



Tips for Advocates: Physical & Mental Health

Health Issues and Resources for Survivors and Advocates

- The trauma and physical abuse related to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) can result in a variety of negative health impacts and coping behaviors for survivors and their children. Survivors may have had limited or traumatic experiences with health care providers.
- Access to quality preventative health care services and/or coverage is important to both survivor health and financial well-being.
- Advocates can explain how health insurance works and the available options under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) through the healthcare exchange (www.healthcare.gov). Open enrollment usually begins around November and runs through January. Depending on certain circumstances, a survivor might have eligibility for enrollment year-round. Find someone in your community who can help with applying at www.localhelp.healthcare.gov, and check out Futures Without Violence's [ACA FAQ](#) and [DV Advocate guide](#).
- Check out the Texas Association of Community Health Centers [website](#) to find a community health center nearby (www.tach.org) that can serve survivors without health insurance.

Reproductive Health and Pregnancy Resources

- Be a safe and informed support system, maintaining a non-judgmental attitude, when working with survivors and their children struggling with addiction, sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) and unintended pregnancies.
- Many survivors have experienced reproductive coercion or had limited choices in family planning. Talk about how relationships can affect survivors' health, reproductive coercion, and reproductive life planning. [Futures Without Violence](#) has online videos to help advocates understand how to talk to survivors about reproductive health.
- Check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) resources for more information on current [contraceptive methods](#) and [STI information](#).
- Female survivors between the ages of 18 and 44 that are legal residents of Texas that do not currently have health insurance could be eligible for services such as annual exams, STI screenings, contraception, and more from [Healthy Texas Women](#).

Mental Health

- Many survivors have experienced varying levels of trauma as a result from abuse or previous life experience. Trauma and mental illness can affect a survivor's interactions with staff, ability to regulate emotions, ability to concentrate or make plans, or talk about what has happened in the past. Advocates can help survivors by normalizing their trauma reactions and nonjudgmentally listening to them. Check out the [National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health](#) (NCDVTMH) for more information and tip sheets on how trauma and mental health affects survivors.



Mental Health (continued)

- If a survivor experiences a traumatic trigger you draw the survivor's attention back to the present by asking a question about their physical space (ex: "Are you thirsty?", "Can you pick out something blue in the room?") or asking them to take deep breathes with their hands over their stomach. Contact TCFV for more information about responding to trauma and triggers.
- Some helpful advocacy strategies when working with survivors experiencing trauma, mental illness, and/or a traumatic brain injury include:
 - When giving referrals or resources, be clear about what they can realistically expect (office location, hours, potential costs, attitudes of staff, etc.).
 - Give regular reminders about appointments and write information down.
 - Focus on the present and one thing at a time.
 - Break down goals into smaller pieces.
 - Clarify if you are saying things in a way that makes sense by using accessible language such as, "I hope I explained that well. Was there anything that didn't make sense?"
 - Respect their choices.
- Having conversations with survivors about suicide and self-harm can be daunting but important to survivor safety. Check out [NCDVMHT's Information Sheet](#) on self-injury and [Texas Suicide Prevention's Toolkit](#) for practical ways to talk to survivors about these issues.
- Texas Department of State Health Services has a list of all local mental health crisis lines at www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhsa-crisishotline/.

Additional Resources

- [Futures Without Violence](#) – information and resources for advocates around the intersection of healthcare and domestic violence including [instructional videos](#), brochures, technical assistance, and more,
- [Someday Starts Now](#) – Healthy Texas Babies' website for resources regarding prenatal and perinatal health information
- [National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, & Mental Health](#) – resources for advocates when providing trauma-informed advocacy to survivors experiencing mental health issues
- [Jane's Due Process](#) – provides legal rights and pregnancy options for Texas minors; Call 1-866-999-5263 or text 512-739-6292 M-F 7:00 am – 4:00 pm
- [Substance Abuse Treatment Facilitator Locator](#) – search this directory for private and public substance abuse treatment facilities by type and location
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) – central suicide prevention crisis number connects the caller with the Lifeline network closest to their location; Call 800-273-TALK (8255)