

BARRIERS PREVENTING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DV AND CD PROFESSIONALS

This document is an attempt to describe some of the lessons learned from the collaboration between Dawn Farm and Alternatives to Domestic Aggression (ADA) and is written from the perspective of Dawn Farm. Some of the history leading up to this collaboration may be helpful.

In 1994 Dawn Farm received a document from ADA that it perceived as a hostile attack on the field of addiction treatment, the disease model of addiction and Alcoholics Anonymous. Prior to this Dawn Farm had little, if any, contact or knowledge of ADA. ADA said that they hoped this document would provoke a dialogue between batterer intervention programs (BIP) and addiction treatment professionals. Based on the tone of this document Dawn Farm decided that ADA was a program that it could not and would not work with. It feared that any referral to ADA would be discouraged from attending 12 step meetings and its work would be severely undermined. As a result there was no communication between the two programs for the next few years.

In 1998 Dawn Farm had a court ordered client who was also ordered to enroll in ADA. Dawn Farm contacted the judge for this case and requested that this client be ordered to a different BIP. The probation officer assigned to this case requested a meeting with the two programs and facilitated a dialogue. Both programs brought their concerns to the table and felt that there was enough common ground to continue the dialogue. (It is important to note that both programs were going through significant internal changes that made them much more open to questioning their assumptions and learning from each other.) After several lengthy discussions about all of the concerns on both sides, both programs were able to find sufficient common ground to work effectively together and not undermine the other.

In the fall of 2000, through continued dialogues, mutual clients and referrals, the relationship had progressed far enough that ADA asked Dawn Farm to develop some substance abuse programming for ADA clients that appeared to have problems with alcohol and/or other drugs (AOD). This group began in the beginning of 2001.

It has become apparent through discussions with other professionals, attending workshops on CD and DV, and research on the subject that our experience is the rule rather than the exception. False assumptions and strident language that prevents dialogue continue to be problems on both sides. We hope that our experience and lessons learned can help other programs to avoid or end the acrimony that Dawn Farm and ADA permitted for too long.

Here are some of the barriers and lessons we identified through this process:

- Both sides approach each other with a “They just don’t get it” attitude, rather than with a willingness to learn and recognition that the “state of the art” for this population has plenty of room for improvement. *Both sides need to listen and learn from each other.*
- Professionals from CD and DV operate from two very different models and attempt to inappropriately transfer premises from one issue to the other in ways they are often not aware.
 - The CD profession has fought long and hard for the acceptance of the disease concept. This has been an attempt to move responsibility for addicts from the criminal justice system and asylums to medical systems. It has also promoted a societal attitude of sympathy and understanding for the addict as sick rather than bad, weak or deviant.
 - The DV profession has been fighting long and hard to move theoretical models of batterers from mental health models to criminal justice/socio-political models. This has been to promote the importance of the victim’s safety and societal responsibility for protecting the victim and holding the batterer accountable. Society tends to understand the batterer’s behavior in

sympathetic terms and moving understanding to a criminal justice model challenges this tendency.

- Even professionals who recognize the differences in these models have difficulty bridging the gap.
- CD professionals have failed to define and articulate the role of personal responsibility in relation to DV and addiction. *Addiction professionals need to clarify this for themselves and their clients before they can determine whether collaboration with DV services is possible.*
- CD professionals fail to recognize that batterers will attempt to inappropriately transfer 12 step material to their battering. (e.g. powerlessness; “I have a disease, you [the victim] can’t leave me”) *CD professionals need to recognize the potential for batterers to twist tools of recovery into tools for absolving themselves of responsibility for their abuse and tools for controlling their victims.*
- DV professionals fail to recognize and use 12 step programs as a potential source of accountability. *Steps 4, 5, 8, 9 & 10 of AA offer a source of accountability and tools for internalizing motivation to change abusive behavior.*

WARNING! - *A batterer may attempt to use steps 8 & 9 to reconnect with the victim. Anyone working with a batterer in recovery should address this possibility well before the batterer approaches these steps. It is often said in AA that “sometimes (particularly past significant others), the best amends is to stay out of that person’s life and take steps to be sure you never repeat that behavior.”*

- Both sides fail to recognize that the other doesn’t need to agree on everything to work effectively together. *If DV and CD professionals talked more openly with each other, they could come up with enough shared beliefs that they could avoid undermining the work of the other and probably support it.*
- In the event programs do determine that a relationship with another program is impossible, they need to resist the temptation to dismiss the problems or questions raised by the other program. *Even when collaboration is not possible, it is important to give careful consideration to the concerns of all sides. Programs should look for the truth in those concerns and find ways to address them that is consistent with their own core philosophy.*
- Both sides fail to acknowledge the weaknesses and contradictions of their own conceptual frameworks; instead they tend to defend their framework more vigorously and with more alienating and sometimes hostile dogmatic rhetoric. Both of these fields can be intolerant of its own members questioning its conceptual framework and are especially defensive and intolerant when members of other disciplines do the same. *Both sides are so protective of their conceptual frameworks because they work. It is therefore the responsibility of both sides to try to make them work together. It would also help to recognize that questions and challenges to these frameworks can help us clarify and further define them.*
 - A POTENTIALLY HELPFUL METAPHOR - Both sides have been going through a philosophical and conceptual “trailblazing” period. Activists on both sides have been fighting to have their conceptual frameworks taken seriously and have turned it into a political cause. Practitioners are now attempting to build roads on those trails and are finding that some trails are too narrow or too wide, in some cases a road can’t be built on the trail and a detour must be used.