

Understanding Complex Realities: Visitation Centers Working with Families Experiencing Domestic Violence

**November 11 and November 12 , 2010
Denver, Colorado**

Visitation Centers, Domestic Violence, and Complex Realities

- Purpose of training
 - Step back and think about domestic violence in the context of working with families in a supervised visitation setting
 - Explore challenging issues in an interactive, skills-focused format
 - Facilitate informal exchange with peers
 - Develop a plan of action

Visitation Centers, Domestic Violence, and Complex Realities

- Introductions:
 - Segment faculty
 - Observers
 - Institute participants
 - Name, location, and years of working
 - What is the One Thing?

Administrative Matters

- Use microphone when speaking
- Keep cell phones on vibrate; step out to take urgent calls
- Adhere to agenda start and end times
- Participation in all sessions is strongly recommended
- Locations of facilities
- Respectful listening and sharing

Visitation Centers, Domestic Violence, and Complex Realities

- Workshop Goals
- Analyze the complex realities faced by families experiencing domestic violence who are using supervised visitation centers.
- Recognize the value of, and integrate safety in all interactions.
- Promote partnerships with domestic violence service providers.
- Develop collaborations with various communities.
- Account for the impact of domestic violence in visitation center policies and procedures.
- Apply knowledge to the development of action plans.

Engaging Families

As a result of this workshop segment, you will be better able to:

- Measure your current knowledge about domestic violence.
- Identify patterns of coercive control that play out in a supervised visitation setting.
- Assess how using a supervised visitation center can positively or negatively affect families.

History and Background of SVN

- An international membership organization of professionals who provide supervised visitation and access services to families.
- *Founded in 1991* to provide opportunities for networking, sharing of information, and training for agencies and individuals who are interested in assuring that children can have safe, conflict-free access to parents with whom they do not reside.
- *Providing resources* for members and families in need of supervised visitation services.

History and Background of SVN

- Is NOT a governing agency
 - Local laws or governmental funding programs, when they exist, govern programs directly
- Members voluntarily agree to follow the SVN Minimum Standards and the SVN Code of Ethics, if they are directly providing SV services.

History and Background of SVN

- Through a grant from the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW), SVN is providing regional training to non-Safe Havens grantees that are providing supervised visitation services to victims of domestic violence.
- The intent of the training to is increase participant awareness of the dynamics of domestic violence within the context of supervised visitation.

Engaging Families

At present, what percentage of your cases involve domestic violence?

- None
- <25%
- 25 – 50%
- 50 – 75%
- >75%

Engaging Families

For those of you who indicated that there are some cases of domestic violence in your center's caseload:

How many of you have changed your practice to accommodate these cases?

If so, how?

Engaging Families: Discussion Questions

Using the statements on the handout, discuss the following questions at your table:

- What do these statements suggest to you?
- What are some of the reasons any parent or child may be saying these?

Learning Points

- Family history can be complicated.
- We often take statements at face value and do not probe what they mean.
- Sometimes, the statements may suggest a history of domestic violence that needs to be explored to ensure safety for all.

What is Domestic Violence?

At the end of this segment, you will be better able to:

- Describe the context of violent behavior and patterns of batterer conduct.
- Evaluate the impact of domestic violence on adult victims and children.
- Assess risks to both adult and child victims of domestic violence in the supervised visitation setting.
- Identify the safety requirements of families using your centers.



Consider for This Couple

- What is the motivation behind the perpetrator's act?
- What is the impact on the victim(s)?



Consider for This Couple

- What is the motivation behind each perpetrator's act?
- What is the impact on the victim(s)?



Consider for This Couple

- What is the motivation behind the perpetrator's act?
- What is the impact on the victim(s)?

Small Group Discussion & Report Back

- Assume you saw the video and had additional facts before any of the people in the cases came to your center. As a provider, how do you:
 - Address the perpetrator's motive in using violence?
 - Address the impact of the violence on the victim(s)?
 - Consider safety issues while providing services?

Context Is Everything

Context is critical

Failing to distinguish one kind of domestic abuse from another can:

- Endanger victims of ongoing violence;
- Embolden perpetrators to commit ongoing violence; and
- Place adult victims and children at greater risk.

Context means

- Offender's INTENT in using violence
- MEANING of violence to the victim
- EFFECT of violence on the victim
 - Lethality and RISK of further violence
 - Risk of other, non violent ABUSE or intimidation of the victim

Who is doing what to whom and with what impact?

Context

- Not meant to excuse criminal behavior, rather, can assist providers in understanding behaviors in the supervised visitation setting and inform the use of safety measures
- Context determines the appropriate interventions and safety planning

Contexts for domestic violence

- Battering
 - patterned use of violence, intimidation and coercion to establish dominance
- Resistive/Reactive
 - violence produced and shaped by battering
- Other (e.g. “Situational,” Pathology)
 - Violence not linked to establishing an ongoing relationship of dominance

Battering/Coercive Control

- In addition to violence, uses power and control tactics designed to intimidate, threaten victim into compliance
- Entitlement
- Often “triggered” by victim’s attempts to assert independence
- Violence often escalates in severity and frequency
- Most often male perpetrated against female

Battering/Coercive Control

- Coercive power involves the ability to cause harm or fear of harm for non-compliance with demands/rules;
- Ability to grant rewards, needed or desired things, for compliance (affection, economic support);
- Batterer's ability to achieve dominance;
- Victims belief that the abuser can and will provide consequences or rewards;
- Victim's response involves choice, but not "free choice"; and
- Depends on abuser's use of surveillance & enforcement.

(Dutton & Goodman, 2005)

Resistive/Reactive to Ongoing Violence

- Response to a pattern of violence and intimidation
- Coping strategy
- Violence may be purely self defensive (non criminal)
- Violence may be retaliatory or an attempt to go “toe-to-toe” with the abuser

Non-Battering Situational

- Other forms of power and control tactics are not being used
- Violence less likely to be serious or lethal
- Use of violence may be atypical
- May be in context of separation

Context

- Measurement of violent acts alone cannot provide whole picture
- Need to understand the uses of violence and response to violence within the context of the relationship:
 - Cultural norms
 - Social status/privilege/access
 - Institutional systems

How do we determine the context for this act of violence? *(Intent, Meaning, Effect)*

- Information from parties:
 - History of violence
 - Pattern of intimidation and threats?
 - Intent and meaning of violence to victim
 - Risk assessment
 - Screening
- Information from others: information from others – court documents or police reports from parents only

What are examples of
rulemaking/coercion?
Methods of enforcement?



Basic/Fundamental Rules

- I make the rules.
- I am entitled to YOU, your obedience, services, affection, loyalty, fidelity and undivided attention.
- You cannot leave w/o my permission.
- You cannot tell anyone of the abuse.

The Batterer

- Pattern of abuse and control
- Abuse may be physical, emotional, financial, psychological and sexual
- May include threats to harm self, children, other family members, pets and property
- Violence is used to intimidate, humiliate or frighten victims, or to make them feel powerless
- Number of acts that may appear minor when viewed in isolation, but collectively form a pattern of abuse
- Acts of violence are seldom single assaults

Interventions for Batterers

- Some successes to date — no false hope for victims
- Anger management and couples counseling not appropriate
- May need to match batterer to specific intervention
- Compounding problems: alcohol/drug abuse, mental illness, poverty
- Variable standards for programs – lack of cultural competence
- Need an integrated response

Learning Points

- Vast majority of DV perpetrated by men against women (80-90%).
- Domestic violence versus high conflict
- When DV is present we see particular dynamics of power and control by an individual

Lunch Discussion

Discuss why you wanted to come to this training and the challenges your center faces when serving families experiencing domestic violence.

Post Separation

- At the end of this segment, you will be better able to:
 - Identify risks to both adult and child victims of domestic violence in the context of supervised visitation and exchange; and
 - Respond to the safety needs of families using the center.



Post Separation

Does battering end with separation?

- The physical violence may stop
- Abuser may alter his focus or tactics and use other coercive controls

Post Separation

Joseph and Dehlia: Case Facts

Joseph and Dehlia are separated. Dehlia left Joseph after a very violent incident. Dehlia packed up her three children took them to an undisclosed location. Joseph filed a motion with the court to gain parenting time and ultimately to gain full sole legal and physical custody of the three children.

The three children are Anna, age 5, John, age 10, and Sarah, age 14.

Post Separation

Discussion questions:

- Does anything about this visit stand out for you? If yes, what?
- Are there any safety concerns?
- How would you respond to any of these concerns you may have?

Post Separation

Discussion questions:

- What changes for you and how?
- What tactics did you observe in the supervised visit?

Post Separation

Tactics that you may observe:

- “POSITIVE”: putting on a show, compliance in hopes of ending supervision, charming or engaging staff as supportive witnesses in litigation
- “NEGATIVE”: disobeying rules, resisting feedback and limits, minimizing concerns, trying to get kicked out, subtle undermining.

Tactics Shift

Now that the batterer may no longer have direct access to the victim, his tactics may shift to include the following:

- Use of the system
- Use of the center
- Use of the children

Use of the System

- Calls to Child Protective Services
- Multiple court filings
- Complaints to child's school
- Involvement with child therapist

Use of the Center

- Changes in schedule
- Late or no-show to visits/exchanges
- Attempts to intimidate staff
- Attempts to engage staff in collusion
- Providing information about the victim
- Appears to be the “perfect parent”
- Use of center documentation

Use of the Children

- Use children to gather information
- Attempt to undermine child's relationship with their protective parent
- Use children to pass messages
- Minimize and/or deny abuse
- Blame protective parent for separation
- Include the children in the battering

Use of the Children

- Telling the children that they cannot be a family because of the victim
- Calling the victim constantly under the guise of talking to or about the children
- Showering the kids with gifts
- Undermining the victim parent's rules
- Changing visitation plans without notice
- Asking children what the victimized parent is doing and who she is seeing

Tactics, continued

- Picking the children up without informing the abused parent beforehand; keeping the children longer than expected or abducting them
- Threatening to take custody/visitation away
- Telling the children that the victimized parent is an alcoholic, addict, or mentally ill
- Keeping court cases active
- Criticizing, assaulting, or threatening the victim's new partner
- Abusing his new partner in front of the children

What About the Victims?

- May be at increased risk
- May be frustrated with the system
- May feel overwhelmed
- Often have limited resources
- May be the visiting parent
- Typically want children to see the abuser, if this can occur safely

Impact on Mothers

- Anxiety – ongoing abuse
- Anger and frustration
- Distrust and suspicion of court related agencies
- Dealing with the aftermath with the children (resistance, frustration, behavior problems)
- Parenting ability is undermined by batterer
- “Non-cooperative”
- Hyper vigilant
- Trying to juggle it all

Impact on Children

- Varies (depends on age, gender, identification with perpetrator, role in family)
- Confusion
- Engagement in adult issues (court issues, finances)
- Anxiety, distress
- Align with batterer
- Attempt to please both

Learning Points

- Impact of domestic violence varies among families, within families.
- Center should take the time to clearly understand each family's history and safety needs.
- The center should respond to each member of the family in individualized ways to meet their unique safety needs.
- Prioritize the safety needs of the children and the adult victim.
- Routinely check in with each person using the center.
- Ensure that safety is not compromised.



Engaging People, Prioritizing Safety

As a result of this segment, you will be better able to:

- Prioritize safety of the adult victim and children;
- Develop individualized responses to each person using the center;
- Critically engage all members of the family;
- Build relationships that are essential for safety; and
- Challenge the concept of neutrality within the context of supervised visitation and exchange.

Engaging Families – Role Play

As you watch the role play, please consider whether you would do anything differently at any point during any of the interactions.

Please take notes to use for later discussion.

Engaging People, Prioritizing Safety

- Would you have done things differently?
How?
- Was enough information obtained at the intake?
- Reflections
- Were there any compromises to safety?

Engaging People, Prioritizing Safety

Additional discussion questions:

- Did the structure of the intake set the stage for the visit?
- Was there enough information obtained during the intake?
- Would more information be helpful? How?

Engaging People, Prioritizing Safety

Large group reflection

- How would the scenario be different if we had engaged Dad, Mom and the child in different ways?
- What other information would you have obtained?
- How might things have looked different?
- Should it matter?

Engaging People, Prioritizing Safety – Learning Points

It is critical to build relationships, otherwise:

- It is harder to discuss difficult issues without making people defensive
- People feel unsupported/unheard, and then operate from that place
- It is unclear who needs protection from whom
- Staff see people 1 – 2 hours a week and then the backlash from the visit falls on Mom
- There is no time to build long term safety beyond the actual visitation
- It results in dehumanizing practices.

Engaging People, Prioritizing Safety – Revisit the Intake

Small group:

- What would the visit look like now that you have had this conversation?

Reflections:

- How would you engage the Dad?
- How would you engage the child?

Neutrality- The Standard

- The SVN Standards state:
- **3.4 Neutrality**
- A provider must be neutral in providing supervised visitation service. See definition under [section 2.0](#) of this document.

Neutrality - Introduction

- Neutrality has been a controversial topic
- What role can SV providers play when working with parents and children without violating the standard of neutrality?
- What are some actions that would be considered a violation the SVN standard of neutrality?
- What type of intervention or assistance can be offered without violating the standard?
- How do we provide physical and emotional safety to participants and maintain the standard?

Definition of Neutrality

According to the standards:

Neutral/neutrality: as used in the context of supervised visitation means maintaining an unbiased, objective, and balanced environment, and when providing the service, not taking a position between the parents in providing the service. Providing service in a neutral manner is intended to ensure respect for all individuals in their capacity as parents and to protect children who are attempting to remain in contact with their parents. Being neutral does not mean providers disregard behaviors such as abuse or violence of any kind.

Definition

Dictionary.com lists some interesting definitions of “neutral”:

1. not taking part or giving assistance in a dispute or war between others: a neutral nation during World War II.
2. not aligned with or supporting any side or position in a controversy of or belonging to a neutral state or party: neutral territory.
3. of no particular kind, characteristics, etc.; indefinite: a neutral personality that made no impression whatever

Does the definition fit?

Are we in a war? Does it feel that way sometimes?

Would you say that SV providers have “no particular characteristics” and make “no impression”?

The concept versus the definition

Are we oversimplifying?

Different definitions for neutrality within the context of botany, chemistry, mechanics, physics, and war.

What would their definition be within the context of SV?

Neutrality for SV Providers

- SV providers can meet the SV standard without meeting the Dictionary.com definition of “neutral”
- SV providers protect children and victims of domestic violence everyday and do so with wonderful “personality and characteristics” that are their own.
- SV Providers can give “assistance” and indeed make an “impression” without violating the SVN standard

Neutrality and Domestic Violence

- The concept of neutrality was never meant to put victims of domestic violence and/or physical abuse at risk. The safety of all participants should be a primary concern for all providers.

Neutrality and Domestic Violence

The SVN standards are clear on this issue:

- Written policies and procedures focused on safety
- Family safety needs should be matched by capacity of provider
- Physical safety measures are not substitutes for building relationships
- Must treat each client with respect and fairness

Neutrality

- Whether you are a private provider, for profit agency, a non profit agency or any other type of entity, odds are the reason for your being in this field is strong belief in helping families and keeping victims and children safe.....you do not have to abandon those ideals to maintain the concept of neutrality and meet the SVN standard

Neutrality – Learning Points

- Understand how to develop individualized service plans for all clients and safety plans for victims
 - Age-appropriate for children
- Grasp the importance of ongoing conversations with clients; building relationships

Building Community Connections

At the end of this segment, you will be better able to:

- Provide supervised visitation services that account for domestic violence and safety needs
- Build relationships and collaborate with other providers, communities and system players that can support the family holistically.
- Determine if you should apply for OVW funding.
- Understand the principles that guide this work.

Community Connections

As a large group:

- What does this family need beyond supervised visitation?
- In your community, who can provide it?
- How do you link with those providers?
- What is your role in making this happen?

Building Relationships: Community Collaboration

- What community/system partners would you like to be connected to in order to better serve families experiencing domestic violence?
- Thinking about the courts and domestic violence service providers, work through Handout 5 – what is your relationship with each, what do you need from them, and how can you improve your relationship?

Community Connections

Learning points:

- Adult victims and children need specialized resources and a continuum of services
- Working together with other community resources can improve the overall system response
 - Appropriate referrals

Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program

- Authorized as a pilot program under VAWA 2000
- First grants awarded in 2002
- Demonstration Initiative
- National Consulting Committee
- Guiding Principles



Program Purpose

To increase safety for victims and their children by increasing opportunities for supervised visitation and safe exchange in cases of domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, and stalking.

Overarching Goals

- Increase safety for adult victims
- Grant activities must ensure equal regard for the safety of children and adult victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

Scope

- Limited to visitation and exchange services between custodial and non-custodial parents
- Visitation and exchange services for the primary purpose of providing access to children in cases of substance abuse, mental illness, child support, foster care, or high conflict divorce are beyond the scope of the grant program

Statutory Considerations

- Number of families served
- Services to underserved populations
- Collaboration with non-profit, non-governmental DV and SA entities
- Collaboration with state and local courts

Minimum Requirements

- By statute, all grantees must:
 - Demonstrate expertise in family violence, domestic violence, and/or sexual assault
 - If they choose to charge fees for services, implement a sliding scale based on income level
 - Demonstrate adequate security
 - Implement standards and protocols.



Activities That May Compromise Victim Safety

- Mediation, alternative dispute resolution, or family counseling
- Pre-trial diversion programs
- Batterer Intervention not linked to the criminal justice system
- Mandating victims to services
- Discriminatory practices

Activities That May Compromise Victim Safety (2010)

- Requiring adult victims to participate in mediation family counseling;
- Providing visitation or exchange services which do not account for the safety of adult victims;
- Requiring a court order to access visitation and/or exchange services; and
- Providing custody evaluations or court reports based on subjective information and opinions of center staff and volunteers.

Recipient Responsibilities

- Ensure that a multi-disciplinary team participates in project development and implementation
- Identify a representative of the grantee agency as project coordinator
- Limit first 12 months to planning and development
- Submit an implementation plan for years 2&3

Special Conditions

- Funds may not be used to support individual counseling, family counseling, parent education support groups, or therapeutic supervision.
- Funds may not be used to provide offsite or overnight visitation services.

Special Conditions

- The grantee agrees to develop adequate security measures, including but not limited to, adequate facilities, procedures, and personnel capable of preventing violence, for the operation of supervised visitation programs or safe visitation exchange.

The Guiding Principles

- Provide guidance for communities developing or enhancing SV/SE services for families experiencing domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking
- Serve as a reference for drafting policies and protocols
- Assist collaborations with shaping local services

Guiding Principles

- I. Equal Regard for the Safety of Child(ren) and Adult Victims
- II. Valuing Multiculturalism and Diversity
- III. Incorporating an Understanding of Domestic Violence into Center Services
- IV. Respectful and Fair Interaction
- V. Community Collaboration
- VI. Advocacy for Child(ren) and Adult Victims

Equal Regard for the Safety of Child(ren) and Adult Victim

- The supervised visitation center should consider as its highest priority the safety of the child(ren) and adult victims and should treat both with equal regard

Incorporating and Understanding of Domestic Violence into Center Services

- Visitation centers should demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the nature, dynamics, and impact of domestic violence, and incorporate that understanding into services.

Respectful and Fair Interaction

- Visitation centers should treat every individual using its services with respect and fairness, while taking into account the abuse that has occurred within the family

Valuing Multiculturalism and Diversity

- Visitation centers should be responsive to the background, circumstances, and cultures of their community and the families they serve

Advocacy for Child(ren) and Adult Victims

- Visitation centers should work with the community collaborative to ensure that child(ren) and adult victims have meaningful access to services, and visitation centers should actively link individuals to those services.

Community Collaboration

- Visitation centers should seek to operate within a community collaborative with has as its goal to centralize safety of child(ren) and adult victims and hold batterers accountable.

Community Collaboration (cont.)

- The community collaboration will strive to:
 - (1) ensure a holistic response to each family member's needs;
 - (2) stop continued abuse of child(ren) and adult victims; and
 - (3) eliminate the social conditions that lead to violence.

Closing Remarks

- It is critical to understand the continued impact of domestic violence on victims
- Supervised visitation providers should:
 - Build relationships with clients
 - Prioritize and individualize safety
 - Collaborate with partners in the community
 - Use principles and standards to guide the work

