

## WORKING WITH TEENS IN SHELTER

An advocate's first contact with a survivor—whether on a crisis line, during an in person interview, or during intake for the shelter—is a critical opportunity to provide information and support to both the survivor and her teenage son or daughter.

During the initial contact with the survivor and her teenage son or daughter, advocates should:

1. Communicate the program's policy and procedures for sheltering survivors with teenage sons/daughters.
2. Ask the survivor to describe any behavioral issues with her teenage son/daughter that the program might be able to help with or should know about.
3. Prepare the survivor for what the shelter environment might be like at that time (e.g. younger children, other teen boys or girls, single women, shared bedrooms/bathrooms, etc.) and discuss how she thinks her teen would adjust to that environment.

### In the Shelter

This can be a very confusing and intimidating time for survivors and their teenage sons or daughters. The teen may feel an incredible amount of stress and mistrust. The teen and their mother were very likely controlled by the abuser, and the shelter rules may feel like another form of control. In addition, the teen may have been forced to leave behind things that were very important to them such as their school, personal belongings, friends, relatives and pets. At the same time, they might see the shelter as a safer environment than the one they were in before, and therefore a safe space for them to express a range of emotions, such as grief, anger, anxiety or relief. It is important that the advocate explain to the teen and the mom the purpose of the shelter rules, safety and confidentiality issues, as well as the support that the family will receive.

Advocates should:

1. Inform the survivor about services provided to victims of domestic violence and their teenagers.
2. Provide the survivor with information that explains the behaviors advocates and/or the agency are mandated to report to CPS.
3. Complete the intake with the survivor without the presence of her teenage son/daughter. The advocate should discuss with the survivor ways the abuser's behavior has possibly impacted her parenting. If needed, the advocate should make a plan with her to support her parenting issues.
4. Discuss with the survivor and her teenage son/daughter the importance of maintaining confidentiality and make a verbal confidentiality agreement with the teenage son/daughter.
5. Discuss the shelter's non-violence policy with the survivor and her teenage son/daughter. Explain the importance and purpose of this policy.

Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2011 [www.gcadv.org](http://www.gcadv.org)

Adapted from *Model Protocol on Working with Battered Women and Their Teenage Boys in Shelter*, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2003 [www.wscadv.org](http://www.wscadv.org)

6. Work jointly with the survivor and her teenage son/daughter to create a safety plan. At a minimum, the safety plan should include the activities the teen participates in outside of school or independent from his/her mother.
7. When appropriate, work separately with the survivor on an additional safety plan that responds to potentially abusive or difficult behavior by the teenage son/daughter.
8. Discuss with the survivor and her teenage son/daughter the importance of privacy, both for themselves and for other residents.
9. Meet separately with the survivor and the teen to assess what support and services they each need.
10. Inform the teen of support groups, activities and other services available, describe their purpose, and encourage participation.
11. Discuss dynamics of domestic violence with the teen and offer age appropriate written materials.
12. Discuss the strategies the teen used or can use to cope with domestic violence.
13. Explore the survivor's relationship with her son/daughter and ask what support she might need.
14. Provide the survivor and her teenage son/daughter with appropriate referrals to community resources for additional support. Make available age-appropriate books and other educational materials addressing youth.
15. Review the content of the agency's adult support group to include accurate and appropriate information about the impact of domestic violence on parenting and on the development of teenagers.