



A Division of the New York Legal Assistance Group

LegalHealth
Professional Partnership to Promote Well Being

This is general information, not legal advice. Patients should consult an attorney for specific guidance.

Domestic Violence Screening and Safety Planning

Domestic violence (“DV”) is a pattern of behavior used to establish power and control over another person through fear and intimidation which often includes the threat or use of physical, emotional, sexual violence or financial abuse. Victims of DV live in fear not only for their own safety and well-being, but oftentimes for the safety and well-being of their children.

What patients should I screen for domestic abuse?

- Domestic abuse can happen to anyone regardless of gender and sexual orientation.
- In addition to physical signs of abuse, DV victims face high rates of depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and may suffer from emotional and financial abuse. Another potential flag may be that the patient is chaperoned by their intimate partner or family.

What is the best way to screen for domestic violence?

- Screening for domestic violence is important because healthcare professionals are often the only point of contact for a DV victim. The healthcare and domestic violence initiative, Womanspace, has created a one-page screening guide for healthcare professionals, found [here](#).

How can I help a patient create a safety plan?

- Instruct your patient to call the police if s/he ever fears for the safety of their children or if the abuser violates an Order of Protection. Instruct your patient that:
 - S/he can ask for a language line telephone interpreter if the responding officers do not speak the victim’s language, and police forms can be filled out in the native language.
 - S/he can ask to speak to officers privately.
 - A call to the police may result in the arrest of the abuser.
- Talk to your patient about moving to a shelter or other safe place. Call Safe Horizon for Domestic Violence Shelter placements at 1-800-621-HOPE (1-800-621-4673). Safe Horizon can also help with safety planning, counseling, changing the locks (for free), and access to courts and free attorneys.
- Tell your patient that if s/he does leave for safety, to take their children with them to keep them safe.
- Patients should keep a copy of any Order of Protection with them at all times as well as at their child’s school and with the babysitters and/or a neighbor.
- Help patients plan an escape route out of their home in case of an emergency.
- Tell your patient to pack a bag with important documents and other things s/he would need if they had to leave in a hurry. Keep it in a safe place, or even leave it with a close friend.
- Family Justice Centers in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, or the Bronx all provide criminal, civil legal, and social services for victims of domestic violence, elder abuse, and human trafficking. There is no charge. Children age 3 and up can play in the children’s room. Walk-ins are from 9am-5pm. For directions: www.nyc.gov/html/ocdv/html/help/fjc.shtml.

Questions: Refer your patient to the LegalHealth clinic.