

Working with Abusive Men in their Role as Fathers in Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Programs

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EXPLORING OUR HOPES AND FEARS

Brainstorm Exercise

Finding a Balance That Promotes Safety

SVC's
Relationship
with Fathers



Accountability
for Abusive
Behaviors

Rationale

- **Children can be profoundly affected by domestic violence**
- **Fathers who use violence often have legal and illegal contact with their children; in some cases, this contact could be transformed into a positive healing experience for the children**
- **Many mothers who have suffered abuse want their children to have safer and healthier contact with their fathers.**
- **Men seem to be able to develop empathy toward their children more easily than toward their partners.**

Rationale

- **Many men who have used violence grew up in abusive households and have lived through the cycle of violence**
- **Abusive men often undermine their partner's parent and use children to further control women**
- **Positive involvement by a father figure can be very beneficial to a child's development**
- **Giving fathers more opportunities for change and healing is an essential component to end violence against women and children**

Rationale

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Working with Men who Batter

Point

Men who batter are manipulative, dangerous and cruel. They need to be observed and monitored

Counterpoint

Men who batter can change, heal their relationships and contribute to the movement against domestic violence

Working with Men who Batter

Point

- Challenge Behavior
- Accountability
- Focus on Problems Limits

Counterpoint

- Support the Person
- Connection
- Focus on Strengths
- Opportunities

Guiding Principles

- In the context of domestic violence, the safety of women and children is always our first priority
- This work must be continually informed and guided by the experiences of battered women and their children
- We do not endorse or encourage automatic contact between the offending fathers and their children or parenting partners
- In any domestic violence intervention, there must be critical awareness of the cultural context in which parenting happens
- Violence against women and children is a tool of domination and control used primarily by men and rooted in sexism and male entitlement
- Abuse is a deliberate choice and learned behavior and therefore can be unlearned
- Some men choose to change their abusive behavior and heal their relationships, while others continue to choose violence
- Working with fathers is an essential piece of ending violence against women and children
- Fathers who have used violence need close observation to mitigate unintended harm

Promoting Safety

Fathers Accountability for Abusive Behaviors

- Center works to decrease fathers inclination to further harm mother and children
- The center is never “neutral” about the violence
- Make sure fathers have a clear understanding of what the center expects of them
- Men are expected to take responsibility for their behavior at the center. They need to follow center policies

Promoting Safety

Relationship and Connection with Fathers

- A belief that men have the capacity to be more peaceful co/parallel parent and fathers
- Being attentive to father's distress and providing them with support
- Be truthful and direct with fathers and at the same time show you care about them
- Provide policies that meet the individual needs for safety for each family – this means having different rules for each family

Things to Consider

De-escalating the situation

- Staff manages their own anxiety of the situation
- Addressing safety issues rather than parenting style
- Staff keeps their focus on the “humanness” of the father as they address the situation
- Staff remains aware of their body language, tone of voice, and delivery of their message
- Staff is consistent in their messages

Contributing to the anxiety

- Staff projects onto the father their own anxieties of the situation
- Staff addresses the situation from a place of judgment and stereotypes
- Staff loses site of their ability to remain calm and contributes more chaotic energy to the situation
- Staff attempts to hold father up to a universal, fictitious “perfect father”

Strategies for Engaging Men

- Make connections with men regarding their beliefs about fathering and their actual performance at the visits
- Validate their experiences
- Focus on moving forward, not on the past
- Help make connections with the community resources that can assist with barriers to change

Policies and Practices that Engage Men

- Hours of Operation
- Appearing at all court hearings
- Providing transportation
- Allowing others to attend visits
- Various levels of monitoring visits
- Various levels of security
- Allowing conversations about what brought the family to use the SVC
- Allowing gifts
- Allowing food
- No fees for services

EXPLORING OUR BIAS AND BELIEFS

Exploring our Bias and Beliefs

Men Who Batter Are....

Exploring our Bias and Beliefs

Battered Women Are....

Many men appear to be more capable of developing empathy, acknowledging damage, and accepting responsibility for violence in relation to their children than in relation to their partners

Remember, women who have been abused by their children's father are in the strongest position to assess the safety of children's contact with their fathers.

Something My Father Would Do

We all play a role in creating a world where children get to hold on to their sense of safety, curiosity, and wonder.....

How do we do this?

By remembering when men abuse the mothers of their children or undermine her parenting they are hurting their children's capacity to respect adults in general and women in particular.