



Massachusetts Certified Batterer Intervention Programs

Batterer Intervention Program Services
Division of Violence and Injury Prevention
Massachusetts Department of Public Health



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Batterer intervention is an educational program for people who have been abusive or controlling towards an intimate partner. Certified batterer intervention programs (BIPs) in Massachusetts adhere to the *Massachusetts Guidelines and Standards for the Certification of Batterer Intervention Programs*. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) has a statutory responsibility to ensure the provision, certification and monitoring of batterer intervention programs in the Commonwealth. These Guidelines and Standards are among the most comprehensive in the nation in promoting victim safety as well as batterer accountability.

Brief History

In 1991 the Massachusetts Legislature mandated that the Chief Justice for Administration and Management establish a commission to create basic standards for Batterer Intervention Programs (BIPs) which accept court referrals. The commission was composed of representatives from the judiciary and probation as well as prosecutors and recognized experts in the field of domestic violence. The Standards were initially disseminated in 1991 and revised in 1995.

Overview

Certified Batterer Intervention Programs represent a critical component of a coordinated community response to domestic violence by documenting abuse, assessing dangerousness, monitoring behavior, creating a paper trail regarding compliance with conditions of probation, and providing information and resources to the victims. These programs can give batterers a reason to change and a method for doing so, but it is up to the individual batterer to decide whether or not he will continue to be violent.

Goal of Certified Programs

Certified batterer intervention programs (BIPS) strive to end domestic violence by providing educational groups for batterers and resource information to partners and victims as part of a coordinated community response.

Definition of Battering

Battering is a pattern of coercive and abusive control directed at the victim. It is learned behavior that can include physical and sexual assault, verbal and emotional abuse, intimidation, degradation, threats, and jealousy. Other examples of abuse can include prohibiting access to transportation or the telephone, harassment, interfering with the victim's work or threatening to interfere with the victim's immigration status.

Educational Approach

Batterer Intervention curricula examine all forms of abusive behavior and their impact toward intimate partners and children, and the cultural and social influences that contribute to violence. Programs

encourage batterers to adopt respectful and non-abusive attitudes and behaviors toward their intimate partners and children.

Who attends these programs? Most of the group participants are court-ordered to attend the program for violating a restraining order or assaulting their partner. Some are referred by the Department of Social Services or a therapist and others are self-referred. People of all ethnic, racial, professional, educational and religious backgrounds comprise the groups.

Are first time offenders appropriate for batterer intervention?

Yes. BIPs are designed specifically as an alternative sentence to jail for first time offenders who assault their partners or violate restraining orders. Often “first time offenders” have committed prior acts of violence that either were not reported or did not result in arrest or prosecution.

Program Duration

Each batterer must attend at least 80 hours of intervention. Groups are typically held for two hours once a week for forty consecutive weeks.

Grounds for Termination

Batterers can be terminated from a program if they re-offend, violate a restraining order, do not accept responsibility for their abusive behavior, or refuse to comply with program rules.

Contact with Victims

Programs must attempt to contact each victim and partner to refer them to victims’ services, explain the purpose and limits of the programs and to assess the dangerousness of the batterer to the victim’s safety. Programs monitor the batterer’s behavior and answer questions through follow-up contacts.

Regular Reporting to Courts

Programs must submit written reports to the courts regarding the batterer’s program participation, compliance with the program rules, and termination/completion information monthly or as needed.

Group Leader Training and Supervision

Group leaders complete a minimum of twenty-four hours of domestic violence and batterer intervention training and observe at least six group sessions at a state-certified training program. All group leaders receive weekly supervision by staff with expertise in domestic violence and batterer intervention.

What is the cost to the client?

Programs use sliding fee scales that consider the batterers’ ability to pay. DPH Guidelines require that no one be denied services based upon inability to pay. Community service options can be available for indigent clients.

Services available in other languages

Some certified programs provide services in Spanish, Portuguese, and Khmer.

How do certified programs differ from anger management?

Anger Management Programs

- serve perpetrators of non-intimate violence
- are only 8-10 sessions in length
- do not require program staff to receive domestic violence training
- are not required to contact victims of batterers
- are not required to screen for substance abuse

- are not state-certified or subject to its annual review of their practices

Certified Batterer Intervention Programs

- work with perpetrators of intimate partner violence
- are at least 80 hours in length
- have staff that are trained in domestic violence and batterer intervention
- must attempt to contact victims and survivors
- must screen clients for substance abuse
- undergo annual review by the Department of Public Health

Because of their limitations, anger management programs should not (and many do not) accept referrals of domestic violence offenders.

Is substance abuse counseling the best solution for batterers with drinking or drug problems?

The relationship between substance abuse and domestic violence is complicated, but it is clear that when a batterer has a drinking or drug problem, there are two separate issues that need to be addressed: domestic violence and substance abuse. Certified BIPs are required to screen all participants for substance abuse and refer them to collateral treatment when needed.

Why not try couples counseling?

Victims have reported renewed violence in retaliation for disclosures they made during couples counseling. Therefore, couples counseling can only be effective after the batterer has completed a certified BIP.

Does Batterer Intervention Work?

Outcome studies have shown that batterers who complete certified batterer intervention programs are much less likely to commit new acts of violence than those who don't attend programs or those who fail to complete them. Several studies have replicated the finding that 2/3 of men who complete batterer intervention programs do not recidivate within an 18 month follow-up period.

These include:

- A six-year outcome study by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Probation's Office found that Certified Batterer Intervention Programs in Massachusetts were effective in reducing recidivism. Compared to offenders referred to shorter anger management programs or substance abuse treatment, those referred to certified batterer interventions "were least likely to have a subsequent arraignment of any kind, an arraignment for a violent offense, or one for a subsequent restraining order violation." (Bocko, S. et al, Restraining Order Violators, Corrective Programming and Recidivism, November 2004)
- A study funded by the Centers for Disease Control found that batterers who complete batterer intervention programs were four times less likely to be arrested for new acts of domestic violence than those who didn't attend programs or failed to complete them. (Gondolf, E. Impact of Mandatory Court Review on Batterer Program Compliance, *Mid-Atlantic Addiction*, 1998)
- Reviewers of 22 different outcome studies of batterer intervention found that a vast majority of batterers who completed their programs remained violence-free during follow-up. Success rates across the 22 studies ranged from 53%-85%. (Tolman R & Bennet L., A Review of Quantitative Research on Men Who Batter, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1990)

For More Information:

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