STATE OF VERMONT
Agency of Human Services (AHS)

AHS Response to Domestic Violence	REVISION HISTORY: N/A	Chapter/Number 1.03
	EFFECTIVE DATE: April 1, 2008	Attachments/Related Documents:

Authorizing Signature: Signed by: Date Signed: 3/10/08
Cynthia D. LaWare, Secretary, Agency of Human Services

Also Authorized By:

Douglas A. Racine, Secretary, Agency of Human Services Date: May 23, 2011

PURPOSE/POLICY STATEMENT:

To support the development of standards and guidelines for the implementation of effective domestic violence policies, procedures, case practices and education within and among all AHS departments and offices.

BACKGROUND and REFERENCES:

In 2003 the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence met with AHS leadership to discuss the AHS reorganization and its implications for victims of domestic violence. Because domestic violence is a cross-cutting issue that requires a holistic view of victims and their environment, and the Agency was adopting a holistic view of its clients and their needs, it was jointly agreed to be an ideal time for collaborative work. The resulting Memorandum of Understanding framed the AHS Domestic Violence Initiative and articulated AHS's commitment to create and support efforts toward long-term sustainable change in the Agency response to domestic violence.

Research has substantiated the connections between domestic violence and virtually all of the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) service orientations. AHS plays an integral role in supporting and enhancing the physical, emotional, economic and psychological safety, security, and well-being of individuals and families who directly or indirectly experience the effects of domestic violence. The Agency of Human Services understands that domestic violence affects individuals and families served by the Agency without regard to age, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation or religion.

The promulgation of this AHS Policy provides the framework for AHS to meet the goal of creating an effective and comprehensive response to domestic violence in partnership with communities and victims of domestic violence. This policy further provides a framework for creating strategies for the prevention of domestic violence within the context of AHS. Effective primary prevention must change the environmental factors that dramatically shape beliefs and behaviors about violence.

RELATED DOCUMENTS/STATUTORY REFERENCES:

Memorandum of Understanding, Agency of Human Services & Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, 2004
Report to the Secretary: Recommendations for Systems Change at the Vermont Agency of Human Services, 2005
Phase One: AHS Domestic Violence Initiative, Report to the Secretary, 2006

DEFINITIONS:

Family Violence describes acts of violence between family members, including adult and adolescent partners; parents and children (including adult children); caretakers or partners of elders or people with disabilities; and

siblings.

Domestic Violence (or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in other contexts), a subset of Family Violence, is a pattern of assault and coercive behaviors that may include actual or threatened physical injury and sexual assault, psychological abuse, economic coercion and various other tactics. These behaviors are perpetrated by someone who is, was, or wishes to be involved in an intimate or dating relationship with an adult or adolescent, are aimed at establishing control by one partner over the other and result in an atmosphere of fear and/or terror for the victim.

Victim (or "survivor" in other contexts) in this policy refers to the person against whom a perpetrator directs abuse or battering. However, the impact of abusive behavior on others including household members, children, witnesses, and co-workers among others is often significant and warrants an informed and diligent response.

Perpetrator (or "batterer" in other contexts) is a person who uses a pattern of coercive control that may be primarily psychological, economic, or sexual, but that is reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, credible physical threat, or sexual assault. A perpetrator is not a victim of domestic violence even when those abused react by using violence to defend themselves.

Coordinated Community Response is a system of networks, agreements, processes and applied principles created by the local shelter movement, criminal justice agencies, and human service programs. (Ellen Pence & Martha McMahon, *A Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence*, The National Training Project, www.stopvaw.org, 2006)

Prevention describes systematic processes that promote healthy environments and behaviors and reduce the likelihood or frequency of an incident, injury or adverse condition occurring. Primary prevention addresses problems before they occur. It is distinct from efforts to modify the behavior of individuals who may already be violent or assist individuals already experiencing the threat or onset of violence. (*Poised for Prevention: Advancing Promising Approaches to Primary Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence,* Prevention Institute, www.preventioninstitute.org, 2007)

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all AHS departments, offices and contracted service providers.

STANDARDS:

All policies, procedures, case practices and education related to domestic violence will be reviewed and developed in accordance with the following standards:

1. Implement a response that prioritizes victim safety.
2. Adhere to the knowledge that the perpetrator, not the victim, is responsible for his/her abusive behavior and for stopping the abuse.
3. Adopt a framework for the prevention of domestic violence that addresses the need to change social and cultural norms and beliefs that create the environment for domestic violence to occur.
4. Collaborate with statewide domestic violence partners as part of a local and statewide coordinated community response to domestic violence.

GUIDELINES:

1. Domestic violence policies and procedures within each AHS Department will:
    a. standardize response;
    b. allow for flexible responses to minimize risk in individual situations;
    c. provide guidance regarding how best to comply with established criminal or statutory obligations without increasing risk to victims.
2. The principles below will be adopted, when possible and applicable, by all AHS departments.
    1. Support victims of domestic violence to access safety and security for themselves and their families.
    2. Attend to safety issues for all AHS staff.
    3. Respect the authority and the autonomy of victims to direct their own lives.

4. Reduce the risks posed by perpetrators to victims and their children.
5. Reinforce the perpetrator's responsibility for violent and coercive behavior.
6. Support perpetrators in their efforts to change their abusive behaviors.
7. Minimize unintended negative consequences.
8. Provide explicit and safe parameters for confidentiality.
9. Create linkages and partnerships with domestic violence programs and services and other local and statewide partners.

AGENCY RESPONSIBILITY:

1. Ensure that all AHS employees and contracted service providers are cognizant of the context of domestic violence, the effects of domestic violence on victims, and the possibility of increased danger to victims and their families. This may occur while the victim is trying to access services or benefits as well as throughout the provision of services.

2. Develop a process for the ongoing assessment and the development of an effective domestic violence response that minimizes unintended consequences through an established agency-wide Domestic Violence Initiative Steering Committee. This committee may act as a review mechanism for proposed/existing domestic violence policies and procedures and be comprised of representatives from Agency departments and domestic violence organizations. An annual report to the Secretary on the Agency's progress/needs/adherence to the policy will be developed by the Steering Committee.

3. Promote the development of strategies to improve the AHS response to domestic violence and work with each of its departments and offices, and in partnership with survivors, family members, domestic violence organizations, federal, state, and local agencies, and other community members in support of these principles.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSIBILITY:

1. Work with the Agency of Human Services Domestic Violence Initiative Steering Committee to modify policies, procedures, case practices and education identified as having a potentially endangering effect on the safety of victims.

2. Develop a safe and effective response to victims and perpetrators.

3. Use the framework provided by this policy to appropriately and effectively further the mission of the Agency and its respective departments relative to the unique needs of domestic violence victims and perpetrators.

4. Provide the necessary staff and support to implement this policy and subsequent departmental policies, procedures, case practices and education developed as a result of this policy.

COMPLIANCE:

The overall responsibility for creating effective responses to domestic violence within AHS rests primarily with AHS Departments and their Divisions. To ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach, the Secretary's Office shall oversee the implementation of this policy and provide individual departments with direction, support and consultation.

ENFORCEMENT:

The Office of the Secretary, in consultation with the AHS Domestic Violence Initiative Steering Committee, may initiate reviews, assessments or other means to ensure that this policy is being implemented.