

Domestic Violence Tip sheet – Page 2590 to consult or make a referral

Assume patients are not alone even if they say they are, and assume there might be abuse even if they have never disclosed it.

Do not lead with specific questions about safety or abuse unless the patient themselves brings it up. Instead, ask more generally about "How are you doing? How are you and your partner/family coping with all that is going on right now?"

Follow the patient's lead regarding what they may or may not feel comfortable talking about, medical or otherwise.

If the patient indicates there might be some safety concerns, explore with caution, ask if they could say a little more about what they are concerned about or need help with; be prepared to switch subjects at any time.

If a patient discloses abuse or indicates they are not safe

Be prepared with a few quick "Yes/No" questions to determine how urgent the situation might be, and whether the patient can even stay on the phone, for example:

"If you are afraid for your safety, you can call 911 any time. Would you like me to call 911 for you right now?" If they say yes, be sure to get the address where the patient is.

"Would you like a hotline number to call? They are available 24 hours. They can help you think through your options, and connect you with help in your area." Offer one or more, as appropriate/as time allows.

Remind patient to use a phone or computer that abuser won't see, or delete the call log or browser history. Let them know several websites include chat/text options if they are not safe to talk.

If they indicate they are not in immediate danger and can stay on the phone, offer other ways for patient to find help when it's a good time for them, for example:

"Would you like the number for BMC's Domestic Violence Program? It's free and confidential. I can give you their number or I can ask an Advocate to call you, if you can tell me a safe number and a good time to call, and whether it's safe to leave a message?"

BMC Domestic Violence Program # 617-414-5457 <https://www.bmc.org/programs/domestic-violence-program>

(providers can page 2590 to consult or make a referral)

"If you can't write anything down right now, and have internet access, you can go to BMC.org and click on "Programs and Services". This page lists several resources including the DV Program, how to reach an advocate, hotline numbers, and information in multiple languages." Let patient know what you will be documenting regarding any disclosures in case they have concerns that an abuser or family member might have access to their or their child's record/MyChart.