

**April 2024**

## **A Safer Naper --- Supporting Domestic Violence Survivors**

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner sexual violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner. As much as we want to believe these types of violence are not a part of the lives of the people that we know and care about, from a statistical standpoint, it is virtually impossible that you do not know someone who is living through regular victimization.

With this in mind, our Social Services Unit wants to make you aware of some of the signs that may indicate that someone is living with abuse and provide you with information that may be helpful if/when someone you know discloses to you that they are living with abuse. You do NOT have to have all the answers or feel pressure to come up with what you perceive to be the “perfect” response; it is most important that you believe what the person is sharing with you, listen to them without judgment and direct them to resources that are best equipped to comprehensively support their needs moving forward.

### **SECTION 1 – Signs of Domestic Abuse**

Possible signs that someone might be experiencing domestic abuse or other sensitive issues include:

- Unexplained bruises, cuts, burns or other injuries, especially if they are frequent and have no explanation or unreasonable explanations of how they were obtained. The victim may also wear inappropriate clothing for the season in an attempt to hide injuries such as wearing long sleeves in the summer heat or wear excessive makeup to cover up marks.
- Changes in behavior such as seeming increasingly anxious, fearful, distracted, depressed, secretive or demonstrating conduct that seems out of character. Low self esteem of statements about their unworthiness or blame for problems in their relationship.
- Increasing isolation from family, friends and other social networks. Plans may get canceled frequently.
- Inability to communicate freely; they may not respond to messages as they once did or you may notice unexplained changes in their tone or the topic of the conversation when speaking with them on the phone.

### **SECTION 2 – Responding to Disclosures**

Learning that someone you care for is enduring abuse can be highly shocking and upsetting. You may struggle to manage your own emotions and reactions to the information. It’s important to make sure that even though you may be having a lot of personal feelings about the situation, you allow the survivor to make decisions about what happens next. Ultimately, people who are experiencing abuse generally share these traumatic and private events with only a select group of very trusted people. More than anything, it is important to acknowledge that they likely trust you, it was difficult for them to share this with you and you are glad they reached out for support.

**Do** let them know that you are glad they confided in you and trusted you with such personal information.

**Do** listen without judgment; focus on open ended questions that allow the person to disclose whatever information they feel comfortable sharing. Avoid questions or comments that can seem accusatory or directive (“Why don’t you.. Or, “You should ....”)

**Do**, if you are comfortable doing so, ask them if there is anything specific you can do to support them moving forward. (more on this in the resource and safety section below)

**Do** encourage them to build a support network of other trusted people and professional providers. Offer to make the phone calls with them if you are comfortable doing so and that would make the outreach easier on the victim.

**Don’t** share information with anyone else (family members, fellow friends or acquaintances, etc.) without their consent. Doing so could violate their trust and make them feel powerless. Never confront the offender directly about the abuse.

**Don’t** make their disclosure of abuse the focal point of your relationship moving forward; ask how/if they would like you to periodically check in with them to see how things are going and respect whatever decision they make.

**Don’t** forget to prioritize your own wellbeing; it can be easy to become highly invested in supporting a victim through this traumatic journey. Be clear about your limitations and boundaries. Remember you should be a support for them, not a savior.

### **SECTION 3 – Resource Sharing and Safety Information**

Our [city’s website](#) is a great place to start to seek additional support or information. The section on [safety planning](#) is critical.

These are challenging conversations to have, but don’t be afraid to be clear about your limitations and what you do and do not feel comfortable assisting with. The most important thing you can offer someone in their time of need is your belief that what they are sharing with you is important. Reiterate that you believe them and that you believe they deserve support. Most importantly, do not underestimate just how impactful your kind and compassionate response can be to someone who is enduring violence. While you cannot answer every question for them or solve the problems they are currently facing, you can absolutely make a difference in their journey and path to healing.

Although domestic violence is prevalent, it often lacks visibility. It can be hard to figure out meaningful ways to intervene to assist those experiencing abuse if they are not coming to you directly for support. There are many dedicated victim service agencies that support the needs of thousands of survivors each year and need the backing of the community to continue to provide these critical services. Here are several ways to make a positive impact on the lives of survivors.

### **SECTION 4 – Offering Support**

#### **Volunteer**

For those individuals who are willing and able to make a consistent commitment to supporting survivors, both [Guardian Angels Community Services](#) (Joliet) and [Family Shelter Service of Metropolitan Chicago](#) accept volunteers to perform a number of important functions.

*TRAINING NOTICE: It's important to note that any volunteer who provides direct service to clients must complete a state-mandated 40+ hour training on domestic violence. This training is periodically offered by the volunteer site but also other surrounding agencies that support victims of domestic violence. The agency you are looking to volunteer for can assist you and coordinate finding a 40-hour training that works for you.*

Local domestic violence agencies offer the following volunteer opportunities that provide direct contact with survivors:

- Shelter Supporter: Augment shelter services by assisting the staff, survivors, and their children in the day-to-day activities necessary to the successful functioning of the shelter program.
- Children's Program Volunteer: Help create a fun, safe environment for children to build healthy relationships and explore ideas and feelings about themselves and others through play.
- Hotline Volunteer: Assist callers with information about domestic violence, provide emotional support, facilitate access to agency services and offer referrals
- Medical Advocacy: Meet with survivors in local emergency rooms to provide them emergency support and information about safety, their options moving forward and services that are available to them (Guardian Angels only)
- Court Advocacy: Assist survivors with obtaining protective orders as a means of safety.
- Other volunteer opportunities as needed such as providing haircuts for clients in shelter.

Alternatively, there are opportunities to contribute to their missions that do not involve direct contact with clients.

- Hotline Assistant Volunteers: Assist with police response calls regarding domestic violence (40-hour training still required)
- Resale Shop Volunteer: Assist victims of domestic violence by helping staff with sorting and pricing of items at resale shops operated by Family Shelter; proceeds go toward supporting victims of violence (Family Shelter Only)

The Family Shelter Service volunteer application can be found [here](#) and those interested in volunteering with Guardian Angels can email their resume to [kmcnamara@gacsprograms.org](mailto:kmcnamara@gacsprograms.org).

### **Other Ways to Support**

There are a number of essential and impactful ways to support survivors of domestic violence that are short term and do not require an ongoing commitment.

**Shop:** Family Shelter Service operates a resale shop located in Naperville. These stores are accessible to the public and all proceeds earned from sale of items goes directly to supporting FSS's mission. The Naperville resale shop is located at 1512 N Naper Blvd, #172. *Additionally, they also accept donations for their resale shop most days of the week and request that you coordinate an appointment to drop off items.* You can contact them at (630) 955-9599 for more information.

**Donate:** Family Shelter Service maintains an Amazon [wishlist](#) of items that are needed to support their clients in shelter. Guardian Angels also has an Amazon [wishlist](#). Items will automatically be shipped to the shelter. If you would like to host a drive for additional items for FSS, you can contact Julia Forte at [ForteJ@MetroFamily.org](mailto:ForteJ@MetroFamily.org) to inquire how to best coordinate this and what items may be needed. If you would like to make a donation of new clothes or household items to Guardian Angels, more information on that can be found [here](#).

**Attend:** Periodically, Family Shelter hosts or supports other events in recognition of survivors. On Thursday, May 9, 2024, DuPage-area civic, business and philanthropic leaders will come together to support Metropolitan Family Services DuPage through a powerful program called A Night to Stand Up for Families. Proceeds support Metropolitan's DuPage-area programs and services, which empower nearly 48,000 families and individuals to learn, earn, heal and thrive. Tickets can be purchased [here](#).



**Financial Gifts:** One time or recurring financial gifts to Family Shelter can be made [here](#) and financial gifts for Guardian Angels can be directed [here](#).