



# Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence

## *Lethality Assessment Program*

### ***Guidelines for Conversation***

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***Contents***

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This packet entitled “Hotline Worker to Victim Communication Guidelines: Guidelines for Conversation” between a domestic violence hotline worker and a victim contains:

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  - When Victim Declines to Speak on Phone Worker





# Guidelines for Conversation

## Introduction

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### 1. Points of Conversation

- a. Gather information about the case.
- b. Build rapport with the victim.
- c. Reinforce the victim's potential danger.
- d. Educate and do immediate safety planning.
- e. Encourage the victim to come to the program.

### 2. Goal and Objective

- a. The purpose of the guidelines is to convey the "points of conversation."
- b. The objective of the guidelines is to focus the conversation to better assure that the worker effectively, but briefly, communicates essential information.
- c. The goal of the guidelines is to get victims into services more frequently.

### 3. Key Feature of Conversation: Brevity

The conversation is a very brief one of no more than 10-minutes length.

### 4. Goals of the Conversation: Safety Planning and Services

The primary goals of the conversation are to:

- a. Do immediate safety planning with the victim, and
- b. Encourage her to go into your program's services.

### 5. Need for a Longer Conversation: Call "Time Out"

- a. A conversation that you believe needs more time requires you to:
  - (1) Interrupt it,
  - (2) Speak with the officer, and
  - (3) Allow the officer to decide if his/her presence is still needed at the scene.
- b. If the officer believes his/her presence is still required or he/she must soon depart, you and the officer must quickly negotiate an arrangement. For example, you would agree to temporarily discontinue the phone conversation so that the officer can wrap-up on the scene, and arrange with the victim that she can call you back once the officer leaves, if the use of her phone is a safe option, or that you will call her back within a certain time period.
- c. Whatever the arrangement is with the victim, ensure that it is clearly worked out before you hang up.





## Guidelines for Conversation



### Summary:

### “Briefly Described...Briefly Conducted”

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#### If the victim speaks with the hotline worker:

1. Gather reference and background **information** from officer and whether victim wants to speak with you.
2. Build **rappport** with victim by acknowledging you understand how hard it must be to speak with you, empathizing with victim’s situation, and expressing admiration for her courage and cooperation. Explain program’s confidentiality policy and services.
3. Express concern with victim’s well-being and **reinforce**, as officer told her, that people in her situation have been killed.
4. **Educate** victim by explaining that abuse is not her fault and that it is an issue of control. **Safety plan** for next 24 hours.
5. Encourage victim to come in for **services**, try to schedule appointment, and obtain safe phone number for follow-up.
6. **Conclude** call by telling officer basic outcome of conversation.

#### If the victim declines to speak with the hotline worker:

1. Gather reference and background **information** from officer and whether victim wants to speak with you.
2. **Safety plan** through officer.
3. **Conclude** call with officer.





## **Guidelines for Conversation**



### **Instructions:**

#### **When Victim Agrees to Speak with Hotline Worker**

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**1. Gather information from the officer.**

- a. When the officer calls, he/she will:
  - (1) Introduce him/herself by giving his/her name and agency,
  - (2) Advise you that he/she has a high danger victim, and
  - (3) Provide you with the following information:
    - (a) Names of the victim and offender,
    - (b) Case number,
    - (c) Victim's "yes" responses to the lethality screen, and those questions she declined to answer,
    - (d) Briefly what happened and what actions he/she has taken, and
    - (e) Whether the victim is initially willing to speak with you.
- b. If the officer does not identify him/herself or provide you with the above information, ask him/her so you are able to record it.
- c. When you address the officer, identify yourself by your name. You do not need to include your surname.

**2. Identify yourself and begin rapport building.**

- a. When the victim comes to the phone:
  - (1) Introduce yourself,
  - (2) In one sentence thank the victim for speaking with you and acknowledge that you understand how difficult speaking with you is for her, and
  - (c) Briefly explain your program's confidentiality policy and services. Your explanation about services should include shelter, or whatever terminology your program uses for "shelter." Describe in your explanation of shelter the accommodations it includes, such as private rooms, meals, provisions for children, etc.
- b. Empathize with the victim's situation; and express your admiration of the victim's courage and cooperation and your and the officer's support of her.

**3. Reiterate how dangerous the situation is.**

- a. Express your concern for the victim's (and her children's) well-being.
- b. Reinforce what the officer has already told the victim: that in situations such as this people have been killed.



#### 4. Provide education and safety planning.

- a. Explain that the abuse is not the victim's fault, is an issue of control, and is recurring and will become worse and more frequent.
  - (1) Provide examples, if appropriate, to the power and control wheel, or specifically, from the victim's screen responses.
  - (2) Do not let the victim, without a remedial comment, rationalize or minimize the abuser's behavior, such as "He only does this when he starts drinking." Focus your statements on the abuser's accountability: "Drinking doesn't cause him to hit you. He's responsible for what he does, and hitting you is a crime."
- b. Safety plan with the victim for her immediate needs, i.e., her safety and specific living necessities over the next 24 hours.
  - (1) See the safety plan checklist at the appendix as a guide. But, remember, not all High Danger victims will consider themselves to be in danger at that time. Safety planning over the next 24 hours may not be a priority for the victim, in which case you should concentrate on options if she would find herself in a dangerous situation.
  - (2) Should the victim agree to go in now for shelter, you don't need to complete the remaining steps of these guidelines, except:
    - (a) To tell the victim what to take for her and her children,
    - (b) To ask her that if she changes her mind and decides not to go into shelter:
      - (1) Whether a program worker can follow up with her the next day just to make sure she is safe, in which case you need to ask for a safe phone number on which to reach her, and
      - (2) About an alternate place for her to go.
    - (c) To conclude by speaking with the officer to advise him/her about the victim's wishes to go into shelter. In this case, you will need to discuss arrangements for the victim's transportation.

#### 5. Encourage victim to come in for services.

- a. Encourage the victim to come in for services and try to schedule an appointment at the earliest possible time. The matter of cost for the immediate counseling arrangement for which you are seeking to schedule the victim should be explained, especially if there is a cost involved.

**Note:** *The approach used in these guidelines to schedule an appointment is the standard. Obviously, other approaches can be used. Whatever approach your program uses to encourage victims to come in for services should be documented and incorporated into these guidelines as the approach your program will undertake.*



*(Instructions, "When Victim Agrees to Speak to Hotline Worker," continued)*

- b. Convey to the victim that she may try to talk herself out of going in for the appointment, that she should seek to overcome that inclination, and that the program is there to support her.
- c. Tell the victim that you (or another staff member) will call her the next day to check on her well-being. Ask for a safe phone number on which to reach her.
- d. If the victim refuses follow-up, tell her you realize she may be feeling overwhelmed at the moment, but that due to the severity of her situation and her responses to the lethality screen, you are concerned for her and her children's safety. Tell her that for your own peace of mind, you (or another staff member) would like to call her to check on her well-being. Ask for a safe phone number on which to reach her.

**Note:** *The approach used in these guidelines to follow-up with a call is the standard. Obviously, as with the approach of scheduling an appointment, other approaches can be used. Whatever approach your program uses to encourage victims to come in for services should be documented and incorporated into these guidelines as the approach your program will undertake.*

- e. Thank the victim for speaking with you, and express to her that she is a strong and courageous person.

**6. Ask to speak to the officer again to conclude the telephone call.**

- a. Ask for permission to speak with the officer and to convey the basic plan you have developed.
  - (1) Asking for permission to convey the plan you have developed with the victim is for the purpose of reducing any possible liabilities with confidentiality and client rights.
  - (2) If the victim declines to let you convey the basic plan to the officer, tell her that you will respect her wishes but that you need to tell the officer that you and the victim are finished.
  - (3) This concludes your conversation with the victim.
- b. Concluding the call, convey the basic plan to the officer, insuring that the victim has the hotline phone number, and thank the officer.





## **Guidelines for Conversation**



### **Instructions:**

#### **When Victim Declines to Speak with Hotline Worker**

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1. **Gather information from the officer.**
  - a. Once you have gotten to the end of the information-gathering phase with the officer, and the officer tells you that the victim has declined to speak with you, the officer will advise you that he/she will encourage the victim to speak one more time, interrupt the conversation, and ask the victim if she's reconsidered. If the officer does not indicate he/she will do that, ask the officer to ask the victim.
  - b. If the victim agrees to speak, the officer will turn the phone over to the victim and proceed with Section 2 of the Guidelines, above..
2. **Safety plan through the officer.**
  - a. If the victim again declines to speak, convey brief safety planning considerations to the victim through the officer, as well as other brief points you believe are relevant and may be helpful in the victim's situation.
  - b. Safety planning considerations would include:
    - (1) **Do you have a safe phone number that we (program staff) can call?**
      - (a) If your program conducts follow-ups, the victim should be informed that program staff would like to call her the next day to check on her well-being. This will entail an information exchange between you and the officer, then the officer and the victim, and finally the officer and you again.
      - (b) Then you will convey the following questions and considerations to the victim through the officer.
    - (2) Whether the offender is arrested, is away from the residence, or is present:  
**Do you have a plan, place to go, or person to contact for you and your children to be safe?**  
The victim should be informed that, if she leaves, she should take birth certificates, SS cards, immigration documents, passports, bank account information, medications, clothing for 1-2 days, for her and her children.



*(Instructions, "When Victim Declines to Speak to Hotline Worker-Safety Plan through Officer," continued)*

(3) **Do you have an available, working cell phone?**

The victim should be informed that cell phones that call 911 are available at the domestic violence program at no cost.

4) Other considerations :

(a) Protective orders are available 24/7 and might keep the abuser away from her and her children, and the hotline can help.

(b) The domestic violence hotline is available 24/7 and can provide a safe place to stay.

**Note:** *This may well be the last time the victim will ever communicate with the program. You are trying to account for her safety and to make it known the program is there any time to help her. But remember: the points must be clear and simple enough for the officer to briefly communicate to the victim.*

**3. Conclude the call with the officer.**

After you have provided safety planning information and obtained the victim's telephone number, your involvement is concluded.

