

Partnering on Safety:

**Addressing the Safety Needs of Domestic
Violence Survivors who have Disabilities**

Barrier Free Living, Inc.

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Who We Are & What We Do

"Helping People with Disabilities Help Themselves"

- **Barrier Free Living, Inc.**, was founded in 1980, with a dedication to help New Yorkers with disabilities live independently within the community.
- Since 1986, BFL has been working with disabled victims of domestic violence.
- BFL operates the largest DV intervention program for victims with disabilities in the country.

What Is Domestic Violence?

- a pattern of coercive tactics that can include:
 - physical,
 - psychological,
 - sexual,
 - economic,
 - emotional abuse
- with the goal of establishing and maintaining power and control.

Where does it occur?

- in all kinds of intimate relationships:
- married couples,
- people who are dating,
- couples who live together,
- people with children in common,
- same-sex partners,
- Parents and other relatives
- Care attendants

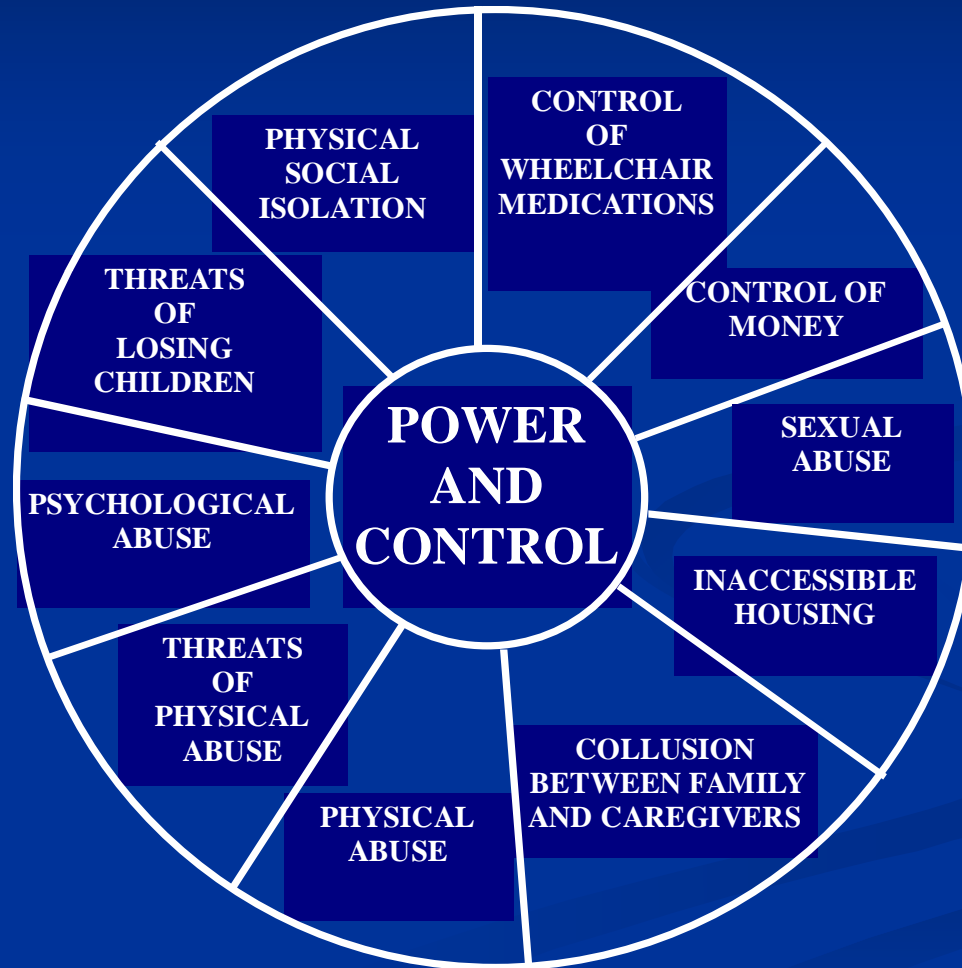
People with Disabilities have a Higher Rate of Abuse

- Women with disabilities have a 40% greater risk of experiencing violence than women without disabilities.
- Women with developmental disabilities have among the highest rates of physical, sexual and emotional violence perpetrated by intimate partners and family members.
- Studies estimate that 80% of women of have disabilities have been sexually assaulted.
- Studies estimate that between 70% and 85% of cases of abuse against adults with disabilities go unreported.
- Children with disabilities are more than twice as likely as children without disabilities to be physically abused, and almost twice as likely to be sexually abused.

* National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Barranti & Yuen, 2008, Young et all 1997

Barrier Free Living Model

POWER AND CONTROL



SHORT-TERM PHYSIOLOGICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF TRAUMA

- Restlessness
- Hypervigilance
- Generalized anxiety
- Headaches
- Weight loss/gain
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbance
- Shallow breathing
- Backaches

Long Term Effects of Trauma related to Domestic Violence

- Cardiac problems
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Low back pain
- Pelvic pain
- Autoimmune disorders
- Chronic fatigue
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Substance use/Abuse
- Dermatologic issues
- Musculoskeletal difficulties
- Depression
- Aggression
- Unhealthy Interpersonal Relationships
- Constricted/avoidance of Intimacy/Sexuality
- Fybromyalgia
- Impulsivity
- Hypersexuality

Domestic Violence, Suicide & Disability

- Domestic partner violence has been associated with increased rates of suicide attempts and suicidal ideation.
- The risk for suicide attempts in individuals who have experienced recent domestic partner violence has been estimated to be 4-8 times greater than the risk for individuals without such experiences.

* Meyers, M (2011). Suicide and domestic violence. Presented at the Brooklyn Family Justice Center April 26, 2011

Victims with Disabilities face obstacles in Achieving Safety

- Obstacles within the Criminal Justice
- Obstacles within the DV system

Other Obstacles in Leaving

- Often the abuser is also the victim's caregiver
- Risk of being institutionalized
- Risk for losing child custody
- Fear of losing/securing affordable housing.
- May not recognize the abuse as a problem.

*National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Effective Intervention for Assisting Survivors in the community

Case Example

Effective Intervention for Domestic Violence Shelter Providers

Case Example

Importance of the Continuum of Care

- Victims with Disabilities often engage first with our community based program
- Once basic needs are addressed and safety planning has begun, the issue of leaving the abuser is assessed.
- Referrals will be made for those ready for shelter
- Community and Shelter staff collaborate during the shelter stay
- Community based program continues the work after the person/family leaves shelter.

Safety Planning

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence stated that **OUTCOME EVALUATION** assesses what occurred as a direct result of the program.

Outcomes must be measurable, realistic, and philosophically tied to program activities.

Outcomes

An OUTCOME is a change in knowledge, attitude, skill, behavior, expectation, emotional status, or life circumstance *due to the service being provided.*

Measuring Safety Project

- Staff at Freedom House have partnered with a team of researchers from New York University to further explore this topic.
- Barrier Free Living have conducted a series of focus groups with shelter residents and staff to identify attitudes, skills and behaviors related to these five facets of safety.

Measuring Safety

- **Safety has been broken down into five facets:**
 - **Travel Safety**
 - **Electronic Safety**
 - **Financial Safety**
 - **Safety of Location**
 - **Safety in Relationships**

Beyond Freedom Initiative

- A “Beyond Freedom” Support Group was established to discuss safety.
 - Participants included residents nearing their departure date as well as former residents who were recently discharged from Freedom House.

A researcher from NYU observed each group to collect qualitative data.

Preliminary Results from Qualitative Data: Emotional Safety

- Participants were largely unaware of the effects that domestic violence can have on mental health, especially those with no prior history of mental illness.
- If many survivors are unaware of the emotional effects of domestic violence, it is not surprising that society largely views abuse as “only physical.”

Relationship Safety

- Participants were able to easily identify numerous warning signs of abuse in relationships
- Participants found it more difficult to identify “green flags,” or signs of healthy relationships
- Participants had little understanding of healthy boundaries in relationships & why they are needed

Safety of Location

- Participants seemed to possess strong safety planning skills in this area.

However....

- Former residents who are no longer living in shelter exhibited less safe behaviors.

Location Safety

- Due to state and federal mandates as well as the safety of all persons in shelter, domestic violence shelters have very stringent rules and regulations driven by safety concerns
- These stringent regulations could lead people to feel as if they are “out of prison” or “have been freed” and more likely to exhibit less safe practices.

Travel Safety

- Participants discussed the importance of maintaining discretion in new locations and exercising caution in what information is revealed to new acquaintances.
- Discussions revealed there is still a need for stressing the importance for lifelong safety planning. Some abusers will never stop seeking their victims.

Technology/Communication Safety

- Participants explored the vast array of technology/communication to monitor.
 - Smart Phones/Phones with GPS
 - Social Networking Sites
 - Online banking/credit card accounts
 - Computer /E-Mail passwords
 - Pin numbers
 - Digital Cameras
 - Credit Reports
 - Online phone books
 - Phone books
 - Utility Bills
 - Joint Bank Accounts
 - Revoking HIPAA consents for medical information
 - Communicating with children's schools/child care providers/doctors

Technology/Communication cont...

- Technological Safety requires constant and life-long vigilance.
- It is challenging to maintain Technological Safety because of it's rapid evolution and the volume of information communicated online.

Project Methodology

- Researchers are now distributing the survey to survivors at four points in their shelter experience.
 - The first week of residence
 - The eighth week of residence
 - Immediately prior to departure
 - Several weeks after shelter discharge

Questionnaire Results

An analysis of the results suggested survivors utilized more safety planning skills while still living in shelter than after their discharge.

We speculate this is due to the loss of social service support and the end of the strict rules and regulations that accompany shelter living.

Future Focus

- Our future focus is the integration of the agreed upon safety measures in all of our work with every aspect of the program
- As we engaged residents in focus groups, residents came to the realization of the need for continued safety practices as they moved out of shelter
- These measures are now being introduced in our community based program

Questions?
Comments?

Information

- Barrier Free Living Hotline: 212-533-4358
- National DV Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233)
- Family Justice centers: familyjusticecenter.com
- Barrier Free Living www.bflnyc.org
- Myra Ricard: myrar@bflnyc.org
 - 212-400-6470 x
- Katie Webb: katiew@bflnyc.org
 - 212-400-6470 x382