their abuse or to seek help for a variety of reasons, many of which revolve around the fear that men will be judged, disbelieved, or unable to access services based upon their gender.

### Misconceptions Regarding Male Victims Seeking Services:

**'Domestic Violence Shelters Don't Help Men'**- Many male survivors are afraid that they will not be able to access services, or that services are simply not available for men. It is the responsibility of each program, therefore, to make sure that its community outreach includes marketing those services that are available to survivors of all genders.

**'Gay or Transgender Male Victims Will Be Outed'**- Gay or transgender men may believe that they will have to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity in order to receive shelter services. This can be an especially daunting prospect in rural communities. Advocates should make sure that clients seeking services know that it is enough to identify as a victim of domestic violence, and that although some demographic information may be asked, it is not mandatory to answer these questions. Advocates should also reassure clients of their organization's privacy and confidentiality policies.

**'Men Who Seek Help Are Weak'**- Many men do not seek help because they fear it will make them seem weak or that it will call in to question their sexuality or masculinity. Advocates should reassure male clients that being abused is not a 'weakness.' "There are few actions that require as much bravery as walking away from an abusive relationship. To

recognize that you are in need of help and then take the steps needed to get it is not weakness. It's a sign of strength." (*Bari Zell Weinberger, 2015*)

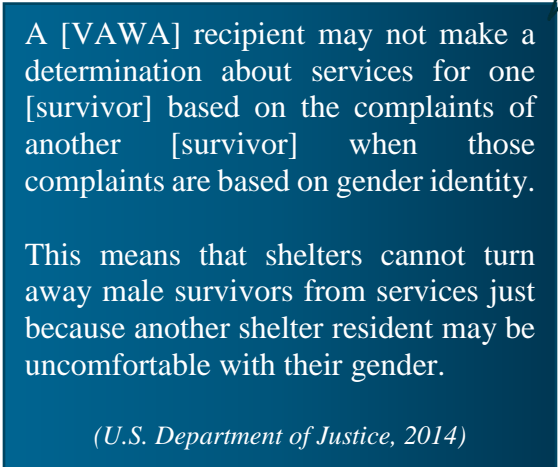
## Considerations for Sheltering Men

Many programs consider sex-segregated shelter services because they are uncomfortable with the notion of housing male and female survivors in the same physical space. Much of this discomfort stems from outdated notions of gender roles, survivor needs, and shelter safety.

### Frequently heard concerns about housing men in shelter include:

- **Female survivors will be afraid.** Domestic Violence programs should strive to empower their clients to live independent, safe, fulfilling lives. Part of this process is understanding that survivors will have to interact with individuals of all genders in their everyday lives. It's also important for advocates to reinforce the reality that not all men are abusers. Indeed, most men are not abusers. Some advocates may be surprised to find that many, if not most, women in shelter do not consider all men threats, and are in fact very open to the prospect of sharing a shelter with male survivors.

The presence and acceptance of individuals of all genders within shelter can have a positive impact on a survivor's healing journey. If advocates believe that the addition of a male survivor to a shelter community will be received negatively by the women in the shelter, then advocates have the responsibility to facilitate a discussion with shelter residents that includes reminders of the program's non discrimination policies and seeks to address any concerns the female residents may have.



A [VAWA] recipient may not make a determination about services for one [survivor] based on the complaints of another [survivor] when those complaints are based on gender identity.

This means that shelters cannot turn away male survivors from services just because another shelter resident may be uncomfortable with their gender.

*(U.S. Department of Justice, 2014)*

It is also important to note that shelters do not have to house male and female survivors in shared bedrooms. It is the practice of many shelters to house male survivors in their own separate bedroom within the shelter, and many have a 'male' bathroom as well. This is considered an acceptable and equitable practice.

- **It is 'inappropriate' for men and women to share space.** There is nothing inherently inappropriate or 'immoral' about housing male and female victims in one shelter. The assumption that male and female survivors, when housed together, will engage in sexual behaviors is misguided and short-sighted, erasing LGBTQ sexual identities and assuming that sexual behavior in shelter might only take place between clients of opposite genders. Additionally, it is not up to shelter staff to police the sexuality of consenting adult clients.

- **Male survivors will be alone/uncomfortable in ‘women’s space.’** This misconception is rooted in the idea that shelter is inherently a ‘women’s’ space, and that only women can be victims of domestic violence. This is a damaging myth that erases the lived experiences of victims of other genders and perpetuates the idea that men are not able to receive shelter services. This also maintains the outdated patriarchal idea that men and women are so fundamentally different that they cannot possibly coexist in a meaningful way. This is the opposite of the empowering, equality-focused ideals that should be central to meaningful anti-violence work.
- **Men may be abusers trying to gain access to their victims/trying to victimize others.** While it is certainly possible for abusers, or simply violent individuals, to gain access to shelter services this is not a phenomenon that is restricted to men. *Advocates have a responsibility to understand that, while the majority of abusers are men, the majority of men are not abusers, and that women and those of other genders may also be abusers or engage in violent behavior in shelter.* For this reason, the four central shelter rules include a ban on violent behavior in shelter, and violence is grounds for immediate exit from shelter services. The expectation is that the shelter environment is one that rejects both emotionally and physically violent behavior. To this end, advocates should be practiced in screening those seeking entrance into shelter to make sure they are not admitting abusers of any gender.

**Many programs have similar concerns about sheltering teen boys as secondary victims. For more information on this issue, see page 85.**

## Screening for Abusers of any Gender

Do not assume that all abusers are men and all victims are women. We know that these beliefs are false and can discourage non-female victims from seeking services. One of the most common concerns when thinking of housing men in shelter is the possibility of admitting an abuser into a safe shelter space. The fear of allowing abusers into shelter is understandable and valid, but advocates must be aware that this possibility is present with abusers of any gender.

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“What would happen if we offered the wrong services to the wrong person? We could place the survivor in danger or in jail and potentially send the message that it was their fault the abuse happened. We could also place the abuser in support services that validate the abuser and tell them they are not to blame for the abuse. We might place the abuser in a confidential shelter or help the abuser get a restraining order against a survivor. This could help the abuser find the survivor or turn a survivor away from services that they need. If we give the wrong services to the wrong person because we are not screening, people get hurt.”

*(Open Minds, Open Doors: Transforming Domestic Violence Programs to Include LGBTQ Survivors, The Network/La Red, 2010)*

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When you have initial contact with an individual seeking services, pay attention to red flags you might hear which could indicate that you are speaking with an abuser.

**Red flags may include things like-**

- *Demanding* to be seen as a victim.
- Repeatedly mentioning and dismissing/justifying violence they have committed toward partner.
- Exaggerating their own injuries and minimizing their partner's.
- History of threats, violence toward other people, non-domestic crime, or weapons use.
- Using abusive language toward the advocate.

Recognize the limits of your knowledge. Batterers are skilled manipulators, accustomed to convincing others of the character they want to portray. It is not the fault of an advocate if someone is admitted into shelter who then behaves in an abusive or violent manner. Every abuser is responsible for their own decisions and violence is a choice.

**Understand that batterers:**

- Act differently in public than when they're alone with their partner.
- Convincingly present themselves as victims. In fact, they may *insist* on being seen as victims. What makes them even more convincing is the fact that they genuinely *feel* victimized if their partner resists their control.
- Blame their behavior on external factors – alcohol, anger, etc.

“Abusers may try to access services that are intended for survivors for many reasons. They may be trying to block their partner from using those services or trying to find their partner. They may also just wish to access the services being offered such as shelter or legal help. However, many times abusers truly believe that they are survivors. Abusers often have a lack of empathy for their partner and a sense of entitlement in the relationship that supports their belief that they are the person being victimized. They may blame their abusive actions on their partner. Additionally, survivors often present themselves as abusers. They may do so because their abusive partner has told them that they are an abuser or that they were to blame for the fights or explosive incidents. They may have been mistakenly perceived as the abuser by police and been arrested. They may feel ashamed for fighting back in self defense and consider themselves abusive. Screening ensures that you are providing the correct service to the correct person.”

*(Open Minds, Open Doors: Transforming Domestic Violence Programs to Include LGBTQ Survivors, The Network/La Red, 2010)*

- Give innocent explanations for abusive behavior. “I just want her to talk to me and understand how I feel, and she thinks I’m stalking her!”
- Blame their behavior on their partner. “She’s a bitch.” “He hit me first.”

*(New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence)*

## Things to consider:

- Screening is a process. Your most useful tools are active listening and open-ended questions.
- Go with your gut; if something feels wrong, keep exploring.
- Listen for red flags, not only during intake. Advocates should have a good familiarity with red flag behaviors and stay tuned to their clients throughout their interactions.
- Screening is a team event. It is okay to check in with co-workers when red flags come up, or if you feel unsure.
- Be willing to screen at every level, not only with clients but also when hiring new staff, volunteers, or board members.


*(The Intimate Partner Screening Tool for Gay, Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Relationships, a project of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Domestic Violence Coalition, 2003)*

## Tips for Screening for Potential Abusers

Assess what you have learned while talking with the potential client.

Check for red flags.

- Think about the context in which abusive behavior occurred.
- What meaning or history does a certain behavior have, given the context? What impact does the context have on the agency/self-determination of each person in the relationship?
- Intent of the behavior (controlling partner or gaining control of oneself).
- Effect of behavior (is person afraid or have they established control?).
- Survivors are more likely to empathize with or make excuses for their partner's behavior. Abusers lack empathy, and will often blame their victim for the abuse or dismiss their feelings.
- Look for agency: Who is making the decisions in the relationship? Were the decisions coerced? Whose life is getting smaller?
- Who is getting their way?
- Look for entitlement, the belief that they have the right to what they want at the expense of others.
- Is the caller in fear of their partner? Are they afraid to go home? Are they planning for the safety of themselves or dependents?
- An abuser may state they are afraid, but upon further probing, you may find their "fear" is really disappointment at not being able to control their partner.



The assessment tool on the next two pages may help advocates screen for potential abusers, as well as better understand their client's risks and needs.

- You may wish to have two people screen together, especially when advocates are new to screening.
- If you are feeling triggered, afraid, or attacked by the caller you might be talking to an abuser-remember to pay attention to your gut.

**If you believe you are speaking to an abuser:**

- ✓ You may wish to pull in a coworker or manager to witness the conversation.
- ✓ Tell the abuser, “From what you have shared with us, at this time we believe that you’ve been abusive.”
- ✓ “We do not offer services for people who have been abusive.”
- ✓ You may refer them to batterer’s intervention.
- ✓ You may terminate the call if the caller becomes verbally threatening or belligerent.

*(The Intimate Partner Screening Tool for Gay, Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Relationships, a project of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Domestic Violence Coalition, 2003; Open Minds, Open Doors: Transforming Domestic Violence Programs to Include LGBTQ Survivors, The Network/La Red, 2010; The Assessment Tool, the Northwest Network. 2011; New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence)*

**Resources:**

*Open Minds, Open Doors: Transforming Domestic Violence Programs to Include LGBTQ Survivors, The Network/La Red, 2010*

*The Assessment Tool, the Northwest Network. 2011*

New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence;  
<http://opdv.ny.gov/professionals/index.html>

*The Intimate Partner Screening Tool for Gay, Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Relationships, a project of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Domestic Violence Coalition, 2003*

Nondiscrimination Grant Condition in the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013  
 FAQ’s, 2014

*It’s Time to Acknowledge Male Victims of Domestic Violence; Bari Zell Weinberger, 2015*