Small Actions, Big Impact:
Flexibility and Trust

Small changes to your organizational practices and norms could create big impacts! Are you looking for ways to build trust and create more flexibility for your team?

We have 7 ideas you can start with right now! Below are some ideas sourced from our <u>What Works: Insights for Thriving Anti-Violence Organizations Project</u>. Anti-violence staff shared various strategies and ideas that are currently practiced and implemented at their organization that create big impacts.

## 1. Flexible Work Arrangements

When life gets in the way of work—whether due to illness, a home repair, or a midday appointment—many agencies allow staff to work from home as needed.
One advocate shared that she became sick during her onboarding period, before she had accrued any paid time off. Rather than requiring her to use future PTO, her supervisor provided a laptop and encouraged her to work from home, saving her leave time for vacation instead of illness. Across multiple agencies, advocates described supervisors who trust them to manage their own schedules and adjust their workdays when unexpected needs arise.

2. Childcare Accommodations

Multiple agencies described flexible and supportive approaches to meeting staff childcare needs.
At one agency, an advocate shared that her supervisor allows her to pick up her children from school around 2:30 p.m. and complete the remainder of her workday from home. At a different agency, staff are permitted to bring their children to the office after school, and work from home without using PTO if their child is sick. As the Executive Director explained, "It's hard enough when you have a child...I want people to stay here, so whatever we can do to adjust to make that happen—we do." Another advocate emphasized how her agency's flexibility with childcare has allowed her to remain employed, explaining, "That's the reason I still work here, otherwise I would have to work nights."
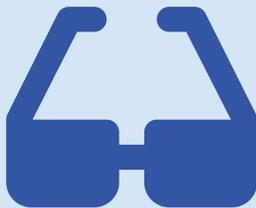
Summer Fridays

To support rest and work-life balance, one agency created additional time off for staff during the summer months. From June through July, employees are able to end their workday at 1:00 p.m. on Fridays. In August, staff receive the entire day off each Friday, creating more opportunities to recharge and spend time with loved ones.

3. Work-Life Balance

To help prevent burnout, several agencies maintain firm limits on weekly work hours, ensuring staff do not regularly exceed their scheduled time.

When employees do work additional hours—such as for an evening or weekend event—they are encouraged to take time off later in the week, since overtime is not permitted. As one supervisor put it, "We're bullying people into balance," explaining that leadership makes a deliberate effort to avoid overloading staff calendars. Advocates described this approach as both practical and supportive. One staff member shared that if they need to take the rest of the day off, their supervisor fully supports them in making up hours later in the week. An Executive Director echoed this commitment, saying, "I try to get people to take time off. If you start to feel burned, take the day... Even if it comes up that morning, we'll figure it out."

4. Limited Productivity Requirements

Another aspect of flexibility and trust that came up when in discussion with advocates was limited productivity requirements.

Many organizations described a culture where folks know that they are valuable as they are—not based on productivity. As one advocate explained, "Our manager supports us by insisting we don't see clients for 8 hours a day. We don't have productivity requirements." Another advocate shared that if a patient cancels, she gets that time back; they don't rush to fill that time, and she can use it to think, plan, organize, and rest.

5. Autonomy

When describing their leadership, many advocates emphasized the importance of not being micromanaged and valuing workplaces where staff are trusted to do their jobs without constant oversight.

As one supervisor put it, "Who is here makes a difference—I don't have to worry at all what staff is doing. They are doing everything and more of what they're supposed to do." Another agency shared how their program managers began holding meetings without supervisors in attendance. This shift created more autonomy and empowerment, allowing them to use their strengths and creativity. Staff also described feeling more ownership over their work, along with stronger collaboration and a renewed sense of excitement and energy. As their Executive Director said, "What's the worst that's going to happen?"

Meeting Needs of Staff

One advocate described struggling to concentrate while working in an open office space with many other team members. She requested a private office, and although it took a few months for one to become available, her request was eventually granted. She shared how important this change was for her ability to complete her work effectively, and how it helped prevent feelings of frustration or resentment toward colleagues. While providing a private office to every staff member may not be realistic, agencies can find creative and flexible ways to meet individual needs and set staff up for success.

6. Balancing Oversight and Support

Many managers described taking a flexible approach to supervision, letting their direct reports guide the style and frequency of check-ins.

They aim to be there for guidance as needed, while giving employees the confidence and trust to be able to take initiative. Leaders noted this helps build trust and grow their skills. Another leader described her style as being "very hands off" and more of a coach, recognizing staff are the experts in their work; she tries to live these values out daily, creating an environment where staff feel like they can regularly come to her for support. Another advocate who shared favorable comments about their supervisor described them as "super supportive without being micromanaged," noting help is available when needed.

7. Dress Code

At one agency, staff are allowed to dress more casually, like wearing sneakers and jeans instead of traditional business attire.

An advocate shared that this has made a big difference, especially financially, since employees no longer need to maintain a separate work wardrobe. Staff also feel more comfortable with people being able to express their personalities. As the advocate explained, "It feels kind of trivial in the grand scheme of things, but it changes the quality of life."

What are 3 small actions, based on these ideas, that you can implement with your team or at your organization?

1.

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3.

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