



## **STRENGTH IN COLLABORATION:**

### **A Protocol for the Dufferin/Caledon Domestic Assault Review Team**

*“Strength in Collaboration”*

*Committed to the safety of abused women and their children  
in the communities of Dufferin/Caledon*

#### ***Guiding Principles and Beliefs***

The Dufferin/Caledon DART Committee was established with the commitment to eliminate woman abuse. As agency representatives, we believe in the following principles:

#### **Freedom from Violence**

It is a basic human right for all individuals to live free of violence, harm or threat.

#### **Woman Abuse as a Social Issue**

Woman abuse is a pervasive, worldwide social issue. It can be found among all ages, social classes, religions, racial groups, cultural heritage and sexual orientations. In Canada, as elsewhere, it is rooted in the social assumptions and inequities of male dominance, power and control.

While violent and abusive acts can be perpetrated by either gender in heterosexual or same sex relationships, men are responsible for the majority of these acts and cause more damaging physical effects.

#### **Woman Abuse as a Crime**

Violence against women, including sexual assault and other abusive behaviour, is a crime with serious negative consequences for woman and child victims and the communities in which they live. Violent and abusive behaviour is never justified and the perpetrator, more frequently but not exclusively male, must be held accountable. Due to safety concerns, criminal justice and community services must be initiated in an expedient, coordinated and responsive manner.

#### **Woman Abuse as a Threat to Children**

As children are particularly vulnerable when exposed to woman abuse, their need for protection is critical. In accordance with the Child and Family Services Act, all individuals and, in particular, professionals who suspect that a child is or has been exposed to domestic violence must report it to the appropriate Children’s Aid Society.

**Respect and Sensitivity**

Individuals cope differently with the experience of violence and abuse. Service recipients have the right to respectful treatment. At times appearance, behaviour, values or associated issues such as substance abuse or mental health may appear to detract from an individual's credibility. It is important to view such behaviour as a coping strategy, a way to survive, and approach discussions with sensitivity and understanding. In this way, blame, recrimination and re-victimization can be avoided.

**The Right to Self-Determination**

Counselling and support services are driven by the needs and preferences of women who have been victimized and are looking for ways to deal with their situation. To ensure that a woman is appropriately informed, DART agencies that provide support services assist her in understanding the advantages/disadvantages of a range of options and then support her right to choose her own course of action. If a woman is choosing an option that may put her children at risk, she is reminded of potential consequences, including the obligation of professionals to report and Children's Aid Societies to investigate suspicions of children at risk of harm.

**Inclusiveness**

Woman abuse occurs among all ages, social classes, education levels, religions, and racial or cultural groups. The DART community response system is committed to encouraging diversity and providing equitable access to service regardless of gender, age, class, ability, religion, language, culture, race or sexual orientation. To maximize access, aids such as interpreter services and special equipment are provided as needed.

**Prevention of Violence Against Women**

Ending violence against women is both an individual and community responsibility. While the criminalization of abuse and its coordinated response systems are essential, a preventive approach including education, advocacy and social action is necessary to address the issue at a systemic level.

**Accountability**

Service recipients have the right to service that is accessible, respectful and appropriate to their needs. If an individual is not satisfied with any aspect of service, s/he has the right to raise concerns or make complaints to the service provider. It is the responsibility of each agency to advise service recipients of the complaints process and to respond promptly, when issues do arise, according to its own policies and procedures.

**Confidentiality**

DART agencies have different policies and procedures in regard to confidentiality as a result of their individual mandates. It is the responsibility of each agency to advise service recipients of the limits of confidentiality. While case discussions assist DART agencies in improving service flow and coordination, participation may vary as each agency abides by its own policy.

**Strength in Collaboration**

DART agencies are committed to a collaborative process to increase the safety of abused women and their children.