

What Can You Do?

1. Hold onto the central focus of your interaction with a student: to SUPPORT LEARNING. Think about how everything you do and say supports the ability of the student to learn successfully.

2. Help the student avoid self-blame and shame

No violence is ever the fault of the victim. Give the message loudly and clearly: “It is/was not your fault.”

3. Respect the student’s choices.

Don’t blame, shame or judge the student. You don’t know best about what she should or should not do. Notice your own language if you are saying “you ought to....” or “you shouldn’t.....” you are suggesting you know what she needs.

4. Hold onto hope.

Support the student by holding a belief that she can learn, that she can make change in her life, that she is not hopeless or stupid. Help her to see that she may have had difficulty learning because of the aftermath of violence but she can still learn – in her own time, in her own way....

Hold onto hope until she can come to hope and believe in herself.

If you have difficulty holding onto hope, talk to a staff person or support worker to get help with this.

5. Help her to find the supports she wants.

Give her a clear message that she deserves the supports she needs.

Give her a clear message about what support you can and cannot provide.

Help her find a variety of supports to meet her needs.

Does she want to talk out her experiences and struggles? If so what options are available for her to talk with a counsellor, therapist or other healer? Help her find someone who she can work with. Help her to keep looking if the first, second, or third resource doesn’t work for her.

Would she like to work through her issues in another mode eg. with art, music, drama? If so are there any possibilities where she could do that? Help her find what is available.

Does she have support from family or friends? Can you help her identify who in her social network might be able to provide her with support and what support she would like from them?

Have experiences of violence led to other problems eg. addictions, self-harming... if so help her find supports that can help address those problems.

6. Help her to be kind to herself.

Help her to think about ways of being a support to herself.

For example:

What does she do when she hurts? What else could she do?

What does she say to herself when she makes mistakes? What else could she say?

7. Be a “side support”

Check in to find out whether the supports she is using are what she needs. Help her to keep hunting for the right supports if not. Listen to how it is going.

Offer encouragement that she can work through the issues she is struggling with.

Remind her to be kind to herself

When you see change help her to see it too.

Encourage her and remember to hold onto hope for her. .

8. Bear witness to the pain only when you can do so without crossing the boundaries that are right for you

Not everyone can bear witness to pain. Think through whether you are in a position to bear witness and if so in what way.

Can you read about experiences of violence in the learner’s journal or other writing?

Can you hear or read about the pain of having experienced violence (ie. Not the actual story but the pain that there is a story)

Can you read published stories/watch videos that speak of experiences of violence with a learner who wants to see or read these?

Can you listen to details of her experiences? If so, what ground rules will you set in place and what supports do you have in place for yourself?

Give clear messages to the student if, when, and how you can bear witness.

If you cannot bear witness in the way that the student needs make sure that you help her find someone else who can.

9. Attend to yourself and your needs

Balance the pain and joy in your life – make sure that you have joys, time in nature, ways to heal and let go of the pain you are aware of.

Make use of the help of a support person – counsellor or staff person – to talk through how you are working with the student and how you are looking after yourself.

If your own issues are brought up through this work make sure you have support to work through those issues.