

**Vermont**  
**Statewide Standards**  
**for**  
**Domestic Violence Accountability Programming**  
January 2015



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In 1996, the Vermont Department of Corrections issued the “Statewide Standards for Domestic Abuse Intervention”. These standards were developed by a core committee of Corrections staff, domestic violence victim advocates and batterer intervention providers. They were the first effort in Vermont to create a consistent set of expectations for programs that provided services to men who batter and reflected a national trend in this regard. The work of the core committee drew from efforts to develop standards in many other states and from the experience of providing batterer intervention services in Vermont.

In 2001, the Vermont Coalition of Batterer Intervention Services initiated a process of updating the 1996 Standards. The process was a collaboration involving staff of the Department of Corrections, the Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (now known as the Department of Children and Families), batterer intervention providers and members of the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence. This effort resulted in revised Standards adopted in 2005. These revised Standards included for the first time a requirement for programs to be certified for their compliance.

In 2008, the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence was established in statute. Amongst other duties, the Council was tasked with developing and maintaining Standards for programs that work with domestic violence offenders. In 2009, the Council initiated process of revising the Statewide Standards. Once again, stakeholders throughout the state participated in the review process. This document is the result of this process.

The body of experience and knowledge about batterer intervention services continues to grow. This document intends to reflect the history of the battered women’s movement and the early development of batterer intervention services as well as the most current research about how to hold domestic violence offenders accountable and services that are most effective and appropriate for them.

Many people contributed to the creation of this document. Their time, commitment and effort are greatly appreciated. Those organizations and agencies that made significant contributions to this effort include:

- The Vermont Council on Domestic Violence
- The Vermont Coalition of Domestic Violence Accountability Programs
- The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

**VERMONT STATEWIDE STANDARDS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMMING**  
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**SUMMARY OF  
VERMONT STATEWIDE STANDARDS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACCOUNTABILITY  
PROGRAMMING**

**Standards for Program Format and Design**

**Standard #1**

Enrollment is open-ended allowing new participants to begin at any point.

**Standard #2**

Programming provided is gender and relationship specific.

**Standard #3**

The community-based program is designed to accommodate participants with or without a criminal conviction and/or court mandate.

**Standard #4**

Each group meets for at least 1½ hours.

**Standard #5**

A community-based program requires a minimum of 26 weekly group sessions for a participant to complete.

**Standard #6**

Groups are led by two facilitators.

**Standard #7**

Group enrollment does not exceed 10 participants for community-based programs except in limited circumstances during which enrollment may exceed these levels by no more than 25 percent. Groups are not held with enrollment of fewer than three participants more than 3 times a year.

**Standard #8**

The program engages in appropriate screening and documentation prior to granting any request for accommodations or alternative programming.

**Standard #9**

If a provider accepts third party payments from health insurance companies, the program takes appropriate steps to ensure doing so does not conflict with the program's message about participant responsibility for their coercive behavior or interfere with the program's adherence to the Standards.

**Standards for Program Content**

**Standard #10**

The program uses a modality consistent with the philosophy outlined in these standards.

**Standard #11**

The program uses a curriculum approved by the Vermont Council.

**Standards for Program Referral, Screening, Intake and Orientation**

**Standard #12**

Once a referral has been received, the program schedules an intake interview within two weeks of the date of referral.

**Standard #13**

The program documents the date a referral is received.

**Standard #14**

An intake interview is rescheduled if a referral packet is not made available by the referring agency.

**Standard #15**

Candidates sign a confidentiality agreement at or before the intake process allowing information disclosed during the intake process to be shared with the referring agency, victim advocates, and partner/ex-partner(s).

**Standard #16**

The intake/orientation process includes an eligibility screening, collection of relevant personal information, a discussion of any barriers a participant may face in completing the program as required and a thorough review of the program content and expectations.

**Standard #17**

To be eligible, candidate signs a program contract outlining the expectations of program participation, which includes a commitment to abide by the contract. The participant's signature is witnessed by a program staff member.

**Standard #18**

Candidates with pending charges for domestic violence-related crimes are considered ineligible.

**Standard #19**

Candidates acknowledge a history of abuse against their partner(s) to be eligible.

**Standard #20**

If referred from the Department of Corrections, evidence based risk assessment scores, such as ORAS and DVSI-R, will be shared prior to intake.

**Standard #21**

Program staff should seek to be members of any team involved with the referred candidate.

**Standard # 22**

Program intake procedures include an exploration of candidates' histories of substance use/abuse and substance abuse screenings and/or treatment.

**Standard # 23**

During the intake/orientation process, a participant acknowledges, in writing, the program start date as well as the time and location of group. Documentation of this acknowledgement is provided to the referring agency, if any.

**Standard #24**

The program provides all participants with information about the program's weather and holiday cancellation policy.

**Standard #25**

The program provides all participants with clear information about the program's grievance procedure.

**Standard # 26**

If accepted, a participant attends his first group with 14 days of signing a program contract except under approved circumstances.

**Standard # 27**

If a waiting list is used, no individual participant is on a waiting list for more than 30 days and the program does not maintain a waiting list for more than 90 consecutive days.

**Standard # 28**

Upon completion of an intake, the program provides written notification of the program's determination of the candidate's eligibility to the referring agency within 14 days. If a candidate is found ineligible, this notification includes an explanation of the specific reasons for this determination.

**Standards for Program Contracts**

**Standard # 29**

The program uses the Domestic Violence Accountability Program Contract.

**Standards for Program Attendance**

**Standard # 30**

A participant is considered to have missed a group if s/he fails to arrive on time for a group meeting, fails to arrive with a completed homework assignment, or fails to participate appropriately.

**Standard # 31**

A participant in a community-based program is allowed no more than three absences within a period of 26 group meetings.

**Standard # 32**

A participant can be on leave without dismissal for up to 30 days in the case of a medical situation, civic obligation or long term substance abuse treatment that is prolonged, prevents a participant from being able to attend, and is verified and approved by the program and the referring agency. Beyond 30 days, the participant is dismissed.

**Standard # 33**

Participants believed to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are asked to leave group and are considered absent.

**Standards for Program Information to Partners**

**Standard # 34**

The program acknowledges in all of their services and professional endeavors that improving the safety of domestic violence victims and children is the foremost goal of domestic violence accountability programming.

**Standard # 35**

Under no circumstance does the program share information gathered from a partner during the process of partner contact with a participant or use the information to challenge a participant in group.

**Standard # 36**

The program has a written partner contact protocol outlining its process of providing information in a timely manner to partners that has been reviewed and approved by the local Network program.

**Standard # 37**

The partner contact protocol has procedures for informing partners of participant behavior that might constitute a risk to her safety or the safety of her children.

**Standard #38**

Within 14 days of a participant signing a program contract, a program sends the partner comprehensive information about the program, batterer intervention services and resources available to her.

**Standard #39**

The program informs partners/ex-partners of their ability to choose not to receive additional contact from the program after information is sent following participant enrollment.

**Standard # 40**

A participant's partner/ex-partner is notified in writing of a participant's dismissal or completion within 14 days. In the case of a dismissal, this notification includes the reason for the dismissal and how the partner/ex-partner can receive additional information regarding possible pending legal action resulting from his dismissal.

**Standard #41**

The program is clear, in its policy and in information provided to partners/ex-partners that substance use or abuse is not the cause of domestic violence and that sobriety and/or recovery alone will not guarantee safety.

**Standards for Dismissal and Completion**

**Standard # 42**

To complete, a participant meets all requirements for program completion as identified in the program contract

**Standard # 43**

If completion is based on demonstration of specific competencies, the program defines a clear process of when and how participants' demonstration of these competencies will be assessed and documents a participant's success or failure at demonstrating program competencies.

**Standard #44**

The program provides written documentation of a participant's dismissal or completion within one week to the referring agency and, if requested, to the local Network program. Documentation of program dismissal will include an explanation of the reason(s) for dismissal.

**Standards for Documentation**

**Standard #45**

A participant's signed contract and any confidentiality agreement is maintained in a participant's file and provided to the referring agency upon request.

**Standard #46**

A participant's dismissal notice, including specific reasons for the participant's dismissal, is kept in the participant's file and shared with the referring agency.

**Standard #47**

A participant's completion letter, including the participants start date, number of sessions attended, status of participant's financial obligation to the program, and completion date, is maintained in the participant's file and shared with the referring agency.

**Standard #48**

Attendance and payment records for each individual participant are maintained and shared with the referring agent as needed.

**Standard #49**

Information gathered from a participant's partner/ex-partner is kept in a separate file and remains confidential from the participant.

**Standard #50**

Participant files are maintained for a period of at least seven years.

**Standards for Staff Qualifications and Training**

**Standard # 51**

Paid staff and volunteers of programs are required abide by the Vermont Statewide Standards for Domestic Violence Accountability Programming.

**Standard # 52**

Paid and unpaid staff are expected to be free of documented violence in their own lives. Any staff with a history of perpetrating domestic violence will be violence-free in his or her own life for a period of at least three years and have completed a recognized intervention program. Any staff with a new or active civil or criminal case, must notify the Domestic Violence Accountability Coordinator within one week.

**Standard #53**

Paid and unpaid staff communicate and act in ways that are free of victim blaming, sexism, or misogyny and remain open to self-examination and receptive to feedback on issues of power and control, sexism, and collusion in their work and their own lives.

**Standard #54**

New staff members are provided with an orientation to the program's guidelines, rules, and expectations.

**Standard # 55**

New staff members attend and complete a training approved by the Batterer Accountability Committee of the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence within three months of their employment.

**Standard # 56**

New staff members observe at least two groups at a certified batterer intervention program within one month of their employment, 2 more within the next 2 months and a total of six within 6 months of their employment.

**Standard # 57**

New staff members (facilitators for 2 years or less) attend and document at least ten hours per year of professional development approved by the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee. Staff with more than two years of facilitation experience must attend and document 6 hours of annual professional development approved by the DVAC.

**Standard # 58**

Facilitators are observed at least twice per year by a person with appropriate training and experience in batterer intervention services. Observers will fill out the Observation Form and send to the DVAC.

**Standard #59**

Program staff are expected to serve as mandatory reporters of abuse of children and vulnerable adults.

**Standard #60**

If asked to comment in child custody decisions by relevant agencies, the program provides factual information about a man's participation and challenges any inaccurate assumptions about program participation or completion being an indication or predictor of a man's safety as a parent.

**Standards for Program Collaboration**

**Standard #61**

The program is an active member of the local task forces or DOC and DCF led team meetings in each community where they provide services and assigns at least one representative to regularly attend task force meetings.

**Standard #62**

The program participates regularly in the Vermont Coalition of Domestic Violence Accountability Programs.

**Standard # 63**

The program maintains a cooperative working relationship with local Network programs.

**Standard #64**

The program provides a comprehensive orientation for community observers and appropriate confidentiality for participants and partners/ex-partners.

**Standard for Program Policies**

**Standard # 65**

The program adopts and verifies in writing its compliance with the Domestic Violence Accountability Program Policies.

**Standard for Program Evaluation**

**Standard #66**

Programs will seek approval from the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee prior to any evaluation.

**Standard #67**

Programs will submit regular reports to the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee on performance measures approved by the DVAC

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Statewide Standards for Domestic Violence Accountability Programs (hereafter referred to as Standards) is to enhance the safety and security of domestic violence victims by providing guidelines for effective, consistent and quality programs and related services for domestic violence offenders. The Standards will also guide domestic violence accountability programs in the coordination of their services with those involved in local and statewide responses to end domestic violence.

These standards are intended to address gender appropriate programs for men or women who use violence against their intimate partner and perpetrators of intimate partner violence in same sex relationships. The standards are not intended for other forms of family violence such as child or elder abuse. While some of the intervention tools and processes outlined in this document may be useful and applicable to other clients manifesting violent behavior, it is believed that other programs created for these groups would necessarily be distinctly different.

### **Why do we need domestic violence accountability programs?**

Domestic violence requires political, social and cultural solutions. Given the lethal nature of domestic violence as well as its impact on all within its range, each community should have a vested interest in eliminating and preventing domestic violence. Interventions for domestic violence must be based on a complete understanding of the most effective strategies for this specific problem and should be implemented by those well-educated and skilled in those methodologies. Group education programming is recognized as only one of the contributions to effective intervention with those who use domestic violence. Other effective intervention strategies include safety planning for the victims, prompt response by law enforcement, rigorous prosecution, appropriate adjudication, close monitoring by probation, and sentences which reflect the seriousness of this crime against the community. Since education is one approach being used for a problem that has such serious consequences to others, the providers of domestic violence accountability programming should meet the highest standards. These standards are necessary to recognize that domestic violence is a serious, potentially lethal problem and that programming for these violent individuals requires more than just a general knowledge of the treatment of behavioral or interpersonal problems.

However, education programs must never be used as an alternative to legal sanctions, but always as an adjunct to those sanctions. Research suggests a combination of legal sanctions and educational programs is a more effective means of reducing abusive behavior than either one alone.

Communities committed to ending domestic violence in a safe and ethical way should prioritize their efforts to ensure:

- shelter, advocacy and support services for battered women and children,
- improvement and coordination of the criminal justice response to domestic violence at all levels of the criminal justice system. The criminal justice response should include a strong pro-arrest response by law enforcement, a clear understanding of the concept of dominant aggressor, rigorous prosecution, appropriate adjudication, close monitoring by probation, and sentences that reflect the seriousness of the crime,
- professional training of health, social services providers and legal services providers, and
- widespread community education.

Domestic violence accountability programs shall not provide services to domestic violence offenders if advocacy, safe housing and support services are not available for their partners in the local community. Additionally, domestic violence accountability programs shall not provide services to domestic violence offenders without appropriate screening for eligibility. When the aforementioned efforts are organized and monitored in a community, it then becomes appropriate to provide domestic accountability programs.

Once developed in a community, domestic violence accountability programs will:

- Hold offenders accountable and support victim safety,
- Support offenders in engaging in a process of change and provide them with the skills and information they need in order to stop their abusive behavior,
- Provide the courts, DCF and other criminal justice stakeholders with a service appropriate for domestic violence offenders screened as eligible. At the time of the writing of these Standards, possible sentences for committing crimes relating to domestic violence in Vermont include the following: probation or split sentences with mandatory domestic violence accountability programming; incarceration with long term violent offender programming; and incarceration until near maximum sentence for offenders who do not complete required programs. Additionally, family or juvenile court may refer domestic violence offenders as allowed by statute.
- Be a catalyst for social change through participation in community collaborations aimed at reducing the incidence of domestic violence and the creation of effective community responses to end domestic violence, and
- Regularly solicit feedback from battered women and advocates from the Network and its member programs.

### **Why do we need standards for domestic violence accountability programs?**

**The growing body of evidence on what works in reducing recidivism with criminals indicates that program implementation should be viewed as an on-going process by which programs are evaluated based on their continued practice and fidelity to the program model. Standards allow a framework by which domestic violence accountability programs in Vermont can maintain fidelity to the program goals and more readily evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing offender accountability and victim safety.**

Standards will help to ensure:

- 1) The safety of domestic violence victims and their children and of program staff is a priority.**
- 2) Appropriate modalities for intervention are used by the programs.**
- 3) Provision of services by those well-educated and skilled in appropriate program methodologies.**
- 4) All programs for batterer intervention operate as integral components of a broad societal response.**
- 5) All community members of a coordinated community response to end domestic abuse will have consistent criteria to evaluate the quality of their community domestic violence accountability programs.**

### **To whom do these standards apply?**

These Standards apply to all domestic violence accountability programs seeking to receive referrals from the court, AHS, or any other criminal justice agency in the State of Vermont. This includes programs provided in the community by independent agencies. However, the Council maintains the statutory authority to adapt these Standards to include certification of any future domestic violence accountability programs provided by any AHS agency, including DCF or DOC, or any other criminal justice institution seeking referrals from the court.

### **How do the Standards work?**

Expectations for programs are defined in Chapters three through fourteen of this document. Each Standard is highlighted and is intended to define what is expected of programs. In addition most Standards also include a rationale intended to help explain the reason for the Standard. Some Standards also include a statement about implementation. This is intended to provide guidance to programs about strategies for

compliance or to community taskforces about how to evaluate whether a program is in compliance with the Standards.

## DEFINITIONS

### Domestic Violence Offender

A domestic violence offender is a person who uses a pattern of coercive control against a partner that may be primarily psychological, economic, or sexual, but that is reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, credible physical threat, or sexual assault.

### Domestic Violence Accountability Program or “Program”

A domestic violence accountability program is specifically designed to provide education about domestic violence to domestic violence offenders and to motivate them to end their abuse and engage in a process of behavior change. When not specified otherwise, the term “program” is used throughout this document to refer to domestic violence accountability programs.

Community-based program: The term community-based program is used in the Standards to describe the independent providers of domestic violence accountability programs. These programs are distinguished from any institutionally provided program that may emerge after these Standards are adopted.

### Domestic Violence:

Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors that may include actual or threatened physical injury and sexual assault, psychological abuse, economic coercion and various other sexual and psychological tactics. These behaviors are perpetrated by someone who is, was, or wishes to be involved in an intimate or dating relationship with an adult or adolescent, are aimed at establishing control by one partner over the other and result in an atmosphere of fear and/or terror for the victim. (VT Agency of Human Services Policy on Domestic Violence 2007)

It is important to recognize the distinction between domestic violence, as understood in these Standards, and the legal definition of domestic assault. The latter is a legal term used to define specific behaviors for which a household member (as defined in 15 VSA § 21 sub chapter 1101) can be arrested and prosecuted. While many behaviors involved in domestic violence are against the law, many are not considered illegal as such.

### Network Program

Network program refers to any of the independent advocacy programs that are members of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. Network member programs are independent entities. All adhere to basic standards of service as a prerequisite to their membership in the Network, and out of a deep, shared commitment to victims and survivors. Network programs may provide some but not all of the following services: 24 hour hotline, safe homes or shelters, legal support, children's services, support groups and community outreach.

### The Vermont Council on Domestic Violence

The Vermont Council on Domestic Violence is a multidisciplinary council which provides leadership for Vermont's statewide efforts to eradicate domestic violence. The Council provides statewide leadership on issues related to domestic violence and offers support to local domestic violence task forces.

### Participant

The term “participant” is used throughout this document to refer to a man who is enrolled in a program. Prior to enrollment, those referred for programming are referred to as “candidates.”

### Partner

The term “partner” is used throughout this document to refer to an intimate partner of a participant in a batterer intervention program. In most cases, partner refers to a woman who is the victim or survivor of abuse perpetrated by a program participant. In some cases, partner may refer to a new intimate partner who may or may not have been the target of the participant's abuse for which the participant was arrested.

### Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (VNADSV)

The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is a statewide coalition of Vermont's 16 domestic and sexual violence programs with a statewide office in Montpelier. The member programs provide comprehensive domestic and sexual violence services to each county in Vermont. The VNADSV will be referred to throughout this document as “the Network”.

### Victim/Survivor

“Victim” and “survivor” are terms used to refer to the person against whom domestic violence offender directs abuse or battering.

Victim Advocates Domestic violence victim advocates provide services and support to victim/survivors of domestic violence that will enhance the safety, liberty and security of themselves and their children. Victim advocates can include both staff of member programs of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and state-based victim advocates who work on behalf of victims from within state agencies. State-based advocates are exempt from the crisis worker privilege statute that allows Network program advocates to maintain complete confidentiality in most instances.

## CHAPTER TWO: PHILOSOPHY OF STANDARDS

Based on the definition of domestic violence, the Vermont Standards acknowledge that:

- **Domestic violence is a violation of human rights.** It is so because it jeopardizes the safety, liberty and security of its victims. Many states, including Vermont, have passed laws making specific behaviors common to domestic violence illegal. While not all behavior is illegal, any act of domestic violence can be viewed as a violation of human rights.
- **The safety of victim/survivors and children is paramount.** The safety and rights of the victim/survivor must be respected at all times. Their right to live free of violence supersedes other considerations. Their needs, as well as the potential for further harm should always be of utmost consideration when making policy decisions regarding the structure, design and content of intervention programs.
- **Domestic violence cuts across all lines of race, ethnicity, education, social class, sexual orientation, age, religion, geography, and physical or mental ability.**
- **Men's use of domestic violence is a form of gender-based violence.** It is rooted in the institutionalized imbalance of power (patriarchy) between men and women and is reflective of a belief system (sexism) that is based on the widespread assumptions that men are entitled to impose their will on their partners and women are objects for possession. Historically, cultures have endorsed men's use of violence to maintain dominance in relationships with their partners.
- **Domestic violence offenders use multiple tactics to achieve and maintain power over their partners.** Domestic violence is purposeful, intentional behavior that is an effective method to gain power and control over intimate partners.
- **Domestic violence offenders choose their tactics of abuse, and are solely responsible for their actions.** Domestic violence does not result from individual personal or moral deficits, diseases, diminished intellect, addiction, mental illness or other external persons or events. Domestic violence is also not a result of provocation or loss of control. Domestic violence offenders carefully select the targets of their abuse: their partner. They choose the circumstances of their violence, including the amount of injury inflicted by their assault, the location of those injuries, the use of weapons, the presence or absence of witnesses, and the level of terror accompanying the assault.
- **Domestic violence is a widespread social problem that has dire consequences for individuals, families and communities.** Domestic violence may result in death or other serious physical or emotional injury.
- **Because domestic violence offenders choose violence, they can also choose to stop violence and eliminate coercive and controlling tactics in their relationships.** The decision to forsake violence and to participate in intimate relationships in a safe, respectful and equitable manner rests exclusively with domestic violence offenders. Domestic violence accountability programs are charged with educating participants to consider the options for ceasing abusive behavior and embracing belief systems respectful of women's safety, security and liberties.
- **Coordinated community responses are vital to the long-term solution to ending domestic violence.** Domestic violence accountability programs cannot guarantee the safety, liberty, and security of victims/survivors and children alone. As a piece of the larger community response, intervention programs need to coordinate efforts with the criminal justice system, other domestic violence accountability programs, Network programs, family court, schools, religious

organizations, media, substance abuse treatment, private and public mental health agencies, and more.

- **Domestic violence accountability programs are not to be used as a substitute or a way to circumvent arrest, incarceration, or other legal sanctions; nor should they be used as a mitigated legal consequence.**

### **Program Objectives**

Intervention programs shall be designed to support domestic violence offenders in a process of change with the goal of eliminating abusive and violent behavior, focusing on individual accountability and concrete ways in which to engage in healthy relationships, free of violence. Therefore, the intervention model must focus on strategies that will best serve to motivate participants to do what is necessary to engage in safe behavior within intimate partnership and family relationships. The model is education, not therapy.

The program and curriculum utilized in the programs shall work to:

1. Increase the participant's identification of his behaviors that are used as a means of controlling his partner's and children's actions, thoughts, and/or feelings. All forms of abuse shall be identified and challenged, including physical, verbal, and emotional abuse, intimidating behavior, threats, terrorizing tactics, isolating tactics, using male privilege, using the children, and sexual abuse.
2. Support participants in identifying cultural, social and familial influences related to the identified controlling and coercive behavior and those that can support safe and respectful relationships. This includes an exploration of the social contexts in which this violence is used, without allowing these issues to excuse or justify an individual's abusive actions.
3. Challenge participants' excuses for abuse and support participants in accepting responsibility for their behavior. This shall include a philosophical position emphasizing that domestic violence offenders are solely responsible for their choices to abuse and can make other choices and that abuse is never justified, and. This challenge must occur in a respectful manner that is supportive of self-change.
4. Examine the harmful, damaging and potentially lethal consequences of abuse on battered women, children and the batterer's relationship with them. The short- and long-term effects of abuse and violence shall be enumerated, and participants shall be expected to take responsibility for creating these consequences. Programs will also work to increase the participant's understanding of the effects of domestic abuse on children.
5. Motivate participants to engage in a process of changing their pattern of coercive control and to make a commitment to supporting the safety and well-being of their partners and children. This includes helping participants to identify personal goals for engaging in a process of change. This may include their desire to be responsible fathers, respected within their community and respectful partners.
6. Provide the participant with strategies and skills to intervene in controlling and abusive behavior and to promote respectful intimate partner relationships.
7. Provide the participant with structured activities to practice and demonstrate the acquisition of strategies and skills to intervene and refrain from controlling and abusive behavior.
8. Domestic abuse intervention programs do not guarantee that men will cease their violence. Nor are interventions intended to salvage relationships. (Austin and Dankwort, 1999)

## **CHAPTER THREE: STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM FORMAT AND DESIGN**

### **Standard #1**

#### **Where possible enrollment is open-ended allowing new participants to begin at any point.**

Rationale: A format provides a social environment of peers for participants to be accountable for their behavior and to explore motivations for change. This format also provides an opportunity for participants to challenge each other based upon their shared experience and the knowledge and skills they have acquired in group.

### **Standard #2**

#### **Programming provided is gender and relationship specific.**

Rationale: Groups will be separated due to the population of offender they serve. Programs can be certified who work with adult men who batter their female intimate partners, for women, perpetrators of violence in same sex relationships, or for intervention in other forms of family violence such as child or elder abuse.

Implementation: Not every community will have the capacity to provide programming to all domestic violence offenders. It is NOT the intention of the Standards to mandate the availability of such programming in every community.

### **Standard #3**

#### **The community-based program is designed to accommodate participants with or without a criminal conviction and/or court mandate.**

Rationale: Program participants may or may not have been convicted of a crime against their partner. While some will have had no criminal convictions, others may have been convicted of behaviors towards others or property which is related to the history of the abuse against their partner. Examples include charges for assault on a person engaged in or believed to be engaged in a relationship with a program participant's former partner or assaults on someone who is attempting to intervene in a batterer's assault on a partner.

### **Standard #4**

#### **Each group meets for at least 1½ hours.**

Rationale: Group meetings should provide for sufficient time for participants to explore the challenging information discussed and to support the difficult process of change that programs hope to motivate. Fewer than one and half hours is not adequate time to address these goals.

### **Standard #5**

#### **A community-based program requires a minimum of 26 weekly group sessions for a participant to complete.**

Rationale: Due to the complex needs of domestic violence offenders, programs shorter than identified in this Standard makes it difficult for programs to cover appropriate material and to engage participants in a process intended to motivate behavior change.

### **Standard #6**

#### **Groups are led by two facilitators.**

Rationale: Co-facilitation is central to making group programming for participants with such a high degree of resistance effective. Co-facilitation enhances safety for facilitators, participants and partners. The challenge of facilitating batterer intervention groups stems from both the difficulty of facilitating group programming and working with a highly resistant population. Additionally, research indicates that in other change based programs (CBT, etc.), two facilitators are required. Two facilitators enable more comprehensive delivery of curriculum. The expectation that groups will be co-facilitated is therefore not a reflection or statement about the skill or training of any specific facilitator.

Implementation: It is recommended that co-facilitation teams consist of one male and one female. Despite the challenges that staffing groups with a man and a woman presents, experience has shown that same-sex facilitator teams (whether male-male or female-female) can significantly alter the dynamics of the group process and content.

Any ongoing group within a program may be facilitated by one facilitator no more than three times during a six month period and only in circumstances in which the other facilitator cannot be present due to unforeseen reasons such as an unexpected illness or in the instance in which there are fewer than 3 participants. Programs will maintain documentation of any groups not co-facilitated and provide this

documentation to their certification review team. Programs may adopt a policy of canceling any group for which two facilitators are not present.

Programs are encouraged to maintain substitute facilitators so that group cancellation can be kept to a minimum.

#### **Standard #7**

**Group enrollment does not exceed 10 participants for community-based programs except in limited circumstances during which enrollment may exceed these levels by no more than 25 percent. Groups are not held with enrollment of fewer than three participants more than 3 times a year.**

Rationale: The attention that each individual gets diminishes significantly when groups get too large.

Additionally, the dynamic of group accountability is undermined with fewer than 3 participants.

Implementation: Limited circumstances are defined by periods of no more than 30 days in which programs are referred more men than can be served in the number of groups within a community. When this occurs, the program must assess whether the increase in demand for services will be sustained. If the demand for services is found to be ongoing, strategies must be employed to reduce group enrollment to 10 participants for community-based programs. Groups are not held with enrollment of fewer than three participants more than 3 times a year.

#### **Standard #8**

**The program engages in appropriate screening and documentation prior to granting any request for accommodations or alternative programming.**

Rationale: Programs have a responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Programs may also receive requests periodically for alternative programming. These circumstances should be addressed responsibly in consultation with appropriate community resources.

Implementation: When a program receives a request for reasonable accommodations or to provide services in a manner other than group programming, the program will at a minimum:

- (1) Ask the candidate and/or referring agencies for an explanation of why the candidate is not able to participate in group programming.
- (2) Conduct an assessment of the need for alternative programming or consult with other professionals who can accurately assess the need for alternative programming.
- (3) Determine if the request for alternative programming is warranted.
- (4) Document the stated need for alternative programming, collateral contacts and the program's determination.
- (5) Ensure that any alternative programming will focus on the violence and other abuses perpetrated by the offender and follow all other standards regarding appropriate intervention modalities.
- (6) Develop a plan for ensuring that any alternative programming will include appropriate procedures for addressing partner safety and partner contact.

#### **Standard #9**

**If a provider accepts third party payments from health insurance companies, the program takes appropriate steps to ensure doing so does not conflict with the program's message about participant responsibility for their coercive behavior or interfere with the program's adherence to the Standards.**

Rationale: While it may be financially necessary for programs to charge insurance, it is important to understand that domestic violence is not a mental health issue at its core. Over the years, concerns have been raised about the practice of batterer intervention programs' billing of health insurance to cover the cost of participation in programming. There has been concern that billing for batterer intervention programming through insurance contradicts the endorsed philosophy and methodology, by implying that

domestic violence is a result of mental illness or other mental health issues, rather than an intentional choice. There have been additional concerns that billing insurance limits participants' investment in their programming and impacts the ability of a program to hold the offender accountable, as a participant's payment is associated with taking personal responsibility for need for the program and literal ownership of the solution.

There is also concern that the practice of billing insurance creates additional staff qualifications that limit the availability of community members to facilitate groups and can prioritize qualifications required for insurance reimbursement over other training and experience specific to domestic violence.

Programs that have billed insurance have argued that billing does not inherently contradict the modality outlined in these Standards and that staff are expected to abide by the Standards and receive appropriate training on domestic violence, regardless of their qualifications for health insurance reimbursement.

While consensus may not exist on the practice in general, it is clear that programs engaged in the practice of accepting payments from health insurance providers must avoid practices that contradict the modalities outlined in these Standards and avoid practices that would explicitly support participants' attempts to externalize responsibility for their behavior. They must also work to ensure the partners of program participants receive a clear message about participants' responsibility for their behavior.

Implementation: Appropriate steps to ensure that billing health insurance does not conflict with the program's message about participant responsibility for their coercive behavior or interfere with the program's adherence to the Standards include but are not limited to:

1. using only billing codes such as V- (Programming for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence) that make a participant's pattern of coercive behavior the primary focus of intervention and do not imply the presence of a mental illness.
2. ensuring that billing practices do not give out messages that a participant might construe as relieving his responsibility for his choices that lead to threatening or violent behavior,
3. hiring staff based on their ability to facilitate domestic violence accountability programming consistent with the philosophy and methods outlined in these Standards and not based solely on their ability to qualify for third-party reimbursement.

## CHAPTER FOUR: STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM CONTENT

### Standard #10

**The program uses a modality consistent with the philosophy outlined in these standards.**

Rationale: Partners have a reasonable expectation that programs will adhere to modalities that support behavioral change of batterers and therefore support the safety of partners.

Implementation: An appropriate modality is one that:

1. Holds that battering is intentional and coercive behavior that can be used to maintain power and control over a partner.
2. Maintains that domestic violence offenders are solely responsible for their abuse and challenges an attempt to shift responsibility onto victim/survivors, drug or alcohol use/abuse, mental health issues or any other justification.
3. Holds that the safety of adult and child victims is paramount to all other considerations.

Theories, methods of practice, or techniques which in any way holds the victim responsible for the batterer's violence are inappropriate and do not comply with these Standards. While some of the following methods may, in some cases, be helpful as collateral services to address other issues, they are inadequate and inappropriate for batterer intervention if they stand alone as the focus of intervention. These methods are:

1. Psychodynamic individual or group therapy, which center causality of the violence in the past.
2. Communication enhancement or anger management techniques, which lay primary causality on anger, including fair fighting techniques and getting in touch with emotions.
3. Systems theory approaches, which treat the violence as a mutually circular process, ascribing any degree of responsibility for either the perpetration or cessation of abuse to the victim.
4. Addiction counseling models, which identify the violence as an addiction and the victim and children as enabling or co-dependent in the violence.
5. Family therapy or counseling that places the responsibility for the batterer's behavior on the children and/or partner.
6. Approaches focusing on gradual containment and de-escalation of violence.
7. Theories or techniques which identify poor impulse control as the primary cause of violence.
8. Methods that identify psychopathology of either the batterer or victim as a primary cause of violence.
9. Couples counseling in any form, including couples conjoint counseling or marriage enhancement groups.

### Standard #11

**The program uses a curriculum approved by the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee.**

Rationale: Partners, community members and other stakeholders have a reasonable expectation that the content of a program's curriculum will be consistent with the philosophy and objectives of these Standards. Some batterer intervention programs have a history of using an eclectic mix of program materials that are not consistent with the modalities outlined in these Standards. At the same time, the field of batterer intervention is still developing and innovation must be encouraged. The challenge is to balance the creative efforts of programs with the expectation that stakeholders have a clear sense of what is being done in groups.

Partners also have a specific interest in clear information about program curriculum. Without clear information about program content, partners may find it difficult to recognize the attempts of domestic violence offenders to manipulate information presented in programs in self-serving and/or coercive manners.

Implementation: Programs may submit their curriculum for approval at any time to the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence Committee on Batterer Accountability. The Committee will review the curriculum to ensure that it is clear, consistent with the philosophy and objectives of the Standards, reflective of models supported by research and evidenced based practices, and consistent with an appropriate modality.

The DVAC reserves the right to review curricula at any time and to identify new curricula to be used by programs requesting certification.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM REFERRAL, SCREENING, INTAKE AND ORIENTATION**

### **Standard #12**

**Once a referral has been received, the program schedules an intake interview within two weeks of the date of referral.**

Rationale: It is recommended that those referred to programs from the court system be referred for service as quickly as possible. Partners of program participants have expressed that the period between conviction and the beginning of intervention services is a stressful time. Every effort should be made to keep this period to a minimum even though enrollment in the program does not guarantee safety for partners and their children.

Implementation: Community-based programs may schedule the interviews themselves or provide referring agencies with an intake schedule so that the referring agency may schedule the candidates.

### **Standard #13**

**The program documents the date a referral is received.**

Rationale: Programs will make every effort to ensure that eligible candidates begin services in a timely manner. The date of the referral must be documented in order to assess the timeliness of the referral and screening process.

### **Standard #14**

**An intake interview is rescheduled if a referral packet is not made available by the referring agency.**

Rationale: To be considered for participation in a batterer intervention program, potential participants or the agencies that refer them must provide to the program information about specific behavior for which participants are expected to be accountable. Without that information, intake interviewers cannot accurately determine a potential participant's accountability or eligibility for the program. Examples could include a State's Attorney Information sheet and affidavit, risk assessment scores, Relief from Abuse Order and affidavit, or a DCF case plan.

### **Standard#15**

**Candidates sign a confidentiality agreement at or before the intake process allowing information disclosed during the intake process to be shared with the referring agency, victim advocates, and partner/ex-partner(s). The confidentiality agreement includes the confidentiality of the identities of other participants and the participants' partners/ex-partners and children.**

Rationale: Information shared by the program candidate may be helpful for the referring agency or the partner/ex-partner. Appropriate confidentiality agreements are therefore important at the time of intake to allow information sharing to occur. The information shared would be based on the observations of the candidate by the intake worker and would be shared if the intake worker felt the information revealed by the candidate posed a potential risk to a partner or to children.

### **Standard #16**

**The intake/orientation process includes an eligibility screening, collection of relevant personal information, a discussion of any barriers a participant may face in completing the program as required and a thorough review of the program content and expectations.**

Rationale: The intake and orientation process serves three main purposes. These include:

1. Determination of the candidate's eligibility for the program.
2. Collection of relevant personal information and information about the candidate's history of abuse.
3. To provide the candidate information about the program content and expectations.

Implementation: Relevant personal information to be collected during an intake process includes:

1. Demographic information
2. A history of abusive behavior,
3. Information about partner/victim (including new partners) and children for the purpose of partner contact

4. A history of Relief from Abuse Orders, including any violations and the conditions of any current RFA(s)
5. History of involvement with the criminal justice system, including any violations of court conditions
6. Relevant probation and/or furlough information, including probation/furlough conditions and risk assessment score.

#### **Standard #17**

**To be eligible, a candidate signs a program contract outlining the expectations of program. The candidate's signature is witnessed by a program staff member.**

Rationale: Participants should not be allowed to participate in program services without agreeing to abide by the expectations of the program. To ensure accountability and transparency, it is essential that the participants' agreement to the terms of program services be documented with the participant's signature and witnessed by program staff.

#### **Standard #18**

**Candidates with pending charges for domestic violence-related crimes are considered ineligible.**

Rationale: Domestic violence accountability programs provide an opportunity for participants with histories of domestic violence to learn more about healthy relationships and engage in a process of changing their behavior. They are not intended as a diversion from the consequences of their behavior, including possible criminal conviction. Furthermore, participants with pending charges are frequently unable to talk openly about their histories of abuse.

#### **Standard #19**

**Candidates acknowledge a history of abuse against their partner(s) to be eligible**

Rationale: Participants in domestic violence accountability programs have a very specific legal obligation to be accountable for the acts of abuse for which they have been convicted. Programs have an obligation to the court system and partners to hold offenders accountable for those acts for which they have been convicted. The legal system and partners should expect that domestic violence accountability programs will not renegotiate what participants have been found responsible for in court.

Determining that a participant demonstrates an adequate level of accountability for the acts of abuse for which he has been convicted can be challenging. Domestic violence offenders may minimize their behavior and attempt to shift responsibility. Additionally, participants may not be ready to take responsibility for their abuse at the onset of the program. The program must make a determination of what the behaviors are and whether the participant has provided sufficient acknowledgement of them.

Implementation: It is recommended that programs use the State's Attorney's Information Sheet and/or any stipulated agreement, as well as any risk assessment information as the basis for determining the behaviors that a participant is accountable for. A person is not always convicted of every act in an affidavit. The State's Attorney's Information Sheet and/or any stipulated agreement provide a clearly understanding of exactly what behavior a person has been charged and convicted of.

For determination of eligibility, the focus of attention should be on whether the participant acknowledges committing the behavior even if he shifts blame or claims that the behavior was justified. Addressing the justifications and blaming are appropriate discussions during a participant's participation in the program. Over time, participants will presumably progress in the process of change from a point of the typical denial and minimization toward a place of full accountability for all acts of abuse that they have engaged in.

#### **Standard #20**

**If referred from the Department of Corrections, evidence based risk assessment scores, such as ORAS and DVSI-R, will be shared prior to intake.**

Rationale: Evidence-based best practice with criminal offenders shows that programming is most successful if linked directed to the risk and needs of the offender. Domestic violence offenders referred from the DOC may have been assessed for general criminogenic risk (ORAS) and domestic violence specific risk (DVSI-R) by their probation officer prior to referral to domestic violence accountability programming. The scores and the specific risk factors for candidates may prove useful for domestic

violence accountability program staff at intake to assess whether the program is appropriate for the candidate and to inform the themes discussed at intake and throughout the program.

Implementation: Where possible, program staff should meet with DOC staff to discuss the most efficient means by which risk information can be shared, taking into account any confidentiality and victim safety concerns.

#### **Standard #21**

**Program should seek to be members of any team, either Corrections or DCF based, involved with the referred candidate.**

Rationale: Local risk reduction or multi-disciplinary criminal justice teams help to facilitate consistent safety and accountability decisions. The collaborative review of these teams helps to ensure that decisions made are thorough and that the decisions reflect the best possible thinking about offender accountability and victim safety.

#### **Standard #22**

**Program intake procedures include an exploration of candidates' histories of substance use/abuse and substance abuse screenings and/or treatment.**

Implementation: When indicated, referrals to appropriate substance abuse assessment services should be made.

#### **Standard #23**

**During the intake/orientation process, a participant acknowledges, in writing, the program start date as well as the time and location of group. Documentation of this acknowledgement is provided to the referring agency, if any.**

Rationale: If found eligible for the program, a participant should not leave an intake without acknowledging, in writing, when and where he is expected to begin his first group. Doing so avoids any potential conflict about exactly when and where a participant is to attend group and makes it easier to address missed groups.

#### **Standard #24**

**The program provides all participants with information about the program's weather and holiday cancellation policy.**

Rationale: Providing participants with information about a program's weather and holiday cancellation policy helps to avoid conflicts about cancelled groups. Providing participants with information about how to find out if groups may be cancelled due to weather can also help decrease the safety risks to participants.

#### **Standard #25**

**The program provides all participants with clear information about the program's grievance procedure.**

Rationale: Batterer intervention programs provide a service to participants and their families. Like all service providers, batterer intervention programs have a responsibility to provide participants with information about their rights as participants and a process for contesting program decision if they feel that their rights have been violated or decisions have been made contrary to program policy.

While providing information about grievance procedures to participants may result in some participants using the process in manipulative ways, doing so will more frequently provide a method for resolving complaints/concerns in a respectful and appropriate manner.

Implementation: There are several ways that participants can be provided with information about the program's grievance procedure. Participants may be provided with a specific form or document outlining the grievance process or the information can be included in a program contract.

Programs should ensure that information about grievance procedures is provided in a manner that is accessible and clear.

#### **Standard #26**

**If accepted, a participant attends the first group with 14 days of signing a program contract except under approved circumstances.**

Rationale: Programs should make every effort to ensure that eligible candidates begin services in a timely manner. In some communities, it may be possible to accommodate additional participants in other available

groups or by starting additional groups. This can be more difficult in smaller communities where it is unclear if there is a demand to support the addition of a new group. Under certain circumstances, it may be necessary for programs to maintain waiting lists at times.

Implementation: An *approved circumstance* for a waiting list is defined as a period where more participants have enrolled in the program than can be accommodated by the capacity of groups in the service area. When this occurs, a program must assess whether the demand for additional services will be sustained or whether existing services can accommodate the participant pending assignment to an ongoing group.

**Standard #27**

**If a waiting list is used, no individual participant is on a waiting list for more than 30 days and the program does not maintain a waiting list for more than 90 consecutive days.**

Rationale: While approved circumstances may occur for waiting lists, participants should not be kept on a waiting list for extended periods nor should a waiting list be used for indefinite periods. If a waiting list is required for an extended period, additional groups should be developed to serve the demand for services. Programs should make every effort to ensure that eligible candidates begin services in a timely manner.

Implementation: An approved circumstance for a waiting list is defined as a period of no more than 90 days during which a program assesses whether the demand for additional services will be sustained or whether existing services can accommodate the participant pending assignment to an ongoing group.

**Standard #28**

**Upon completion of an intake, the program provides written notification of the program's determination of the candidate's eligibility to the referring agency within 14 days. If a candidate is found ineligible, this notification includes an explanation of the specific reasons for this determination.**

Rationale: It is essential that referring agencies are aware of the outcome of a program's screening process. If a participant is found ineligible appropriate actions need to be taken to ensure accountability and partner safety. Appropriate documentation and information sharing allows this to occur.

**CHAPTER SIX:  
STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM CONTRACTS**

**Standard #29**

**The program uses the Domestic Violence Accountability Program contract.**

Rationale: The goal of domestic violence accountability programming is to motivate participants to change their abusive behavior and support participants in becoming accountable for their behavior. Accomplishing these objectives is more difficult if the expectations for successful program participation are not clear and acknowledged. When expectations are not clear, time is wasted on conflict over rules and focus is shifted away from the participant's pattern of coercive control. For this reason, a program's participant contract should clearly explain what is required for successful completion or conversely what might result in dismissal from the program.

Implementation: At a minimum, programs should use the DVAP contract. Once a participant has signed a program contract, the program's authority to hold participants responsible to expectations is limited to what is included in the signed program contract. Programs may include more conditions of the contract than outlined in the DVAP contract with approval from the DVAC.

**STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM ATTENDANCE**

**Standard #30**

**A participant is considered to have missed a group if s/he fails to arrive on time for a group meeting, fails to arrive with a completed homework assignment, or fails to participate appropriately.**

Rationale: A participant should only be considered present when they arrive on time, participate appropriately and complete all appropriate assignments prior to the start of group.

Implementation: An absence cannot count toward achieving the number of sessions required for program completion.

**Standard #31**

**A participant in a community-based program is allowed no more than three absences within a period of 26 group meetings.**

Rationale: Participants will face circumstances in their lives that may interfere with their ability to attend batterer intervention programming. A limited number of absences are allowed to ensure that participants can care for a sick child, deal with a broken vehicle, attend a funeral, recover from an injury or address other obligations while still prioritizing their focus on programming. Providing additional "excused absences" other than those described here is inconsistent with this Standard.

Implementation: If a participant in a community-based program is required to attend more than 26 group meetings to complete, the programs attendance policy must provide for a comparable number of misses. Programs may create an attendance policy that is more stringent than this standard.

**Standard #32**

**A participant can be on leave without dismissal for up to 30 days in the case of a medical situation, civic obligation or long term substance abuse treatment that is prolonged, prevents a participant from being able to attend, and is verified and approved by the program and the referring agency. Beyond 30 days, the participant is dismissed.**

Rationale: In most circumstances, it is expected that participants prioritize participation in batterer intervention services and make arrangements in their personal lives to accommodate their participation. There are a limited number of circumstances in which a participant's ability to make accommodations is limited and therefore programs should make reasonable accommodation. These circumstances include such things as service in the National Guard, extended jury duty or medical situations, such as recuperating from major surgery, that prevent a participant from attending.

**Standard #33**

**Participants believed to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are asked to leave group and are considered absent.**

Rationale: Program staff should be aware of any behaviors or physical indicators that might indicate that a participant is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Participants who are under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol during group are unable to participate appropriately in the discussions and behavior change process that programs intend to foster.

Implementation: Program staff should observe for any behaviors or physical indicators that might indicate that a participant is under the influence. Physical indications and behaviors of intoxication can include, but are not limited to:

- Lack of orientation to time, person, or place
- Lack of physical coordination: inability to touch fingers to nose or walk straight.
- Pupils may be restricted or dilated
- Reaction to light may be slowed, reactive, or non-reactive
- Slurred speech
- Sweating
- Drowsiness
- Delusions or hallucinations
- Physical complaints: heart racing, abnormal breathing, low or elevated body temperature.

When observed, such indications should be documented.

Tests that indicate past use of substances (i.e. positive test for THC within the past thirty days) should not be used to consider a participant under the influence.

For participants referred by the court, any information about substance use or abuse should be reported to the Department of Correction's staff responsible for the participant's supervision.

Prior to the participant's departure, program staff should determine whether this is an elevated risk factor that needs to be shared with law enforcement, referring agency or the partner.

**CHAPTER SEVEN:  
STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM INFORMATION TO PARTNERS**

**Standard #34**

**The program acknowledges in all of their services and professional endeavors that improving the safety of domestic violence victims and children is the foremost goal of domestic violence accountability programming-**

Rationale: Domestic violence accountability programming is rooted in the desire to protect the safety and well-being of victims and children. While the lives of program participants may also be enhanced by participating in programming and the behavior change they engage in, the safety of partners and children remains the priority.

**Standard #35**

**Under no circumstance does the program share information gathered from a partner during the process of partner contact with a participant or use the information to challenge a participant in group.**

Rationale: Partners/ex-partners can provide valuable information regarding a participant's behavior outside of group. Using that information, however, to directly confront or challenge a participant can endanger the partner's/ex-partner's safety and autonomy. Using information from partners to challenge participants in group places partners at risk. Programs should be designed in a way that motivates positive changes in participant behavior and holds participants accountable for their patterns of coercive control without relying on information from partners/ex-partners.

Implementation: When contacting partners/ex-partners, programs will explain that information shared by partners will not be shared with participants and will remain confidential.

**Standard #36**

**The program has a written partner contact protocol outlining its process of providing information in a timely manner to partners that has been reviewed and approved by the local Network program.**

Rationale: Programs are responsible for engaging in an ongoing process of risk assessment. During the course of programming, facilitators may observe participant behavior or acquire information that indicates that a participant's partner(s)/ex-partner(s) may be at heightened risk of abuse. It is essential that programs have clearly defined procedures for sharing this information with partners.

Implementation: Each program should work with their local Network program to create a protocol for victim contact.

**Standard #37**

**The partner contact protocol has procedures for informing partners of participant behavior that might constitute a safety risk to the victim or any children.**

Rationale: Programs are responsible for engaging in an ongoing process of risk assessment and will periodically observe participant behavior or acquire information that indicates that partners may be at heightened risk of abuse. It is essential that programs have clearly defined procedures for sharing this information with partners.

**Additionally,** the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment is well documented. Programs have a responsibility to consider the safety of children. If a program receives information about a participant's behavior that may pose a risk to a child's safety or well-being, the program has an obligation to share this information with the participant's partner/ex-partner and the referring agency. A program's ongoing risk assessment process should include a focus on children's safety and well-being.

### **Standard #38**

#### **Within 14 days of a participant signing a program contract, a program sends the partner comprehensive information about the program as well as services and resources available to partners and children.**

Rationale: Partners/ex-partners are entitled to information about their abusers' participation in intervention programs. Programs also have a responsibility to provide information to new partners of program participants regardless of whether they can be identified as victims of participants' abuse.

Information about the domestic violence accountability program, services available to survivors and their children and a participant's status and behavior in a program can greatly assist a survivor's ability to safety plan.

Domestic violence accountability programming may give the partner a false sense of security and may impact their safety planning. Therefore, when contacting a partner, it is necessary to make information available to survivors regarding the goals of domestic violence accountability programs and realistic expectations about what they can accomplish. Hence, intervention must be undertaken with particular care to guard the safety of a survivor and their children.

It should always be recognized that providing information to partners/ex-partners of program participants can jeopardize their safety. Every effort should be made to ensure that safety remains a priority when contacting partners/ex-partners. It is essential to work with advocates to develop policies and procedures regarding partner/ex-partner contact.

Programs are ultimately responsible for ensuring that partners/ex-partners receive information, but this protocol can identify how information to partners/ex-partners may be provided in collaboration with Network programs, the referring agency, or other community partners.

Comprehensive information to partners/ex-partners will include at least the following.

1. An overview of the program. Partners/ex-partners should be provided with accurate information about the program's objectives and the structure of the program. This should include information about payment, attendance, completion and dismissal policies as outlined in the program contract. Partners/ex-partners should also be informed of their ability to observe program services.
2. The limitations of domestic violence accountability programs. Programs should provide partners/ex-partners with accurate information about the possible impact of the program on them and their children and explain that a man's participation does not guarantee that his partner/ex-partner or children will be safe. Partners/ex-partners should be informed that some participants may escalate or substantially change their tactics of abuse when involved in a batterer intervention program.
3. Participants' responsibility for their behavior. Programs should provide partners/ex-partners with a clear message that domestic violence offenders are solely responsible for their abuse and consequently for their participation in programming. Partners/ex-partners are not expected to be involved in participants' programming, nor are they responsible for changing participants' behavior. Programs should be clear that information and materials provided to participants should not be used against partners/ex-partners in a coercive or manipulative manner.
4. Information about local resources. Programs should provide contact information for the following:
  - a. The local Network program
  - b. The participant's supervising Corrections Service Specialist (CSS)
  - c. Family court

- d. The state's Attorney and State's Attorney's victim advocate
  - e. Local law enforcement or nearest state police barracks
  - f. Nearest supervised visitation program
5. Resources for safety planning. Information regarding safety planning includes referral information to a Network program.
  6. Information about the program's confidentiality policy regarding information shared by partners/ex-partners. The safety of women and children can often be jeopardized by failure of programs to protect information shared by partners/ex-partners. It is imperative that programs not disclose information shared by partners/ex-partners, unless required under mandatory reporting and duty to warn laws and policies. Partners/ex-partners should be provided with accurate information about how, when and to whom information that she shares with the program might be disclosed to others.
  7. Overview of information about participant's enrollment and participation that partners/ex-partners will have access to.
  8. Information about grievance procedures. In addition to information about how to contact the program, partners/ex-partners should be informed about how to file a complaint with the program.
  9. Information about appropriate intervention modalities. Programs should provide partners with information about the possible dangers involved in other intervention modalities, such as couples or family counseling, anger management or substance abuse treatment without attending a batterer intervention program.
  10. Information about the Vermont Automated Notification System.
  11. Information about the program's policy on substance abuse and domestic violence.

#### **Standard #39**

**The program informs partners/ex-partners of their ability to choose not to receive additional contact from the program after information is sent following participant enrollment.**

Rationale: Some partners/ex-partners may appreciate receiving information about a participant's participation in the program. Others may not. Informing partners of their ability to choose whether or not to receive additional information allows partners/ex-partners to make the decision that is best for them. Implementation: A partner's or ex-partner's choice to receive no additional information will not preclude her from requesting information at a later date.

#### **Standard #40**

**A participant's partner/ex-partner is notified in writing of a participant's dismissal or completion within 14 days. In the case of a dismissal, this notification includes the reason for the dismissal and how the partner/ex-partner can receive additional information regarding possible pending legal action resulting from his dismissal.**

Rationale: Partners have a right to know when a participant's enrollment in the program has ended and whether this was a result of dismissal or completion. Programs should make it clear that program completion is defined as compliance with standards or completion requirements, and does not guarantee battering has stopped during program participation or in the future.

#### **Standard #41**

**The program is clear, in its policy and in information provided to partners/ex-partners that substance use or abuse is not the cause of domestic violence and that sobriety and/or recovery alone will not guarantee safety.**

Rationale: Some partners may have the misperception that if a participant stops drinking or using other substances his pattern of coercive control will also end. This can be the result of cultural misinformation linking substance use to domestic violence. Participants' frequent attempts to blame their abusive behavior on alcohol or drugs is also a contributor. Partners/ex-partners may also connect some of the most severe assaults perpetrated against them with participants' drug or alcohol use. This misperception can lead

partners/ex-partners to focus more on participants' substance use/abuse and may be an obstacle to effective safety planning.

Domestic violence accountability programs offer a unique opportunity to provide partners/ex-partners with factual information about the intersection of domestic violence and substance use/abuse.

**CHAPTER EIGHT:  
STANDARDS FOR DISMISSAL AND COMPLETION**

**Standard #42**

**To complete, a participant meets all requirements for program completion as identified in the program contract.**

Rationale: Program completion is defined here to mean compliance with standards or completion requirements. It does not guarantee battering has stopped during program participation or in the future. Programs should not use terms like "graduation." Even "successful" completion can connote more than is appropriate.

All participation standards are evaluated by demonstration. There is no expectation that group facilitators are able to accurately evaluate the degree to which any participant internalizes the concepts taught.

**Standard #43**

**If completion is based on demonstration of specific competencies, the program defines a clear process of when and how participants' demonstration of these competencies will be assessed and documents a participant's success or failure at demonstrating program competencies.**

Rationale: Participants should be provided with clear information about what they must do to successfully complete the program. If a program assesses participants for specific skills, attitudes, or competencies as part of deciding if he has completed the program or his participation will be extended, these criteria and the process for reviewing them should be explicit. Both the participant and the referring agency (if any) should be aware at the time of enrollment what the participant must do successfully complete.

Implementation: Competencies used to determine program completion must be clearly defined and allow for assessment based on observable behavior within the program setting. Competencies should also be directly related to the program objectives outlined in Chapter Two.

Program competencies should be designed to minimize any disparities in program success based on race, socio-economic background, educational level and/or cognitive abilities. This documentation should be included in the participant's program and core files.

**Standard #44**

**The program provides written documentation of a participant's dismissal or completion within one week to the referring agency and, if requested, to the local Network program. Documentation of program dismissal will include an explanation of the reason(s) for dismissal.**

Rationale: Domestic violence accountability programming is one part of a community response to domestic violence offenders. If a participant is dismissed from a program that he was sent to as part of an obligation to the court or other system, it is essential that the referring agency know about the dismissal in a timely manner so that appropriate steps can be taken to address the participant's non-compliance. Given the potential that a participant's dismissal could have important legal consequences, formal, written documentation is necessary even if an informal notification has been provided.

**CHAPTER NINE:  
STANDARDS FOR DOCUMENTATION**

**Standard #45**

**A participant's signed contract and any confidentiality agreement is maintained in a participant's file and provided to the referring agency upon request.**

Rationale: Having a signed contract and confidentiality agreement is essential if a participant fails to comply with the expectations of the program. Without this documentation it is much harder to prove that a participant knew what was expected of him.

**Standard #46**

**A participant's dismissal notice, including specific reasons for the participant's dismissal, is kept in the participant's file and shared with the referring agency.**

Rationale: This information may be required for efforts to hold participants accountable for non-compliance with expectations to complete batterer intervention serves.

**Standard #47**

**A participant's completion letter, including the participants start date, number of sessions attended, status of participant's financial obligation to the program, and completion date, is maintained in the participant's file and shared with the referring agency.**

Rationale: This information may be requested at a later date and should be kept on file.

Implementation: For corrections-based programs, the completion letter will also include a description and review of the participant's completion of required tasks and assessment of program competencies.

**Standard #48**

**Attendance and payment records for each individual participant are maintained and shared with the referring agent as needed.**

Rationale: Accurate information about participant attendance and payment is required for determining whether a participant has met program completion expectations. This information may also be requested by referring agencies and/or the courts at a later date.

**Standard #49**

**Information gathered from a participant's partner/ex-partner is kept in a separate file and remains confidential from the participant.**

Rationale: Ensuring partner/ex-partner confidentiality is an important safety measure. No information from partners/ex-partners or information that may disclose the whereabouts of a partner/ex-partner or relevant child should be kept in a participant file. Doing so provides participants with access to this information, which could put the partner/ex-partner at significant risk, particularly if she is trying to keep her location confidential. Even though programs may receive very little information from partners/ex-partners, this information should remain in a file separate from a participant's file.

**Standard #50**

**Participant files are maintained for a period of at least seven years.**

Rationale: Maintaining participant files is helpful for many reasons. Participants may be referred to programming again and previous documentation may be helpful at the time. Additionally, information in a participant's file may be requested by the courts or other agencies and may prove helpful in efforts to protect partners and children. Participant's files may also be helpful in evaluating program effectiveness.

**CHAPTER TEN:  
GUIDELINES FOR STAFF QUALIFICATIONS, TRAINING AND OBSERVATION  
Standard #51**

**Paid staff and volunteers of programs are required to indicate their willingness to abide by the Vermont Statewide Standards for Domestic Violence Accountability Programs.**

Rationale: Each program has a responsibility to ensure that staff behavior is consistent, at all times, with the goals and principles of these Standards.

Implementation: Programs can implement this standard by including an expectation that staff abide by the Standards within a job description or by having staff sign a specific agreement to abide by the Standards. In either case, it should be made clear to staff that failure to abide by the Standards will result in a termination of their role within the program.

**Standard #52**

**Paid and unpaid staff are expected to be free of documented violence in their own lives. Any staff with a history of perpetrating domestic violence will be violence-free in his or her own life for a period of at least three years and have completed a recognized intervention program. Any staff with a new or active civil or criminal case, child or adult protective service involvement or RFA hearing must notify the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee within one week.**

Rationale: The credibility and effectiveness of programs is seriously compromised by staff members who engage in violence. It is possible for a person with a history of violence to become effective at facilitating domestic violence accountability programs but only after thoroughly and appropriately addressing their personal behavior.

Implementation: Staff members whose documented violence predates the existence of intervention programs will not be required to have attended an intervention program. Staff with new or active civil, juvenile or criminal cases, child or adult protective service involvement or RFA hearing must notify the DVAC. DVAC will review, and where necessary, invoke sanctions.

**Standard #53**

**Paid and unpaid staff communicate and act in ways that are free of victim blaming, sexism, or misogyny and remain open to self-examination and receptive to feedback on issues of power and control, sexism, and collusion in their work and their own lives.**

Rationale: Role modeling is one of the most effective strategies that facilitators use to support participants in a process of change. Behaviors that contradict the purpose and objectives of the program may actually reinforce participants' patterns of coercive control and interfere with the programs ability to motivate behavior change. This is true for overtly sexist and/or victim-blaming behavior as well as more subtle adversarial, argumentative and disrespectful behaviors.

**Standard #54**

**New staff members are provided with an orientation to the program's guidelines, rules, and expectations.**

Rationale: New staff members should be aware of the program's guidelines, rules, and expectations before they are expected to facilitate program services. Without this information, new staff cannot be effective in their facilitation and may undermine the effectiveness of the program.

**Standard #55**

**New staff members attend and complete a training approved by the Batterer Accountability Committee of the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence within three months of their employment.**

Rationale: Facilitating domestic violence accountability programs is difficult work. Appropriate training helps prepare new staff members to be effective at this work.

Implementation: Training for new staff members will include the following topics:

1. The dynamics of domestic violence and behaviors used by domestic violence offenders as part of a pattern of coercive control,
2. The objectives of domestic violence accountability programming,
3. Appropriate and inappropriate modalities for working with domestic violence offenders,

4. Strategies for effectively confronting excuses for abuse, including substance abuse/addiction and victim blaming,
5. The impact of domestic violence on victims and children, and
6. The role of domestic violence accountability programs within a coordinated community response to domestic violence.

The Domestic Violence Accountability Committee of the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence will maintain a process for approving training for new staff members.

**Standard #56**

**New staff members observe at least three groups at a certified batterer intervention program within one month of their employment and a total of six within 12 months of their employment.**

Implementation: It is recommended that new staff observe at a site or group meeting other than the one in which they will be working. It is highly recommended that new staff members be paired with a co-facilitator with at least one year of experience. If no experienced co-facilitator is available and two new staff members must be paired together, a program should develop a specific plan for observing/supervising this team on a frequent and regular basis. Observation may be via video or skype.

**Standard #57**

**New staff members (facilitators for 2 years or less) attend and document at least ten hours per year of professional development approved by the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee. Staff with more than two years of facilitation experience must attend and document 6 hours of annual professional development approved by the DVAC.**

Rationale: Batterer intervention programming is an evolving field and even experienced facilitators benefit from ongoing professional development and training.

**Standard #58**

**Facilitators are observed at least twice per year by a person with appropriate training and experience in batterer intervention services. Observers will fill out the DVAC Observation Form.**

Rationale: Observations of facilitators provide facilitators feedback about their work and an opportunity for ongoing professional development. Observations help to break down the isolation within which many facilitators work. They can also help identify inappropriate practices when they are occurring.

Implementation: Observations may be conducted by the DVAC, a facilitator's supervisor, a person from outside the organization with appropriate training and experience, or through peer supervision among other certified program facilitators

Observers will fill out the DVAC Observation form and return to the DVAC.

**Standard #59**

**Program staff are expected to serve as mandatory reporters of abuse of children and vulnerable adults.**

Rationale: The co-occurrence of domestic violence and maltreatment of children has been well documented. Programs can help protect the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults by providing information about suspected acts of abuse to children or vulnerable adults to the appropriate agencies.

Implementation: Programs should be familiar with child abuse reporting procedures and the potential ways that participants may use a program's responsibility as a mandatory reporter to attack their partners/ex-partners through false reports of abuse. It is helpful for programs to work in collaboration with the Domestic Violence Unit within the Department for Children and Families in cases involving suspected acts of abuse.

**Standard #60**

**If asked to comment in child custody decisions by relevant agencies, the program provides factual information about a man's participation and challenges any inaccurate assumptions about program participation or completion being an indication or predictor of a man's safety as a parent.**

Rationale: While not common, programs may at times be asked to provide information to courts or other child protection agencies in relation to child custody or visitation decisions. Programs can frequently provide information that is helpful to those making these decisions. In doing so, programs must ensure that

the information shared is factual and rooted in observations of participant behavior while enrolled in the program.

Implementation: Programs will attempt to make clear what participation in the program does and does not provide. Programming does provide education and opportunities to practice skills, but is not an evaluation of risk to re-offend.

**CHAPTER ELEVEN:  
STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM COLLABORATION**

**Standard #61**

**The program is an active member of the local task forces in each community where they provide services and assigns at least one representative to regularly attend task force meetings.**

Rationale: The majority of Vermont's fourteen counties have multidisciplinary domestic violence task forces in recognition that domestic violence is a problem that must necessarily be addressed in a collaborative manner. These task forces often consist of representatives of the various agencies that have a common goal and a vested interest in dealing with domestic violence, (e.g. family and district courts, state's attorney, law enforcement, Network programs, Corrections and others). Task forces provide important venues for information sharing, receiving feedback and problem solving from a system perspective.

**Standard #62**

**The program participates regularly in the Vermont Coalition of Domestic Violence Accountability Programs.**

Rationale: The Vermont Coalition of Domestic Violence Accountability Programs is a coalition of individuals and programs that provide services to men who batter. Its mission is to ensure the provision of quality domestic violence accountability programs throughout Vermont. The Coalition provides a forum for information and idea sharing, standards review and further development, networking, training, and the beginning of a peer supervision process.

Implementation: The Coalition will meet at least twice a year and attendance will be taken. Programs who do not regularly attend will be found non-compliant with the Standards and face possible sanctions.

**Standard #63**

**The program maintains a cooperative working relationship with local Network programs.**

Rationale: Domestic violence accountability programs are one component of an effective community response to domestic violence and domestic violence offenders. The effectiveness of programs is strongly influenced by their collaboration with other community stakeholders. Domestic violence advocacy programs are one key community stakeholder that programs have a unique responsibility to collaborate with. Maintaining a cooperative working relationship with local Network programs is one way that batterer intervention programs maintain a focus on the interests and perspectives of partners/ex-partners and remain up to date about challenges faced by partners/ex-partners with the community.

Implementation: A cooperative working relationship may include, but is not limited to:

1. A regular practice of case consultation with victim advocates,
2. Regular schedule for communication and/or meeting about individual cases and program issues,
3. Ongoing sharing of information about program services,
4. Collaborative training or public awareness activities,
5. Sharing of program literature,
6. Collaboration on grants and other funding opportunities,
7. Mutual support of program services, and
8. Certification review of programs occurring at taskforce meetings.

**Standard #64**

**The program provides a comprehensive orientation for community observers and appropriate confidentiality for participants and partners/ex-partners.**

Rationale: Programs have an obligation to provide appropriate opportunities for members of the community to observe program services. These observations contribute to a program's accountability to the community and can serve as an important training/information resource for community members about domestic violence offenders and accountability programming. Observations can also provide an additional challenge to participants to be accountable for their behavior.

Implementation: A comprehensive orientation for observers will be outlined in writing and include:

1. A requirement that all observations occur for a purpose approved by the program and with prior program approval,
2. Expectations of observer participation,
3. A signed confidentiality agreement, (Observers are expected to keep confidential the identities of participants and their partners/ex-partners).
4. A process for requesting feedback about the program from observers,
5. Specific guidelines for requests by victim/survivors to observe groups, (It is recommended that a victim/partner not observe a group in which her abuser is a participant).
6. Any limitations on observers. (For example, this could include limitation on the age of observers or on how many observers are allowed in a group at a time. It is recommended that no more than two people observe a group at one time. It is also recommended that programs receive written permission from a parent prior to a minor observing a group).

**CHAPTER TWELVE:  
STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM POLICIES  
Standard #65**

**The program adopts and verifies in writing its compliance with the Domestic Violence  
Accountability Program Policies.**

Rationale: To create consistency in program implementation and delivery of services statewide, in order to be certified, a program must adopt and verify its compliance with the Domestic Violence Accountability Program Policies. These policies will include both operational and philosophical policies such as:

- Grievance
- Attendance
- Cancellation
- Termination and Re-enrollment
- Payment of Fees
- Risk Assessment
- Substance abuse and alcohol
- Staff compliance with the Standards

**CHAPTER THIRTEEN:  
STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION**

**Standard #66**

**Programs will seek approval from the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee prior to engaging in any formal evaluation.**

Rationale: When considering program outcomes, it is critical to understand and acknowledge that the results of any particular domestic abuse intervention cannot be measured in a vacuum. Programs for domestic violence offenders play an integral part with other intervention processes, including courts, law enforcement, prosecution, victim advocacy, and Corrections. The laws themselves and changes in the law, public education, and societal tolerance all play a significant role in our ability to successfully respond to domestic violence. It is also important to acknowledge the difficulty in creating objective measures for attitude change.

All domestic violence accountability programs must be constantly challenged for continuous improvement, both because the stakes are so dangerously high for victims and families and because our responses must be as cost effective as possible. In undertaking research, providers and researchers accept responsibility for the selection of research topics and methods used in investigating, analyzing, and reporting that will enhance the safety and integrity of victims/survivors and advance the elimination of domestic abuse.

The desired outcome of domestic violence accountability programming is to keep victims and children safer and lessen the rates of domestic violence. When programs are evaluated, the whole system's response and efforts to hold domestic violence offenders accountable must also be evaluated.

Implementation: Prior to engaging in any formal evaluation, the program must request permission from the DVAC. Permission may be granted based on the evaluation guidelines below:

1. Working in collaboration with the Network, its member programs and other advocates,
2. Taking extraordinary care to protect the identity and confidentiality of victims who are subjects or partners of subjects on any research,
3. Planning research in ways to minimize the possibility that findings will be misleading,
4. Providing thorough discussion of the limitations of data, especially where the product touches on social policy or might be construed to the detriment of victims/survivors, abused children, or persons in specific age, sex, race, ethnic, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic, or other disenfranchised social groups,
5. Seeking to have independent research rather than self-evaluation,
6. Acknowledging the existence of alternative hypotheses and explanations of their findings, and not suppressing disconfirming data,
7. Taking credit only for work actually done, and
8. Broadly disseminating findings that will help victims/survivors make effective safety plans and obtain adequate legal protection and social support.

Researchers in the field of domestic violence shall make every effort to incorporate the perspective of victims/survivors into their entire research process in a way that does not compromise their safety and/or pressure them to participate unwillingly.

**Standard #67**

Programs will submit regular reports to the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee on performance measures approved by the DVAC.

Rationale: Data is necessary to better understand what constitutes evidence based best practice with domestic violence offenders, Consistent and uniform data will allow the Council to better understand what is working with domestic violence offenders and where there are gaps in accountability and victim safety.

Implementation: Where possible, technological databases will be used to gather data to ensure accuracy and consistency. The DVAC will work with the programs to create the most efficient means by which to gather data. Programs who do not submit regular data, as required by this Standard, will face sanctions.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN: PROVIDER CERTIFICATION AND DE-CERTIFICATION**

### **Rationale and objectives of the review process**

In order to ensure quality programming, all providers of domestic violence accountability programs, must be periodically reviewed to ensure that they are meeting the expectations set out in these standards. Programs that participate in such reviews and are found to be in compliance with the Standards will receive a certificate with the endorsement of the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence. This certificate will allow the program to receive referrals from the court system, Department of Children and Family Services and the Vermont Department of Corrections.

The purposes of the review process are to:

- 1) Confirm that the program is providing services in a manner consistent with the statewide Standards
- 2) Provide programs with information about policies and/or practices that are not consistent with the Standards and what programs must do in order to become in compliance with the Standards
- 3) Provide a consistent and recognized method for community members and agencies to verify that a program is providing services in compliance with the Standards
- 4) Provide a structured process for addressing concerns raised by community members and agencies about program practices and policies.

### **The Review process**

**The review process will occur in two ways: One, to ensure on-going operational and programmatic compliance and two, to ensure community collaboration and system wide accountability.**

**For new programs seeking certification: To become certified a program must engage in a review process and be found in compliance with the Standards.**

For programs seeking renewed certification: To remain certified a program must be reviewed and found in compliance with the Standards on a biannual basis. The Domestic Violence Accountability Committee of the Domestic Violence Council will be responsible for initiating and monitoring the schedule of program reviews.

**Part One: Operational and Programmatic Review:** The DVAC will meet with the program biannually to review its compliance with all operational and programmatic Standards, including, but not limited to: policies, forms, staff training, observations, file maintenance and statistical reports.

**Part Two: Community Collaboration and System wide Accountability Review:** This portion of the review will occur as part of the community domestic violence taskforce agenda. The DVAC and the program will request time on the taskforce agenda. The Program will facilitate a discussion with the taskforce on: intake, referral and dismissal issues or concerns, partner contact protocols, risk assessment, contract and curriculum overview, and staff training and address any concerns of the taskforce. The DVAC will ask the Taskforce for any recommendations regarding certification, including concerns or areas needing improvement prior to certification.

If a community does not have an active taskforce, the program will identify 5 local stakeholders to meet and discuss the above mentioned collaboration and system accountability Standards review. The review team membership must include a representative from the local Network Program. Other members can include:

1. a victim/survivor of domestic violence.
2. a representative of the Department of Corrections or the Department for Children and Families.
3. a representative of the local State's Attorney's office.

4. a public defender or defense attorney familiar with domestic violence cases.
5. a mental health professional or substance abuse treatment provider.
6. a member of the faith community.

For programs that provide services in multiple counties, the Part Two of the Review will occur with each taskforce/review team. The Committee may consider proposals for streamlining the review process and approve specific modifications for the program review as appropriate.

Once the Part One and Part Two of the Review have occurred, the DVAC will make a recommendation to the Council Committee. The DVAC can recommend any of the following options:

1. that the program is in compliance with the Standards and should be certified with no corrective actions required.
2. that the program is substantially in compliance with the Standards and the program should be provisionally certified if the program submits a plan of action to address specified areas of non-compliance with the Statewide Standards.
3. that the program is not in compliance with the Standards and should not be certified.

The DVAC's recommendations should include a completed program monitoring form documenting observations about the program's compliance with the Standards and any annual program observation concerns. The DVAC will provide written documentation to the program of its recommendation to the Council Committee.

If a program contests the findings of the review team, it must inform the Council Committee in writing of its decision to contest the findings within 14 days of receiving the review team's recommendation. The program should provide specific information about why it believes the review team's findings were inaccurate and the program is in compliance with the Statewide Standards. The Council Committee will consider this information when considering the review team's recommendation.

If the review team recommends provisional certification, DVAC will work with the program to create an action plan for compliance. Batterer Accountability Coordinator in developing their plan of action. The plan of action should include specific strategies for addressing the areas of non-compliance outlined by the review team and specific timelines for the implementation. The plan must include dates by which actions should be complete. The Action Plan will be reviewed and approved by the Council Committee.

Council Committee's Recommendation: The Council Committee will review the recommendations for certification/re-certification and make a final recommendation to the Council on Domestic Violence. Upon unanimous support of its members, the Council Committee may recommend any of the options outlined previously. The Committee will provide written documentation to the program of its recommendation to the Council and the date on which the Council will consider the Committee's recommendation.

If the Committee's recommendation is different from the recommendation of DVAC, the program may submit a written request for reconsideration to the Committee within 7 days following notification of the Committee's recommendation. The Committee will review only those issues that are contested and will not conduct a complete program review. The Committee will respond in writing to any request for reconsideration prior to making its final recommendation to the Council.

In the case of a recommendation for provisional certification, the Committee will review the program's plan of action and ensure that the plan represents a reasonable attempt to address the areas of non-compliance outlined by the review team. If the program fails to comply with the plan of action within specific time periods, the Committee will recommend to the Council that the program is not in compliance with the Standards and should not be certified.

Council Committee recommendations to the Council will be warned to all Council members according to the Council's decision making process. The Committee will provide the Council with a summary report of each program recommendation. The summary report will include information about both the review process and the Committee's recommendations. The summary will also include information about any issues that the program asked to be reconsidered and the Committee's resolution of that request and any plan of action that has been approved by the Committee.

No member of the Council Committee will participate in a decision related to a specific program that they are employed by or have a financial interest in.

Council approval: Upon receipt of appropriately warned recommendations, the Council will make a final decision at its next quarterly meeting. The Council will consider recommendations from the committee as a whole, rather than as individual recommendations, unless a Council member requests that an individual recommendation be considered separately. If no member requests to consider a specific recommendation separately, the Council will accept a motion to concur with the Committee recommendations as a whole. If a member requests individual consideration of a specific recommendation, the Council will discuss and act on that specific recommendation separately in accordance with the Council's decision making process. Any remaining recommendations will be considered together as one decision.

Council meetings are open to the public and programs are welcome to attend. If a program wishes to address the Council regarding the Committee's recommendation, it may submit a written request to be included in the Council's agenda. The program's request should indicate the reason for their request and outline any area of disagreement with the Committee's recommendation.

Following a decision about the Committee's recommendation, the Committee will provide written notification to the program and the taskforce/review team of their decision within 14 days. The Committee will also inform local domestic violence task force, Network program, and Department of Correction's office.

Written requests from a program for extensions of any of the timelines above will be considered by the Committee on a case by case basis.

### **Certification of programs serving multiple counties**

Programs serving multiple counties may request consideration of a modification to the certification review process that allows for a unified review of any documents or policies that are used in all counties served by the program. The review of the program's compliance with additional Standards would still require Part Two of the Review. Any request for modification should be directed to the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee of the Council.

The Domestic Violence Accountability Committee may approve or disapprove any request for modification of the certification review process. The Committee will ensure that any request provides for

appropriate representation of the counties served by the program. All local taskforces/review teams would be provided with the outcome of the unified review and may incorporate findings related to the Standards reviewed as part of the unified review process if they feel that the local practices or implementation of the documents or policies differs from what is presented during the unified review.

### **Certification of new programs**

New programs may submit an application for certification at any time. Upon receiving an application, the Committee will inform community stakeholders of the application and provide information about the timeline for Council action. Community stakeholders will be reminded that the program would only be eligible to receive referrals if and when the Council approves the interim certification of the new program. The Committee will review the application and supporting documents. This review is intended to ensure that the program's philosophy, policies, protocol for partner contact, program contract, and plan for community collaboration are consistent with the Statewide Standards. If the Committee finds any of the submitted information to be inconsistent with the Statewide Standards, the applicant will be informed of the inconsistencies and provided an opportunity to re-submit any application documents to address these inconsistencies.

Applications for certification from new programs will be reviewed in a timely manner. The Committee will make a recommendation to the full Council at the next of quarterly meetings of the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence as long as an application is received at least six weeks prior to the Council meeting. The Committee will make reasonable efforts to respond to applications received less than six weeks prior to a Council meeting, but recommendations may need to be acted upon at a subsequent Council meeting.

After conducting a review of the proposed program, the Committee will make a recommendation to the Council on the program's application. The Committee could recommend that the Council approve the program's certification on an interim basis or that the program not be certified. A recommendation for interim certification would include a timeline for the program to complete a full certification review, including a program review and site visit conducted by a local review team, based on the process followed by existing programs. The recommendation may also contain any expectations that the program must comply with in order to maintain their interim certification until a full review is completed.

If a program wishes to address the Council regarding the Committee's recommendation, it may submit a written request to be included in the Council's agenda. The program's request should indicate the reason for their request and outline any area of disagreement with the Committee's recommendation.

The Council will consider the Committee's recommendation and makes a final decision on the applicant's interim certification. After the Council takes action on the Committee's recommendation, the Committee will inform the program and the local community of the Council's decision. If the Council approved the program's certification on an interim basis, the local court, Department of Corrections and Department for Children and Families office, and any other referring agency, would be informed that the program was eligible to receive referrals. The community would also be informed of the timeline for a full certification review.

Program's approved for interim certification will then complete a full review according to the Council's approved process for program certification.

### **Community Complaints**

Community members and agencies may at any point raise concerns about a program's compliance with the Standards. Concerns or complaints should be brought to the attention of the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence Committee on Batterer Accountability. The Committee will develop an objective and impartial process for reviewing concerns and complaints. The Committee will inform the program that a complaint has been received. The program will be allowed an opportunity to respond in writing to the concern or complaint. After reviewing the complaint and the response of the program, the Committee will then determine whether to initiate a full program review

If a program review is initiated and finds that a certified program is out of compliance with the Standards, the program will be informed that they are no longer certified. The local domestic violence task force, Corrections office and Network program will be informed of the review team's findings.

Decertified programs may either address the findings of the review team and re-apply for certification or contest the findings in accordance with the process identified above.

If, after reviewing the complaint or conducting a review, the Committee finds issues of non-compliance, it can create an Action Plan for the program with set dates by which full compliance must be achieved. The Committee would work with the program to come into compliance and address the areas of concern. The Committee would notify the complainant of the Action Plan and the decision of the Committee.

#### **De-certification**

A program may be de-certified for non-compliance with the Standards. De-certification requests can come from the community, from the DVAC or from any member of the Council. The Committee will notify the program in writing of the request for de-certification or the concern regarding compliance with the Standards. The Committee will hold a meeting with the program to discuss any issues of non-compliance and allow the program an opportunity to respond in writing to the compliance concerns. After reviewing the areas of non-compliance and the response of the program, the Committee will then determine whether to initiate a full program review.

If a program review is initiated and finds that a certified program is out of compliance with the Standards, the program will be informed that they are no longer certified. The local domestic violence task force, Corrections office and Network program will be informed of the review team's findings.

Decertified programs may either address the findings of the review team and re-apply for certification or contest the findings in accordance with the process identified above

#### **Certification and Program Referrals**

In order to receive referrals from the court, Vermont Department of Corrections of Vermont Department for Children and Families, a program must be able to provide documentation that it has been reviewed and found to be in compliance with the Standards.

**CHAPTER FIFTEEN:  
STANDARDS REVIEW PROCESS**

Given that domestic violence accountability programming is an evolving field, it is important that there is an opportunity to update the Standards to ensure that they remain up to date with current research and trends. The process of reviewing these Standards must also ensure that any changes are considered carefully and involve multiple perspectives from stakeholders involved in the community response to domestic violence.

For these reasons, changes to these standards shall be considered on a yearly basis and must be approved by the Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the Vermont Coalition of Domestic Violence Accountability Programs. Recommendations for changes can be referred to the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence, which will be responsible for initiating a yearly review process. These Standards will be reviewed in their entirety every five years.



**CHAPTER SIXTEEN:  
STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES/COMMITMENTS**

**Vermont Coalition of Domestic Violence Accountability Programs:**

The Coalition will participate in the revision process of the Standards. A representative of the Coalition will participate in the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee of the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence. **By signing below, the Coalition approves of the Standards and will abide by them.**

NAME:

DATE:

TITLE:

SIGNATURE:

**Vermont Council on Domestic Violence:**

The Council will establish and maintain standards for intervention programs for perpetrators of domestic violence, and develop a process for certifying that programs are complying with the standards as required by 15 V.S.A. chapter 21, subchapter 4. The Domestic Violence Accountability Committee of the Council will maintain a process for certifying programs as laid out above and for approving training for program staff. By signing below, the Council is agreeing that it approves of the Standards and will oversee the compliance of programs with the Standards.

NAME:

DATE:

TITLE:

SIGNATURE:

**Vermont Agency of Human Services:**

Programs that do not receive the certification from the Council will not receive referrals through the departments of the Vermont Agency of Human Services. AHS recognizes that couples counseling and anger management programs do not adhere to the philosophy of these Standards and may not be appropriate for domestic violence offenders. By signing below, AHS agrees that when referring clients to domestic violence accountability programs, it will refer appropriate clients to only certified domestic violence accountability programs.

NAME:

DATE:

TITLE:

SIGNATURE:

**Vermont Office of the Court Administrator:** Programs that do not receive certification from the Council will not receive referrals through the court. The court recognizes that couples counseling and anger management programs do not adhere to the philosophy of these Standards and may not be appropriate for domestic violence offenders. By signing below, the Office of the Court Administrator agrees that the court will refer appropriate litigants only to certified domestic violence accountability programs.

NAME:

DATE:

TITLE:

SIGNATURE:

**Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence:**

The Network will work with the Vermont Coalition of Domestic Violence Accountability Programs, and the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence in their efforts to hold batterers accountable and enhance the safety of victims of domestic violence and their children. A representative of the Network will participate in the Domestic Violence Accountability Committee of the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence, and will provide support for the local review process through either the participation of local Member Programs or by participating in the review process. The Network will provide support for the Standards to reflect nationally recognized best practice by sharing such information with the other stakeholders. **By signing below, the Network approves the Standards.**

NAME:

DATE:

TITLE:

SIGNATURE:

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## **APPENDIX D Common Acronyms**

**BIP** Batterer Intervention Program

**CCSC** Community Correctional Services Center

**CO (or CCO)** Community Correctional officer

**CR** Conditional Re-entry (formerly furlough reintegration)

**CRSU** Court & Reparative Services Unit

**CSC** Cognitive Self Change

**CSS** Correctional Services Specialist

**DA** Domestic Assault

**DAEP** Domestic Abuse Education Project

**DCF** Department of Children and Families

**DOC** Department of Corrections

**DV** Domestic violence

**DVTF** Domestic violence task force

**FR** Furlough

**FRAO** Final relief from abuse order

**IDAP** Intensive Domestic Abuse Program

**ISAP** Intensive Substance Abuse Program

**PAF** Pre-Approved Furlough

**PD** Public defender

**PO** Probation officer (also referred to as Correctional Services Specialist)

**P&P** Probation and parole

**RAO** Relief from abuse order

**SA** State's Attorney

**TRAO** Temporary relief from abuse order

**VAPO** Violation of an abuse protection order

**VCR** Violation of conditions of release

**VOP** Violation of probation

**VSS** Victim Services Specialist

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