

## **Appendix C**

### **Best Practice Guidelines**

**and**

### **Implementation Checklist**

Woman Abuse Council of Toronto  
Originally created in 1998  
Revised 2002

# Best Practice Guidelines And Implementation Checklist

## Introduction

One of the most significant problems within the community response has been the fragmentation and lack of consistent approach to woman abuse by the various sectors. This inconsistency in approach among practitioners has been perpetuated by a lack of clear delineation of responsibilities. As a result individual practitioners and service providers -- doctors, police officers, social workers, Crown attorneys-- often use their discretion when responding to a woman who disclosed abuse by her intimate partner. The gap of clear policy direction leaves a void which is then filled by individual's own biases, values and understanding of the issue.

Effective collaboration between sectors cannot be accomplished until there is some degree of internal consistency regarding the response to women abuse within sectors. These **Best Practice Guidelines** are an attempt to provide guidelines for how agencies or sectors can improve their internal consistency through *the development of a common analysis and understanding of woman abuse, which will bring about a consistency in the level and quality of services.*

## Background to the Best Practices Guidelines and Checklist

**Best practice is a term that is used to identify a practice or service that has been demonstrated to be effective and accountable. This concept is particularly useful regarding the community response to woman abuse because, rather than providing proscribed rule and directives, best practices provide guidelines that can be modified and adapted according to unique local realities.**

**The Best Practice Guidelines were created by member agencies of the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto. The guidelines resulted from a three year process of working together to identify the key principles and operational components necessary to provide an effective and accountable response to woman abuse.**

**The premise of this work is that services and programs should be provided in ways that promote the safety of women and their children, while supporting a woman's right to self- determination.**

**The Best Practices Checklist (which follows the Guidelines) can be used to assess and monitor the progress within an agency or sector in adopting the Best Practices Guidelines and identifying areas requiring further work.**

**Potential benefits from implementing the Best Practices Guidelines and using the Checklist include:**

- **The opportunity for service providers to examine/assess their attitudes and actions with respect to the issue of woman abuse**
- **Increased safety for women**
- **Increased prevention of abuse and enhanced recognition of abuse as a societal issue and a crime**
- **Improved coordination of the attention and resources of the services sector on the issue of woman abuse**

## **The Best Practices Guidelines**

**Safety of women and children is regarded as an overall principle and top priority and that what occurs in a family should be open to scrutiny to ensure that women can live a violence free life.**

**Components of Best Practices include:**

- A) Philosophical Principles**
- B) Policies and Procedures**
- C) Mechanisms of Multi-Agency Coordination**
- D) Accountability Mechanisms**
- E) Leadership and Advocacy**
- F) Training and education**
- G) Monitoring and Evaluation**

## **A) Philosophical Principles**

**As a first step in implementation of the Best Practices Guidelines, it is beneficial for the Board of Directors (or other senior governance structure of the organization) to ensure that a Statement of Principles in place to provide overall direction for the organization's response to woman abuse.**

**This Statement of Principles can serve to guide the Board of Directors, management, frontline staff and volunteers as they develop and implement their organization's policies and procedures related to the identification, assessment and support of women who have been abused.**

### **Examples of Principles Organizations May Adopt**

Every woman and child has the right to live free from abuse.

Any overt and/or subtle forms of discrimination based on gender, race, age, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, class, language and/or religion must be challenged by all services and institutions within the community response system.

Violence against women will continue until women attain economic, political, social and cultural equality.

The prevention of violence against women requires a coordinated effort where woman abuse is systematically challenged and confronted by all service sectors and the community at large. We will not be effective in ending violence against women until we utilize a process which includes coordinated, inter-sectoral needs assessment and planning.

Victims are never responsible for the violence. An abuser's violence towards his partner is a matter of personal choice and he is entirely responsible and should be accountable for his violence.

Legal sanctions against women abuse must be enforced consistently and vigorously.

The response to woman abuse should support, empower and assist women to better protect children.

Services must be provided in ways that facilitate a woman's ability to exercise informed choices and, the fullest extent possible, enable her to be a full participant in the process.

Women and children must have access to linguistically sensitive and culturally appropriate services.

Accountability standards and guidelines should go through the appropriate agency process for full acceptance by all levels of the organization.

## **B) Policy and Procedures**

**Based on the Statement of Principles, the organization then develops policy that identifies and responds effectively to woman abuse, and prevents future abuse, where possible. The following steps are for those developing policies in organizations.**

### **Awareness**

- Ensure that policies and operating procedures are articulated, documented and publicized to service users and the general public.
- Ensure that all staff, board members and volunteers are aware of the Statement of Principles, and any policies or procedures that flow from this statement.

### **Commitment**

- Ensure that policies flow from, and are consistent with, the Statement of Principles and that there is organizational commitment at all levels to these policies.
- Ensure commitment from senior levels in the organization to an implementation strategy within a specific timeframe.

### **Consistency**

- Identify and document all procedures, staff roles/responsibilities in the implementation process.
- Evaluate mechanisms for monitoring implementation to ensure consistency.
- Develop and use intervention strategies that seek early identification of abuse situations, take into account power imbalances in abusive relationships, provide immediate crisis intervention and carry out safety planning with victim.

### **Accountability**

- Ensure that resource and services protect service users from further abuse, attempt to empower victims, and protect other family members, particularly children, who may be at risk.
- Involve service users the development of any policy or service, with particular attention to increasing the participation of marginalized women.
- Provide accessible services that meet the safety, physical, communication, financial

and emotional needs of users.

## **C) Mechanisms of Multi-Agency Coordination**

A woman who has been abused requires an accessible support system characterized by continuity, a consistent level of service and quick response. No one organization can fully address the problem of women abuse and an effective response requires coordination and collaboration between organizations and sectors. Multi-agency coordination involves the following approaches.

### **Awareness**

- Recognize the range of services and organizations that are actively responding to this issue, including services within various ethno-racial and ethno-cultural communities.
- Recognize the range of services and organizations that are indirectly impacting on the situation.

### **Commitment**

- Identify areas of inter-sectoral linkages, and create mechanisms to ensure communication between these sectors.
- Recognize individual agencies' strengths and limitations within the network of service agencies and actively work together to provide a full range of coordinated services.
- Each organization should acknowledge the need for an integrated approach, and accept responsibility for ensuring appropriate multi-organizational linkages.

### **Consistency**

- Articulate, document and publicize inter and intra sector protocols.
- Work through existing inter-agency networks and establish new multi-agency alliance to identify specific agency roles and identify where overlap and interface takes place.

### **Accountability**

- Create mechanisms within each agency to track cases in order to monitor compliance to operating policies and protocols.
- Develop inter-agency forums for issue identification, problem solving and mutual accountability.

Each organization should have policies in place to ensure the following elements.

### ***COORDINATION IDENTIFICATION***

Policies should ensure that service providers:

- ask women who have been abused if she is, or has been, supported by another organization(s) and determine the services provided by other organizations;
- should contact, in consultation with the women, the organizations with whom she has been involved to facilitate case consultations and service coordination; and,
- identify any additional service requirements to ensure the safety of the woman and her children, and contact the appropriate service providers.

### ***INTER-AGENCY INFORMATION SHARING***

Policies should be place to ensure that service providers:

- identify, in consultation with the woman, information to be communicated to other organizations or agencies for the purpose of case coordination and service continuity; and
- communicate documented information to relevant organizations.

### ***INTER-AGENCY REFERRAL***

Each organization should ensure that:

- inter-agency referral guidelines are developed in consultation with the other organizations and implemented in order to promote service coordination and continuity of service for women who have been abused; and,
- service providers receive updates on the availability of the range of community services and resources and establish working networks with service providers in the organization to which refers are made.

### ***CASE CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION***

- Each organization should develop a list of other organizations and or contact persons who provide consultations on cases of abuse, as needed.
- Establish guidelines for inter-agency case coordination.

- When more than one organization is working with a woman who has been abused, one should be designated as the lead organization for purpose of case coordination.

## **D) Accountability Mechanisms**

Accountability mechanisms provide ways to ensure that each organization and agency is effectively responding to the needs of abused women and providing effective interventions

### **Awareness**

- Recognize the impact of this work on both the users of the services and the workers.
- Services should be accountable to:
  - Women and children who use the service
  - People who do the work
  - Organization boards and committees.

### **Commitment**

- Staff compliance to the agency's woman abuse policy should be included in performance appraisals and in decisions about advancement
- Ensure that each agency has a commitment to a minimum standard of service

### **Consistency**

- Funding bodies should include agency and organizational compliance to protocols in their performance appraisal process
- Create and publicize a vehicle for inter-intra agency cooperation and feedback
- Each agency should create materials for the community that outline the agency role and the accountability mechanisms that exist.

### **Accountability**

- Create and use feedback and complaint mechanisms on a regular basis
- Include compliance to woman abuse policies and practices in the establishment of professional accreditation processes
- Involve women survivors in policy development, program design and evaluation.



## **E) Leadership and Advocacy**

An agency or organization should play a leadership role in challenging community tolerance of women abuse. The pervasive nature of woman abuse indicates the prevalence of values and beliefs that condone abusive behaviour in intimate relationships. Therefore, advocacy on individual situations and as well as systemic issues is an inherent aspect of this work.

### **Awareness**

- Agencies should be involved in ongoing public education on the issues that lead to woman abuse and should challenge systemic tolerance of violence against women.

### **Commitment**

- Agencies should take leadership and participate with other organizations to promote changes in legal and social policy that promote women's safety
- Agencies should take leadership and participate with others to promote changes that increase accountability within the legal, social service, health systems etc.

### **Consistency**

- Agencies should ensure that all community education initiatives clearly articulate that woman abuse exists in all communities, and identify that religion, culture, economic status cannot be used to justify or condone abusive behaviour

### **Accountability**

- Take a proactive role in identifying women's safety needs and gaps in service and promote changes that would address these issues.
- Play a leadership role in demonstrating the need for funding and support to a diverse spectrum of services.

## **F) Education and Training**

No social issue is static; in order to effectively address woman abuse our understanding of the issue must continue to develop and grow. The community response should continually evolve in response to the changing reality of our communities. Education and training for all who are involved in providing services must, therefore, be ongoing.

### **Awareness**

- Include identification, assessment and intervention strategies related to woman abuse in training programs for staff/ board members and volunteers.
- Ensure that mandatory training and support is provided to all staff

### **Commitment**

- Ensure an orientation program and ongoing training is provided for staff/ board and volunteers.
- Provide training programs that are based in the concepts provided through the best practice guidelines and that reflect current knowledge of the issue.

### **Consistency**

- Utilize inter-agency training formats in order to promote a common knowledge base, inter-sectoral understanding of roles and responsibilities, and to promote linkages and collaborative responses

### **Accountability**

- Ensure that training and professional development on woman abuse issues utilize the skills and experience of women survivors and those working as advocates with women in the community
- Recognize the time and expertise of women survivors by providing some kind of compensation/ honorarium for women when they are asked to speak and participate in training sessions.

## **G) Monitoring and Evaluation**

All services, policies and initiatives require monitoring and evaluation to ensure that they meet their goals and objectives and that they are effective in holding abusers accountable and protecting the safety of women.

### **Awareness**

- Information about the effectiveness of services/ programs should be shared with other similar and related services and with the public

### **Commitment**

- Agency goals, resources and timelines should reflect a commitment to carrying out evaluation as a critical element of doing this work

### **Consistency**

- Agency policies and practices should be regularly reviewed to ensure consistency with the accepted statement of principles
- Information from a variety of sources should be used in program evaluations including; staff, users of the service, volunteers, board members etc.

### **Accountability**

- Each agency should provide safe and accessible means for service users to critique the effectiveness and respectfulness of the services offered



Are your policies and procedures on woman abuse brought to the attention of new staff as part of the agency orientation process?

1                      2                      3                      4

Are your policies and procedures related to responding to woman abuse cases reviewed regularly with staff?

1                      2                      3                      4

Have service users (i.e. women survivors) been involved in the development of these policies and procedures?

1                      2                      3                      4

Are your agency's policies and procedures explained and publicized to service users and to other relevant community agencies?

1                      2                      3                      4

### **C) Mechanisms of Multi-Agency Coordination**

Has your organization formalized agreement with other organizations and /or sectors that guide how woman abuse cases are addressed?

1                      2                      3                      4

Has your organization developed a process for formal communications with other relevant organizations and/or sectors?

1                      2                      3                      4

Has your organization developed an informal process for dealing with other sectors regarding problems and safety issues that might arise?

1                      2                      3                      4

## **D) Mechanisms of Accountability**

Do you include feedback/ accountability mechanisms which are sensitive and responsive to service users?

1                      2                      3                      4

Do you incorporate this feedback into policy/program decisions and changes?

1                      2                      3                      4

Do you include feedback from other relevant agencies regarding the quality of your service in your policy/program decisions?

1                      2                      3                      4

Do you have a mechanism to ensure that service users are aware of the accountability procedures?

1                      2                      3                      4

## **E) Leadership and Advocacy**

Does your agency use problems and difficulties experienced by individuals to identify systemic gaps and problems that require attention and action?

1                      2                      3                      4

Does your agency participate with other community agencies and organization to promote systemic changes that will create a more effective and accountable response?

1                      2                      3                      4

Does your agency attempt to change the larger system response by engaging in community education, outreach and advocacy activities?

1                      2                      3                      4

## **F) Education and Training**

Do you have an orientation program on your own policies as well as general issues related to woman abuse for new staff/ board members and volunteers?

1                      2                      3                      4

Do you have ongoing training on issues of woman abuse for all staff/ board / volunteers

1                      2                      3                      4

Do you incorporate current information, utilize community expertise and include the perspectives of women survivors in agency and inter-agency training sessions?

1                      2                      3                      4

Do you provide opportunities for inter-disciplinary training and problem solving sessions?

1                      2                      3                      4

## **G) Evaluation**

Do you evaluate your agency/ organization's programs on a regular basis?

1                      2                      3                      4

Does the evaluation criteria for your agency include placing priority on the safety of women and children and holding men accountable for their abusive behaviours?

1                      2                      3                      4

When doing program evaluation do you provide opportunities for service users to participate in a safe and meaningful way?

1                      2                      3                      4

Do you share program evaluation results with other agencies so as to improve services and maximize collaborative efforts?

1                      2                      3                      4