

## About us...

**Housing Resource and Support Service** works for consumer empowerment and supports the consumer to control their own life. HR&SS seek the greatest range of choice in housing, resources and services.

HR&SS works for wider social change in the areas of inclusion, accessible housing, disability rights and self-determination.

[www.hrss.com.au](http://www.hrss.com.au)

**Women's Health West** works in partnership with women and a range of organisations to meet the social, emotional and physical health needs of women in Melbourne's Northern Metro region. WHW's Family Violence Service is an entry point for assistance women experiencing family violence in the West.

[www.whwest.org.au](http://www.whwest.org.au)

**Women with Disabilities Victoria** is Victoria's peak body for women with disabilities. Our membership and staff represent the diversity of women with disabilities. WWD support women with disabilities to achieve their rights through community education, peer support, research and systemic advocacy on key Statewide committees. WWD's priority areas are access to health care, parenting rights, and addressing the prevalence of violence against women with disabilities.

[www.vwdn.org.au](http://www.vwdn.org.au)

# Building Bridges

creating pathways to  
safety for women with  
disabilities

 **womenwithdisabilitiesvictoria**  
empowering women

 **Women's Health West**  
Equity and justice for women in the west

# Resources

## National

### Web

Getting Free from Abuse: A guide for women with disabilities  
<http://dvrcv.org.au/Disability/DisabilityIndex.htm>

WWDA: Women with Disabilities Australia  
- Australia's peak organisation for Women with a Disabilities have great knowledge and online resources about violence.  
<http://www.wwda.org.au/contents.htm>

Domestic Violence Fact Sheet by WIRE  
Women's Information - this sheet explains what is family violence and some ways to stay safe.  
[http://www.wire.org.au/womens\\_info/violence/domestic/domestic\\_violence.pdf](http://www.wire.org.au/womens_info/violence/domestic/domestic_violence.pdf)

### National Disability Abuse & Neglect Hotline

Receives reports of abuse and neglect of people with disability using government-funded disability services and refers allegations to appropriate government agencies for investigation. Refers reports of abuse and neglect in other situations on for assistance as appropriate.

Ph: 1800 880 052

TTY: 1800 301 130

Email: [enquiries@disabilityhotline.org](mailto:enquiries@disabilityhotline.org)

Web: [www.disabilityhotline.org](http://www.disabilityhotline.org)

## Victorian

### Staff Training

Getting Safe Against the Odds,  
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Vic

### Web

Building the Evidence: A report on the status of policy and practice in responding to violence against women with disabilities in Victoria  
[www.vwdn.org.au/publications.htm#bte](http://www.vwdn.org.au/publications.htm#bte)

# Contacts

# Tips

Sometimes a disability support worker is the only person who observes abuse. It might be possible to make the world of difference by linking a client to specialist support services. You can do this confidentially without disclosing your name or your client's name.

### Creating a safe space

- Observe signs of fear in your client.
- If your client appears scared of someone close to them, it is not safe to discuss safety in front of that person. It is not safe to confront them.
- Open dialogue with your supervisor about your concerns for your client's safety.
- If you suspect abuse and you find it difficult to know for sure, consult a family violence service for confidential advice.

### Opening up conversation

- It's OK to let women talk about their experiences
- If you feel comfortable to do so, you can ask women direct questions, eg. are you scared of anyone at home?

### Reduce isolation

- Think about ways to increase community participation.
- Encourage referrals which promote support from other agencies.

**Listen Believe Take Action**

## Listen Believe Take Action

<b>Woman talks openly about experiencing violence and wants to take action</b>	<b>Woman talks openly about experiencing violence or abuse but doesn't want a referral made</b>	<b>Worker suspects violence or abuse is occurring but the woman has not talked openly about it</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ring your local family violence service and speak to an Intake worker.</li> <li>• An Intake worker will do an assessment with the woman over the phone or arrange a face-to-face appointment.</li> <li>• The work of the family violence service will always be woman-centred and will respect the woman's choices. This work may include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making a safety plan.</li> <li>• Discussing the different options available to the woman.</li> <li>• Making referrals to refuge, housing, counselling, financial support, etc.</li> <li>• Doing outreach work with the woman.</li> <li>• Providing family violence education</li> <li>• Providing court support.</li> <li>• Engaging in co-case management with other agencies – often across sectors.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• At the centre of the family violence service's work is the promotion of the woman's empowerment to gain control of her own life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you believe the situation poses a serious and immediate risk to the woman's health, contact a family violence service as soon as possible to discuss the situation. Family violence workers are the experts in assessing risk.</li> <li>• Explain to the woman that she can phone a family violence worker at any time to discuss her situation, seek advice or just debrief. She can do this anonymously.</li> <li>• Disability workers are encouraged to seek secondary consultation from a family violence service. Have a conversation with the Intake worker. You can then use this information in your next discussion with the woman. You do not have to identify yourself, your agency or the woman whose situation you are discussing.</li> <li>• Explore with the woman whether she would like to see a counsellor, particularly a feminist counsellor.</li> <li>• Always be open to having a discussion with the woman about her experiences, concerns and ideas.</li> <li>• Check in with her regularly.</li> <li>• Let the woman know about women's support groups operating in her local area.</li> <li>• Focus on empowering the woman.</li> <li>• Talk to the woman about whether there is anything that she thinks can be done to improve her safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you believe the situation poses a serious and immediate risk to the woman's health, contact a family violence service as soon as possible to discuss the situation. Family violence workers are the experts in assessing risk.</li> <li>• Try to arrange to see the woman on her own and open up a conversation with her. For example, try talking generally about the context in which the abuse is happening (e.g. 'home'). You might ask, 'Who do you live with?' 'How is it going?' 'Tell me more about the people you live with and what it's like at home'.</li> <li>• Talk to other support people in the woman's life, for example, family members, friends, support workers, service providers, etc. What are their observations?</li> <li>• Seek secondary consultation from a family violence service. These conversations can be anonymous.</li> <li>• Contact the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) for information and/or advice.</li> <li>• Come up with an action plan about how you will work towards improving the woman's safety.</li> <li>• It may be useful to use a table with a separate column for each family member to help to focus on the needs/issues of each individual separately. This may help to clarify possible pathways forward and ensure that the woman's voice is always being heard.</li> <li>• <u>Ensure that the needs of the woman are kept at the centre of all conversations, no matter how complicated the situation.</u></li> </ul>
<p><b>Whatever the situation... 1. Do something! Trust your instincts and take action.</b></p> <p><b>2. Talk it through with a family violence service. 3. Talk to Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service (statewide service).</b></p> <p><b>4. Keep the needs of the woman at the centre of all conversations and always try to talk to her independently.</b></p>		