

# About Domestic Violence Victim Service Programs

## What Are Domestic Violence Victim Service Programs?

Domestic violence service programs can offer a number resources designed to help victims live a life free from violence and abuse. Domestic violence programs have specially trained advocates who are trained to recognize the dynamics of abuse and to empower victims to regain control in their lives. Domestic violence advocates provide confidential communications with victims.

## What to Expect If You Call a Domestic Violence Victim Service Program

The services each program provides may vary from place to place, but most can include the following:

- **24-Hour Crisis Line.** Most programs have a 24-hour crisis line that is answered by trained advocates to provide callers with emotional support, safety planning, and options for services available in the community. Most programs allow callers to remain anonymous until they are comfortable providing personal information.
- **Cost.** Most domestic violence programs offer all of their services at no cost to victims.
- **Support.** All programs have people who can listen and help you sort out what options might be available to help in making the changes you decide would be helpful in your life.
- **Information and referrals.** Staff can provide information on the dynamics of abuse and referrals for other services that may be helpful.
- **Advocacy services.** Most programs have specially trained advocates who can assist you in finding help with other agencies such as the aging network, criminal justice, immigration, housing, Social Security, employment protections, and more.

- **Emergency shelter.** Many programs offer a temporary place for you to stay if you are in danger such as an emergency shelter or safe homes.
- **Transitional housing.** Some programs have a place where you can live for a longer period of time, sometimes up to two years, and provide you with the support you need as you work to stabilize your life.
- **Counseling.** Most programs provide you with an opportunity to meet others who have had similar experiences (often called peer support) or may provide individual counseling or referrals for therapy if you think it would be helpful for your situation.
- **Support groups.** Some programs run groups for children, youth, and adults. A few programs offer support groups specifically designed for older survivors who have been abused by someone they trusted and loved.
- **Privacy.** Most programs have strict confidentiality policies and will not share information about you or your situation with others. Sometimes there is an exception to this rule if advocates are mandated to report elder abuse by state statute. You can request this information when you call to ask for help.
- **Legal advocacy.** Most programs offer information about the legal system and information on tools that may be helpful for you such as protection orders. Most do not provide legal counsel, but can refer you to free or low cost attorneys.
- **Crisis intervention services.** Many programs offer 24-hour crisis intervention services to help during or after an abusive incident. An advocate may be available to meet with you at an emergency room or other safe place.

**Before you call a shelter think about the things that are of biggest concern to you. Ask for all the details you need so you'll feel as comfortable as possible making your important decisions.**

# What to Expect If You Go to a Shelter

## Every shelter is different, but usually you can expect that:

- Shelters are free—no fees are charged to stay.
- Shelters generally house multiple families at the same time. You may have your own bedroom or you may have to share a room.
- Most shelters have shared kitchens, common areas, and bathrooms.
- All shelters must welcome service animals. However, most shelters cannot accommodate pets. Often they will work with you to make arrangements to have your pets cared for elsewhere.
- Shelters have laundry facilities and supply linens (sheets, towels, and blankets).
- They usually have food, clothing, and toiletries available for the first few days of a stay.
- Shelters can be stressful—this is group-living with others who are experiencing tough times.
- You will be asked to honor the privacy of other residents by not discussing their names or situations with anyone else.
- Shelters are concerned about everybody's safety, so you may be asked to keep the location a secret.
- Visitors are generally not allowed.

## Some shelters:

- Allow you to bring your pets
- Have computers you can use to check your email and access online resources
- Offer free cell phones for 911 calls only

## What to Expect If You Call a Legal Advocate

Some domestic violence victim service programs have legal advocates that can help victims by providing assistance and support in engaging with the criminal or civil legal system.

**When you talk to a legal advocate, you can expect that:**

- Services are offered free of charge
- Legal advocates are not attorneys and will be unable to give legal advice

**Advocates can offer a range of services that might include:**

- Accompanying you to court
- Helping you fill out paperwork
- Helping you understand the civil or criminal process
- Outlining or prioritizing the legal options that are available
- Informing you about what actually goes on in court
- Preparing you for a hearing or trial, and giving support before, during, and after



**If you are in danger and want law enforcement to respond, call 911.**

To talk to someone confidentially for support and information, call the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](https://www.ndv.org) at 1-800-799-7233 or TTY 1-800-787-3224.

To find your local sexual abuse victim service program, call the [Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network](https://www.ranet.org) at 1-800-656-4673 (HOPE).