

***A Collaborative Approach
to Define and Measure
Empowering Practice within a
Domestic Violence Shelter Program***

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Presentation Overview

We often talk about “the empowerment model,” working in “an empowering way,” or using “empowering practice.”

What does it mean? Do we do it? How do we know?

Does it matter??

Empowering Practice:

Behaving with a survivor in ways that increase her power in personal, interpersonal, and political arenas.

Gutierrez, et al, 1995; Sullivan, 2006

Belief in ability to
achieve goals

Critical understanding
of sociopolitical context

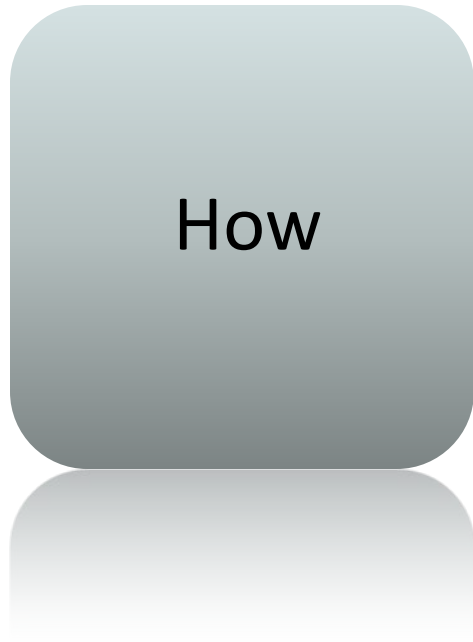
Access to and control
over resources

Community
involvement



What does an “empowered” person look like?

Empowering Processes



Empowered Outcomes

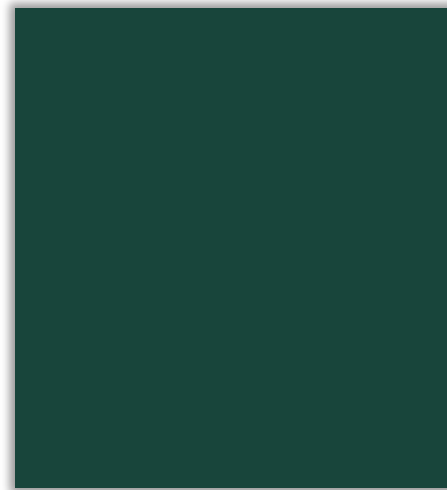


Empowering Practice

How

1. *Shared power*
2. *Respect for survivor's strengths and resources*
3. *Services are survivor-driven*
4. *Services are flexible and individualized*
5. *Problems are not located within the survivor*
6. *Services are action-oriented and proactive*

EMPOWERING PRACTICE: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE??



The Process:

We worked with staff of a local DV program to determine together:

1. How do we define empowerment?
2. What does empowerment look like in practice?
3. What *outcomes* are expected as a result of this practice?



Empowerment



Behaving with a survivor in ways that increase her actual power in personal, interpersonal, and political arenas so she can obtain and control the resources that affect her life and take action to make the changes she wants for her life

(Gutierrez, 1990; Gutierrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995; Rappaport, 1981)

**Key Elements of
Empowerment
Practice**

**Key Elements
Translated
into Practice**

**Survivor
Outcomes**



Key Elements of Empowerment Practice

Key Elements Translated into Practice

Survivor Outcomes

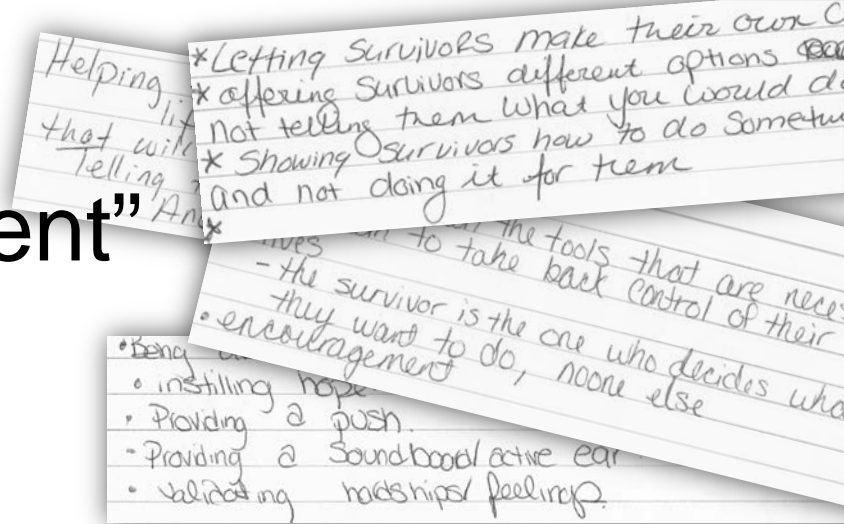
- Shared Power
- Respect for strengths
- SURVIVOR-driven
- Flexible Services
- Problems are not
W/in SURVIVOR
- ^{Proactive} Action-oriented
Service delivery

What does “empowerment” mean to you?

“Facilitating autonomy and self-determination.”

“Offering survivors different options and not telling them what you would do.”

“Giving women the tools so they can take back control of their lives.”



Key Elements of Empowerment Practice

Key Elements Translated into Practice

Survivor Outcomes

• Shared Power

• Respect for strengths

• SURVIVOR-driven

• Flexible Services

• Problems are not W/in SURVIVOR

• Action-oriented
Proactive Service delivery

- Intake ^{Don't rush her. Make comfortable} on own time, when it works for her, at her own pace
- Welcoming body language - body language that is consistent w/ verbal
- Survivor leads discussion - don't grill her. Let her open up on own time + pace.
- Not ~~having to ask~~ asking questions & more than once
- Don't hide paperwork from survivor, explain questions
- Can end intake at any time
- Tell her you will keep confidential
- Acknowledge strengths, courage
- Prepare for what to expect when going to shelter - what it's like, what's available
- Safety plan
- Listen to concerns + address them
- Tell her about TP services + what's available, e.g. personal needs items
- Respect feelings so she feels heard + understood
- She decides goals, what she wants to work on
- Equalize power by not sitting behind desk

What is it that you **do** that is empowering?



“Provide information and resources.”

“Share knowledge about systems that we have that are relevant to obtain or accomplish goals.”

“Being approachable; listen, eye contact, reflect and validate feelings.”

“Give information, but not tell her what to do.”

Key Elements of Empowerment Practice

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Proactive Service delivery

Key Elements Translated into Practice

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Survivor Outcomes

- Self esteem - feel smart, intelligent, capable, self efficacy
- Can change own life, feel autonomous
- Confidence
- Knowing what she wants in service delivery
- Right and ability to make decisions
- ~~Self~~ Recognize strengths
- Believe in violence-free future, able to revisit past abuse, hopeful future
- Greater understanding about DV/SA, impact of violence on children, aware of legal system
- Impact of trauma + stressors - de-pathologize themselves
- Feeling like there is support for them, regardless of the choices they make
- Women are not the label but a person
- Not in a crisis - have a PDA
- Learn self-care strategies
- Move from ~~surviving~~ ^{just surviving} to healing
- Not alone - other women experience
- What women experienced is real
- Know better parenting strategies - feel that they could be better parents.
- ~~Can~~ Set can set boundaries

How Should This Practice Impact the Survivor??



“She’ll feel capable, smart.”

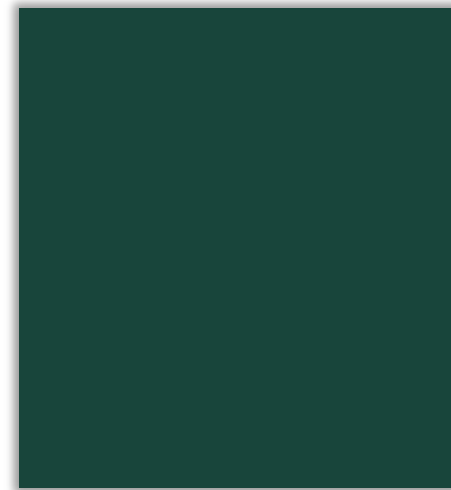
“She’ll know what resources are out there.”

“She’ll be more in control of her life.”

“She’ll recognize her strengths.”

“She’ll feel less alone.”

MEASURING EMPOWERMENT



Empowering Practice

- Provide information
- Offer empathy and support
- Support survivors' decision-making



Empowered Outcomes

- Knowledge
- Self-worth
- Self-determination

Empowering Practice Scale

The shelter staff...

1. helped me define and meet the goals I thought were important.
2. respected the choices I made.
3. used the words “sexism” or “racism” or “oppression” when talking about the community response to domestic violence.
4. talked to me about how common domestic violence is.
5. believed in me.
6. encouraged me.
7. noticed my best qualities.
8. talked with me about how to find services and resources in the community to help meet my needs.
9. helped me think through how to get something I needed or resolve an issue.

Empowered Outcomes Scale

Because of my experience at shelter, I feel....

1. I have a greater understanding of how common DV is.
2. I have a greater understanding that women are not to blame for being abused in a relationship.
3. I am more able to achieve goals I set for myself.
4. I am better at knowing what steps to take to achieve my goals.
5. I am more hopeful about the future.
6. I am better at figuring out how to handle problems that arise in my life.
7. I know more about the community resources I might need.
8. I'm better able to get what I need for myself.
9. I know more about my options.

THE STUDY



“Empowering Practice” Study

Conducting interviews with women after they exit two different shelters in Michigan;

Interviews are voluntary, confidential, safe, and women are paid \$25 for participating;

We hope to shorten the surveys, and see if practice relates to outcomes.

Conclusions, Next Steps

- Empowerment activity benefited staff
- Study results will hopefully inform practice



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