

Trauma Support Partner Housing Program Orientation

The Trauma Support Partner role is to:

- ✓ Go over informed consent
- ✓ Go over mandatory reporting
- ✓ Go over notice of confidentiality rights

HUD rapid rehousing programs have 2 objectives:

1. increased earned and unearned income
2. stable housing (not returning to homelessness/unsafe housing with abusive partner)

We guarantee one year of rental and utility assistance as long as you live in the unit. This can help provide positive recent rental history.

We enroll on a first come first serve basis, meaning whoever is approved for a unit first will receive the funds. If funds run out while you are searching, we will put you back on the assessment list which is why it's very important to quickly search and provide all documentation to enroll in the program.

- Being selected from the assessment list does NOT mean you will automatically receive housing rental assistance. Until the participant entry packet and income examination is completed, you have not officially been accepted onto the program.

We complete an assessment at 11 months to document income and progress toward the goals you set at intake. A determination is made if you qualify (income examination, progress toward goals set on service plan/TSP recommendation) for additional months of assistance and if funding permits.

We are here to support you and walk beside you as you take back your life.

We are inspired by your courage for leaving the abusive relationship and know it's going to be hard, but we believe you can do it.

We are not here to make difficult decisions for you.

We will not give you advice because it's your life and only you know what's best for you.

Your role:

- Make sure you have an ID/DL so you can apply to rent a unit. If you can't get a US ID/DL, some landlords allow you to rent with a foreign national ID from your country of origin and some allow you to rent without an ID.
- Search for a unit you like
- Go look at it in person
- Check the neighborhood out at different times of day to make sure you feel safe
- Check to see if you will have places to work that you have experience working at
- Check the transportation availability if you don't have your own or your car needs repairs and should not be driven much
- Get the information of the unit (address, phone number, brochure) to your Trauma Support Partner (TSP).
- Ask how much the application fee is and let your TSP know the amount.
- **DON'T PAY ANY MONEY TOWARD THE UNIT until your TSP approves the unit.**
- **DON'T TURN ON UTILITIES IN YOUR NAME AT THE UNIT until your TSP approves the unit.**
- **DON'T SIGN LEASE until your TSP ensures there are funds available.**
- Get copies of check stubs, public benefits awards letters, and other income verification which are required by HUD.
- LET YOUR NEW HOME BE A SAFE SANCTUARY – EVEN IF YOU BEGIN TO RECONCILE WITH THE ABUSIVE PARTNER OR MEET A NEW PARTNER, TRY TO MEET THEM OUTSIDE YOUR SAFE SANCTUARY.

Trauma Support Partner role is to:

- ✓ Identify basic resources available near desired location unit and discuss feasibility of location for success in achieving program goals
- ✓ Identify/recognize/nurture gifts, strengths and passions, then help develop a plan to monetize and use to overcome challenges
- ✓ Explore/identify options for income until you reach your career goal/dream job
- ✓ Give information on the effects of abuse/trauma
- ✓ Give information on triggers that are a result of the abuse and may get in the way of achieving goals and remaining stably housed
- ✓ Help you recover from the trauma response by showing you techniques to calm your nervous system or head injury impact.
- ✓ Help develop a social network
- ✓ Help motivate and encourage you
- ✓ Listen without judging you

- ✓ Accompany you to court (your case against your abusive partner, divorce/child support/custody)
- ✓ Make the decision on when the Housing Service Specialist (HSS) is needed to resolve an issue
- ✓ Obtain income verification at annual and exit. Forward to HSS.

Ask for tips to save on utilities because we can only pay the allowance calculated by the housing authority. Any overage will be your responsibility. Utility companies are starting to say no to people trying to switch if they owe another company.

Let TSP know before you change utility companies. TSP will forward bill to HSS.

Let TSP know before you move. TSP will forward info to HSS.

An eviction or non-renewal of lease will contribute to a rental history that is difficult to overcome and find rental properties that will lease to you after.

Before problems with a landlord are beyond repair, let your TSP know to get a referral for free legal advice that may prevent an eviction being filed.

Once an eviction is filed, it is part of your rental history even before going to court. Evictions make it very hard to rent another unit.

We are here to be a support, we don't judge, but we want to assist with any issues that may arise to prevent the evictions and broken leases. Your TSP and HSS is here to assist you with staying safe in your home.

- Location is client's choice, however, encourage search for housing near possible income earning potential locations that matches experience/skills and appropriate services including transportation options if available, while keeping in mind safe distance from the abusive partner and/or their family.
- Funding allows for placement in the following: Houses, apartments, townhomes, condos, mobile homes, duplexes, etc.
- Browse Gosection8.com (primarily lists 3+ bedroom units) and socialserve.com to look suitable dwellings based on household size.

HUD Regulations on Suitable Size

Two persons per bedroom with exceptions

- (1) In establishing occupancy standards, PHAs may provide for the assignment of units so that:
 - (a) No more than two persons would be required to occupy a bedroom.
 - (b) Persons of different generations, persons of the opposite sex (other than spouses and children who are under school age) would not be required to share a bedroom.
 - (c) Children of the same sex share a bedroom.
 - (d) Children, with the possible exception of infants, would not be required to share a bedroom with persons of different generations, including their parent.

- (2) These guidelines result in the following range of persons per bedroom:

Number of beds	Number of persons	
	Minimum	Maximum
	1	1
1	1	2
2	2	4
3	3	6
4	5	8
5	7	10

For example, if the PHA has adopted these standards, households with three people generally should not receive apartments with more than three bedrooms. Nor should such households be required to live in apartments with fewer than two bedrooms. A household of three persons should be permitted to live in an apartment with fewer than two bedrooms if the household so desires, unless there is a state or local occupancy law forbidding occupancy of the unit by three or more persons or unless the PHA maintains an occupancy policy forbidding occupancy of the unit by three persons, and such an occupancy Policy is reasonable under the circumstances.

- (3) If, because of a physical or mental handicap of a household member or a person associated with that household, a family may need a unit that is larger than the unit size suggested by the guidelines in paragraph 5-lb (2), it may be an unlawful failure to make reasonable accommodation to deny such a family the opportunity to apply for and obtain such a unit. ***(The agency will need a letter from a healthcare provider that this accommodation is necessary.)***

- (4) A live-in care attendant who is not a member of the family should not be required to share a bedroom with another member of the household.

(5) A PHA may provide space for a child who is away at school but who lives with the family during school recesses. A PHA would usually not provide space for a family member who will be absent most of the time, such as a member who is away in the military. A family may need a unit that is large enough to accommodate a member of the family or a person associated with that household who has a physical or mental handicap. Failure to provide reasonable accommodations to such a family may be unlawful. It may also be unlawful to deny such a family the opportunity to apply for and obtain such a unit. *(The agency will need verification that the student is enrolled each semester.)*

→ If household composition changes during the term of assistance, recipients and subrecipients may relocate the household to a more appropriately sized unit. The household must still have access to appropriate supportive services.

HUD Requirements for Your Children's Education

HCDVCC staff considers the educational needs of children when placing families in housing and, to the maximum extent practicable, will place families with children as close as possible to their school of origin so as not to disrupt the children's education if requested. However we recommend because you are fleeing dv that you do not remain near the school of origin to ensure your safety.

In the case of projects that provide housing or services to families, that subrecipients will designate a staff person to be responsible for ensuring that children being served in the program are enrolled in school and connected to appropriate services in the community, including early childhood programs such as Head Start, part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and programs authorized under subtitle B of title VII of the Act;

United Way-211

Review 211 - how to use it for a listing of all other possible resources other than rental payment and utility allowance.

Meal Preparation

"If you are disabled and need help obtain meals or need meal preparation services please contact Meals on Wheels or United 211 to coordinate. Your TSP is available to help if you need it."

Wellness Check

We are glad you are here! Feel free to share as much as you feel comfortable throughout your time at HCDVCC. Some services may have time limits, so I will let you know when that applies, but the most important thing I want you to know is that our door is always open. HCDVCC's main goal is for you to know what options and services are available so that you get to make choices and decisions that are right for you. Do you mind if I ask a few questions to get to know you so that I can offer the best help?

1. What questions can I answer for you about our agency?
2. What do you think is important for me to know about you?
3. What are your biggest worries?
4. What type of services would be most helpful to you right now?
5. Is there anything you need help with today before we end the appointment?
6. Explanation of available services (**some services depend on if funding is available**):
 - Family Violence Option-** providing a client with a Family Violence Option (Good Cause) form or a Family Violence Exemption and can be done in person or over the phone. Please refer to the Emergency Orientation policy guidance for more information on how to report clients who only receive this service.
 - Educational Arrangement for Children-** providing services that result in a nonresident child being in compliance with the compulsory attendance requirements found in the Education Code. Examples include providing clothing or supplies for school, conferring with schoolteachers or administrators.
 - Child Services-** providing services to a child resident or the parent resident one-on-one, if the child is not developmentally able to be involved with services, that includes activities such as; structured arts and crafts activities and/or non-counseling, information activities provided by a trained staff person or a volunteer. This service also may include child care for nonresidential clients when the child's parent is receiving a family violence service by a licensed or permitted DFPS child care facility. If the center contracts with a non-HHSC approved subcontractor, then the service can only be counted as a one-time referral.
 - Child Recreation or Social Group-** providing a child client with group social activities such as; daycare programming, after-school programming, arts and crafts, special outings or other non-counseling information group activities.
 - Transportation-** providing a client with transportation and/or transportation assistance such as; arranging transportation to and from emergency medical facilities. This also includes non-emergency transportation for the adult/child resident, program participant to a single destination or to a series of destinations in a single trip. Transportation can include staff providing or arranging clients' transportation to court, place of employment and other appointments. Transportation service also includes the provisioning of bus passes.
 - Medical Care-** providing a client with assistance arranging for non-emergency professional medical services, or obtaining prescription or nonprescription medication for the victim's self-administration if funding permits.
 - Medical Accompaniment-** accompanying a domestic violence victim to, or meeting a victim at a hospital, clinic, or medical office.
7. **Intervention Services-** providing a client (including children) intervention services such as; safety planning, understanding and support, advocacy, case management, and dating violence services, to victims of family violence.
8. **Information and Referral-Community Services-** providing a client with information and referrals about existing community resources, including but not limited to the following: medical care, legal assistance, department of protective and regulatory services, resource assistance, public assistance, counseling and treatment service children's services and any other appropriate family violence services.
9. **Information and Referral-Employment-** providing a client with information and referrals about employment training and employment opportunities, either directly or through formal arrangements with other agencies.
10. **Legal Assistance-** providing a client with legal assistance including identifying individual legal needs, legal rights and options, and providing support and accompaniment (including court accompaniments) in their pursuit of those options.
11. **Support Groups-** providing a client with support groups related to family violence led by trained staff, survivors, or volunteers covering educational material or issues brought up by the group. Support groups may be gender, population and/or age specific. Support groups may be open-ended or closed, time specific or on-going. Weekly support groups must be provided, but attendance cannot be mandated.
12. **Orientation-** providing introductions to the organization by a trained staff. This service should be provided in person or through face-to-face technology; however, it can be provided over the phone in certain circumstances as a last-resort option.

13. **Counseling/Therapy**- providing a client (including children) with the use of therapeutic methods of treatment and/or one-on-one support delivered by a trained staff or a volunteer. This includes professional counseling, peer therapy, group therapy and any other form of therapeutic treatment.

Explanation of Mandatory Reporting of Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation

Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (HCDVCC) commits to maintaining our clients' right to privacy and confidentiality. There are circumstances, however, in which agency staff must by law disclose certain identifying client information. One circumstance would be if HCDVCC suspects the abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child, a person who is elderly, or a person with a disability.

According to Section 261.101 of the Texas Family Code and Section 48.051 of the Human Resources Code, HCDVCC **staff must make a report to the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) in the following situations:**

1. When there is reason to believe that a child has been abused, neglected, or exploited.
2. When there is reason to believe that an individual who is elderly or a person with a disability has been abused, neglected, or exploited.

Notice of Confidentiality Rights

At HCDVCC you have the following rights regarding the confidentiality of your personal information and communications with HCDVCC staff and volunteers:

- 1 HCDVCC **will be keep your information confidential to the greatest extent allowed by law.**
- 2 You may choose what information you want to provide to HCDVCC. **HCDVCC will not deny you access to services if you choose not to provide certain identifying information.**
- 3 As a client of HCDVCC, you have the **right to request and receive a copy of your records.** If you would like to do so, please work with your advocate to submit a request to the custodian of records at HCDVCC.
- 4 After your first appointment with HCDVCC, you may choose a referral to other (partner) agencies for additional help and support. Partner agencies include: Bay Area Turning Point, The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Fort Bend Women's Center, Houston Area Women's Center, Daya, Northwest Assistance Ministries, Montgomery County Women's Center, the Montrose Center and AnNisa. **You decide how much or how little of your personal information HCDVCC will or will not share with each partner agency.** An advocate will offer a general overview of each partner's obligations to keep your information confidential. If you choose to have HCDVCC share some of your personal information with a partner agency, an advocate will explain exactly *how* and *what* information will be shared. If you later decide that you do not want the information shared with any HCDVCC partners, let us know and we will not share any more information with those partners.
- 5 HCDVCC keeps client records, but limits the information it keeps to items needed to establish goals and advocacy, document the need for and delivery of services, protect the liability of the center and its employees, volunteers, and board members, as well as for statistical, research and funding needs. HCDVCC keeps these files for 5 years regardless of whether you exit voluntarily or if for some reason your services are terminated. HCDVCC limits access to files to staff working on your case. This includes advocates working with you, their immediate supervisor, and the Executive Director.
- 6 If you have any questions or concerns about this notice or your rights, or if you have a concern that your confidential information was not treated appropriately, please contact Abeer Monem at 281-400-3680.
- 7 HCDVCC will not share the information you provide including your name, address, phone number, and other information that could identify you with other individuals or agencies without your permission unless it falls under the following exceptions:
 - a. If you **sign an informed, written, reasonably time-limited written release** for HCDVCC to speak with someone outside of the agency, which can be revoked by you at any time.

b. **HCDVCC staff are required by law to report certain situations even if you don't give them permission to share or report the situations.** This includes reporting suspected child abuse, neglect or exploitation, and the abuse, neglect, or exploitation of the elderly or a person with a disability. In Texas, program staff reserve the right, but are not required, to alert outside people if there is an imminent threat to a client or others close to them. Staff and advocates will inform you of any reporting requirements prior to having conversations with you and will tell you when they must make a report and what information will be shared. Even when these reports are made, HCDVCC should not share information beyond what is required by law.

c. If a properly issued court order is received a staff member will contact you. If you do not want the file released, HCDVCC's attorney will file a Motion to Quash. If the motion is not successful, HCDVCC will comply with the court order.

d. HCDVCC staff are required by state law to report abusive, illegal, or sexually exploitative acts committed by other mental health service providers.

e. HCDVCC must share some general information about the types of services provided and overall demographics (e.g., age and income ranges, average number of children, ethnicities) of people that use HCDVCC services with the agencies that fund HCDVCC like the Office of the Governor (OOG) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) depending on which program you are being served by. However, **HCDVCC will never share information that specifically could identify you as someone who used their services unless specifically authorized in writing by you.**

f. HCDVCC staff may share your information with other staff in order to assist with service provision.

Considerations for Remote Consent for the Informed Use of Technology based Communications/Client File

and Data Storage (Phone, Texts, Individual and Group Video Chats, Email, Electronic Signatures, client file/

data storage)

Remote informed consent might be needed for survivors who live far away from the program, those who are at work during the program's office hours, and those who may not be able to easily meet in-person for any number of reasons including cases of emergency.

Alternative options, like using phone, text, email and video chat/meetings have issues related that include preventing impersonation, privacy, and safety concerns.

You have the right to private and confidential communications with HCDVCC and the right to accept or refuse sharing your personally identifying information (PII) as follows:

- It's up to you to determine the best way to meet your current need by having HCDVCC disclose personally identifying information (PII) OR NOT, including by technology based communications/client file or data storage;
- You are aware of the pros & cons of sharing information (listed below) and communicating via technology based communications, as well as alternative ways to meet the need without providers having to disclose PII;
- These technology based communications (What's app, Go To Meeting, Zoom, Teams, other virtual platforms, text, cell phone, email, etc.) will be used if in person meetings cannot be had or are not preferred, there isn't an ability or enough time to complete a traditional written signed consent either in person or via mail;
- We will store your PII data/file on Microsoft 365/Sharepoint unless you decline.
- HCDVCC can confirm we are actually communicating with the survivor whose PII will be disclosed – see below;
- HCDVCC has clear written instructions on the release form about what information should be disclosed, to whom the survivor wants it disclosed, the method by which it will be disclosed, and the time limit for making the disclosure;
- You were able to review a written version of the form with instructions before signing it.

Preventing impersonation:

Can we establish a code to be texted or spoken to ensure it's you when using text or phone calls to communicate?

Privacy and safety:

Email is not a secure way to communicate. Abusive partner may have your email password, can you create a new email for our communications? If not, can you erase the emails from my agency from the inbox and deleted box? **Please limit the personally identifying information you send in emails to only what is necessary.** Most email providers (even many of those marketed as encrypted) have access to the content of the emails sent and received by account holders. If they can access the content, then the communication may not be regarded as truly confidential.

Can you let me know when the safe times for communication for phone, text, or video chats are by sending me a text with the code we agree on?

Can you erase all your texting with me right after if you feel the abusive partner will see your phone or is capable of commandeering your phone and looking without your permission?

Abusive partner may have GPS activated on your phone to know your whereabouts – please de-activate.

Abusive partner may have loaded spyware on your cell phone or can trace electronic signature documentation. Please check all apps and security settings.

Technology based communications/file or data storage may be HIPPA compliant but still not completely safe to use. Those cloud based/internet based platforms may have administrators and employees that have access to the communications/use/information shared, so not just HCDVCC staff has access to the information. In addition, their policies may say the company will respond to court orders accordingly which may adversely affect any court proceedings you have or will have with your abusive partner.

I understand all the above technology communications and information/data sharing risks. I understand the below are **not** completely confidential but agree to communicate with my HCDVCC advocate with the platform(s) I choose as follows. I can also choose in person communications and landline phone communications, but that may result in slower response times since HCDVCC mobile and housing advocates do not work from the office.

NNEDV Email best practices:

When Emailing with Survivors

- Let the survivor determine the means of communication that can best accommodate their ability, access, needs, and preference
- If a survivor contacts you through email, HCDVCC response should:

1. Delete their initial email and/or any previous thread. This way, if the email gets intercepted or accessed by the abuser, the request for assistance or the entire history of the conversation isn't revealed.
2. Include information about the risks related to email communication (example below) and discuss email safety and privacy with survivors, encouraging them to delete the messages they have sent and received, and to clear out their deleted folder.
3. Ask if there are safer ways that you can communicate.
4. If communication continues, check in periodically to see if email is still a safe and preferred method of communicating.
 - Do not store victims' names and email addresses in address books.
 - If you must print out an email exchange, shred the email conversation as soon as you no longer need it.
 - Most email programs will autofill the rest of the address for you after you type the first few letters of the name. To prevent sending emails to the wrong person, make sure to double check the address before hitting send.
 - Staff should regularly delete emails from survivors so as to not keep identifying, confidential information for longer than needed. This includes purging the "sent" and "deleted" folders as well.

When Emailing Coworkers About Survivors

- Internal communication about survivors should be restricted. Before emailing a coworker about a survivor, consider more privacy focused options, like telling the colleague in person or over the phone.
- Do not include a survivor's name or other identifying information in emails, including initials.

When Emailing Outside Parties About Survivors

Before using email to communicate with outside parties (including using encrypted email), you should first determine if there are other options that are more survivor-centered, and that don't create a digital trail. Opening the door to communicating confidential information over email is very risky. Before doing so, you'll need to make sure that every staff person in your agency who will be using email to communicate confidential client information is fully trained on the VAWA, FVPSA, and VOCA confidentiality obligations, and that they understand the risks and nuances related to email communication. It can be very easy when caught up in the back and forth of an email conversation to forget or accidentally overlook the specific limitations a survivor has set regarding their permission for you to release their information. Advocates can easily share more than they've been permitted to by answering follow-up questions.

If you decide to move forward with using email, be sure to follow the best practices outlined below:

- You can only communicate about a survivor with another agency over email when the survivor wants you to do so, and you can only communicate the specific information they have given you permission to share. When doing this, you must have a written, informed, and time-limited release from the survivor before sharing any information. Refer to the NNEDV Confidentiality Toolkit for more information about releases and confidentiality obligations.
- Make sure that every survivor is fully informed about what sharing their information over email will look like and the related risks of doing so, so that they can make an informed decision about if they want their information shared that way or not. Advocates will need to be prepared to talk about how your agency is working to ensure that the emails are secure, and any potential risks (for example - that you can't control what the other person does with the email once they have it; that they may send a reply to you in an unencrypted format; etc.).

Secure Email

There are many products on the market that claim to offer secure, encrypted email. Most email providers (even many of those marketed as encrypted) have access to the content of the emails sent and received by account holders. If they can access the content, then the communication may not be regarded as truly confidential. For more information about confidentiality requirements for victim services providers under federal law, please see our Confidentiality Toolkit.

A stronger protection is known as “zero knowledge encryption,” which makes the data being sent back and forth unreadable to the software company that hosts the email. It is important to know that while this kind of security adequately protects victim data (as long as spyware is not on the device), it also complicates the process of sending and receiving email, so staff and any outside parties will need to be trained on how to use such software.

Agency Best Practices & Policies

Agencies should have a data retention policy ensuring that information that isn't needed is regularly deleted. (Visit NNEDV's Technology & Confidentiality Resources Toolkit for best practices on record retention and deletion.) This policy should include emails received from and sent to survivors, and emails containing information about survivors. Don't forget that emails are often backed up or archived, and email conversations between you and survivors will be saved, so backups and archives containing survivor information will also need to be deleted.

When communicating with others about survivors, make sure you are following your organization's confidentiality obligations and requirements for privilege (if your state has advocate-client privilege). Email is a form of written record; guard it responsibly.

Sample Email Disclaimer Language

Since few people actually read the information in signature lines, being creative in your use of a disclaimer may help get the message across more effectively. The language below can be included at the beginning of every email with a survivor.

Communications between *HCDVCC* and clients are protected by Texas privilege and/or federal confidentiality law. *HCDVCC* does not reveal or share client communications without a client's written permission except where required to do so by mandated reporting. However, we want to make sure you are aware of the privacy risks related to email communication:

- Email is not a secure way to communicate.
- Emails can be easily seen by other people without your knowledge or consent. Because of that, please limit the personally identifying information you send in emails to only what is necessary.
- *HCDVCC* staff can talk to you more about ways to increase your privacy and safety online.

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For more detailed safety using technology information, please go to the website below

<https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors>