

Domestic Violence and the Holidays: Cultural Sensitivity

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National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE HOLIDAYS: CULTURAL SENSITIVITY DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDANCE

DECEMBER 2013

With the holiday season upon us, questions may arise about the increase of domestic violence during this time and how to appropriately meet the needs of survivors and advocates working in shelter through the holiday season. This time can present both opportunities and challenges. Below are several issues to consider as you work with survivors and their families during the holiday season. Guidance from the Capacity Building and Education Team follows.

For the past few years, the NRC DV has released [Technical Assistance Guidance](#) to the field during the holidays, **defined here as the time period beginning the week of Thanksgiving through New Year's Day**. Although there continues to be a common perception that domestic violence increases during the holidays, available research on such a link is still limited and inconclusive. For the past 9 years, the number of calls received by the [National Domestic Violence Hotline \(NDVH\)](#)¹ have dropped dramatically during the holidays (see **Effect of the Holidays on Calls to the Hotline**, pg. 6 for additional information).

Although some survivors may choose not to leave their home during this time to keep the peace, or to not disturb long held family, religious or cultural traditions, many families find themselves in hiding, spending the holidays in safe shelter. In turn, many shelter advocates find themselves working through the holidays—away from their families and loved ones—to ensure that emergency shelter and hotline services are provided on a 24-hour/7 days per week basis. While some advocates may choose to work during this time, many are required to work and do not have the option to take leave. Whether domestic violence programs experience an increase or decrease in the number of survivors *accessing* services during the holidays, programs need to provide particular attention and support to survivors and shelter staff during this stressful time.

“BUT IT’S CHRISTMAS!” - CULTURAL SENSITIVITY DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The experience of being in shelter (for both survivors and advocates) can be particularly challenging and potentially isolating during the holidays—a time when many families are celebrating together and society at large appears festive, happy, cheerful, and in the spirit of giving. Despite the mainstreaming of Christmas-related observances, decorations, events, and sentiment, it is a Christian-based holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. While many still celebrate and participate in the observance, not everyone practices Christianity or observes religious traditions related to Christmas. This TA Guidance underscores the need for sensitivity throughout the Christmas-based holiday season and provides ideas about how programs can offer specific support to both shelter residents and program staff. We are particularly grateful to Margaret Hobart at the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV), and our other reviewers, for their critical advice and feedback.

¹ NDVH call data reflect individuals reaching out on a toll-free helpline for assistance, including victims, friends and family, and less frequently, offenders.

By solely focusing on Christmas during this holiday season, secular programs may cultivate feelings of isolation, alienation and being “othered” for some shelter residents and staff who practice a religion other than Christianity, who identify as atheist or agnostic, or who simply do not wish to celebrate Christmas. It is also important to note that not all religions have holidays that occur in the second half of December or that observe January 1st as the start of the New Year. For example, those who practice Judaism refer to the “high holy days” or “high holidays” in reference to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which are the most important holidays in that faith. Although roughly three-quarters of Buddhists (76%) and Hindus (73%) celebrate Christmas², the most joyful and important Hindu holidays do not occur in late December, and this is also true for Islam. One concrete way to support survivors’ emotional safety is by not assuming that all residents want to celebrate or participate in Christmas-related activities.

The goal of this TA Guidance is not to squelch the enthusiasm of residents who do and have traditionally celebrated Christmas, but rather to consider how the actions of others, and program staff in particular, may marginalize or ignore the needs of non-Christian residents and those that do not celebrate Christmas. Keep in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for residents spending the holiday season in shelter and away from their extended family, community and other support systems. Offering a range of supportive programming can increase the chances that residents will have a positive shelter experience. The following are practical, cost-effective interventions, which may be easily adopted at any shelter program.

PROGRAM POLICIES

- **Create clear policies on how holidays, particularly those with a religious basis such as Christmas, are observed in the shelter.** Offices, counseling spaces and other work areas should be kept religiously neutral in the interest of being welcoming to everyone. Programs should have a clear policy that is shared with all residents and considers the needs of *every* resident seeking safe shelter and support. Asking residents in a group setting about their preferences is strongly discouraged. Jewish, Muslim and other survivors should not be made to feel responsible in voting for or against another survivor’s desire to celebrate or observe Christmas in the shelter.
- **Limit the presence of Christmas in shared residential spaces.** Rather than putting up a large Christmas tree in the shelter, an option to decorating for the holidays may be limited to resident’s individual rooms. That way, any religious, cultural or traditional holiday may be observed in a way that encourages survivor autonomy, cultural expression and religious requirements around eating, prayers, or other observances. More guidance on shelter design and its connection to victim advocacy values of empowerment can be found at [Building Dignity](#), a project of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence that explores design strategies for domestic violence emergency housing.
- **Be aware of the impact on children residing in shelter.** Each year, thousands of children accompany their mothers into domestic violence shelters. In just one day in 2012, domestic violence programs across the country served 24,783 children.³ Of those, 18,968 children found refuge in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program. Many children in shelter during the holidays will have particularly strong emotions about it—anxiety about being away from home or otherwise breaking family tradition, divided loyalties to and feelings about the abusive parent, possible feelings of being left out if their family’s religious traditions do not include observance of Christmas, potential excitement about Christmas, receiving or giving gifts, and a vast array of other feelings and concerns.

² Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project. (2012, July). [Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faith](#). Washington, DC. See [Holiday Celebrations](#).

³ National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2013). [Domestic Violence Counts 2012. A 24-hour census of domestic violence shelters and services](#). Washington, DC.

Shelter programs can play a crucial role in helping support and encourage healthy relationships between survivors and their children to build or nurture relationships that may have been sabotaged by abuser behaviors.⁴

- **Allow residents to share personal beliefs, observances and traditions in their own time in their own way.** Not all residents will feel safe or will want to share about their personal beliefs, observances and traditions in a mixed group amongst shelter residents and staff. Some survivors may have very valid concerns and fears that others will view them as odd, exotic and strange, or may simply not even try to understand or learn about their ways and customs.

Consider how requiring shelter residents to participate in activities where these types of exchanges are expected may in fact create stress or strife within the shelter. Some residents may fear discrimination from shelter staff and it is not fair to expect people in crisis to carry that fear or responsibility. Work hard to ensure that participation is truly voluntary.

- **At the same time, recognize that some residents may be genuinely interested in learning new ways of celebrating and observing the holidays.** This may include survivors who may have had to separate completely from their communities due to imminent and ongoing safety concerns, who may be immigrants, or who are using this time to begin new traditions. Programs should strive to be culturally competent by seeking to include everyone without excluding most. Communicate and build meaningful relationships with residents to understand their unique needs and the needs of their families during their time in shelter. Being immersed in the dominant culture of Christmas and Christianity during this time can be challenging. For some however, it may be a welcome time of cheer, festive celebration and good will towards all.

PROGRAM SERVICES

- **Allow time for respite.** The holidays can be emotionally and physically draining, even without the added layer of experiencing domestic violence, and even more so when families are separated from their home and community. Shelters should allow time for respite, quiet talks and other forms of relaxation, such as walking, yoga and meditation. Limiting the number of house meetings and prioritizing time to relax can help decrease the stress and frustration residents may experience during the holiday season.
- **Provide one-on-one counseling.** A survey of services provided at 90 domestic violence programs across the country found that the majority of survivors (88.5%) responded that they wanted “information about counseling options.”⁵ That being said, the holidays are a great time to offer varied opportunities for individual counseling. Although both individual and group counseling can be effective for working with survivors, the holidays might bring out issues that residents may not want to share during a group session.

Furthermore, residents may be expected to participate in other group activities during this time (such as holiday events at their child’s school, their place of worship, or at the workplace), and they may need more one-on-one time with counselors to process their feelings and experiences.

⁴ Baker, L. & Cunningham, A. (2004). *Helping Children Thrive/Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers: A Resource to Support Parenting*. Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System of the London Family Court Clinic.

⁵ Lyon, E., Lane, S., & Menard, A. (2008). *Meeting survivors’ needs: A multi-state study of domestic violence shelter experiences*. Final report prepared for the U.S. National Institute of Justice. Harrisburg, PA: NRC DV.

- **Emphasize safety planning.** The importance of safety planning around the holidays should not be underestimated. Advocates can help keep the season safe for survivors by sharing with them some holiday specific safety tips, including starting new holiday routines, meeting family and friends in new locations unknown to the abusive partner, avoiding shopping areas and/or holiday parades and events where survivors may anticipate seeing their abusers, and using a P.O. Box (or no return address at all) if sending holidays cards.
- **Support spiritual needs.** Research suggests that spirituality and religious involvement can promote greater psychological wellbeing for domestic violence survivors, including greater quality of life and decreased depression.⁶ Oftentimes domestic violence shelter staff may avoid discussions about spirituality with shelter residents. Reasons for this include concerns about proselytizing⁷ (which is not allowed under most grants), as well as lack of staff time and resources, the personal nature of spirituality, the diversity of religious or spiritual beliefs among individuals, and apprehension around creating misunderstanding or intruding on a survivor's privacy.⁸

A study on the importance of spirituality in the lives of domestic violence survivors found that, for many women, their trust in a higher power and the support they receive from their faith community was integral to their healing.⁹ Of 151 women interviewed for this study, the majority (97%) noted that spirituality or God was a source of strength or comfort for them. This research, and years of practice, suggests that providing opportunities to find other who share the same spiritual beliefs can help survivors expand their support network.

At the same time, providing regular non-denominational or inter-faith spiritual healing or prayer groups, on a volunteer basis for participants, could be especially healing and powerful to many survivors. Appropriate clergy or lay leaders from the faith community could be brought in to facilitate such groups. Other strategies include providing space within shelters designated for prayer or meditation and/or providing transportation for residents to attend religious services.

WAYS TO SUPPORT SHELTER STAFF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

In domestic violence programs, staff run the risk of experiencing burnout or vicarious trauma due to repeated exposure to the cruelty of abusers, the heightened awareness of vulnerability and the fragility of life, and/or due to the shattered assumptions about basic beliefs in our world for safety, security, trust, and justice. During the holidays these conditions can worsen given that many shelter staff are away from their families due to work schedules and related obligations. While it is important that staff identify and try to prevent compassion fatigue or burnout, programs should address this as a workplace concern.

Although victim advocacy work is rewarding and meaningful to many advocates, program leadership can proactively develop appropriate administrative practices that are supportive to the needs of their staff. On an ongoing basis, all new and seasoned staff can be supported in taking care of themselves emotionally and physically.

⁶ Gillum, T., L., Sullivan, C., M., & Bybee, D., I. (2006). The importance of spirituality in the lives of domestic violence survivors. *Violence Against Women*, 12(3), 240-250.

⁷ Proselytizing is defined as trying to persuade or recruit people to join a religion, cause, or group.

⁸ Edmund, D., S., & Bland, P., J. (2011). *Real Tools: Responding To Multi-Abuse Trauma: A Tool Kit To Help Advocates And Community Partners Better Serve People With Multiple Issues*. Alaska Network on Domestic and Sexual Assault. Juneau, AK.

⁹ Gillum, T. L., Sullivan, C. M., & Bybee, D. I. (2006). The importance of spirituality in the lives of domestic violence survivors. *Violence Against Women*, 12(3), 240-250.

Providing a supportive work environment begins with organizations offering staff the time, space and resources to explore their own personal struggles, and possible triggers, that may take place during the workday. Advocates can be encouraged to seek out appropriate counseling resources as needed. Domestic violence programs can develop strategies to help advocates cope with intense or negative feelings and reactions to being required to work during the holiday season. Here are few suggestions drawn from programs around the country:

- **Be sensitive to advocate workload, especially during the holidays.** Understand that overloading a single staff person can place them at higher risk for burnout. Discuss and plan as a team to help staff manage and share the increased workload that may come during the holiday season, such as use and management of volunteers.
- **Take care of and demonstrate appreciation for those staff that work overnight shifts in the shelter,** particularly in the event that they experience inclement weather and are forced to remain at the shelter for an extended period of time without any relief or help. For example, give staff a “*We Appreciate You*” care package with extra toiletries, snacks, warm socks, magazines, gift cards or gas cards to help ease the burden during inclement weather.
- **Frequently rotate staff working the hotline and allow breaks for focused self-care.** Organization leaders can create a self-care space within the shelter or hotline area that allows for staff to decompress and recharge after experiencing a number of calls. Items within the space may include a notebook for writing/reading positive affirmations, books of motivational sayings and poems, coloring books or sketch pads with coloring utensils, room for pillows or cushions to be used in quiet meditation, chocolate and other tasty treats, and/or postcards or notecards that can be written for other advocates as means of appreciation and encouragement. Staff may also be allowed time to process with supervisors and/or more seasoned support staff working the hotline during this time.
- **Ensure that staff are allowed sufficient time off to be with their families and loved ones at important holiday events and work to be respectful of cultural, traditional or religious observances.** This may mean that shelter/program leadership allow for flexible or alternative schedules during this time and that supervisors or volunteers are bought in to help cover shifts at the shelter to meet the needs of frontline advocates.
- **Plan staff and resident activities that are enjoyable** such as family game nights, involving the family in making decorations for different holidays and décor of resident rooms, and practicing group exercise, mediation or yoga.

It is important that advocates use this time of year to increase public awareness that domestic violence does not stop during the holidays, and that although the holidays may bring additional stressors, abuse and physical violence is always an intentional behavior. It is important for advocates to provide compassionate, culturally relevant services and create a welcoming atmosphere for diverse populations and families that are in need all throughout the year. For a deeper understanding of issues that may arise during this time, read previous NRC DV TA Guidance on DV & the Holidays:

- 2011 [Domestic Violence and the Holidays: Considerations for Survivors from Specific Populations](#). Provides guidance to expand the organizational capacity of shelters during the holidays, including tips for making services more supportive and accessible to different populations.
- 2012 [Domestic Violence and the Holidays: What’s Cooking?](#) Focuses on the food related needs of survivors in shelter and is a great resource for programs seeking to encourage healthy eating.

Effect of the Holidays on Calls to the Hotline

These statistics represent the experience of the National Domestic Violence Hotline only. Representatives of state and local programs, along with representatives of law enforcement and medical staff, may have different seasonal experiences with victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Table A: Thanksgiving Holidays—Number of National Calls to the Hotline, 2004-2012

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
The Week of Thanksgiving	2270	2312	3151	3285	3487	3546	4741	4080	4060
	2660	2863	3724	3829	4090	4189	5257	5110	5075
The Week After	2779	2752	3596	3759	3831	4102	5432	5244	5207
	2660	2863	3724	3829	4090	4189	5257	5110	5075
Thanksgiving Day	146	166	239	290	332	341	376	344	340
	380	409	532	547	584	598	751	730	725

Number at the Top of the Cell = Holiday Number of Calls

Number at the Bottom of the Cell = Average Number of Calls Received in a Typical Week or Day

Table B: Christmas and New Year's Holidays—Number of National Calls to the Hotline, 2004-2012

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Dec 15 to Jan 1 "The Holidays"	5660	5625	7403	8540	10094	8367	12259	9958	9788
	6840	7362	9846	9846	10512	10764	13518	13140	13050
Jan 2 to Jan 15	5935	5956	7563	8415	9413	7511	10702	9161	9001
	5320	5726	7658	7658	8176	8372	10514	10220	10150
Christmas Eve	192	184	234	370	452	304	470	420	421
	380	409	547	547	584	598	751	730	725
Christmas Day	135	160	208	270	394	258	374	359	355
	380	409	547	547	584	598	751	730	725
New Years Eve	276	243	283	523	669	422	569	398	395
	380	409	547	547	584	598	751	730	725
New Years Day	260	236	342	428	508	341	604	429	499
	380	409	547	547	584	598	751	730	725

Number at the Top of the Cell = Holiday Number of Calls

Number at the Bottom of the Cell = Average Number of Calls Received in a Typical Week or Day

The NRC DV welcomes your input. If you have any comments or additional information to provide, please contact our Capacity Building and Education Team at nrcdvTA@nrcdv.org.



National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE HOLIDAYS: WHAT'S COOKING?

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDANCE

NOVEMBER 2012

With the approaching holiday season, questions may arise about how to appropriately respond to the food-related needs of survivors in shelter and how to manage excess food donations. The NRC DV Technical Assistance Team offers the following guidance.

For the past few years, the NRC DV has released [Technical Assistance Guidance](#) to the field in preparation for the holidays, defined here as the time period beginning the week of Thanksgiving through New Year's Day. Research on the prevalence of domestic violence during the holidays continues to be limited and inconclusive. For example, a 2005 study found that police incident reports of domestic violence are higher than the normal daily average on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, with New Year's Day averaging 2.7 times more incidents of domestic violence than the normal daily average.¹ On the other hand, information on the number of calls received by the [National Domestic Violence Hotline \(NDVH\)](#)² for the past *eight* years indicates that the number of calls drops dramatically during the Holidays, including on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day (see **Effect of the Holidays on Calls to the Hotline**, pg. 7 for additional information).

Whether domestic violence programs experience an increase or decrease in the number of survivors accessing services during the holidays, it is likely that there will be particular opportunities and challenges to be considered by programs as they work with survivors and their families during the holiday season. Last year's [Technical Assistance Guidance \(2011\)](#) addressed the need for additional emotional support and safety planning with survivors during the holidays. Considerations for making services more supportive and accessible to different populations were provided, as well as guidance related to managing the influx of volunteers during the busy holiday season. This year's Technical Assistance Guidance is intended to help advocates respond more appropriately to the food-related needs of survivors in shelter during the holidays, as well as provide recommendations for managing excess food that may be donated to programs during this time of the year.

Responding to the Food-Related Needs of Survivors in Shelter

Food nourishes body and spirit. In addition to meeting our biological and nutritional needs, certain food can help improve our mood or help us feel connected to our families and cultural heritage. Food can also allow loved ones to spend quality time together in the kitchen and around the table.

"Our staff does whatever it takes to help victims live a life free from fear of violence. They work on weekends to take survivors to their jobs and pick up donated meals so the residents have warm food on the table. They continue working after hours so they can have time to meet with survivors to help them find stability as quickly as possible." – [Georgia Advocate \(DV Counts 2010, NNEDV\)](#)

¹ Vasquez, S. P., Stohr, M. K., Purkiss, M. (2005). Intimate partner violence incidence and characteristics: Idaho NIBRS 1995 to 2001 data. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 16(1), 99-114.

² NDVH provides a very different data source than is used in the other study, which examines law enforcement statistics. NDVH call data reflect individuals reaching out on a toll-free helpline for assistance, including victims, friends and family, and less frequently, offenders. Also, data analyzed by the two sources are from different time periods.

At a communal space such as a domestic violence shelter, kitchens are spaces for social interaction, and access to food may reduce feelings of family instability. Cooking food together may help shelter residents bond and apply or develop essential life skills. During the holidays, food can be a means through which individuals and families express and celebrate their unique culture and traditions. The following suggestions can help programs ensure that food selection, preparation, and sharing during the holiday season are inclusive and empowering experiences for survivors and their children. Of course, many of these suggestions are applicable year-round.

Meeting Food Needs. Despite scarce resources, domestic violence programs across the country provide life-saving services and supports, including providing food for shelter residents, who are likely to be *food insecure*³ due to poverty, abuser control of family resources, disrupted mealtimes, eating disorders resulting from trauma, and more. Shelters meet the food related needs of residents in a variety of ways, including relying on food banks and helping residents access public assistance benefits such as Food Stamps and WIC. Some shelters employ very resourceful strategies, including growing their own gardens (see **Growing a Food Garden**) or partnering with local church groups or restaurant owners who provide prepared meals every week or at special occasions.

During the holiday season, local businesses and community groups may be more inclined to help those in need. A local restaurant may be willing to donate gift cards to shelter residents so that they can treat themselves to a holiday meal. The holiday season is an opportune time to reach out and host a food drive, for example, as community members are more likely to donate to charities. Because shelters often operate with a small staff, and residents are often required to rotate cooking and cleaning duties, food-related assistance is not limited to food or money donations. A local culinary school may be able to send a chef to prepare a large meal at the shelter while residents take the time to do their holiday shopping, wrap gifts, or spend quality time with their children.

Attending to Cultural Diversity & Dietary Restrictions. When preparing their grocery or holiday wish list, programs should strive for inclusiveness, keeping in mind that survivors from different cultural and religious backgrounds may observe the holidays differently (or not observe them at all). By attending to residents' unique holiday traditions, advocates can help survivors and their children feel respected and included as part of the communal environment. To begin with, recognition that not every family wishes to eat turkey on the holidays is a must. Main prized dishes on many holiday tables include, but are not limited to, ham, venison, prime rib, and "turducken." Of critical importance is to also note that many cultures and religions follow specific dietary laws. For example, Kosher law dictates what foods can and cannot be eaten by Jewish people and how those foods must be prepared and consumed. For example, the flesh of birds and mammals cannot be eaten with dairy, and all blood must be drained from the meat or broiled out of it before it is eaten. For Muslims, unlawful or prohibited foods include swine/pork and its by-products, as well as animals improperly slaughtered or dead before slaughtering.

It is important to note as well that attending to diversity goes beyond creating menus for specific ethnic or religious groups. A broad definition of culture involves other markers such as social class, sexual orientation, lifestyle choices and disability, just to name a few. Likewise, a broad range of issues – ranging from religious or social concerns to medical conditions and health considerations – affects people's food choices. That being said, the holiday menu should also accommodate the needs of a resident with a disability who may require

³ It is estimated that 1 in 6 people in the US are "food insecure." Note that among the more than [50 million](#) food insecure people in the U.S., nearly 17 million are children (see current data and further discussion at [Feeding America](#)). Broadly speaking, the term "food insecurity" means limited or uncertain access to enough nutritious and safe foods to lead an active and healthy life. For additional information, see [An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security](#).

pureed or soft-textured food. For a mother and her children whose dietary practice is veganism, a tofurkey may need to be added to the menu. Advocates should take a count of how many residents will be at the shelter for the holidays and consult them about their dietary needs (including food allergies). Fortunately, many different food manufacturers now cater to specific dietary restrictions (for example, gluten-free, non-dairy, vegan, low sulfites, organic, etc.). As a good practice, advocates can research and learn about diverse dietary restrictions and holiday traditions so they can be prepared to support victims and survivors from different populations. Finally, residents who do not observe any holidays should also be invited to the table and to provide suggestions and assistance.

Involving Residents in Decision-Making. Leading up to the holiday season, shelter staff should provide a forum for residents to make suggestions to the grocery list and holiday menu, as well as seek input regarding food preparation, child-related food needs, shopping, cleaning and decorating, among others tasks. How many residents will be staying in shelter on Christmas Eve? Who is doing the cooking for the shelter holiday celebration? What are some of the dietary needs not being addressed by the menu? These and other questions require input from residents, whose thoughts and ideas can be gathered during the shelter's house meeting or by using a "suggestion box." The practice of involving residents in decision-making should not, however, be limited to the holiday season. Instead, it should be a reflection of the agency's overall and ongoing commitment to use survivors' feedback to ensure that services and supports meet the needs of those using the program.

Minimizing Conflict and Empowering Survivors. In communal shelters, the kitchen can be a space where connection and bonding can be created. At the same time, this environment can also be a space where conflict and challenges emerge among residents and/or between staff and residents. Common challenges and sources of conflict include maintaining cleanliness, access to food and resources, and different cultural and personal approaches to food, among others. By examining their physical space, policies and procedures, shelter programs can help to minimize conflicts and create welcoming and accessible environments for survivors and their children. The [Building Dignity](#) website by the [Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) explores design strategies for easing communal living, increasing harmony, supporting parenting in shelter and ensuring safety. For example, multiple ovens and cooktops allow different residents to access these appliances simultaneously. Unlocked food storage allows advocates to focus on advocacy, rather than monitoring residents' access to food. Dining nooks allow families to gather for their meals while controlling noise and distraction levels. The guide [How the Earth Didn't Fly Into the Sun: Missouri's Project to Reduce Rules in Domestic Violence Shelters](#) by the [Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence](#) offers guidance for creating environments where survivors can reclaim their autonomy and feel secure without excessive and punitive rules. For example, having residents volunteer to cook a Thanksgiving dinner is more empowering and supportive than imposing the task on residents who may not feel comfortable in their ability to do so.

Being Child-Friendly. Accessible and inclusive food selection and preparation also includes considering the needs of children, who are a large proportion of domestic violence shelter residents, as well as of food insecure individuals. Research indicates that as many as 68% of survivors in domestic violence shelters are accompanied by their minor children.⁴ And, among the more than [50 million](#) food insecure people in the U.S., nearly 17 million are children.⁵ The holiday menu must include items that are appetizing and child-friendly, and substitutes for foods that are not safe or suitable for younger children should be offered. For example, seeds, nuts, raw vegetables and large chunks of meat are unsafe for young children as these foods could cause a

⁴ Lyon, E., Lane, S., & Menard, A. (2008). *Meeting Survivors' needs: A multi-state study of domestic violence shelter experiences*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice. Available at http://www.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/MeetingSurvivorsNeeds-FullReport.pdf.

⁵ Feeding America. (2012, September). USDA Report Shows That Food Insecurity Remains High; More Than 50 Million Americans Face The Reality of Hunger. Chicago, IL. Available at <http://feedingamerica.org/press-room/press-releases/usda-food-insecurity-2012.aspx>.

possible choking hazard. For menu ideas, shelter workers can consult child-friendly holiday recipes that can be easily found online (see [Holiday Recipes Your Kids Will Actually Eat](#)). The importance of ensuring child safety in kitchen areas, as well as of consulting parents about any [food allergies](#) that their children may have, cannot be overstated. As shelter workers and residents prepare the holiday table, attention should also be given to offering child-sized eating utensils and arranging for appropriate child seating. Moreover, including children in the process of decorating the shelter and setting the table, among other child-friendly jobs, is a great way to involve children in the holiday spirit and teach them about proper etiquette, family-style dining, appropriate dinner conversation, and holiday rituals.

Diversifying the Pantry and Avoiding Food Surpluses. Besides turkey, there are other food items that may be donated in abundance to shelters during the holidays. These include canned staples such as peas and corn, soups and stews, rice and beans, peanut butter and cereal. If possible, shelters should plan a wish list before potential donations are delivered. By being creative and involving residents, programs can jazz up their pantries by including less common items such as canned collard greens or asparagus, dried whole grains, as well as a variety of seeds, herbs and spices. Fresh fruit and vegetables are unfortunately not predominant in shelters, so efforts must be made to address this gap. Partnering with local farmers or supermarkets and growing a food garden are good strategies for increasing a shelter's supply of produce. In addition to avoiding a surplus of certain food items, a well-planned grocery and wish list are more likely to address diverse food preferences and nutritional needs.

Moreover, the program may be in need of pots and pans, paper products, utensils, and/or dishes in order to prepare and serve a nice holiday meal to shelter residents; or containers, foil and freezer bags may be needed to store extra food for later use. In preparation for the holidays, it may be useful for shelter staff to do an inventory of the available kitchen and tableware supplies and add any needed items to their holiday wish list. Shelters can post the wish list on their websites and develop a 1 -page flyer that can be readily faxed or emailed upon request. Both the website and the flyer should include pertinent details such delivery location (usually the main office site, not the shelter), dates/times that staff will be available to accept donations, and a contact person for questions.

Growing a Food Garden. Some domestic violence shelters have the space and sunshine necessary to grow a garden. Some programs across the country have learned the benefits of growing a vegetable and fruit garden to supplement the food supply at the shelter and to provide a healthier and more nutritious diet to survivors and their children. By properly harvesting and storing the fresh vegetables and fruit from their garden, shelter staff and residents may be able to enjoy nutritious food all year-round. In addition to helping meet a shelter's food needs, gardening has been shown to be a therapeutic and educational experience for shelter workers and residents alike, also providing esthetic, economic, social and cultural benefits to domestic violence programs. Despite the challenges and hard work that can be associated with growing an edible garden and harvesting and storing the produce, these experiences can help staff, volunteers, survivors and their children to learn and/or apply valuable marketable skills. There may be a local gardening course or group of [Master Gardeners](#) that will volunteer to assume responsibility for routine upkeep of the garden and be willing to teach residents basic gardening skills. Mothers and children can spend fun, quality time working together on the garden. During the holiday season, staff and residents may be able to reap the financial benefits of their garden by selling canned or jarred vegetables and fruit at the local market. Children can be involved in the process by helping paint and decorate the jars with festive holiday themes. Information available from [Project GROW](#) and the [Gardening Guide](#) by the White House's [Let's Move!](#) initiative can provide guidance to shelter programs considering growing an edible garden. Helpful information on home canning is available from [The Complete USDA Guide to Home Canning](#).

*"We like to get fresh vegetable, otherwise, we have to eat frozen since they are the only fresh vegetables that the shelter gets." –
[Resident at a shelter with an edible garden](#)
(Center for Food and Justice, 2002)*

Providing Health Education. Due to competing demands and limited resources, healthy food and nutrition education have not been a common activity in typical shelter programs. Shelter staff themselves are often in need of education and training on this area. During the holidays and beyond, domestic violence programs have an opportunity to provide health education to shelter residents and staff, including information on [nutrition](#), meal planning, and food safety. A local community college offering food service or nutrition courses may be a valuable resource for the shelter. A nutrition instructor can be made available by the college to facilitate a healthy food workshop for staff and residents at the shelter facility. A short discussion on food safety and food-borne illnesses can be introduced to the next house meeting's agenda. Reader-friendly [brochures](#) and [handouts](#) can be displayed in kitchens and common areas for workers' and residents' reference. Information and educational materials can be freely obtained from the [Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#) and the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#), among many others. During the holiday season, examples of useful food-related information to be disseminated at the shelter include how to safely cook a turkey ([Turkey Basics: Safe Cooking](#)) and tips for creating healthy celebration events ([Make Celebrations Fun, Healthy & Active](#)).

Managing the Surplus of Food Donations

While some shelters may experience extreme food insecurity throughout the year, including during the holidays, others may find themselves with a good problem to have – a surplus of food due to generous donations of groceries and cooked food from the local community. As discussed in the previous section, planning grocery and holiday wish lists in preparation for the holiday season may help programs avoid food surpluses and have a well-balanced pantry. However, programs have limited control over how much and what type of material goods they will receive at any time. In the spirit of optimism for a successful holiday food drive, the following are recommendations to address a potential surplus of food donations.

Reaching Out to Survivors Not in Shelter. One of the best ways for domestic violence programs to manage their holiday surplus of food is to share it with survivors who are not currently living in shelter. These include former clients, survivors living in transitional housing, and/or survivors receiving other non-residential domestic violence services. Of course, reaching out to survivors during the holiday season for the purpose of donating food should be in alignment with overall follow-up procedures in place at the program. As a [best practice](#), follow-up services and supports must keep survivors' safety at front and center, and can only be provided if the survivor has previously agreed to follow-up contacts. A shelter's ability to reach out to former residents or other non-residents will therefore depend on each survivor's individual circumstances, including whether she/he is presently in a safe situation. The following are some recommendations around sharing surplus food with non-shelter residents during the holidays, keeping in mind recipients' safety concerns and the overall efficiency of the donation process.

- Considering that the shelter has established follow-up relationships with a number of survivors – that is, as long as contact is authorized and does not jeopardize the survivor's safety – staff can reach out to these individuals via phone, email or regular mail to inquire whether they would like to be placed on the holiday surplus food list.
- As food recipients are identified, staff should develop a chart/list including information such as the survivor's name and address, number of people in the household, food items to be donated, estimated delivery or pick up time (if former residents are allowed to pick up donations at the shelter), and staff/volunteer assigned to deliver the food. It is also very important to ask the survivor ahead of time about any [food allergies](#) that she/he and/or their children may have and to record that information on the chart. Needless to say, the names and addresses of survivors should be kept confidential, which means that the chart/list should not be shared with shelter residents or other third parties.
- The shelter will need insulated containers or coolers for keeping food at appropriate temperatures, and other necessary carrying or handling tools. Any containers or utensils that the shelter would like to

get back should be labeled as such. In that case, a pick-up or delivery date for these items also needs to be coordinated with the recipient upon delivery of the food. Such information should be logged to the chart for future reference and tracking purposes.

- If shelter staff is delivering the food to the survivor's door, the shelter will need a reliable vehicle and at least one dedicated staff or volunteer to drive and make the deliveries. She or he should have directions to the survivor's house (or other safe location), as well as a phone number, in case she/he gets lost in the way or the delivery needs to be canceled or delayed for some reason. In the event that recipients are coming to the shelter to pick up their food packages, a staff person or volunteer needs to have a copy of the chart/list and be available to handout the food packages to the respective recipients.
- Properly packing and transporting the food is crucial to ensure its safety and quality. Basic [guidelines](#) for preventing food from spoiling or becoming dangerous during packing and transporting are provided by the [FDA](#).
- Remember: 'Tis always the season for kindness! Consider including a note or card to the survivor wishing her/him a peaceful holiday season and a prosperous new year. If possible, consider also including age-appropriate toys or treats if there are children in the home.

Making Use of Food Preservation Methods. If sufficient refrigerator and freezer space is available at the shelter, storing extra food or leftovers for later use will come in handy during times when food donations are not as abundant. According to the [FDA](#), there are limits to how long you can safely store foods in the refrigerator. In the freezer, foods will stay safe *indefinitely*, although their quality and taste may be affected. [Guidelines](#) for ensuring that refrigerated or frozen foods are stored safely can be found on the [FDA](#) website and should be consulted by shelter staff and residents, if needed. A reader-friendly [refrigerator and freezer storage chart](#) can be taped on to kitchen walls and refrigerator doors to serve as a quick reference for shelter workers and residents. Refrigeration and freezing are not, however, the only options for home food preservation. Other methods include, but are not limited to, canning, curing, and fermenting. The [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#) is a source for current research-based recommendations for most methods of home food preservation.

Planning for After-Holiday Meals. With an abundance of food items coming into shelter during the holidays, the opportunity to assess current supply and plan for the first few weeks of meals following the holiday season is presented. Shelter staff should assess which items are appropriate for storage (see above) and which may be best to prepare and serve within the first few weeks of the New Year. Many families celebrate the start of a new year with a celebratory dinner. Sharing a meal together could be a great way to set the tone for how families and staff interact within the shelter environment. Recognizing the start of a new year can be another opportunity for families to discuss the ritual of setting goals or resolutions for the year, as well as learn about diverse, cultural traditions related to food as part of a new year's celebration. For instance, many families will partake in foods that symbolize luck, happiness, health and prosperity for the year on New Year's Eve or on New Year's Day (see [American New Year Food Traditions](#)).

Conclusion

A wealth of information is readily available online to support domestic violence programs in their continued efforts to provide sufficient, safe, nutritious, and culturally-appropriate food to survivors in shelters, during the holiday season and beyond. A variety of resources and materials are hyperlinked throughout this Guidance and can be consulted by staff and residents for reference and skill development purposes.

Effect of the Holidays on Calls to the Hotline

These statistics represent the experience of the National Domestic Violence Hotline only. Representatives of state and local programs, along with representatives of law enforcement and medical staff, may have different seasonal experiences with victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Table A: Thanksgiving Holidays—Number of National Calls to the Hotline, 2004-2011

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
The Week of Thanksgiving	2270	2312	3151	3285	3487	3546	4741	4080
	2660	2863	3724	3829	4090	4189	5257	5110
The Week After	2779	2752	3596	3759	3831	4102	5432	5244
	2660	2863	3724	3829	4090	4189	5257	5110
Thanksgiving Day	146	166	239	290	332	341	376	344
	380	409	532	547	584	598	751	730

Number at the Top of the Cell = Holiday Number of Calls

Number at the Bottom of the Cell = Average Number of Calls Received in a Typical Week or Day

Table B: Christmas and New Year's Holidays—Number of National Calls to the Hotline, 2004-2011

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Dec 15 to Jan 1 "The Holidays"	5660	5625	7403	8540	10094	8367	12259	9958
	6840	7362	9846	9846	10512	10764	13518	13140
Jan 2 to Jan 15	5935	5956	7563	8415	9413	7511	10702	9161
	5320	5726	7658	7658	8176	8372	10514	10220
Christmas Eve	192	184	234	370	452	304	470	420
	380	409	547	547	584	598	751	730
Christmas Day	135	160	208	270	394	258	374	359
	380	409	547	547	584	598	751	730
New Years Eve	276	243	283	523	669	422	569	398
	380	409	547	547	584	598	751	730
New Years Day	260	236	342	428	508	341	604	429
	380	409	547	547	584	598	751	730

Number at the Top of the Cell = Holiday Number of Calls

Number at the Bottom of the Cell = Average Number of Calls Received in a Typical Week or Day

The NRCDV welcomes your input. If you have any comments or additional information to provide, please contact our Technical Assistance Team at nrcdvTA@nrcdv.org.



National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE HOLIDAYS: BEYOND RESOLUTIONS, ENVISIONING YOUR FUTURE Technical Assistance Guidance

Authored by Ivonne Ortiz

DECEMBER 2015

With the holiday season fast approaching, and as we naturally reflect on the year that has passed, questions may arise about how to set and achieve life goals and envision the short- and long-term future. The New Year's holiday provides an opportunity for domestic violence programs to engage in positive visioning with advocates and survivors. The guidance that follows was developed by the NRCDV's Capacity Building and Education Team in collaboration with Jenna Lodge Foster, Domestic Violence & Youth Initiatives Training Consultant.

For the past several years, the NRCDV has released a series of Technical Assistance Guidance to the field in preparation for the holidays, defined here as the time period beginning the week of Thanksgiving through New Year's Day. Although the common perception that domestic violence increases during the holidays remains prevalent, available research on such a link is still limited and inconclusive (see discussion in the December 2011 TA Guidance, [Domestic Violence and the Holidays](#)). Information on the number of calls received by the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH)¹ for the past ten years indicates that the number of calls drops dramatically during the holidays, including on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day (see **Effect of the Holidays on Calls to the Hotline**, pg. 8 for additional information).

For many people around the world, January first represents an opportunity for renewal or re-birth, a time to make a promise towards self-improvement. We call these promises New Year's resolutions, which often center on physical and mental health goals. We enter into the new year with this new resolve, hopeful for the future. We feel highly optimistic and are ready to make changes that will transform our lives. Unfortunately, the common reality is that after a few weeks we revert to our habits and forget or ignore our resolutions. This Technical Assistance Guidance is intended to help advocates and survivors at domestic violence programs think beyond resolutions and harness the energy of the coming new year to focus on setting realistic life goals that will promote resilience and healing.

Life Goals vs. Resolutions

Life goals and *resolutions* are two concepts that may be confused, especially when we are thinking of making positive changes in our lives. While both involve making some changes or following a different life pattern, they differ in terms of scope.

According to [Dictionary.com](#), a resolution refers to the act of determining an action, course of action or procedure. Resolutions made at New Year's are often a **promise** we make to ourselves to change our current way of living and attempt to live a better and fuller life.

¹ NDVH call data reflect individuals reaching out on a toll-free helpline for assistance, including victims, friends and family, and less frequently, offenders.

Many of us make resolutions on New Year's Day, but according to British psychologist Richard Wiseman, more than 80% of us (or approximately 4 in 5) fail at keeping our resolutions (Lehrer, 2009). The main reason for this failure is that the resolutions we set are either unrealistic or too abstract. For instance, one of the most popular abstract resolutions is the desire to "get in shape." A more concrete goal would focus on modifying daily habits with a *specific* task such as walking for 30 minutes 3 times per week.

A life goal is a desired *result* that we wish to achieve, an end-point where we see ourselves after a certain period of time. Life goal setting is a powerful process for thinking about our ideal future, and for motivating ourselves to turn our vision of this future into reality (MindTools.com). The process of setting goals helps us plan where we want to go in life. By knowing precisely what we want to achieve, we know where we have to concentrate our efforts. When we are focused on moving toward a set life goal, we will often make decisions by asking ourselves "*Will this get me closer to my goal?*" thus avoiding choices or pathways that may not. SMART goal setting (discussed below), is a concrete way of organizing our goals and creating verifiable trajectories to accomplishments.

"What a mistake – the whole idea around New Year's resolutions. People aren't picking specific behaviors, they're picking abstractions."

– BJ Fogg, Stanford University

Making our Life Goals a Reality

Envisioning life goals may be more important than we realize. When we envision what we want to accomplish, our brain invests itself into our life goals as if we had accomplished them. That is, by setting something as a *goal*, however small or large, however near or far in the future, a part of our brain believes that a desired outcome is an essential part of who we are – setting up the conditions that drive us to work toward the goals to fulfill the brain's self-image (Wax, n.d.). One study found that mental practices are almost as effective as true physical practice, and that doing both is more effective than either alone (Ranganathana et al., 2013). This study also highlights the strength of the mind-body connection, or the link between thoughts and behaviors – a very important connection for achieving your life goals.

Envisioning your life goals makes you feel good, gives you hope, and encourages you to spend more time thinking about your future.

Research suggests that mental practice could be almost as effective as physical training (LeVan, 2009).

One study found that imagining weight lifting caused actual changes in subjects' muscle activity (Bakker et al., 1996). The process of envisioning our goals impacts many cognitive processes in the brain: motor control, attention, perception, planning, and memory, so that the brain is getting trained for actual performance during visualization. The process of setting life goals is intended to be voluntary and exciting, not burdensome. It can help you choose where you want to go in life. It provides a clear direction—a personal guide to lead the way during times of confusion. It also helps to turn abstract goals into concrete, measurable goals. According to the American Psychological Association, the capacity to make realistic plans and know which steps to take to carry them out is one of the core factors for building resilience.

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress ([American Psychological Association, n.d.](#)). Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have; rather, it is an innate human capacity that involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that anyone can learn and develop. Behaviors that promote resilience range from adopting meditative practices to meeting with a religious congregation, relying on one's culture and community, running, seeing a therapist, or keeping a journal. We know the effects of victimization may linger for years, and the process of recovery demands strength, resourcefulness, and tenacity. Yet, despite the challenges they face, most survivors have the power to reclaim, strengthen, and transform their lives in unexpected ways. If you want to learn more about supporting survivors in building resilience, read [VAWnet's November 2015 TA Question of the Month](#).

As we know, survivors who escape violent relationships face many challenges when starting over, which is why envisioning and setting life goals is an important step towards resiliency and healing. Advocates can foster survivors' capacity for resilience by finding and drawing on their strengths ([National Center for Victims of Crime, n.d.](#)). By helping survivors overcome obstacles, advocates share in their victories. Setting goals can also be a tool for both survivors and advocates to raise self-confidence, as the process includes recognizing abilities and competence.



Advocates can create safe places for survivors to re-group, think and begin their healing journey before moving to the next stage of their lives. According to NNEDV's *DV Counts Census*, in 24 hours, 36,608 domestic violence victims found refuge in emergency shelters or transitional housing provided by local domestic violence programs ([2015](#)). Imagine the impact of enhancing programming with life goal envisioning activities to this volume of survivors!

Although this process can be life changing for many, it's important to remember that not all survivors will be in a place where they are ready to think long term because of the crisis they are experiencing. Life goal envisioning is a very effective and powerful tool, but should be introduced in a way that is [trauma-informed](#) as to not overwhelm or pressure survivors who are not ready to think beyond how they can survive the day to day.

Getting Started

As you get started, you may realize that some important life goals may be short-term. For advocates a short-term life goal might be better time management, while a long-term goal could be to plan for retirement. For survivors, a short-term life goal might include securing employment, applying to school, or finding financial assistance to pay for childcare, while a long-term goal might be

Do not assume that all survivors share the same goals. Many would agree that they don't want violence in their lives, but may not agree on the details on how to accomplish that. It is important that everyone is clear on what their own life goals are and how to come together to provide support to each other.

home ownership. Life goals, short- or long-term, can be important to set your direction and revisit in order to assess personal or professional achievements and to see how your life may have changed or how your feelings about what you want may change. Remember, it is important to celebrate achievements, big or small, along the way toward achieving the final goal.

"I used to suffer with low self-esteem and self-confidence as a result of an abusive relationship. One thing that helped me see myself as a person of value was the process of goal setting. My very first goal was to make one friend so I had someone to go to coffee with. That was it. The friend didn't have to be close – my criterion for successful goal achievement was to just initiate a relationship with another person to the point where it was socially comfortable to catch up for a coffee." – Taz

Step 1: Thinking it through

The first step in life goal setting is to take time to think about your life and separate abstract goals from concrete goals. After thinking about your goals, use the following questions to guide your process:

1. What do I want in a year, two years or five years?
2. What do I NOT want?
3. What is important to me? This can include people as well as your values.
4. What are the most important wants (or goals)?
5. Did I think about things like: family, safety, my faith, financial needs, my community or other things that are important to me?
6. What are my top five personal values? Do these goals fit with my values? Is there anything I would add or leave out after thinking about this?

Tip: Set **SMART** goals.

The simple fact is that for goals to be powerful, they should be designed to be SMART.

Specific- The goal should be clear and well defined.

Measurable- Make sure that there is a way to measure your degree of success.

Attainable- Goals should be achievable.

Relevant- Goals should aligned with the direction you want your life to go.

Time Bound- Your goals must have a deadline.

Step 2: Contracting with yourself

The second step in life goal setting is to write down your thoughts. Writing your goals will make them concrete and difficult to ignore, thereby making you accountable to them. As you write, be sure to use the language *will* instead of *would like* or *might*. Also be sure to set goals that motivate you, are important to you, and for which there is value in achieving them. This process is intended to be rewarding not burdensome.

Step 3: Visualization

The third step in life goal setting is integrating visualization. Begin by establishing a specific goal. Imagine the future in which you have already achieved your goal. Hold a mental picture of it as if it were occurring in this very moment. Imagine the scene in as much detail as possible. Engage as many of the five senses as you can in your visualization.

Ask yourself:

- Who are you with?
- Which emotions are you feeling?
- What are you wearing?
- Is there a smell in the air?
- What do you hear?
- What is your environment?

Practice at night or in the morning (just before/after sleep). Eliminate any doubts, if they should come to you in the process. Repeat this practice often. Combine with a meditation or an affirmation such as *I am courageous, I am strong, I am confident, or I am capable!*

SAMPLE ENVISIONING ACTIVITIES

There are many activities that programs can use to support survivors and advocates in envisioning their future. Samples for adaptation in your program are provided below.

River of life:

River of life is a visual narrative method that helps people tell stories of the past, present and future. It focuses on illustration rather than text, making it useful in groups that may not share a language. When used in a group, it is an active and engaging process, which includes the following steps:

- Draw an example river to help people visualize what it might look like.
- Ask participants to draw a river that represents where they come from, what led them to where they are in their lives right now and what they want to accomplish.
- Participants should use part of the page to represent what they can expect to achieve or learn about themselves, and how they will use this activity to move forward in their home or work environment.



Vision Board:

A vision board is a valuable visualization tool that allows a person's dreams, goals and true self to come to life in a creative way. Advocates and survivors can benefit from this exercise. Creating a vision board allows you to shift the focus from the "here and now" to make projections for the future. Vision boards can cultivate intrinsic and extrinsic change for both advocates and survivors. By using a 3-P model, which includes *Peace, Poise, and Position*, you can create a visual reminder of where you are going and truly "put yourself out into the world."

Note for facilitators: Supplies needed for this activity include: newspapers, magazines, paper or poster board, glue and scissors. First, explain the meaning of a vision board to participants. Next, encourage them to look for words, phrases or images in magazines, newspapers, or on the internet, that coincide with the 3 Ps. Participants should also be encouraged to utilize their personal photographs.

Peace. What calms your spirit? What warms your heart? What brings a smile to your face?

For the purposes of this exercise, *peace* focuses on looking at your life and identifying what brings you true peace. Do not focus on material things. Rather, focus on the *emotional* aspect of true peace and what that can bring to your life. Words, phrases, and magazine clippings that relate should be glued to the outer edges of the board to create an outer ring for your vision. Make sure to provide magazines that are diverse in cultural representations, language, gender, age, etc.

Poise. How do I want to be perceived? What personal changes need to be made in order to make bold, transformative change in my life? What characteristics do I admire most in others? What characteristics do I admire in myself?

For this exercise, *poise* is keeping your emotions in check while *creating action*. As advocates, we must have self-awareness when working with survivors. If we truly embrace trauma-informed care, we must be aware of how we impact others. Survivors also need a sense of self-awareness to move toward a safe, healthy, and stable lifestyle in the future. Words, phrases, pictures, and magazine clippings that relate should be glued to the inside of the outer ring of the board.

Position. What are my goals (spiritual/personal/professional)? What steps do I need to take to reach my goals? Who can I reach out to for support in order to reach my goals? What values do I possess right now to move my goals forward? How will my actions create positive change in my life?

Like a good game of chess, placement and position can be very important. For this exercise, *position* coincides with *action*. Words, phrases, pictures, and magazine clippings that relate should be glued to the remaining inner portion of the vision circle.

Once completed, you will have created a guide for your short and long-term goals, filled with positive shifts in emotion and action. Hang your vision board in a place where you will see it everyday. Be sure to visit it often and review the changes that are taking place in your life. Feel free to add more content as you move closer to your “best self.”

In Conclusion

As Audre Lorde reminds us, “Our visions begin with our desires.” Setting and reflecting on our life goals can be empowering. Our goals can be as simple as taking time to sit quietly and breathe or as big as leaving an abusive relationship. As we approach the upcoming New Year’s holiday, use this opportunity to reflect and look toward the next year. Then practice setting goals instead of resolutions. This will increase your chances for success and keep you motivated and focused for the year to come. Set regular intervals (daily, weekly, monthly) to review your progress, add new goals if needed, and celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how small.

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ADDITIONAL READING

Building Resilience The Power to Cope With Adversity by William R. Beardslee, Mary Watson Avery, Catherine C. Ayoub, Caroline L. Watts, and Patricia Lester for Zero to Three (2010)

Trauma & Resilience: An Adolescent Provider Toolkit by Alicia St. Andrews for the Adolescent Health Working Group (2013)

The TOP Workbook for Sexual Health by Joann Schladale for Resources for Resolving Violence (2015)

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Effect of the Holidays on Calls to the National Domestic Violence Hotline

Comparing Average Call Volume to Holiday Volume

These statistics represent the experience of the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) only. Representatives of state and local programs, along with representatives of law enforcement and medical staff, may have different seasonal experiences with victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Table A: Average Calls vs. Thanksgiving Holidays—Number of Calls to the NDVH, 2005-2014

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<i>Average Week</i>	2863	3724	3829	4090	4189	5257	5110	5075	4725	5271
Thanksgiving Week	2312	3151	3285	3487	3546	4741	4080	4060	4214	4483
The Week After	2752	3596	3759	3831	4102	5432	5244	5207	4769	5257
<i>Average Day</i>	409	532	547	584	598	751	730	725	675	753
Thanksgiving Day	166	239	290	332	341	376	344	340	438	460

Table B: Average Calls vs. Christmas and New Year's Holidays—Number of Calls to NDVH, 2004-2014

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<i>Average 17 day period</i>	7362	9846	9846	10512	10764	13518	13140	13050	12150	12801
Dec 15 to Jan 1	5625	7403	8540	10094	8367	12259	9958	9788	10991	12565
<i>Average 8 day period</i>	5726	7658	7658	8176	8372	10514	10220	10150	9450	9789
Jan 2 to Jan 15	5956	7563	8415	9413	7511	10702	9161	9001	9644	11136
<i>Average Day</i>	409	547	547	584	598	751	730	725	675	753
Christmas Eve	184	234	370	452	304	470	420	421	503	584
Christmas Day	160	208	270	394	258	374	359	355	381	421
New Years Eve	243	283	523	669	422	569	398	395	546	579
New Years Day	236	342	428	508	341	604	429	499	570	591

The NRCDV welcomes your input. If you have any comments or additional information to provide, please contact our Capacity Building and Education Team at nrcdvTA@nrcdv.org.

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