

# Incorporating Domestic Violence Survivors' Safety in Healthcare Practices

PRESENTED BY:  
AID TO VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE,  
INC.



# Disclosure:

(Speakers: Melanie Rodriguez, Matt Tyler)

have no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this program/presentation.



**AVDA**<sup>®</sup>  
*A Community of Hope*

# Learning Objectives:

- Increase understanding of dynamics of Domestic Violence
- Understanding the intersection of Domestic Violence and Healthcare
- Improved practices to recognize and respond to victims/survivors

# Lingo

DV = Domestic Violence

IPV = Intimate Partner Violence

AVDA = Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse

“Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner’s consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other.”

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

**1** in **4** women  
will experience  
**domestic violence**  
during her lifetime.



National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence  
Survey, CDC, 2010.

WOMEN AGED 16-24  
EXPERIENCE THE  
HIGHEST RATE  
OF INTIMATE PARTNER  
VIOLENCE

\$8.3  
Billion

The annual cost of  
IPV against women,  
including medical  
care, mental health  
services, and lost  
productivity.

# 3.6 TRILLION

The lifetime economic cost including criminal justice, civil justice and other costs (shelter services, resources, support for children). The average cost of IPV over a victim's lifetime is \$103,767 for women and \$23,414 for men.



**IPV-RELATED  
INJURIES**



**CRIMINAL/CIVIL  
JUSTICE**



**SHELTER SERVICES**

A map of Florida with various cities and counties labeled. The text is overlaid on the map. The text is white and bold. The map shows major cities like Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, and Miami. The text is arranged in a vertical stack on the left side of the map.

**2020**

**Florida**

**106,515 reported DV incidents.**

**217 lives were lost.**

**Palm Beach County**

**4,359 reported DV incidents.**

**10 lives were lost.**



# MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

- DV is a leading cause of death and serious injury for women, as well as numerous physical and health issues for both men and women.
- Survivors of DV are disproportionately represented in ER, mental health, and other medical settings.
- Many do not report abuse, but seek health care.
- Health care setting is presumed to be a safe place for survivors to disclose and seek help.

# M A G N I T U D E O F T H E P R O B L E M

U.S. Department of Justice reported that 37% of all women who sought care in hospital emergency rooms for violence-related injuries were injured by a current or former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend

Domestic violence is the leading cause of injuries to women ages 15-44

A pair of ornate brass scales of justice is the central focus, positioned in a courtroom. The scales are balanced, with two pans hanging from a central pillar. The background shows rows of empty wooden chairs and a large window with a grid pattern, suggesting a formal legal environment. The lighting is soft, highlighting the metallic texture of the scales.

# Florida Statute 741.28

**Defines Domestic Violence as any:**

Assault, aggravated assault, battery, aggravated battery, false imprisonment, OR any criminal offense resulting in physical injury or death of one household member by another family or household member.

# Florida Statute 741.28

**Family or Household Member means:**

**Spouses, former spouses, persons related by blood or marriage, persons who are presently residing together as if a family or who resided together in the past as if a family, and persons who are parents who have a child in common regardless of whether they have ever been married.**

**With the exception of persons who have a child in common, the family members must be currently residing or have in the past resided together in the same single unit dwelling.**



# Florida Statute 784.046

- A dating relationship must have existed within the past six months...
- Expectation of affection or sexual involvement by the parties...
- AND.. The frequency and type of interaction between the persons must have included that they have been involved over time and on a continuous basis over the course of the relationship.

# Domestic and Dating Violence Injunctions

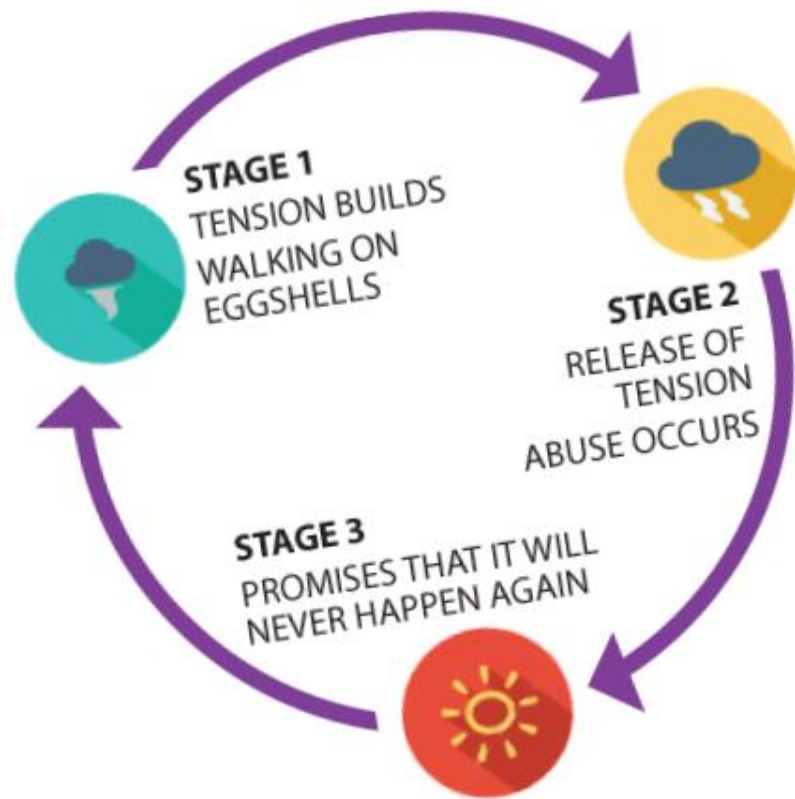
- Violence only needs to occur once in order to apply for injunction.
- Must meet statutory definitions for domestic or dating violence.
- Valid in any state in the US once granted.
- Injunction can only be violated by perpetrator.
- Injunction can protect children, if necessary.
- Not all survivors are safe to apply for injunctions.

# Types of Violence:

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Verbal Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Economic Abuse
- Digital Abuse



# Campaign of Violence VS. Cycle of Violence



- *A Campaign of Violence is based on non-physical, non-sexual tactics batterers choose to use in order to control the survivor.*
- *The Cycle of Violence suggests that the violence occurs in a regular pattern and always includes an outburst of physical violence.*



# Warning Signs Of An Abusive Relationship Becoming Violent or Ending in Homicide



# GOALS OF HEALTHCARE RESPONSE:

## ARE:

- To provide informed, holistic and appropriate care
- To increase safety, reduce isolation, link victims and their families to additional services/support

## ARE NOT:

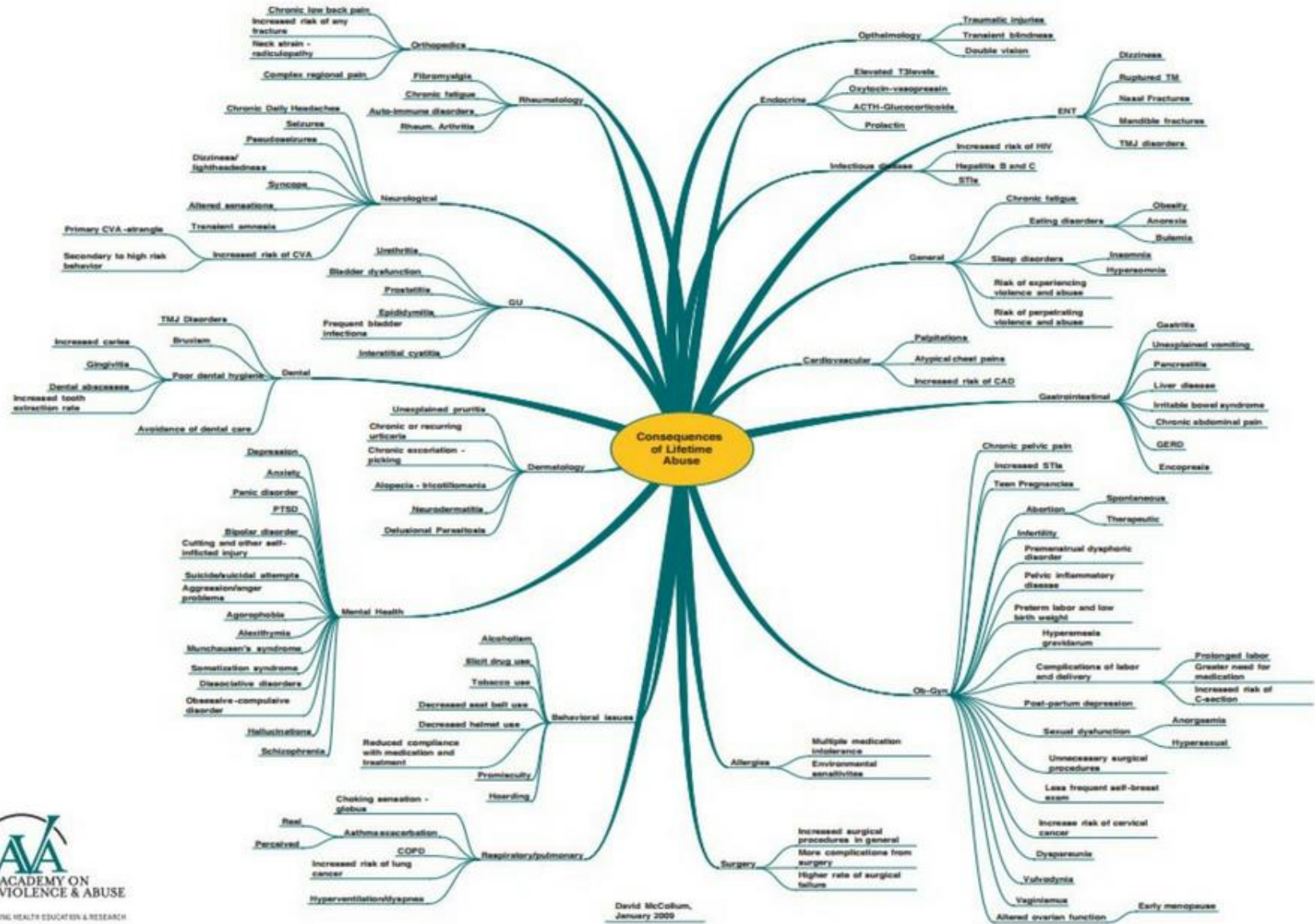
- To force survivors to disclose abuse or take particular action
- To make health care providers responsible for solving the problem or to find perfect, complete solutions.
- Make the survivor feel shame or guilt for not making a particular decision.



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# COLEVA

## Known and Suspected Consequences Of Lifetime Exposures to Violence and Abuse

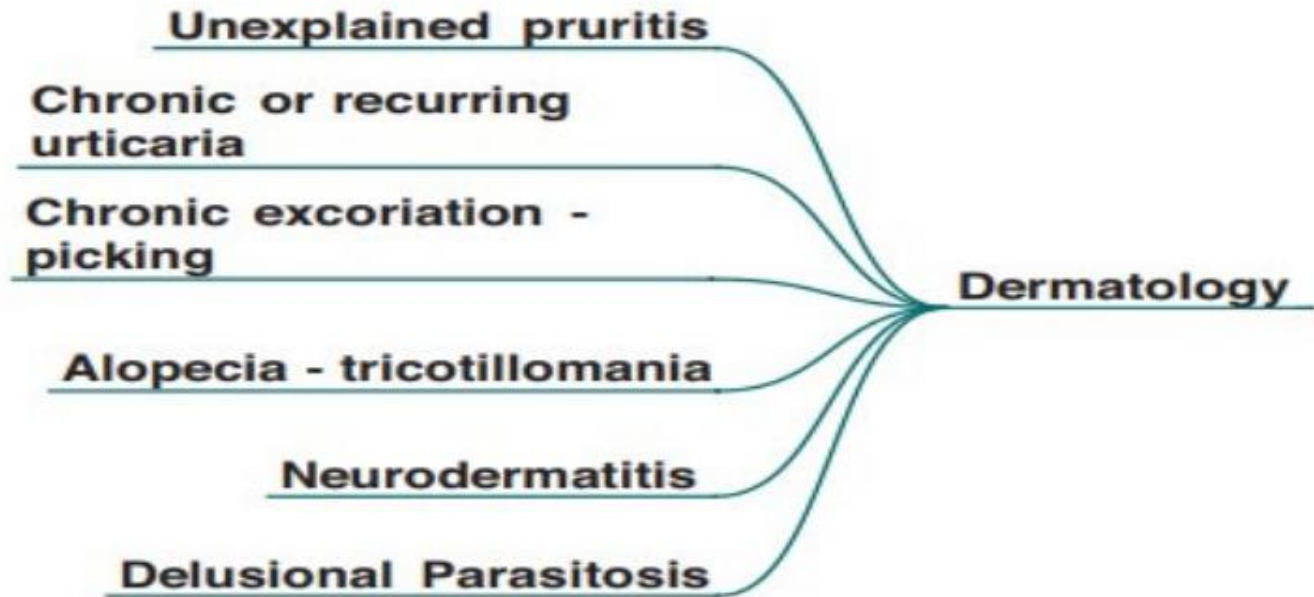


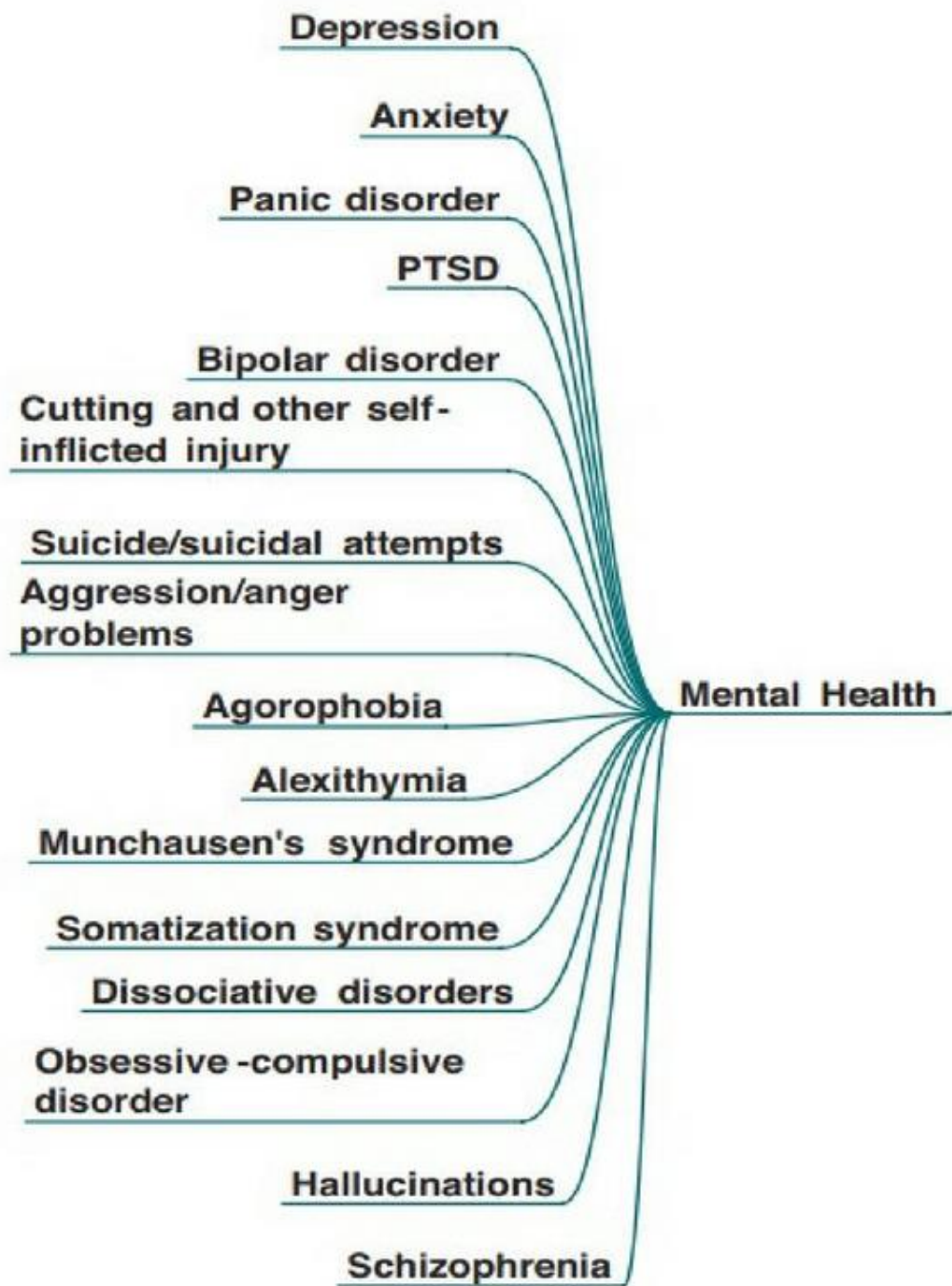
David McCollum, January 2009

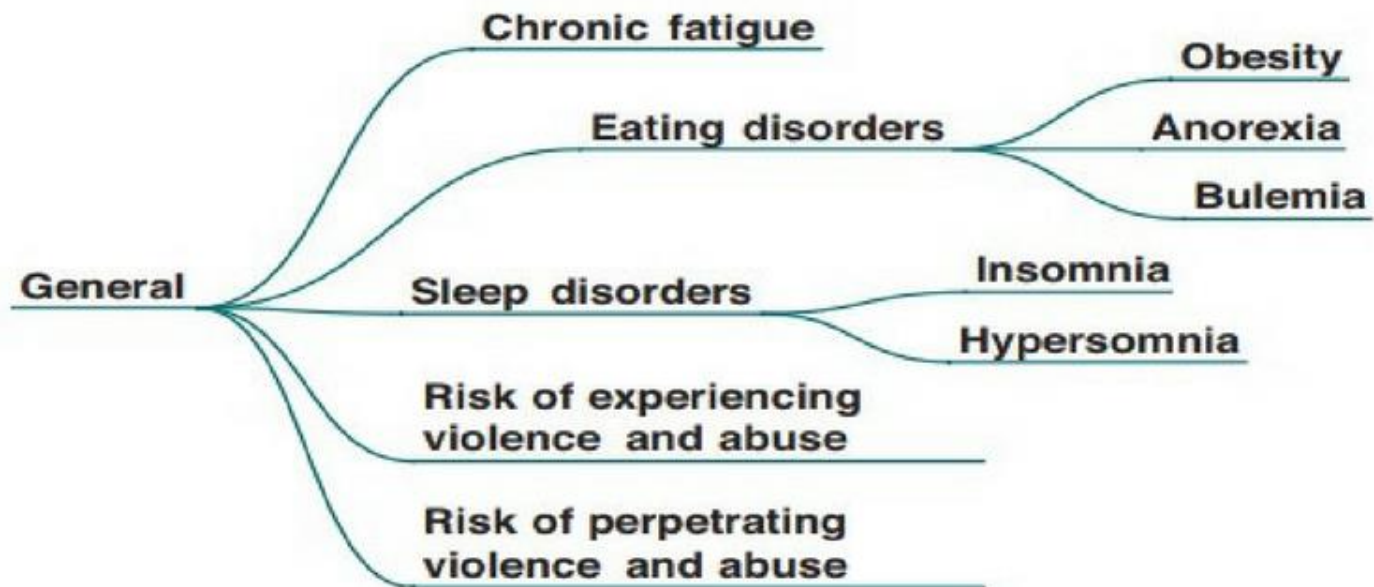
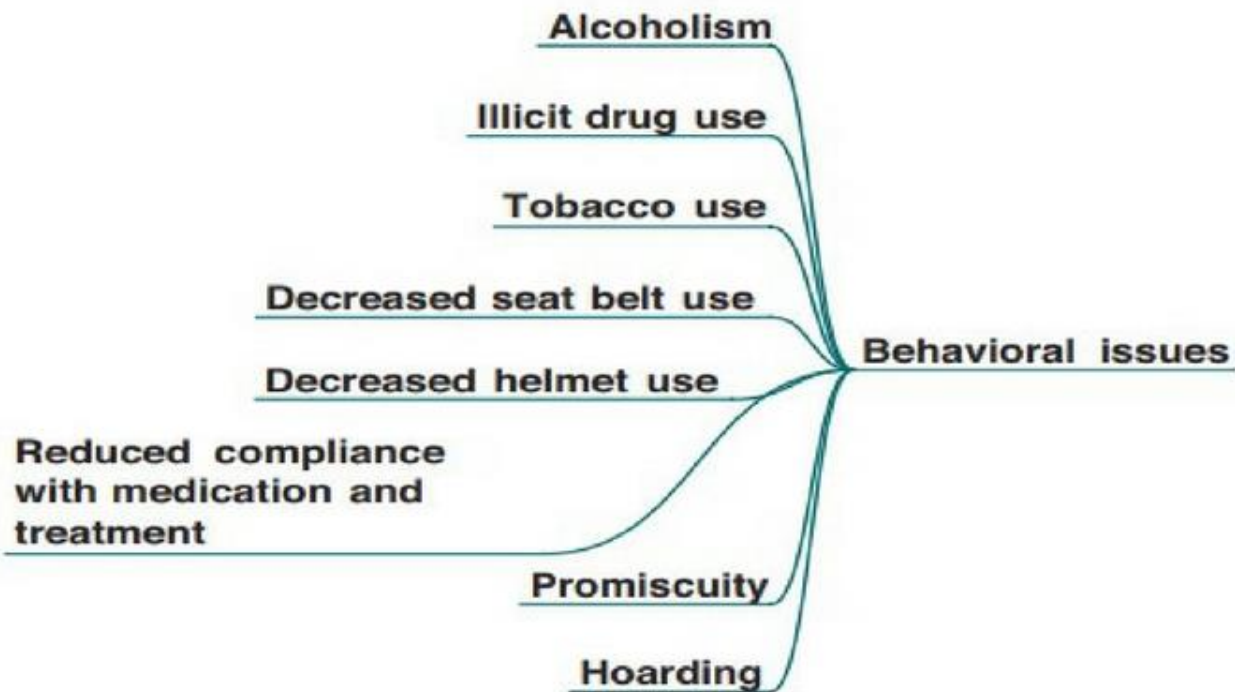


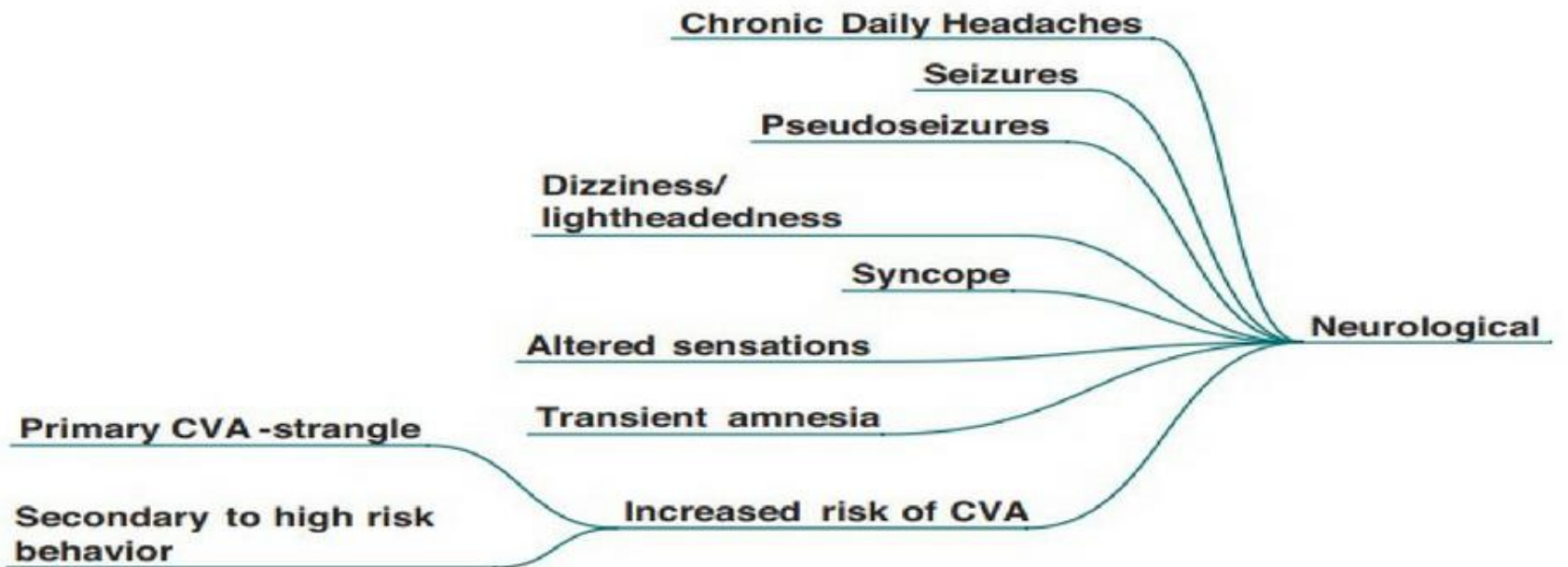
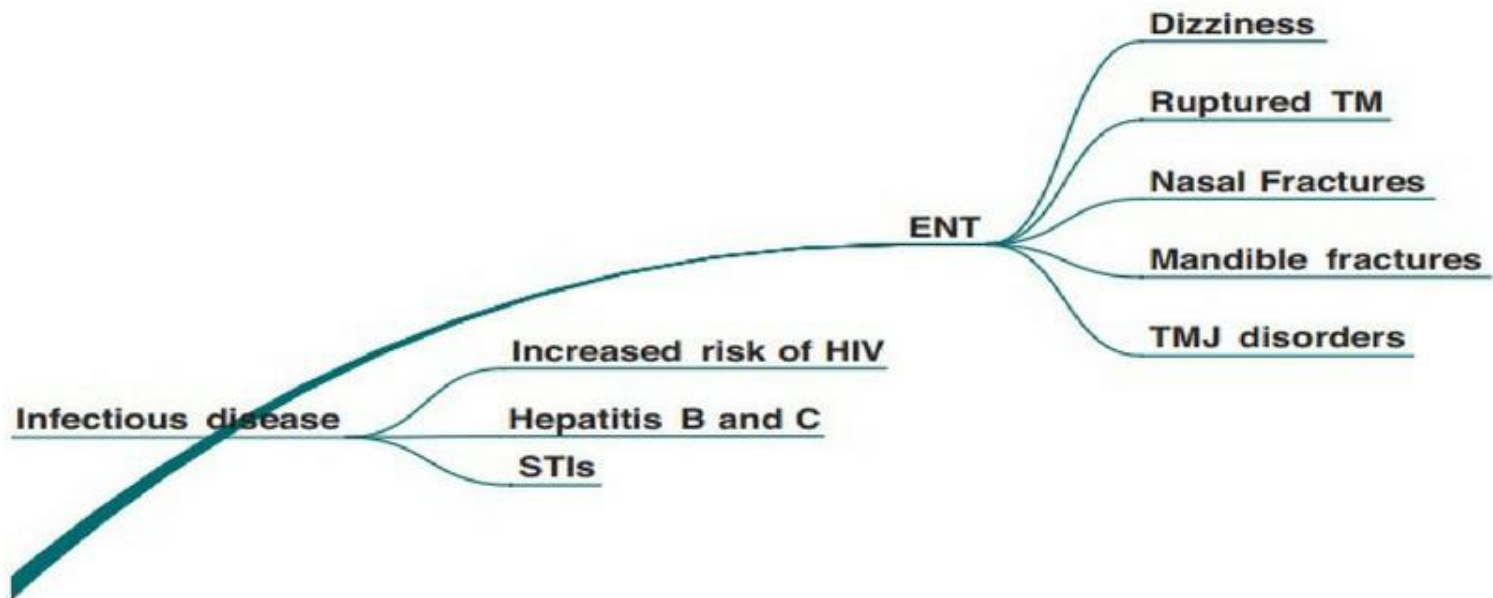
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www.AVAHEALTH.org











# RECOGNIZE INJURIES SUGGESTIVE OF DEFENSIVE POSTURE

## Ulnar Bruising of the Forearm

- Any part of the body can be used as a shield including inner aspects of arms and legs.



WHAT DO YOU THINK  
CAUSED THESE  
MARKS?



# A N S W E R :

- Fingerprint Pressure
  - May appear larger if the person pulled away while being grabbed.
  - Be sure to check under arm medially which is often marked by perpetrator's thumb.
- Hand Print

WHAT CAUSED  
THIS MARK?



# A N S W E R :

- Human Bite Mark
- Can present as very specific and contain saliva or teeth marks or they can present as a non-specific contusion or abrasion.

(PVS/FVPPF)

WHAT CAUSED  
THIS MARK?



# A N S W E R :

- Baseball Bat
  - Linear blunt pattern; parallel lines separated by a clear area.

# STRANGULATION

- Strangulation is one of the most lethal forms of domestic violence: unconsciousness may occur within seconds and death within minutes.
- Death can occur days or even weeks later.
- Significant predictor for risk of future lethal violence. Odds for homicide increase **750%** for victims who have been previously strangled, compared to victims who have never been strangled







Loss of consciousness can occur within 5 - 10 seconds. Death within minutes.<sup>2</sup>



are strangled manually (with hands).<sup>3</sup>



report losing consciousness.<sup>4</sup>



are strangled along with sexual assault/abuse.<sup>5</sup>  
**9%** are also pregnant.<sup>4</sup>



of strangled women believed they were going to die.<sup>6</sup>

And odds for homicide increase **750%**

for victims who have been previously strangled, compared to victims who have never been strangled.<sup>7</sup>

**HOWEVER...**

Oftentimes,  
even in fatal cases,  
there are  
**NO EXTERNAL SIGNS**  
of injury.<sup>3</sup>



Only half of victims have visible injuries



Of these, only 15% could be photographed

# RECOGNIZING STRANGULATION INJURIES

Often subtle, can be lethal.

Attempted strangulation is a grave risk factor for lethality.

Look for:

- Redness around neck
- Rope or cord burn
- Fingernail scratches
- Neck swelling
- Petechia of neck, face, or sclera



# DOCUMENTATION

- Location and severity of injuries, both past and present.  
(Use body map)
- Take photos of woman's injuries.
- The woman's account of the incident.
- Details of previous violent contacts the abuser has had with the patient.
- Emotional and physical symptoms.
- Any additional non-physical indications of abuse, such as torn or damaged clothing.

# TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS

- Discuss the fact that photos will be important legal evidence even if she is not considering legal action.
- Obtain written consent to take photos.
- Use a scale such as a ruler or a coin to provide verification of the size of the injury.
- Write her name, date and time photo was taken, where it was taken, who took it and who else was present when it was taken on the back of each picture.

# COLLECTING FORENSIC EVIDENCE

If patient decides to take legal action, evidence related to the assault must be collected, labeled and handled so that it is useful to the patient's case.

The attending police officer should be consulted to the specific protocol to follow for such material.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
AND HEALTH CARE:  
BEST PRACTICES IN  
ACTION

# CUES: Universal Education for IPV in Hospital Settings (Futures Without Violence)



# IMPORTANCE OF DV SCREENINGS

A 2003 study showed that 37% of battered women admitted abuse to their healthcare provider

- 70-81% of survivors of abuse reported that they wanted their healthcare provider to privately ask them about domestic abuse during their appointments



# R A D A R M N E M O N I C

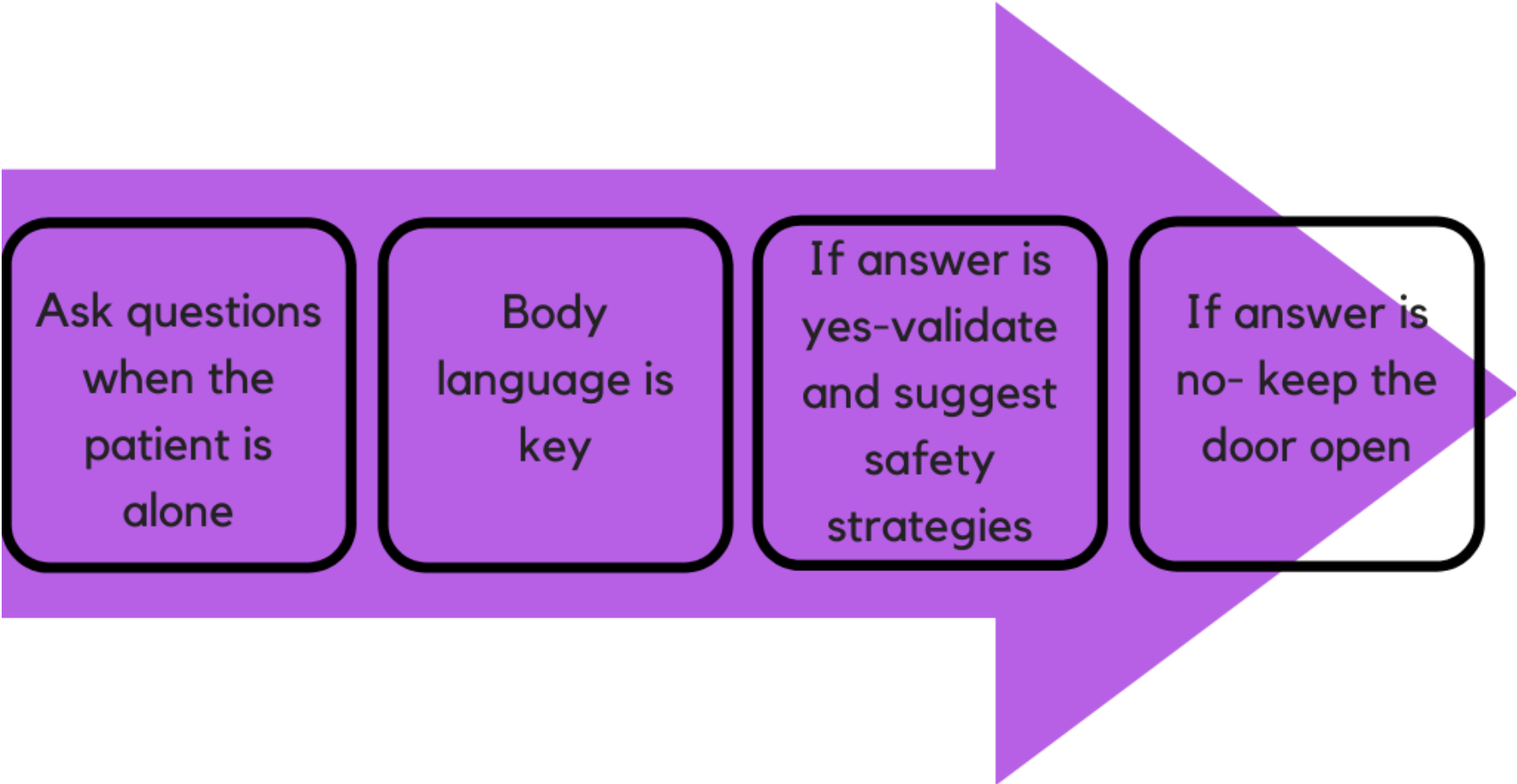
R – Routinely Ask All Patients

A – Ask Direct Questions

D – Document

A – Assess For Safety

R - Refer



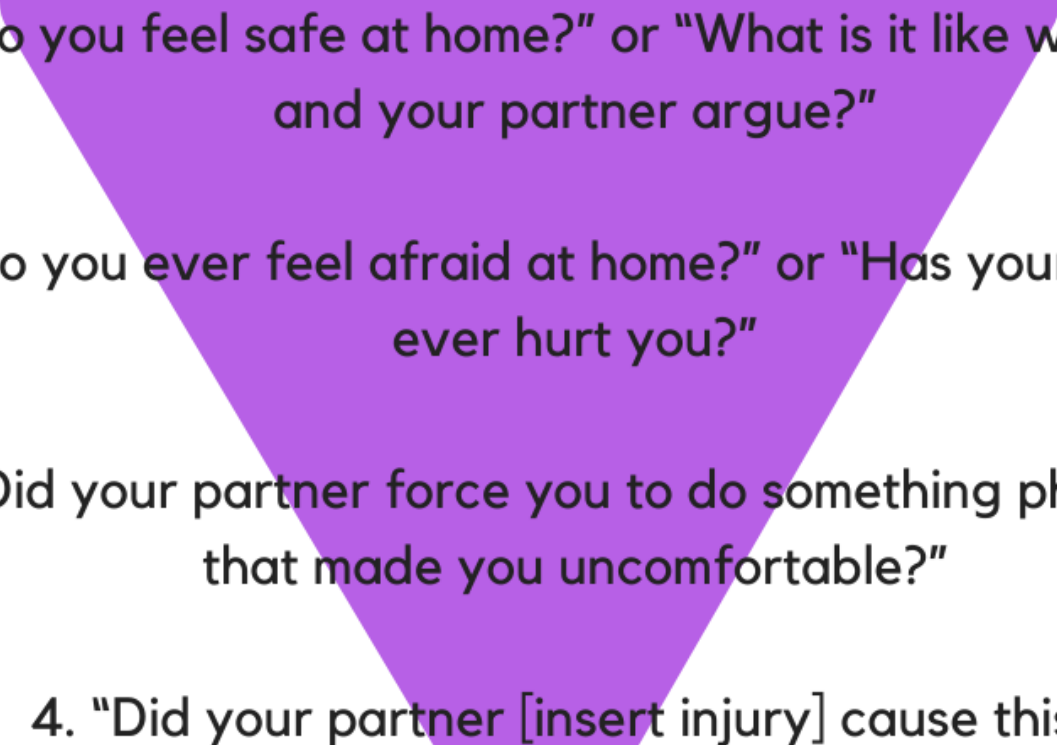
Ask questions  
when the  
patient is  
alone

Body  
language is  
key

If answer is  
yes-validate  
and suggest  
safety  
strategies

If answer is  
no- keep the  
door open

Think about asking questions like a funnel.  
The top part is the easiest, most open ended  
question—like:

- 
1. "Do you feel safe at home?" or "What is it like when you and your partner argue?"
  2. "Do you ever feel afraid at home?" or "Has your partner ever hurt you?"
  3. "Did your partner force you to do something physically that made you uncomfortable?"
  4. "Did your partner [insert injury] cause this?"

# RESPOND IF THEY DO NOT CHOOSE TO DISCLOSE

- Accept their response
- Express your concern
- Offer information
- Communicate willingness to help
- Document any information given or referrals

# RESPOND: WHAT IF THE PERSON DISCLOSES?

- Validate the person's experiences
- Provide support & referrals
- Provide statewide domestic violence hotline
- Document in the Medical Record



Hello

# MANDATORY REPORTING

Florida Statute 790.24

Any physician, nurse, or employee thereof and any employee of a hospital, sanitarium, clinic, or nursing home knowingly treating any person suffering from a gunshot wound or life-threatening injury indicating an act of violence, or receiving a request for such treatment, shall report the same immediately to the sheriff's department of the county in which said treatment is administered or request therefor received.

This section does not affect any requirement that a person has to report abuse pursuant to chapter 39 or chapter 415. Any such person willfully failing to report such treatment or request therefor is guilty of a misdemeanor of the first degree.

Chapter 39 - Child Abuse Reporting Statute  
Chapter 415 - Adult Protective Services Reporting Statute

# MANDATORY REPORTING

Florida Statute 877.155

Any person who initially treats or is requested to treat a person with second-degree or third-degree burn injuries affecting 10 percent or more of the surface area of his or her body shall immediately report such treatment to the local sheriff's department if the treating person determines that the burns were caused by a flammable substance and if the treating person suspects the injury is a result of violence or unlawful activity.

# DV in the Workplace

## FL Statute 741.313

### Unlawful action against employees seeking protection

Employers with 50+ staff must allow 3 days of time off for survivors of dv seeking protection. This includes legal, medical, and advocacy service needs.

- Ask them what they need!
- Consider a flexible schedule to support your staff with distractions and changes to the dynamics in the home.
- Adjustments/Accommodations to their responsibilities if they lost access to resources needed to do their jobs – (Home internet, transportation, hand injuries)
- Provide DV training and be aware of DV resources in your community.
- Maintain their privacy and confidentiality.
- Promote healthy and equitable work relationships.



S A F E T Y  
P L A N N I N G



# BARRIERS TO SEEKING AND FINDING SAFETY

- Fear that brutality and lethality of violence will increase
- Isolation
- Economic challenges
- Fear of law enforcement and judiciary response
- Children
- Trauma
- Limited access to support services
- Reasons of faith
- Love for the batterer
- Danger of the unknown



# TAKE AWAY MESSAGE

It is important as a medical professional to understand the dynamics of domestic violence and how to screen and support your patients because you often have multiple opportunities to see them where other won't.

HOWEVER, you are NOT expected to be a domestic violence expert; certified domestic violence centers are your resource. We also have victim/advocate privilege to protect a victim's communication with our staff.

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# Community Resources

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**(800) 355-8547**

YWCA Harmony House  
(800) 973-YWCA

Florida Domestic Violence Hotline  
(800) 500-1119

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
(800) 799-SAFE

**[avdaonline.org](http://avdaonline.org) | [@AVDACommits](https://twitter.com/AVDACommits)**

CALL 911 IF YOU ARE IN IMMEDIATE DANGER