


Enabling Peace by

Hi-Line's Help for Abused Spouses  800.219.7336 or 406.278.3342

Breaking the Silence


## Introduction: Our Program and Advocacy

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## A LITTLE ABOUT US

We started out as Triangle Transitions in 1976 by Loy Chvilicek when she realized her neighbors on the Hi-Line were being abused and they had no help or anywhere to go for help. This early program was instrumental in starting the shelter in Havre and was the basis for many other programs in Montana. As the oldest program in Montana, and through their longevity, Hi-Line's Help for Abused Spouses' most significant achievement is the growth of the program since it was established. Our goal is to provide every victim with a resource, safe space, and emergency and continued support and advocacy so that they may live a life free of violence and fear.

We serve 7 counties: Liberty, Toole, Eastern Glacier, Pondera, Chouteau, Teton and Northern Lewis & Clark.



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## SERVICES WE PROVIDE

- Crisis Intervention: 24-hour crisis line. Crisis line volunteers call and advocate who will respond as quickly as possible in emergency situations.
- One-on-One Advocacy: Provide support, referrals, options, help with transportation to shelter.
- Legal Advocacy: Provide help with preparations for court, including documents such as orders of protection, court accompaniment and referrals for legal aid.
- Victim Witness Services: Legal advocacy, assist with victim impact statements, filing for victim compensation, and information and referrals.
- Educational Presentations: Workshops, in-services, training for volunteers, law enforcement, medical personnel, child protective services, and community based organizations as well as school programs on dating violence and sexual harassment/date rape.
- Safe Homes and Shelters: Provide a safe haven for victims leaving an abusive situation. Transportation to secure shelter and safe homes.
- Referral Networking: Information on available services relevant to victim's needs.

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## What is an Advocate?

### Purpose

This module is designed to assist you in understanding your role and responsibilities as an advocate and the roles of others with whom you will work. It also helps you determine if the advocate role is right for you or which advocate role is most comfortable for you as an individual.

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this training module, Volunteer Advocates will be able to:

1. Identify the major roles of an advocate,
2. Make appropriate decisions based on state confidentiality laws.
3. Describe personal issues that might affect your ability to be an effective advocate.

### Lessons Contained in this Section:

Define the basic Tenets of Advocacy

Recognize the roles of the Advocate

Maintaining Confidentiality

Is Advocacy the Right Choice?

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## BASIC TENETS OF ADVOCACY

- One of the things advocacy does is to provide victims with information about their options so they can make educated choices. Advocacy encourages victims to ultimately advocate for themselves while giving them a voice when they are unable to speak for themselves.
- Advocacy should be trauma-specific, addressing the current violence and any consequences or issues that arise as a result of crime.
- Do not ignore preexisting life problems; rather, address them in descending order only after the more pressing legal/criminal issues are addressed.
- Issues such as an abusive relationship, substance abuse, mental health problems, or financial troubles affect recovery and are thus issues for the advocate. It is important to know when to make referrals and which community resources are appropriate for follow-up counseling.
- The overriding tenet of advocacy is to listen and to believe the victim. The healing power of this is extraordinary. Survivors do not need to prove they are suffering to win support; advocates give unconditional support while safeguarding the individual's right to be treated with respect, whatever the circumstance. The unfortunate reality is an advocate may be the only person who believes a victim without question, comment, or blame, which makes the words "I believe you," and the corollary, "It wasn't your fault," that more powerful.

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## BASIC TENETS OF ADVOCACY Continued

- The rare case when a survivor is dishonest is relatively unimportant. Clearly, the survivor is suffering on some level and has most likely been victimized in some way. Having the wool pulled over "one's eyes" on that rare occasion is a small price to pay for extending the healing power of unconditional belief which has helped so many survivors.
- Another advocacy maxim is to neither investigate or judge. Leave the investigation to the investigators. This means a no note-taking while the survivor talks about the assault. Keeping one's hands free nonverbally communicates to the survivor you are not interested in "taking" anything from her (including a report) but rather are present as an ally whom she can trust. Advocates are the only first responders who have no other responsibilities and no pressing agenda.
- In addition to these basic tenets, keep the word "teamwork" in mind. As an advocate, you will work with professionals in law enforcement, medicine and other fields to meet the needs of sexual assault and domestic violence victims.
- Advocacy, specialized training, and teamwork have greatly improved the quality of care for victims. Advocates have provided and continue to provide a range of services to address the needs of victims and their families/significant others.

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## DIRECT CLIENT SERVICES ADVOCACY

Volunteer advocates turn the victim over to a staff advocate to follow through with these services

**Medical-Evidentiary Exam Response:** For victims of sexual assault or violence requiring medical attention the following procedures are common:

- 1) For Sexual Assault-HLHAS can transport victims to Benefis in Great Falls or accompany victims in need of transport via ambulance;
- 2) For domestic violence requiring medical treatment, including strangling, HLHAS frequently meets clients at medical facility.

**Law Enforcement Statement Accompaniment:** In addition to being present during an initial police report, which is often taken in the emergency department or other location, the advocate usually offers to accompany the victim to the police department or sheriff's office at a later time when they give their official statement. The advocate provides support and encouragement during what may be an intimidating experience and helps the victim understand why certain questions are asked. Advocates function formally as members of the "response team," a community-response team or informally as members of separate community agencies. Your "team" includes the law enforcement officers; you are not advocating for the victim against the police.

**During the Interview:** During the interview the advocate should not ask questions, provide information or give information to the victim. One way the advocate can assist is by asking the interviewer if the victim may take a break if it appears the victim needs time to compose themselves.

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## DIRECT CLIENT SERVICES ADVOCACY Continued

**Courtroom Accompaniment:** The advocate typically offers to accompany the victim to any attorney appointments as well as to the courtroom. Whatever the scenario, the goal is to familiarize the victim with the process and the courtroom, including where she will sit and what she will be asked to do or communicate.

**Individual, Ongoing, Supportive Advocacy:** HLHAS staff advocates are trained to provide ongoing support and referrals to qualified counseling. Basic supportive listening skills will be discussed during this training session to be used by all advocates.

It is essential paid staff and volunteers consistently review cases with their supervisors and make referrals for cases they do not feel comfortable handling alone. You have a responsibility to yourself and to every survivor you see to recognize the limits of your training and experience and to function within these limits.

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## MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY

- It is important to maintain the victim's confidentiality because it empowers the victim by allowing them to determine who has access to their story or information. Power and control issues that existed within the dynamics of the relationship has limited the victim's ability to feel and safe and secure. Only when the victim knows the limits of confidentiality can she make a safe, educated choice about what to tell the advocate.
- Prior to working with victims, volunteer advocates are required to sign a form agreeing to comply with HLHAS polices and confidentiality laws.
- Montana has gone to great lengths to get state legislation passed to ensure their conversations with sexual assault and domestic violence victims are completely confidential and they cannot be subpoenaed to testify even if the case goes to court (See Advocate Privilege Law). Advocates must know the limits of confidentiality for rape crisis advocates in their state and communicate these to victims before the victims disclose information.
- Advocates have a responsibility to maintain confidentiality, to the limits of the law, about each and every case with which they are involved.
- See Advocate Privilege Law section in this training for additional information

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## Maintaining Confidentiality Means

- Not talking to the media about the case without the victim's permission.
- Not discussing cases with your family.
- Not talking about cases on an elevator or in a public place.
- Not using any details of cases, even anonymously, for training purposes.
- For training purposes, only showing pictures of injuries if those pictures do not show faces or identifying marks (such as tattoos or moles), if written permission was not obtained. Especially in a small community, it is all too easy to breach client confidentiality unknowingly.

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## If You Are A SURVIVOR

Survivors often become particularly sensitive to the fears, concerns and needs of victims, as well as the inadequacies of victim services or magnitude of victim needs—all of which may contribute to a desire to become involved in victim services.

Survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence or stalking may have had a positive experience with the system and now want to offer other victims the same compassionate care. Alternatively, they may have had a very disappointing experience and want to prevent others from having the same experience.

For some survivors, their experience with a victim advocacy program might have been so significant they do not want the connection to end. They may believe becoming an advocate will promote their continued healing.

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## From Survivor to Advocate The Challenge

Every victimization and recovery is different. Experience may or may not give a survivor greater empathy for other victims. Each survivor reacts differently; survivors cannot expect someone else to react as they did or to have the same needs and concerns. Survivors may have continuing unresolved issues such as anger, depression, fear, and difficulty trusting others. It will be very hard for survivors to help others deal with issues they themselves have not resolved.

It is possible during training or while on the job, wounds they had considered completely healed will reopen. Even if survivors complete the training without any problems, they may experience difficulties once they begin seeing victims. It is normal for those in direct contact with recent victims to experience secondary trauma, but it will most likely be short term. For some, however, the secondary trauma may be more intense and lasting

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## From Survivor to Advocate The Challenge

Survivors are more likely to experience this trauma:

- Near the anniversary of their own assault or trauma.
- When they encounter a stalking victim, domestic violence scenario, dating violence incident or rape experience similar to their own.
- When they encounter a rape experience similar to the experience of someone close to them.
- When they work with a victim who is similar to themselves.

These challenges do not necessarily mean survivors cannot be effective advocates. After healing more, they should try again. Alternatively, they may need to reconsider this area of work, at least for the present. Especially if they were victimized within the past year or two, it may be too soon to work directly with others. If you are a survivor and you experience any areas of concern at any point during training or actual practice, talk to the trainer or a supervisor as soon as possible.

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## Advocate Challenges

It is appropriate for any advocate, to ask for assistance or refer clients whenever they feel unable to provide the necessary assistance.

Circumstances that may fit into this category include:

- Assault circumstances too similar to their own
- Personality clash with the victim or her family
- Victim's needs are beyond the advocate's ability level
- Difficulty maintaining healthy boundaries

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## Is Advocacy the Right Choice For You?

- Advocacy is a rewarding experience, but it is also demanding. It is important to take this training and an advocacy position very seriously. Program staff and survivors count on a realistic appraisal of your ability and time. Committing to more than you can give will be detrimental to the program. It is better to start slowly and add more responsibilities or hours at a later date, rather than not fulfill your commitments.
- Deciding to become an advocate is an important decision and can bring immeasurable rewards. By becoming an advocate, you become part of the solution for positive social change; you make a difference. Your attention, assistance, acceptance and caring attitude greatly facilitate recovery.
- At the same time, advocates need to be aware of their own sensitivity. Some people may, because of a tremendous capacity for empathy or past victimization of their own, be too affected by exposure to violence and trauma to be effective advocates.
- If you decide advocacy is not for you, you can find other ways to make a difference without interacting directly with clients. While direct service roles are more visible and their activities can seem to be a more desirable way to help survivors, HLHAS cannot operate without program support roles.

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## VOLUNTEER SUPPORT ROLES

**Crisis Line:** HLHAS has a crisis line that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Each staff member and volunteer advocate take a turn "on call" for 7-8 days. We do our best to accommodate availability, however, that should not be the expectation.

We have a professional answering service who answer the crisis line and will contact you with the information to return the crisis call.

Given the diverse nature of requests, working on the crisis telephone line requires far-reaching expertise and extensive knowledge about community concerns and available resources. This service gives victims immediate support and information about what to do. Incoming calls address a wide range of needs from a diverse population. Concerned family, friends or community members may call with fears for their own safety or concerns about an acquaintance or loved one. They may need immediate support or referral sources. Some callers are being stalked. They fear for their safety and need to know what options and resources are available to them. Callers also may need information on getting an order of protection or filing a civil case.

A backup staff member will be available to assist you with any questions you may have to best serve the victim or crisis line caller. The backup staff can also accompany you to sexual assault and domestic violence call outs at your request.

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## VOLUNTEER SUPPORT ROLES Continued

- **Assisting with Library:** HLHAS has an extensive library available to victims, family members, professionals and volunteers. This library is in constant need of organizing and technological updating.
- **Fundraising:** HLHAS is a non-profit organization and fundraising helps maintain our operation.
- **Hi-Line Store:** HLHAS maintains an office full of donated household goods, bedding, toys, minor furniture and clothing that requires consistent maintenance and organizing.
- **Office Assistance:** At any given time there are office tasks that can be done by volunteers. Cleaning, filing, organizing, typing fundraiser information, etc.
- **Hanging Posters/Raising Awareness:** HLHAS serves the communities in 7 different Montana counties and volunteers frequently hang posters and deliver pamphlets.

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## Mandatory Online Training

The following online trainings will assist you with gaining knowledge and information regarding the dynamics of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

As you journey through the trainings, please take notes on any information you have additional questions about. Asking questions also assists in processing the very intense information provided during the training. Please let us know if some portion of the training is difficult to understand or has an error so we can correct it as soon as possible.

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## After Completing the Online Training

If you are volunteering, please schedule a time to sit down with a Staff Advocate to review these trainings. We will continue to offer additional training to you with the most recent information and knowledge so you can remain confident in your volunteer advocate abilities.

### WELCOME!

We look forward to having you as part of our team and are here to support you as we work towards very rewarding experience!

