

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOUSING FIRST AND FLEXIBLE ENGAGEMENT

Flexible Engagement is the approach used by Domestic Violence Housing First to support survivors of domestic violence and their children with housing and service needs that may quickly change due to the safety and stability issues.

Flexible Engagement (FE) is an approach that allows survivors and their advocates to identify the level of services and funding that would be most useful to access and retain housing stability. A very light touch may be all that is needed for a survivor to safely retain current housing. Other survivors might immediately need a higher level of financial and/or advocate investment to address complex barriers to housing stability. FE is not linear. Survivors living stably in housing may experience a crisis later and need to re-engage in a different service level in order to retain their housing.

Like the Progressive Engagement (PE)¹ approach, FE provides tailored services to meet the needs of families who are experiencing homelessness with the goal to quickly resolve the immediate crisis. The FE approach has additional components and flexibility to adequately address survivors' needs around both domestic violence and housing.

Shared Fundamentals:

- Services and financial assistance provided focus on the level and intensity identified by each survivor
- Participation is voluntary and flexible
- Critical thinking, exploration of resources, and problem solving is shared between the survivor and provider
- Connections made to community resources
- Builds on individuals' resiliency and strengths

Distinct components of Flexible Engagement:

- The initial support is not always at a "light touch" level
- The focus is on helping survivors be safer while resolving the immediate risk of or crisis of homelessness
- Safety is the foundation for the initial conversation
- Conversations are guided by a trauma informed approach²
- Support is provided that reflects the changing safety issues and trauma impacts experienced by survivors

Funding for the FE approach can be challenging. Domestic violence agencies need to maximize flexibility provided by HUD as well as by other federal, state, and local funding sources. Additionally, funders need to allow programs to practice FE understanding that its success relies on flexibility and creativity.

¹ Building Changes, 2015: What is progressive engagement?

² Washington Administrative Code 388-61A-0260 requires domestic violence agencies to provide trauma informed advocacy