



Office for the
Prevention of
Domestic Violence

Survivor Listening Sessions

Preliminary Findings

January 2022

Introduction

Guided by the lived experiences of survivors, the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) is committed to improving the state's victim services delivery systems to ensure every survivor can access the most trauma-informed and culturally responsive services, regardless of where they live in New York. Thus, in 2021 OPDV conducted the first Survivor Listening Sessions (SLS) as a strategy for informing the agency's efforts to move New York State towards a truly survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive domestic violence services delivery system.

For each Session, OPDV sought out a partnership with a community organization. OPDV intentionally sought to partner with organizations working with survivors from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities, especially those who have been historically marginalized and not previously offered a platform for sharing their experiences, concerns, or recommendations. Together, OPDV and the partnering organizations collaborated to create a platform for amplifying the voices of those best positioned to inform that transformation – survivors.

In 2019, OPDV formed a task force charged with looking at New York's domestic violence service delivery model and how it is funded. Understanding the old model was built on the reality of 40 years ago, the agencies that fund domestic violence in the state and the providers who contract with us to provide services to survivors came together to recommend needed changes to the model. However, it became clear to OPDV that we also needed to understand the experience survivors had if we were to truly make a better model. OPDV saw the benefit of institutionalizing the Survivor Listening Sessions in order to remain informed of survivors' experiences with –and perceptions of– the victim services delivery system.

This report summarizes early insights gleaned from the first round of the SLS initiative, executed in the summer and fall of 2021.

(Please see end of report for glossary).

Methodology

OPDV began outreach to community organizations in Spring 2021, intentionally seeking to host listening sessions with organizations chiefly serving marginalized survivors, and those familiar with OPDV. Soon after, outreach expanded to include those unfamiliar with the agency via cold calls. Partnering organizations contracting with OPDV received a \$1,500 award to cover costs associated with hosting and stipends for survivor participants.

Between July and December 2021, OPDV conducted seven virtual Survivor Listening Sessions. Each composed of between 5 and 8 participants, the Sessions included survivors from the NYC, Finger Lakes, Mid-Hudson, and Capital Regions. During the first seven sessions, OPDV reached survivors from disparate socioeconomic backgrounds, racial and ethnic identities, sexualities, gender identities, religions, ages, abilities, and parenting statuses. OPDV provided an interpreter during Sessions to include participants with limited English proficiency.

Survivor Listening Sessions partnering organizations included:

- Two OCFS licensed and approved domestic violence programs, including a program that primarily serves older survivors (55+)
- Three non-licensed domestic violence programs, serving survivors from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, Jewish survivors, and veteran survivors
- A survivor activist group, comprised of survivors from BIPOC communities
- A community organization serving Arab-American survivors

OPDV took leadership from partner organizations in all planning details, including modifying language in the questions below to be clear and relatable for survivor participants. Safety was the foremost consideration throughout planning and execution. Partner organizations co-facilitated and made additional staff available for any survivor participant who requested additional support.

The following questions guided discussion:

1. If you needed help and contacted an organization, was that organization, service provider, or government agency approachable? Did you feel you were in control of your choices?
2. If you didn't reach out to any organization, service provider, program, or government agency, what were your concerns?
3. What are your recommendations for improving responses to those experiencing domestic violence - what changes would you like to see happen?
4. What kind of help did you need that you couldn't get?

What We Heard

While each survivor's experience is unique, the Listening Sessions revealed trends in the characteristics of systems engagement that yielded positive experiences for survivors, as well as those which generated negative experiences for survivors.

Systems Engagement

It was evident that the institutions hosting the Listening Sessions made survivors feel understood and in control of their choices –institutions that are survivor-centered– had several shared characteristics:

- **Advocacy for survivors across systems, prioritizing system accessibility and allowing for survivor choice and autonomy**

Survivors expressed that positive engagement with systems was frequently characterized by responders advocating for them across systems. Survivors' experiences seeking help were made easier when responders –regardless of their home system– made an effort to help them navigate their options by detailing the work of different systems and the processes of seeking help from them, clearly explaining survivors' rights and entitlements, patiently outlining the tools available to survivors to achieve their goals, and offering them trusted referrals when unable to serve their needs internally. Not only did such efforts help survivors get the help they needed expeditiously, but they supported their autonomy by ensuring survivors had the knowledge to understand each option available to them and actively consent to each step of the process.

"I didn't have an easy case, but my case managers helped me a lot with child support issues, getting legal help, getting people to return my calls. She was very hardworking. I appreciated her help."

- **Believing survivors and respecting their experiences**

Unsurprisingly, being believed was fundamental to survivors' positive experiences engaging with systems. Not only was this quality nearly always a prerequisite for survivors continuing the process of seeking help, but it was essential for them to feel understood, validated, affirmed, and empowered. Unfortunately, several survivors encountered instances in which this was not the case. In interactions lacking these qualities, survivors were frequently left with no other option than to remain in unsafe situations, had their experiences minimized or they did not get the help they were looking for.

"I can tell you that what worked for me when I found Becky and she was just straight with me, you know what I mean? Like she let me know that she believed

me. . . . once I found somebody that I trusted and I felt like I knew believed me, then that's when the barriers started going away."

"When I initially reached out to [partnering organization], they asked, 'Is it safe for you to talk now?' I never had that before. I wish they would treat us when we reach out not like we are a nuisance or an exaggerator, they would know that it's legit and we're in pain, and we don't know where to go, and we're scared and we're weak."

- **Clear understanding of domestic violence and the dynamics that underlie it**

Survivors' positive experiences seeking help were also frequently characterized by the responders having a nuanced understanding of domestic violence. Effective responders were able to understand that adverse responses from survivors were likely due to the trauma they had experienced. Survivors also benefited from responders who understood coercive control, and thus were more likely to discern abusers' falsities. Moreover, survivors underscored the importance of responders understanding that domestic violence is not always characterized by physical abuse, but also by emotional, verbal, financial, and other forms of abuse.

"I wasn't very significantly physically hurt, physically abused, so that's something I learned from the shelter, from [the local domestic violence program], that emotional abuse is a huge deal too. It is a kind of abuse. Again, educating this part is very important too. Just because the cops came in and didn't see any bruises on me, they just walked away."

- **Provide regular follow-up and follow-through, offering consistent communication and support**

When responders initiated regular communication, survivors described feeling supported and in greater control of their circumstances. Too often, survivors recounted experiences of making dozens of calls to little avail or reaching someone for help only to never be called back. Survivors stressed again and again that consistent communication and reliable follow-through from responders were critical to getting them the assistance they needed and helping them feel in control of their circumstances.

"When I got divorced, it was very hard to communicate with me. It was very hard to explain the reality because I was deep inside [myself]. [My lawyer] was very patient with me, I'm talking about even phone calls during the evening, during the nighttime, phone calls, Zoom. She explained everything to me, she was super patient. I think the most beautiful thing I had from my lawyer was her being very patient with me when I was horrible. I was deep in a horrible relationship and she helped me understand that she was here for me, she wasn't against me."

- **Understand and respect survivors' specific cultural contexts, offering culturally specific tools and language accessibility**

Many survivors, especially those who were immigrants, refugees, or from marginalized racial or ethnic identities, stressed the benefits of interacting with responders and service providers who understood and respected survivors' specific cultural context. In some situations, this meant recognizing the culturally specific barriers a survivor struggled against to get help. In others, this meant ensuring that interpreters were utilized whenever needed. Understanding survivors' specific cultural contexts was often an essential prerequisite to building trust and getting them the help they needed.

"[The local center providing Arabic-specific services] provided assistance with basic needs, finding legal services, systems advocacy, regular follow up and follow through."

Barriers to Systems Engagement

Over the course of the Listening Sessions, OPDV also gained an insight into the concerns that broadly prevented survivors from reaching out to certain institutions for the help they needed or stalled them in doing so. Such concerns included:

- **Experiences of discrimination, cultural insensitivity, identity-specific biases, and language barriers**

Unfortunately, survivors described frequent experiences of discrimination and identity-specific biases whilst attempting to seek help from systems. Several immigrant survivors described experiencing discrimination and racism while attempting to seek help. Not only did this discrimination create added harm, but it prolonged the amount of time survivors had to stay with their abusers while seeking help for themselves and their children. The Sessions also revealed survivors' experience of bias and discrimination towards older survivors (55+), male victims, and survivors from BIPOC communities.

"When we ask for police to come, they need to understand the language, customs, and cultural barriers. You can't have the same expectations for everyone. We need this kind of support to empower us to continue."

"The language issue was very, very tough and made it near impossible to seek help. The police didn't understand Arabic. It was hard for me to even give them an address."

"Officer made me go to my room. Treated me like a child."

- **Previous adverse experiences engaging with systems**

Many participating survivors recounted previous negative experiences engaging with systems. Survivors described instances of law enforcement officers believing and supporting abusers, as well as not acting against abuse that was not physical. They also shared that they were frequently not believed by authorities in systems, especially when their abuse experiences were extreme or atypical. They were frequently called crazy, or difficult, even threatened with arrest or arrested. Additionally, survivors explained that they were fearful of systems they perceived as having power over them, especially law enforcement and child welfare. Survivors, especially those from BIPOC communities, emphasized that such systems were viewed as one and the same. Several survivors also acknowledged that being repeatedly asked to divulge their stories of abuse at every new system engagement was a major barrier to further interaction, as they did not want to experience the emotional toll of doing so.

“Systems feel self-righteous for the help they provide but fall short of acknowledging the harm being done. No policy change will fix this. What is it with the systems and service providers that they can’t acknowledge they aren’t helpful, but causing harm?”

“Seven of us [out of eight in the session] have been to jail for false accusations. Systems think they are helping but they re-victimize us.”

- **Lack of advocate follow-through**

Survivor participants shared they had experiences with domestic violence program advocates neglecting to return their phone calls, following up with them, or following through with what they promised. Unfortunately, this meant that many survivors felt neglected when they most needed help, left to their own devices to navigate unfamiliar systems without the advocacy they needed.

“I spoke with three folks at the VA and I also spoke to the outside, but they asked me so many questions and they weren’t interested in helping. DV group in [my county] - I called that and they didn’t do anything, they just said they would call me back. I called them a few days after, but there was nothing done on their end.”

“I want to say that none of the people who I was talking to called me back. Many are stating the date and time they would call back, but they never did, and it was very frustrating.”

- **Lack of systems accountability**

Survivors frequently expressed frustration and anger as they described how judges, law enforcement officers, child welfare employees, and officials from District Attorneys' offices made what they perceived to be unjust decisions impacting their agency and safety, too often resulting in being separated from their children or empowering their abusive partners. Survivors stressed that when harmful actions are taken, the systems seem to lack tools for holding such officials accountable.

"How does he get away with multiple false reports to child welfare, police reports, keep me in court for 8 years? "

- **Mainstream and culturally specific stigmas about domestic violence**

Though not directly linked to systems' behavior, many survivors indicated that a chief barrier preventing them from seeking help was the cultural stigma surrounding domestic violence. Survivors frequently cited the fear of not being believed and the shame of disclosure of domestic violence victim status as a barrier to asking for help. Unfortunately, many survivors shared they received pressure from their families and faith communities to refrain from speaking about their abuse or asking for help. If there was broader public understanding of domestic violence, both among community members and professionals in helping systems, survivors acknowledged it may have been easier to disclose their experience and seek help.

"My family was against going to the police. I was told to go to the Mosque instead. The pressures from religious people is so difficult. I was told I couldn't start over."

Unmet Needs, Gaps in Victim Services Systems

In several of the Listening Sessions, survivors were also asked to identify help they needed but were not able to get.

- **Financial assistance to secure housing**

Many survivors expressed a need for access to funds to pay security deposits. Survivors recounted their experiences of being forced to scrounge for rare, small-quantity funding opportunities, or risk detailing their situation to a new landlord, often at the risk of compromising their move-in or being saddled with higher rents until they have paid off their security deposit.

"That financial support. You need that kind of help, and again, I had somewhere to go. Many victims don't have anywhere to go. So, you go to the shelter and you

are grateful for that if you can get into a shelter. If you have a shelter, is it safe? Especially if you have children. So, some kind of help, even if it's not cash, like helping towards security on an apartment."

- **A clear, comprehensible explanation of the options and tools available, and the order in which to pursue them**

Several survivors expressed that they desired a clear, step-by-step breakdown of the different steps of the process of removing themselves from their abusive partners, the tools available for them to do this, and the procedures they needed to engage with in order to do so. Survivors explained that frequently they did not know what their rights were, what tools such as Domestic Incident Reports or Orders of Protection were, or what the steps were of engaging with the Family Court process. Survivors requested responders from all systems clearly and patiently explain such processes and tools.

"I was looking for help on the internet, and it said on the internet that there are some organizations that will help you make a plan step-by-step. I was anticipating to find that help, with the plan, what to do. I didn't get that in reality when I went to these organizations, so it was really difficult for me."

"I didn't have information, like someone said before, if only I was guided and told that these are your rights, these are these people, this is the system. I had no idea. I didn't know anything. I wish I had known."

"I would say the accessibility of this system, because even going to the [local Family Justice Center], I didn't know that I had rights, and I went there three times. To have a little bit more information about the process, to know that there are rights to women who are foreigners."

- **Assistance navigating Family Court**

Beyond having more information about the process and procedure of Family Court, survivors expressed a need for regular access to someone who could help them navigate the system and understand what to expect throughout the process, beyond mitigating the immediate crisis. Survivors also indicated they often struggled to access interpreters while navigating Family Court.

"A step-by-step breakdown and explanation [for Family Court] of everything: what rights you have, the procedures."

"Making the Family Court system more accessible."

"Family Court System: providing translators so victims aren't disregarded, further or disempowered."

- **Inequitable, ineffective representation in court**

Survivors frequently described anguish and frustration around what they experienced as inequitable representation in court. Unfortunately, many felt they were at a disadvantage when their abusive partners were able to pay for expensive attorneys, while they were forced to rely on legal aid attorneys, who frequently were overburdened with other cases. Survivors indicated that this created an imbalance of power during custody, child support, and family offense cases.

"How do you fight systems where the dad can hire a lawyer for \$700 an hour and mom must rely on legal aid?"

"Make legal representation fair and balanced."

- **Assistance physically removing personal belongings**

Several survivors, especially older survivors and those with physical impairments, described the struggle they faced while trying to remove their personal belongings when they were ready to leave their abusive partners. Even when programs did offer such assistance, the service was not perceived as available by several survivors.

Survivors' Recommendations

During the Listening Sessions, survivors offered numerous meaningful recommendations for improving systems' responses to domestic violence. Survivors had the most to say here and were eager to provide insights to inform the potential policy and programming improvements affecting other survivors.

Domestic Violence Programs

Though many survivors described positive experiences with domestic violence programs, survivors also offered recommendations for such programs' continued improvement. Recommendations included increasing training on trauma-informed practice, conducting training on internal biases, and ensuring hotlines are staffed by knowledgeable professionals capable of offering consistent information. Prior to calling for such changes, several survivors reported reaching out to hotlines, only to receive little help or contradictory information. Survivors also described encountering harmful treatment in shelter.

Survivors also recommended that programs enhance their services, expanding to offer services that support a holistic response to trauma, rather than only crisis intervention services. Survivors without children also expressed a need for increased assistance and access to resources, specifically in New York City.

"I called so many hotlines. Some answering didn't seem interested or they sounded like they were reading from a script, or new and inexperienced. Responses are very inconsistent."

"Regarding shelters and my experience, there are people, workers, who are allowed to shout or scream at women who experienced DV, so women in the shelters are not treated well. It was psychological pressure for me and the people I know that I talked to, to be in this shelter."

"There was a lot of inconsistency on DV hotlines. Having someone experienced (trained), who cares, makes a big difference."

"I needed someone who understood my culture and language."

Housing

Survivors' foremost recommendations with regards to housing included developing more affordable housing and creating more shelters. Survivors also described the lack of financial resources to pay for security deposits as a significant barrier to accessing permanent housing.

Law Enforcement

The recommendations included expanding mandated, regular training to include domestic violence-specific responses, barriers experienced by survivors from BIPOC communities and older survivors, and trauma-informed responses; increasing attention to victims at the scene of an incident; discontinuing the practice of asking victims to leave the home as a response to domestic violence; and allowing advocates to accompany police during domestic incidents. One survivor also called for mandated training on domestic violence for 911 operators.

Several survivors also recommended that law enforcement take complaints and submit requests for orders of protection, even if they do not believe there are grounds for the order to be issued. Survivors acknowledged that even if judges find there are no grounds, the survivors may benefit from such a record of attempts in the future. Survivors also expressed a need for accountability for law enforcement who abuse their power, or who respond poorly.

"And I did call, and then Yonkers police came to my house, and obviously, as usual, the other person said this person is crazy, I'm crazy, and I have lost my mind and this is why I called the cops, and they believed him. . . .The police specifically told me, and this is literally what they told me, is that there is no abuse here. Nobody has been hurt. I have pictures and videos of my son having two marks on his face, fingermarks of his grandma. I was so scared I didn't show them any pictures, I didn't show them any videos that I took because I was totally lost at that moment, but they believed him."

“I went to see the police, and it was the most depressing part. I lived a block away and I went to tell them what was going on at home four times. After the first time, nothing was done.

Family Court System

Survivors’ recommendations for Family Court coalesced around three themes:

- increasing accessibility in the court system;
- improving court system procedures; and,
- supporting equitable representation.

Survivors called for a continuation of virtual access to court procedures, acknowledging that this option increases both physical safety and mental wellness. Several survivors also called for increased accessibility to language access services, making translators more available to those navigating court procedures. In regard to improving court procedures for domestic violence victims, one survivor called for an end to judges asking identification questions, such as their current address, in the presence of the other party. This practice, the survivor stressed, may compromise victim safety. Other survivors, especially those from historically marginalized communities, also called for greater enforcement of child support orders, as well as introducing limits on how long domestic violence cases are allowed to be in court. Finally, several survivors stressed the need for making legal representation fair and balanced. Throughout the Listening Sessions, survivors described the inequity of monied partners able to hire incredibly expensive lawyers, while they are unable to do so.

“They re-victimize us and pull us down to another level of poverty. How many can work a full-time job, raise children and engage in court for a whole year?”

Legal Services

In addition to their recommendations for improving the Family Court system’s response in cases involving domestic violence, survivors made several recommendations for bolstering general legal services for domestic violence victims. Survivors recommended that attorneys be mandated to be trained in domestic violence and working from a trauma-informed lens. Survivors also called for expanded access to quality legal aid and pro bono services to include representation for divorces and criminal proceedings.

“The family defenders in family court are not standing up for survivors and we rely on them to get our children back which is a problem. Public defenders aren’t making good cases because they are not invested.”

“Family defenders require education and sensitivity training.”

Child Welfare System

Survivors from BIPOC and refugee communities were most frequently those offering change-based recommendations for the child welfare system. Survivors offered several

recommendations for improving the child welfare system's response to domestic violence, including training employees on domestic violence and trauma-informed services, discontinuing practices that penalize survivors for their victimization, developing a tracking and accountability system for those who repeatedly make false reports, and discontinuing the forced collection of child support. Survivors stressed a hope that treating them with sensitivity and dignity would become a norm within this system.

"People of color and poor people have concerns with the police and ACS. This is why we say there is no difference between the two."

"Stop making survivors jump through hoops."

"Husband locked our 9-year-old in a closet. She urinated on herself because he wouldn't let her out. The children's lawyer reported it to ACS. They didn't investigate."

Healthcare

Though the healthcare system did serve as an entry point to services for some, several survivors also made recommendations for improving this system's response to domestic violence. Survivors recommended that healthcare settings increase screenings, as well as discreetly offer patients in hospitals the ability to request speaking with an advocate about their experiences.

Primary Prevention

Many survivors called for increased education about healthy relationships and domestic violence. Survivors advocated both for healthy relationships education at every level of schooling, as well as opportunities for education about domestic violence in less traditional settings. In many sessions, survivors acknowledged that healthy relationships education is a crucial preventative strategy that is not employed enough. Survivors also expressed that they would have benefited from education on domestic violence while they were experiencing abuse, as many did not realize that what they were experiencing was not okay, nor that it was domestic violence. Several survivors also expressed a desire for more education on their rights as victims.

"Whatever reason we think it's okay at the time we are getting abused, it really does boil down to the lack of education." "In school, we had Home-Ec and Shop [classes], so bring in classes like healthy relationships. My healthy relationships and social skills are not going to look the same in grade school, as they are in middle school, as they are in high school, or when I'm going off to college. Teaching healthy boundaries and healthy relationships. "

"But I suggest something, and for me, the best idea would be to set up a coaching class where she will go, I will go, and say, 'Guys, okay, I'm going to give you an example of how it shouldn't be.' And I bet you a lot of them would say that, 'Hey, this is happening to me. This is wrong, this is not supposed to happen.' I would benefit, she would benefit, and someone else would say, 'Hey, what about this one? 'Also bad.' 'When I go back

home, I know I won't allow that. It's like a class, they will coach you, this is right this is wrong.

Our Learnings and Conclusion

The first round of Survivor Listening Sessions –and the insights they yielded– have served as an invaluable resource for OPDV. As we strive to foster truly survivor-centered services and responses across systems, we recognize that hearing directly from survivors is an invaluable component of this process.

OPDV is grateful to all of the survivors and the partnering organizations who participated in the first round of Survivor Listening Sessions. We recognize that choosing to share their experiences and insights is an act of trust and bravery, and we plan to honor these actions moving forward, as we strive to foster empowering responding systems that meet their stated needs. OPDV looks forward to further Listening Sessions throughout 2022.

Throughout this first round of sessions, in addition to the prior content described in this report, we learned the following:

- Both survivors and partnering organizations expressed enthusiastic interest in – and appreciation for– being provided a platform for having their concerns and recommendations heard by NYS. They acknowledged the process to be powerful and meaningful to them, underscoring that Survivor Listening Sessions filled an important unmet need.
- Providing attentive services to survivors: following up, following through, showing compassion and concern about their situation, was invaluable. Helping connect them to meaningful resources and support made them feel cared about, believed, and hopeful. Survivor participants also shared that advocates who they knew to be survivors often served as role models to them, empowering them to feel like they, too, could heal and achieve their goals.

“Program explained everything, Variety of services offered felt empowering. Advocate helped me start over, made me feel like I had control, choices and options. Helped me accept my situation and take steps to take back my life. Could bring children. Provided law enforcement advocacy which had a positive outcome.”

“When she told me she was a survivor and had just graduated college, it made me feel like I could do that too.”

- Too frequently, engaging with systems often results in survivors’ revictimization and exacerbation of their situations. Survivors described instances of experiencing indifference, scorn, or shaming and blaming from responders, as well as situations in which they experienced responders criminalizing them or

weaponizing responding systems against them. Unfortunately, such experiences too often create further harm. This harm is compounded when responding systems lay total accountability on the survivor, often perceived as crazy or non-compliant.

"I've been through family court, criminal court, child support, visitation. I'm doing the running around while the one causing harm leans back. All the accountability on me. How can the system say they are helping when they are causing more harm?"

- Survivors communicated that the absence of language access services within responding systems did not only interfere with their ability to access systems, but also stripped them of their autonomy, making it nearly impossible for them to advocate for themselves or their children. Reports of responding systems hanging up on survivors, disregarding their pleas for help, and shaming them for not being proficient in English suggests responder systems might be complicit in alienating survivors from the relief, support, and services they are entitled to.

"The language issue was very, very tough and made it near impossible to seek help. The police didn't understand Arabic. It was hard for me to even give them an address."

As OPDV continues to work towards fostering a service delivery system that is truly survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive statewide, we are committed to ensuring our efforts remain informed by survivors. To that end, we have institutionalized Listening Sessions with survivors of domestic violence as an ongoing initiative and will soon begin similar work with survivors of sexual abuse and assault.

Glossary

Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV)

The only executive-level domestic violence state agency in the country. OPDV is responsible for advising the Governor's Office and Legislature on gender-based violence policies and programs, training and public awareness campaigns throughout the state, and working to ensure comprehensive domestic and sexual violence service provision statewide. Their work is completed under four main bureaus: Sexual Assault Prevention, Policy, and Programming; Domestic Violence Prevention, Policy, and Programming; External Affairs; and Law and Public Safety.

Autonomy

An individual's right to make their own decision about their well-being.

Criminalized survivors

This term frequently refers to survivors of domestic violence, rape, and other forms of gender violence who have been arrested or engaged in the criminal justice system for violence against their abusive partner, imprisoned for survival actions, including: self-defense, "failure to protect," migration, removing children from abusive people, and being coerced into acting as an "accomplice."

Cultural barriers

Culturally specific challenges to accessing help and support. It also refers to difficulties survivors experience from systems due to bias or discrimination.

Culturally responsive

A culturally responsive approach recognizes that survivors' experiences and needs are impacted by intersections of class, race/ethnicity, culture, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, geography, and many other lived experiences and identities. Culturally responsive services respond to these intersections, actively meet the diverse needs of all survivors and communities and respond to their needs appropriately and respectfully.

Domestic violence

A pattern of behavior used by an individual to establish power and control over their intimate partner. The behavior includes abusive tactics, threats and actions that may or may not rise to the level of criminal behavior. The tactics may include physical, emotional, financial and sexual abuse.

Identity-specific biases

Behaviors and beliefs (stereotyping, microaggressions, harassment) by an individual(s) in a system who do not acknowledge or accept the way a survivor perceives themselves and what they call themselves, impacting a survivor's ability to receive responsive and affirming services.

Language access

A survivor's ability to access information and services in their preferred language within systems.

Marginalized survivors

Survivors from groups and communities which have historically experienced discrimination and exclusion because of unequal power relationships. Frequently marginalized survivors are from non-white racial and ethnic groups.

Older survivor

Domestic violence survivors over age 55.

Responders

Individuals from helping systems that respond to survivors with support and assistance when requested.

Service providers

Community programs, organizations, and agencies that provide non-emergency and emergency services to those requesting it.

Survivor-Centered

A survivor-centered approach works with survivors to meet their needs as they prioritize and define them and recognizes the impact of intersectional experiences—influenced by factors such as survivors' race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation—on their needs and priorities. Survivor-centered responses are confidential, accessible, high-quality, flexible, strengths-based, and recognize survivors' rights to self-determination about their safety and future.

Systems

Any institution a survivor may go to seeking help, including domestic violence service providers, law enforcement, social services entities, child welfare authorities, Family Court or Criminal court, legal aid services, and healthcare entities.

Trauma-informed

A trauma-informed approach recognizes the high-prevalence and widespread impact of trauma and utilizes practices that promote healing and actively resist re-traumatization. Being trauma-informed is recognizing signs, triggers and symptoms of trauma and fully integrating this knowledge into policies and procedures.