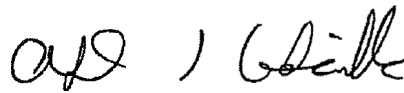


**State of Vermont  
Agency of Human Services (AHS)**

<b>Policy Title:</b> AHS Response to Domestic and Sexual Violence	<b>Revision Date:</b> 1/1/2008, 5/23/2011
<b>Attachments/Related Documents:</b>	<b>Revision Number:</b> 1.03
<b>Name/Title of Authorizing Signature:</b> Al Gobeille, Secretary	<b>Effective Date:</b> 3/11/19

Authorizing Signature:



**PURPOSE/POLICY STATEMENT:**

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

The State of Vermont envisions employee workplaces that support safe, respectful, and equitable relationships that challenge any social norms that support or perpetuate domestic or sexual violence. In recognition of the significant and deleterious effects of domestic and sexual violence in the workplace, the State endeavors to take a proactive approach to create and support employee work environments that are free from any form of discrimination, intimidation, or harassment.

**SCOPE:**

This policy applies to all AHS departments, offices, and designees.

**OTHER RELATED POLICIES:**

- 11 [Trauma Informed System of Care](#)
- 11 [Suicide Prevention Protocol](#)
- 11 [DHR Domestic and Sexual Violence Policy](#)
- 11 [DHR 3.1 Sexual Harassment](#)

**BACKG.ROUND AND REFERENCES:**

In 2003 the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence met with AHS leadership to discuss the Agency reorganization and the resulting implications for victims of domestic and sexual violence.. At the outset of these meetings, Domestic Violence (DV) was identified as a multi-faceted issue that required a holistic view of victims and their environment. As a result, the AHS chose to adopt a collaborative approach to this work, one that encouraged shared best practices that support a more comprehensive, coordinated community response.

The resulting Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) framed the AHS Domestic Violence Initiative and articulated the AHS's commitment to create and support long-term, sustainable changes in practice and policy in response to DV.

To our knowledge, this is the first such formal understanding between state government and non-governmental domestic violence service providers in the country.

Research has substantiated the connections between DV and virtually all the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) service orientations. Eventually, the work of this initiative expanded its focus to include the pervasive and detrimental impacts of sexual violence. The AHS understands that domestic and sexual violence (DSV) effects individuals and families regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, disability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or religion, and that impacted individuals are served by every Department housed within the Agency. As a result, the 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 DSV.

This policy provides the framework for the AHS to meet the goal of creating an effective, comprehensive and coordinated response to domestic and sexual violence; one that includes prevention measures and fosters collaboration with allied partners and Victim/Survivors of DSV. For primary prevention to be effective, however, efforts must facilitate change in the environmental and social factors that dramatically shape normative beliefs regarding the use of violence in all its many forms. To that end, this policy seeks to promote Agency-wide implementation of strategies that directly and effectively address these factors that influence the prevention of domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment within the context of the AHS. The standards and guidelines that follow are in alignment with Department of Human Resources' policies and training related to domestic and sexual violence.

## RELATED DOCUMENTS/STATUTORY REFERENCES:

*Memorandum of Understanding*, Agency of Human Services and 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:

**Coordinated Community Response:** A system of networks, agreements, processes and applied principles created by the local shelter movement, criminal justice agencies, and human service programs.

**Domestic Violence** (or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): A pattern of abusive behavior used by one person to gain and maintain power and control over an intimate partner or an ex-partner. It occurs in both dating and long-term relationships. Tactics may include physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse, isolation, coercion, and intimidation.

**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.

**Human Trafficking:** The action of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim for the purposes of exploitation, which includes exploiting the prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or similar practices, and the removal of organs. Consent of the victim is irrelevant where illicit means are established. If alleged victim is a minor, please follow link to [DCF Family Services Sex Trafficking of Minors](#).

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**Prevention:** Prevention describes systematic processes that promote social norms that protect against violence, teach skills to prevent violence, and create protective environments to reduce the likelihood of violence. 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. Preventing sexual and domestic violence requires comprehensive prevention strategies that address factors at each level of the social ecology-individual, relationship, community, and society. (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/CDC*)

**Sexual Violence:** Sexual violence is defined as a sexual act committed against someone without that person's freely given consent. Anyone can experience sexual violence including: children, teens, adults, and elders.

**Sexual Harassment:** A form of discrimination based on gender and/or gender identity. Sexual harassment means unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. DHR 3.1 Sexual Harassment.

**Sexual Violence Perpetrator/Abuser:** A person who uses force, coercion or other manipulation tactics to engage in sexual contact with an individual without consent.

**Stalking:** A course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.

**Victim/Survivor:** The person against whom an abuser directs their abusive behaviors and coercive control tactics.  
*Note: Abusive behavior can also have significant negative impacts on individuals indirectly such as household members, children, witnesses, and co-workers who likewise require a conscientious, trauma-informed response.*

## GUIDELINES:

All policies, procedures, case practices and education related or linked to domestic and sexual 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/their abusive behavior and for stopping the abuse.
3. Adopt a framework for the prevention of domestic and sexual violence that addresses the need to change social and cultural norms and beliefs that create the environment for domestic and sexual violence to occur.
4. Collaborate with statewide domestic and sexual violence partners as part of a local and statewide coordinated community response to domestic and sexual violence
5. The principles below will, when possible and applicable, be adopted by all AHS departments to serve as the framework for the development and promulgation of domestic and sexual violence policies and procedures specific to the roles and responsibilities of each department.
6. Policies and procedures should:
  - 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.

## PRINCIPLES:

1. Support victims of domestic and sexual violence to access safety and security for themselves and their

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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 abusers 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 and sexual violence programs and services and other local and statewide partners.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

1. Ensure that all AHS employees and contracted service providers are cognizant of the context of domestic and sexual violence, the effects of domestic and sexual 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 effective domestic and sexual violence responses that minimizes unintended consequences through an established agency-wide Domestic and Sexual Violence Steering Committee that reports to the AHS Secretary. This committee may act as a review mechanism for proposed/existing domestic and sexual violence policies, procedures and trainings, and shall be comprised of representatives from Agency departments and domestic and sexual violence organizations. A biennial 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 and sexual violence and work with each of its departments and offices, and in partnership with survivors, family members, domestic and sexual 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 and Sexual Violence 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 of abuse and perpetrators of abuse.
3. Use the framework provided by this policy to appropriately and effectively further the mission of the Agency and its respective departments, divisions, and units relative to the unique needs of both victims and perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence.
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.

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## **COMPLIANCE:**

The overall responsibility for creating effective responses to domestic and sexual violence within AHS rests primarily with AHS Departments. 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 and Sexual Violence Steering Committee, may initiate reviews, assessments, or other means to ensure that this policy is being implemented.