

Gateway Project: *A Path to Nonviolence*

Beliefs and Practice Guidelines¹

The following are our shared beliefs about the work we do. These are essential elements to our curriculum and the Gateway Project model of service.

Abusive partners are...

- All capable of escalating their violence, and some to lethal levels
- Abusive in a variety of ways – as individuals and between individuals
- Capable of changing and becoming non-abusive
- Everywhere and can be anyone
- Likely to have been witnesses of trauma or oppressive systems

Victims & survivors of intimate partner violence are...

- Everywhere and can be anyone
- Changed or impacted by the abuse they experience
- Important to listen to
- Not to blame for their abusive partners' violence
- Likely to have been witnesses of trauma or oppressive systems

Abusive partners abuse because....

- They feel entitled to punish someone who does not do what they want
- There is a lack of individual and social consequences
- It is what they have witnessed, what they have learned, and what has been reinforced
- They believe it gets them what they want
- They are operating from insecure fear
- Power feels good and healthier alternatives feel unfamiliar

People change when...

- They have the knowledge, tools and healthy role models
- They are personally ready to choose to
- The benefit outweighs the cost
- They can communicate in an environment where they feel safe and are not shamed
- They feel their experiences are appreciated and their feelings are validated

¹ The program first developed Shared Beliefs & Practice Guidelines in 2004 and has revisited them over the years. The version in this document was created on July 12, 2019.

The following are the practice guidelines for the program model that reflect those beliefs:

The Organization

- Organization leadership will create an environment that demonstrates care for the staff and service community.
- Intervention and prevention work will extend beyond the intervention program's group rooms and include community engagement and advocacy efforts.
- Service development will be guided by the voices of survivors.
- Staff will assume that every client is worth working with.
- A person's behavior is never used as justification for their partner's abuse.
- The focus of change remains with the abusive partner. Participants are challenged to focus on their own behavior rather than their partners' behavior.
- The agency works to distinguish itself from the legal system or other referring institutions and focuses its efforts on respectfully promoting healthy relationships.
- Staff create an environment in which efforts to change are recognized and encouraged.

Program Structure

- The program's application process will include an opportunity for participants to share their experiences through the referral process, their fears about participating in the program, and their relationship history as they have experienced it.
- There will be objective milestones for participants to demonstrate a readiness to change and participants who fail to meet that standard will be dismissed from the program.
- The program will work to build a sense of community between group members and encourage them to build a healthy support network with one another.
- For the safety of other staff and the consistency of participant experience, program staff will avoid making exceptions to stated program policies.

Staff Reflection and Role Modeling

- Program staff will model nonviolence and respectful communication. Those who have a history of perpetrating intimate partner violence will have successfully completed an abuse intervention program.
- Program staff will be mindful to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and challenge participants who use them.
- Program staff will recognize they hold power and will model healthy ways of using and sharing power.
- Staff members will examine their own complex identities within power-based systems, which can include both holding privilege and experiencing oppression.
- Staff members will be mindful of their own trauma histories and experiences of oppression and work to prevent them from negatively impacting others.

Participant Engagement

- Program staff will resist labeling participants as “abusers,” as the abusive behaviors they have used are not the whole of their identity; to do so is an unnecessary barrier to change.
- Program staff will work to build rapport and trust with participants so they feel safe enough to try suggestions that feel unfamiliar.
- Staff will resist giving the participants or their partners a false sense of hope that simply participating in and completing the program will necessarily prevent future abuse.
- Program staff will first assume that resistance is an expression of fear and respond with empathy.
- Program staff will remain nonjudgmental when participants acknowledge using abusive behaviors when genuinely seeking support from the group. The Facilitators will express appreciation for their willingness to share.
- Program staff genuinely listen to participants and use motivational interviewing skills to engage participants in the change process.
- When participants return after completing or having their case closed, program staff will remain encouraging about their potential for positive change in and outside of the group room.
- Program staff will create a space where participants are encouraged to express their ideas and feelings.
- Program staff will be mindful of the monumental consequences that some participants face if they do not successfully complete the program and how those consequences are influenced by systemic oppressions.
- Facilitators will read the case history, intake interviews and any other information available for each group member.
- Facilitators will avoid making personal assessments about participant change and appreciate that they cannot objectively know whether a participant is continuing to abuse their partner.
- Facilitators will recognize that program participants are mirroring oppressive systems they have witnessed or experienced.

Partner Engagement

- The program (or a contracted partner) will make an effort to contact the partner of every participant to offer services, assess for lethality and support safety.
- Partners will set the pace of service engagement and program staff will be prepared to meet them where they are.
- Partner engagement strategies will be trauma informed and work to avoid any negative impacts on partners.
- Contacts with current and former partners of program participants will include:
 - Information about partners’ right to refuse to engage with the program
 - Information about the various ways people can be abusive.
 - Offers of supportive services available to them within and outside of our organization
- All staff will assume that the partner of every participant is worth working with.
- Program staff will always be empathetic and respectful to all partners.

Appreciation for the service community

- Program staff will understand the demographic landscape of their community and the impact of institutional oppressions on the referral process for the intervention program, as well as the program's participants and their families.
- Program staff will recognize that participants and their victims may come from and return to environments that support abuse.
- Program staff will be mindful of the effort, risk and vulnerability required of participants to make the changes being asked of them.

Staff Knowledge and skills

- Program staff should be knowledgeable about the change process, appreciate that it is not linear and recognize that the path to nonviolence requires a long-term commitment.
- Staff will be trained to identify abusive and manipulative behaviors the participants may use with them and work to set and reinforce boundaries.
- Regular supervision and peer support are vital to both staff and participant health and safety. A sense of humor also helps.
- Facilitators will be knowledgeable about current and developing lethality assessments and research.
- Facilitators will have training on various types of abusive tactics.
- Facilitators will be trained to recognize and challenge minimization, denial and blame in the group room.
- Facilitators will be trained to recognize that people who grow up in unpredictable and dangerous environments may develop a particular fear of the unknown and a desire to be in control.

Service Partners

- Program staff will provide or make referrals to supportive services to remove potential barriers to the change process and reduce resistance.
- Program staff will have relationships with licensed counseling and mental health providers.

The Curriculum

- Program curriculum will provide participants with the tools to be nonviolent and the opportunity to practice using them.
- Program content should be focused on equality and the fundamental rights of all people.
- Program curriculum will help participants identify the negative impact their abusive behavior has had on their lives.
- The program curriculum will focus on the difference between short-term benefits and long-term negative consequences of abuse.
- The curriculum will help participants explore nonviolent alternatives to meet their healthy personal goals.
- The curriculum will assist participants in identifying their primary feelings and the essential role expressing those feelings in a healthy way has in reducing their violence.
- The curriculum should address men's historical oppression of women and how that has been socially and culturally supported for generations.
- Facilitators will run the curriculum as it is written, without modification.
- Facilitators will be aware of portions of the curriculum that could be particularly upsetting to participants and be prepared to offer supportive resources.