

## Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes—12/11/2001

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Minutes by Chris

### Methods of utilizing the 9/11 terrorists attacks as a teaching tool in our groups with abusive men

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Initially some of the men reacted to the event with talk of violence, retaliation, and racist comments. Those comments could be further discussed for what is behind them—what leads to such talk (e.g., feeling hurt, vulnerable, angry; feeling helpless or powerless; wanting to restore a sense of feeling powerful and in control; etc).

-Some commented that in contrast to previous terrorist attacks, whether against the U.S. or other countries, this one “happened on our own soil”, which made it more upsetting and unsettling. That can be compared to how much worse domestic violence is to other forms of violence, because it, too, happens on the “own soil” of one's own home.

-Another line of questioning could be to encourage men to look at how we Americans have used our power over others. What is our role in the violence that has occurred? While there is no justification for the terrorist attacks, what was the U.S.'s role in “the dance”?

-It seems that interest in the terrorist attacks has faded fairly quickly. It is no longer garnering the attention that it once did among group members.

-There are many other parallels between everyone's experience of the terrorist attacks and women's experience of domestic violence. For example, threats of further terrorism, while as empty as ever, are now being taken more seriously in the wake of the terrorist attacks (just as threats of violence become much more serious once violence has already previously occurred).

We, as a people, have become much more vigilant and on edge since the attacks, which is similar to how women who have been abused may behave. Even normal activities, such as flying on airplanes, or opening mail, have become anxiety provoking, just as normal activities for abused women can also become unnerving in the wake of abusive behavior. The terrorist attacks were a huge distraction, especially in the first few days, preventing people from concentrating, dealing with other issues, getting their work done, etc. Much energy, time, and attention went to addressing the “fall out” from the terrorist attacks. Similarly, women who have been abused may have problems concentrating, going about their day to day routines, may be distracted, and regularly thinking about the abusive episode. In the days and weeks after the terrorist attacks, particularly the television scenes of the planes crashing and the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, people may have had sudden vivid recollections during the day or nightmares featuring those images at night. Women who have been abused may have similar experiences with memories of abuse. After the terrorist attacks many people seemed to be more tense, stressed, walking on eggshells, more prone to irritability, etc. Many of these qualities are regularly experienced by women who are abused. Finally, while the terrorist attacks were over in just a few minutes, they resonated and remained with people for days on end. Similarly, abusive episodes may stay with women for days on end, even if the actual abusive episode was relatively brief in duration.

-One significant difference between the terrorist attacks and women's experience of abuse:

Everyone knew about the terrorist attacks and was willing to acknowledge it, talk about it, look at it, etc. There were many opportunities to express feelings, receive support and validation.

People checked up on each other, etc. Because domestic violence is often done in the privacy of the home, it is often hidden and others are unaware that anything is going on, so little support is offered. To appreciate that, imagine if you had witnessed the terrorist attacks, but no one else had. Imagine if you could not talk with anyone else about them. Imagine if the rest of the world had just continued on like nothing bad had happened. That is typically the experience of women who have been abused, even in their own homes.

-Nationalism can be a bit unsettling. Specifically, the idea of coming together against a single foe—potentially scape-goating those people in order to form a union against them.

-Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> generated intense feelings in nearly everyone. What did people do with them—act them out? Externalize them? Or use them constructively (e.g., helping out with ground zero, volunteering, donating blood, money, etc.)? How people handled the feelings of then can be used to illustrate constructive and destructive ways of handling intense feelings on a personal level.