

# Supporting Victim-Survivors Tip Sheet

## UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS

There are a number of barriers that prevent victim-survivors from seeking help. Victim-survivors from marginalized groups in particular can face significant challenges:

- High costs of mental health care
- Familial shame around mental health
- Cultural stigma of mental illness
- Lack of diversity in health care
- Lack of cultural competency amongst providers
- Whiteness as a foundation of mental health care
- Distrust of the medical industry
- Difficulty navigating the process
- Emotional hesitation
- Negative past experiences
- Economic abuse and financial resources

## INTERSECTIONAL, TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Understand that each person lives at the intersection of multiple identities, creating their own unique experiences and barriers as a victim-survivor. There is no “one-size-fits-all” model to supporting victim-survivors.

Taking an intersectional approach to care is critical because having multiple marginalized identities increase the risk of victimization and the barriers to seeking help. Advocates can take an intersectional approach to care by:

- Acknowledging the existence of structural racism.
- Address their location in the matrix of privilege and oppression.
- Acknowledge how intersecting identities can create resilience.
- Learn about multiple intersecting identities in the lives of marginalized victim-survivors.

## Intimate Partner Sexual Violence (IPSV) Facts

- 33 percent of rapes are perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner.
- 40 to 45 percent of individuals in an abusive relationship will also be sexually assaulted by their partner.
- 18 percent of women who experienced marital rape reported that their children witnessed the crime.
- Individuals who experience IPSV often develop mental and physical health problems. Physical health issues include sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, and other reproductive issues. Mental health issues include acute stress or posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, suicide, and risk for further victimization in the future.

### DO:

- **Ask** open-ended questions and explain why you're asking them. Let them lead the conversation.
- **Recognize** the barriers the survivor may be facing, such as financial, medical, familial, etc.
- **Be prepared** for them to have shame, embarrassment or confusion about their victimization.
- **Explore** other experiences the survivor has had and the skills used to weather them. Highlight how they could be used to move through current challenges.
- **Validate** them and believe their story.

### DON'T:

- Victim-blame.
- Ask interrogating questions.
- Advise them on what they should have done or what you would have done.

### Helpful things to say:

- “I believe you.”
- “Thank you for trusting me with this.”
- “You didn't do anything wrong.”
- “You don't deserve this.”
- “How can I support you?”