



# A Domestic Violence Tool for Healthcare Providers

## Domestic Violence

Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence (DV/IPV) is the most common cause of injury to women in the US. Universal screening is necessary for all clients because no one group is without risk. Domestic violence episodes may increase during pregnancy and it is especially important for health care providers to assess for risk factors. Health care providers are in a unique position to help save lives by assessing for DV, providing referrals, assisting in creating a safety plan, and educating about resources. Asking your patients about domestic violence will get easier for you the more you do it. For the patient who is pregnant and has a diagnosis of diabetes, resources and access to care are available.

Health care providers should look for:

- ❖ Injuries to head and neck
- ❖ Multiple or repeated injuries or bruising at different stages of healing
- ❖ Vague complaints about headaches or stomach pains
- ❖ Injuries to breast, abdomen, or genitals
- ❖ Miscarriage or any injury during pregnancy

Some behavioral signs and symptoms you should look for include:

- ❖ Missed appointments
- ❖ Seeking care from different providers
- ❖ Reasons given for an injury are inconsistent with the nature of the injury
- ❖ Intimate partner refuses to allow the patient to be seen alone during the examination

Let “SAFE” be your guide. Ask your patients the following questions:

- ❖ **Safe**  
What stress do you feel in your intimate relationship?  
Should I be concerned about you and your children's safety?
  
- ❖ **Afraid**  
Are there times in your relationship when you are afraid?  
What happens when you and your partner disagree?  
Has your partner ever threatened or hurt you or your children?

❖ **Friends/Family**

Have your friends or family ever told you they are worried about you or your children's safety?

Do any of your family or friends know that you've been hurt?

Would you be able to tell them?

What would they think about it?

Would they help you?

❖ **Emergency**

Are you in danger now?

In an emergency, do you and your children have a safe place to go? (A safety plan can be created. Help your patient write names and phone numbers on an emergency preparedness card. See SAFETY AT A GLANCE FOR WOMEN WITH DIABETES for more information)

When physical abuse has occurred, immediately escort the patient to the Emergency Department. A physical assessment of pregnancy status should include:

- ❖ Fetal Heart Rate (FHR)
- ❖ Non-Stress Test (NST)
- ❖ Amniotic Fluid Index (AFI)
- ❖ Biophysical Profile (BPP)
- ❖ Obstetrical ultrasound
- ❖ Uterine contractions
- ❖ Vaginal bleeding
- ❖ Leakage of amniotic fluid
- ❖ And other signs of progressing labor/imminent delivery

If you need more information:

- ❖ [www.safehorizon.org](http://www.safehorizon.org)
- ❖ [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)
- ❖ [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/domesticviolence.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/domesticviolence.html)
- ❖ Domestic Violence Helpline - 800-978-3600