



# Trauma-Informed Approach to Victim Assistance in Health Care Settings

Dignity Health recommends universal education about various forms of abuse, neglect, and violence in all of its health care settings, particularly in settings that offer longitudinal care and services. For urgent and emergency care settings, a universal education approach may be most appropriate and effective when a patient presents with risk factors and/or indicators of victimization. **The PEARR Tool** offers key steps on how to provide such education to a patient and how to offer assistance in a **trauma-informed and victim-centered manner**. A double asterisk **\*\*** indicates points at which this conversation may come to an end. Once this conversation ends, refer to the double asterisk **\*\*** at the bottom of this page for additional steps. **Note:** The patient's immediate needs (e.g., emergency medical care) should be addressed before use of this tool.

## P

### Provide Privacy

1. Discuss sensitive topics **alone** and in **safe, private setting** (ideally private room with closed doors). If companion refuses to be separated, then this may be an indicator of abuse, neglect, or violence.\*\* Strategies to speak with patient alone: State requirement for private exam or need for patient to be seen alone for radiology, urine test, etc.
  - **Note:** Companions are not appropriate interpreters, regardless of communication abilities. If patient indicates preference to use companion

as interpreter, see your entity's policies for further guidance.\*\*

- **Note:** Explain **limits of confidentiality** (i.e., mandated reporting requirements) before beginning any sensitive discussion; however, do not discourage person from disclosing victimization. Patient should feel in control of all disclosures. Mandated reporting includes requirements to report concerns of abuse, neglect, or violence to internal staff and/or to external agencies.

## E

### Educate

2. Educate patient in manner that is **nonjudgmental** and **normalizes** sharing of information. Example: "I educate all of my patients about [fill in the blank] because violence is so common in our society, and violence has a big impact on our health, safety, and well-being." **Use a brochure or safety card** to review information about abuse, neglect, or violence, and

offer brochure/card to patient. [Ideally, this brochure/card will include information about resources (e.g., local service providers, national hotlines)]. Example: "Here are some brochures to take with you in case this is ever an issue for you, **or someone you know.**" If patient declines materials, then respect patient's decision.\*\*

## A

### Ask

3. Allow time for discussion with patient. Example: "Is there anything you'd like to share with me? Do you feel like anyone is hurting your health, safety, or well-being?"\*\* If available and when appropriate, use **evidence-based tools** to screen patient for abuse, neglect, or violence.
  - **Note:** All women of reproductive age should be intermittently screened for intimate partner violence (USPSTF Grade B).\*\*
4. If there are indicators of victimization, **ASK** about concerns. Example: "I've noticed [insert risk factor/indicator] and I'm concerned for your

health, safety, and well-being. You don't have to share details with me, but I can connect you with resources. Would you like to speak with [insert advocate/service provider]? If not, you can let me know anytime."\*\*

- **Note:** **Limit questions** to only those needed to determine patient's safety, to connect patient with resources (e.g., trained victim advocates), and to guide your work (e.g., perform medical exam).

*USPSTF = US Preventive Services Task Force*

## R R

### Respect and Respond

5. If patient denies victimization or declines assistance, then **respect patient's wishes**. If you have **concerns about patient's safety**, offer information about resources that can assist in event of emergency (e.g., local shelter, crisis hotline).\*\* Otherwise, if patient accepts/requests assistance with accessing services, then **provide personal**

**introduction** to local victim advocate/service provider; or, **arrange private setting** for patient to call hotline:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-SAFE (7233);
- National Sexual Assault Hotline, 1-800-656-HOPE (4673);
- National Human Trafficking Hotline, 1-888-373-7888 \*\*

\*\* Report **safety concerns** to appropriate staff/departments (e.g., nurse supervisor, security). Also, **REPORT** risk factors/indicators as required or permitted by law/regulation, and continue **trauma-informed** health services. Whenever possible, **schedule follow-up appointment** to continue building rapport and to monitor patient's safety/well-being.



### Child Abuse and Neglect

**Risk factors** include (not limited to): Concerns of domestic violence (DV) in home; parents/guardians exhibiting mental health or substance use disorders; parents/guardians who are overly stressed; parents/guardians involved in criminal activity; presence of non-biological, transient caregivers in home.

**Potential indicators of victimization** include (not limited to): Slower-than-normal development, failure to thrive, unusual interaction with parent, signs of mental health disorders [e.g., depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm], sudden difficulty in school, medical or physical neglect, sudden changes in behavior, new or unusual fears/anxiety, unexplained injuries (e.g., bruises, fractures, burns – especially in protected areas of child’s body), injuries in pre-mobile infants, sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

**For additional information**, see *Child Welfare Information Gateway*: [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

### Abuse/Neglect of Vulnerable Adults (e.g., elder and dependent adults)

**Risk factors** include (not limited to): Concerns of mental health or substance use disorder with caregiver, caregiver exhibits hostile behavior, lack of preparation/training for caregiver, caregiver assumed responsibilities at early age, caregiver exposed to abuse as child.

**Potential indicators of victimization** include (not limited to): Disappearing from contact; signs of bruising or welts on the skin, burns, cuts, lacerations, puncture wounds, sprains, fractures, dislocations, internal injuries or vomiting; wearing torn, stained, bloody clothing; appearing disheveled, in soiled clothing; appearing hungry, malnourished.

**For additional information**, see *National Association of Adult Protective Services (NAPSA)*: [napsa-now.org](http://napsa-now.org); *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*: [cdc.gov/violenceprevention/elderabuse/index.html](http://cdc.gov/violenceprevention/elderabuse/index.html)

### Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Anyone in a relationship can be a victim of DV/IPV, regardless of age, race, gender, or sexual orientation.

**Risk factors** include (not limited to): Low self-esteem, low income, low academic achievement, young age, aggressive/delinquent behavior as youth, heavy alcohol/drug use, depression, anger, and isolation.

**Potential indicators of victimization** include (not limited to): Injuries that result from abuse or assault, e.g., signs of strangulation, bruises, burns, broken bones; psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances; sexual and reproductive health issues, e.g., STIs, unintended pregnancy.

**For additional information**, see *National DV Hotline*: [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org); *CDC*: [cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/index.html](http://cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/index.html)

### Sexual Violence

Anyone can become a victim of sexual violence. Some stats from Rape Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN): More than 300,000 persons are victimized annually; ages 12-34 are the highest risk years. Female college students (ages 18-24) are three times more likely than women in general to experience sexual violence. One in 33 American men have experienced an attempted or completed rape. And, 21% of transgender, genderqueer, nonconforming (TGQN) college students have been sexually assaulted.

**Potential indicators of victimization** include (not limited to): STIs, pregnancy, depression, PTSD.

**For additional information**, see *RAINN*: [rainn.org](http://rainn.org); *CDC*: [cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/index.html](http://cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/index.html)

### Human Trafficking (e.g., labor and sex trafficking)

Although anyone can be a victim of human trafficking, traffickers often target persons in situations of vulnerability. **Risk factors** include (not limited to): Running away or homelessness (particularly for youth), history of interpersonal abuse or violence, involvement in commercial sex industry, minority/immigrant status.

**Potential indicators of victimization** include (not limited to): Accompanied by controlling companion; inconsistent history; medical or physical neglect; and submissive, fearful, hypervigilant, or uncooperative behavior.

**For additional information**, see *National HT Hotline*: [humantraffickinghotline.org](http://humantraffickinghotline.org)

As defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a **trauma-informed approach** “includes an understanding of trauma and an awareness of the impact it can have across settings, services, and populations.” This includes understanding how trauma can impact patients, families, communities, and the professionals attempting to assist them.

The PEARR Tool reflects principles of a trauma-informed and **victim-centered approach**. As described by the US Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), a victim-centered approach is one in which a person’s wishes, safety, and well-being are prioritized in all matters and procedures. This includes seeking and maximizing patient input in all decisions.

**To learn more**, please see *SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*: [store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4884/SMA14-4884.pdf](http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4884/SMA14-4884.pdf); See also *OVC’s Victim-Centered Approach*: [ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/1-understanding-human-trafficking/13-victim-centered-approach/](http://ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/1-understanding-human-trafficking/13-victim-centered-approach/)



**Local, Regional, and State Resources/Agencies**

County Child Welfare Agency:

County Welfare Agency for Vulnerable Adults:

Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) Center  
or Child Advocacy Center (CAC):

Local Law Enforcement Agency:

Local FBI Office:

Local DV/IPV Shelter – Program:

Local Runaway/Homeless Shelter:

Local Immigrant/Refugee Organization:

Local LGBTQ Resource/Program:

**National Agencies, Advocates, Service Providers**

National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888 (888-3737-888)

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline: 1-866-331-9474

National Runaway Safeline for Runaway and Homeless Youth: 1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)

StrongHearts Native Helpline: 1-844-7NATIVE (762-8483)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

**Notes**

