



Empowerment Model

The individual is not the cause of his or her problem. With information and support, the individual can make the best decisions for generating a solution.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional, social process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. This process creates the power to use these choices in his or her own life, community and society, with individuals acting on issues that they define as important.

WISE works from the perspective that domestic and sexual violence is embedded within a social and historical context of oppression, and must be addressed comprehensively through education, advocacy, and empowerment. The services offered by WISE are designed to support empowerment by providing information, tools, resources, and opportunities, based on the goals and objectives defined by each survivor. WISE recognizes that the systems victims are involved in are often confusing and perpetuate social imbalances of power. The organizational mission and services of WISE are rooted in the principles of the empowerment model.

History:

The empowerment model arose from the feminist movements of the 1970s, which understands sexual and domestic violence within a social, cultural and historical framework of inequality between the sexes. Violence perpetrated by men against women in intimate relationships is a result of this systemic power imbalance that serves to keep women subordinate. Empowerment is based on the belief that everything possible should be done to restore power to victims through validation, community and celebration of their strengths. Other interventions may consider the victim disordered, as if s/he were maladaptive or contributing to the violence being perpetrated on them. The empowerment model instead works to identify and challenge the external conditions of their lives, to promote resilience in the face of adversity, and to make the victim the primary player in discussions and decisions about their future. This is based in a social justice mission to work with individuals around their unique situations, and simultaneously dismantle the circumstances which allow for violence to happen.

Because domestic and sexual violence often remove one's ability to exercise control over their life, the first goals of crisis intervention in the empowerment model is to validate what has happened to them and make obvious the innate power, and survival strategies they have developed to stay alive. The empowerment model recognizes that violence is never the fault

of the victim, and WISE works with people to exercise the individual's power by providing them with a safe, supportive space to brainstorm, experiment, and gather information without judgment. The empowerment model aligns with the desires and expectations from Feder's meta-analysis.¹ It has also been consistently validated by evaluations conducted with survivors using WISE services. Because the empowerment model directly responds to the root cause of violence being perpetrated as a social system in addition to the immediate needs and long term goals of survivors, it is the most effective model for our work.

The process of empowerment enables one to gain power, authority and influence over themselves, within institutions or society. Empowerment can be the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- Having decision-making power
- Having access to information and resources to make decisions aligned with their personal goals and outcomes
- Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or)
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- Trusting one's ability to affect change for themselves and in the world
- Ability to build skills for improving one's personal or group power
- Active in a growth process and self-evolution that is never ending and self-initiated
- Increasing one's positive sense of self- and overcoming stigma
- Increasing one's ability to identify things that they are comfortable with and those which are violating some sense of themselves or their boundaries

¹ Women Exposed to intimate partner violence: expectations and experiences when they encounter health care professionals: a meta-analysis of qualitative studies. Feder GS, Hutson M, Ramsay J, Taket AR