

## Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) Standards Frequently Asked Questions for Judges (FAQ's)

### **1. What is domestic violence?**

The Governor's Council on Domestic Violence defines domestic violence as "a pattern of coercive behavior used by one person to control and subordinate another in an intimate relationship." While domestic violence is commonly thought of as physical abuse, it can include many other types of abusive behavior including verbal, psychological, economic, and sexual abuse. Some domestic violence perpetrators do not do any physical abuse at all.

### **2. Can't alcohol, drugs such as meth, and high conflict couples cause domestic violence and therefore be the primary focus of intervention?**

While any of those things can escalate abusive behavior, they are not the primary cause. In men who are generally non-abusive and have non-abusive beliefs, even if there is an addiction or a difficult relationship, they will still remain relatively non-abusive. The primary cause of abusive behavior are the underlying beliefs that lead an abusive man to give himself permission to be abusive.

### **3. What is Senate Bill 81 and the related OARS?**

In 2001 Senate Bill 81 was passed requiring that the state attorney general, in consultation with a statewide panel of domestic violence experts promulgate standards for batterer intervention programs--those programs who provide intervention to abusive men. The intent of the bill and, later the OARS, was to establish standards for such programs to assure that there was a uniform and consistent level of service being provided to address this issue. Nearly every state has similar legislation requiring minimum standards for batterer intervention programs.

### **4. What is batterer intervention?**

Batterer intervention is a coordinated systemic response intended to stop domestic violence by focusing on the actions of the batterer. Members of this systemic response typically include law enforcement, the court, probation, victim advocates, and batterer intervention providers, among others.

### **5. Is anger management an appropriate intervention for abusers?**

No, it is not. Domestic violence is characterized by abusive behavior and underlying pro-abuse beliefs related to power and control. Anger management traditionally does not address either abusive behavior or underlying beliefs and therefore is not appropriate.

### **6. What are typically ways abusers can manipulate the courts?**

Some of the most common ways abusers manipulate the courts include: presenting as the victim; making ingenuine, superficial changes; falsely characterizing the victim as mentally ill or emotionally unstable (separate from his abuse); and providing a variety of excuses and reasons for their abusive behavior rather than taking responsibility for it.

### **7. Shouldn't every person be evaluated to determine if they need to be in a batterer intervention program?**

Lying about and minimizing abusive behavior is extremely common among abusive men. Therefore, self-report, particularly self-report claiming no prior history of abuse, is not reliable. Likewise, victims of abuse also often deny and minimize the abuser's behavior for a number of reasons; most often safety for themselves and/or their children. Therefore, to do a reliable evaluation would require hours of interviewing and gathering collateral information, particularly when an abuser is claiming no significant history of domestic violence. Such evaluations would cost hundreds of dollars to complete. Given that the vast majority of men convicted of domestic violence crimes do have a prior history of domestic violence, it appears far more practical and cost effective to simply require all to complete a batterer intervention program.

### **8. What about level of risk and treatment?**

Level of risk to reoffend can be used in two ways. One is to direct certain high risk individuals to programs that offer specialized services to high risk individuals. Secondly, if there are limited resources so that not all abusive men can receive services, then those at highest risk should be prioritized. There is no empirical or theoretical support that lower risk individuals only need a briefer program than higher risk individuals. Likewise, many individuals who score at lower risk may still become abusive again and even commit domestic homicide.

### **9. What is the effectiveness of batterer intervention programs?**

There is not yet consensus on the effectiveness of batterer intervention, with empirical study results ranging from finding batterer intervention highly effective at reducing recidivism to completely ineffective. Effectiveness also appears to be affected by the quality of the coordinated community response. In communities where there is more active involvement of judges and probation batterer intervention appears to be more effective than in communities where that is lacking. Regardless of the effectiveness, at a minimum batterer intervention programs offer weekly monitoring of abusive men and exposes them to pro-social thinking and accountability.

### **10. Why do the standards require 48 weekly + 3 monthly sessions?**

Besides the most blatant abusive behavior that led to a man's arrest, there is usually much more extensive subtler forms of abusive behavior including verbal and psychological abuse that occur far more frequently. There are also typically long standing beliefs that led the man to make abusive choices in the first place. Because these beliefs and behaviors have been long present they do not change quickly or easily. If a man has been acting and thinking these ways most of his adult life he is not typically going to change these ways of thinking and behaving in just a few weeks. In addition, many abusive men enter programs with some level of denial and only once this denial is addressed and set aside can true change work be done. That shift in denial alone can take months of weekly group work.

### **11. What about men who can't afford to pay for a program?**

Many programs are able to offer reduced fees or other payment arrangements. Abusive men will also often use limited finances as an excuse to avoid enrolling. It is not that they don't

have the money, it is that they don't wish to spend it on the program. When courts hold abusers responsible for paying their fees and financial obligations to their family, it sends a strong message of accountability to the abuser.

For those men who are truly impoverished it may be necessary for the court and batterer intervention providers to develop alternative forms of payment such as community service.

**12. How were the standards developed?**

A panel of statewide experts in domestic violence including providers, advocates, probation officers, defense attorneys, and judges met over several years to craft minimum standards for batterer intervention providers that would assure a uniform level of quality and care in such work with abusive men.

**13. What is the empirical support for the standards?**

Due to the relative newness of batterer intervention, researchers are still in the midst of determining what is most helpful in stopping abusers from abusing. These standards are based on looking at what programs around the country are using and the extensive experience and knowledge of a variety of statewide experts on domestic violence. The Attorney General's Batterer Intervention Task Force continues to monitor research on the issue and revisions to the standards reflect those findings.

**14. Are we required to comply with the standards?**

The standards are written for batterer intervention providers. However, without the support of other members of the coordinated community response, including the court system, it will be difficult for providers to comply with the standards.

**15. How can compliance with the standards increase community safety and offender accountability?**

These standards were developed based on what is known to be most helpful in reducing the perpetration of domestic violence while increasing accountability. Compliance allows for a uniformity of intervention around the state as well as encourages a high level of coordination.

**16. Why comply with the standards?**

It is necessary for all facets of our community to come together to truly address domestic violence in our state. It is unlikely batterers will cease their abusive behaviors unless there is an active and coordinated response to domestic violence.

**17. What are the benefits of following the standards?**

Communities that respond to domestic violence together are more likely to see benefits, such as victims reaching out for services, batterers understanding the consequences of abusing their intimate partners (e.g., criminal charges, financial, etc) , and community members who are educated on the issues and who support the efforts to address violence.

**18. Who can I consult with if I have questions about the standards?**

The batterer intervention providers in your county should already be familiar with the standards. You are also welcome to contact members of the standards advisory group.

Contact information for them can be found at:

[http://www.doj.state.or.us/crimev/doc/advisory\\_committee.DOC](http://www.doj.state.or.us/crimev/doc/advisory_committee.DOC)

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