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Services Bureau

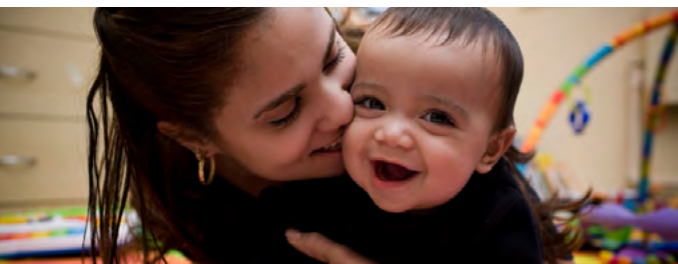
## Family Violence Prevention & Services Program



# Building Promising Futures: Guidelines for Enhancing Response of Domestic Violence Programs to Children & Youth



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This paper is a companion to *Developing Outcome Measures for Domestic Violence Programs' Work with Children and Youth* (2016), which can be found on the Promising Futures website at:

<http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/building-promising-futures/>

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Thank you to the demonstration sites — the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, the Idaho Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, the New Jersey Coalition End Domestic Violence, and End Abuse Wisconsin — for letting us learn with you about what approaches lead to better outcomes for mothers and children experiencing domestic violence.

We are grateful to the following individuals for the contributions of their time and expertise: Susan Blumenfeld, Ann Brickson, Betsy Groves, Sandy Davidson, Tammy Mello, and Amy Torchia. We truly appreciate your dedication and all of the work that you do.

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Sincerely,

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## Introduction

This discussion paper presents guidelines for consideration to improve the services to and success of children exposed to domestic violence. There is increasing evidence—both research-based and practice-based—of the strong relationship between the health and well-being of children and that of their protective parents or caretakers<sup>1</sup> where family and/or domestic violence occur (Carpenter & Stacks, 2009; Blodget et al., 2008; Bourassa, 2007; Burke et al., 2008; Crusto et al., 2010). Many domestic violence (DV) programs across the country have made great strides in focusing more attention on children and youth over the last 15 years, including those supported in 2005-2008 with funds generated by the Family Violence Stamp<sup>2</sup>. However, others may require additional support and guidance to fully embrace and implement comprehensive and integrated approaches to working with children affected by violence within their families. Separate responses to mothers' and children's safety and well-being often place them at odds with one another. In contrast, an integrated approach to intervening with the family as a whole results in better outcomes for children, their mothers, and the whole family (Gewirtz et al., 2011; Ghasemi, 2009; Jaffee et al., 2002). These comprehensive solutions more accurately reflect the lived realities of families affected by the violence.



Current literature from the United States and a number of other countries throughout the world suggests that the best outcomes for children (that is, significantly less custodial interference, less maltreatment, less physical, sexual, and verbal abuse) (Hamby et al., 2010) result from approaches that integrate attention to children's safety and well-being into services and supports provided to the families and communities in which children live. UNICEF (2013) clearly indicates that women's rights and children's rights are interrelated as they pertain to their mutual well-being. Moreover, well-established models of holistic, integrated services are in place and operating successfully in many parts of the world and in some parts of the U.S., such as Project Support and Kids' Club & Moms' Empowerment (see Chamberlain, 2014). These models are especially evident in immigrant communities (Perilla et al., 2007; Perilla et al., 2012), communities of color, and Native communities. Unfortunately, only a few of these culturally-specific programs appear in the current literature and thus their work is not widely acknowledged or disseminated.

This paper represents a collaboration involving [Futures Without Violence \(FUTURES\)](#), the [Family Violence Prevention and Services Program/Family and Youth Services Bureau \(FYSB\)](#) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the [National Resource Center on Domestic Violence \(NRCDV\)](#), and other key partners, and explores how domestic violence programs can best respond simultaneously to the needs of children

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<sup>1</sup> We are aware that children who have witnessed/experienced violence in their home live in families in which their primary caregiver may be one or both parents, grandparents or other families members. In this document we will use the term "mother/caregiver" to refer to any person who has ongoing responsibility for childrearing in the home, while at the same time recognizing that the majority of caregivers who provide most of the care of these children are their mothers or grandmothers.

<sup>2</sup> See box on p.14 for a description of these Enhanced Services for Children Who Have Been Exposed to Domestic Violence discretionary grants.

and their caregivers. As an initial step, seven experts<sup>3</sup> in the field who have extensive experience working with children and youth exposed to domestic violence were consulted to capture their ideas about creating a more comprehensive response. An earlier draft of this paper was then circulated among a larger group of experienced professionals for feedback. In addition, the paper drew on the experience and lessons learned from the collective and remarkably diverse experience of providers in four demonstration sites who had received federal funding from the Family and Youth Services Bureau<sup>4</sup> to develop or expand programming for children exposed to domestic violence. The information, experiences and insights gleaned from these sources were supplemented with a review of what was being done in other countries to address the needs, environment, and resilience of children who had witnessed and/or experienced violence in their home.



## About Women and Children

UNICEF used data from the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children, which reviewed existing studies on the topic from throughout the world, to create a list of six basic needs that children have to be better protected from the deleterious effects of violence in their home: (a) a safe and secure home environment; (b) adults who will listen to them, believe them, and shelter them; (c) a sense of routine and normalcy; (d) support services that meet their needs; (e) learning that domestic violence is wrong and being trained

about non-violent ways of resolving conflict; and (f) adults who will speak out and break the silence (UNICEF, 2006). U.S. researchers have compiled similar lists of sources of resilience (see Gewirtz & Edleson, 2007).

In addition to violence in the home, many children in this and many other countries are also exposed to street violence, drugs, gangs, bullying in school and neighborhood, extreme poverty, lack of basic needs, and many other conditions that can prevent them from realizing their right to a childhood free from violence and fear UNICEF (2009). When children do not have their basic needs met, their mothers are also affected. UNICEF (2009) indicates that “the well-being of women and children is heavily determined by what happens in the private spheres of their lives: within their families, households and communities” (p. 21). Thus, it is logical that in countries outside the U.S., strategies to address and prevent negative child outcomes are closely tied to plans and policies for increasing the well-being of the mothers. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in this country until quite recently.

Additionally, many abusive partners attempt to undermine the non-abusive parent's relationship with their children. Some domestic violence victims may have difficulty at times monitoring closely what is happening with their children in the home. This can create opportunities for children to be victims of not only the terrifying experience of seeing their mother being abused, but also of being the victims of sexual or other abuse perpetrated by people who have access to their home. At times it may be the biological father of the children

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<sup>3</sup> We are grateful to the following individuals for the contributions of their time and many of the ideas reflected here, although relieve them of any responsibility: [alphabetical] – Susan Blumenfeld, National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health; Ann Brickson, Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Betsy Groves, Children Witness to Violence Project, Boston, MA; Sandy Davidson, Praxis International, MN; Tammy Mello, Director, Domestic Violence Unit, MA Department of Children and Families; and Amy Torchia, Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence.

<sup>4</sup> Grant Number 90EV0401 from the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Profiles of promising interventions can be found at <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/advancing-the-field/communities-in-action/>.



(Bancroft & Silverman, 2002), at other times it may be a new person with whom the mother is living. In either case, some children can be at increased risk of abuse. Mothers and other caregivers may need support when child abuse by their partners is disclosed, as well as to access resources and tools to help them support their children.<sup>5</sup>

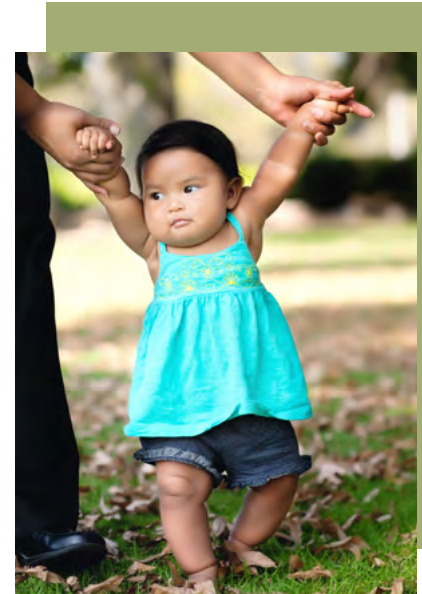
In the U.S., efforts to jointly address violence against women and children have not been considered widely and, in some instances, the two have been regarded as opposing camps in competition with one another for funding and relevance. The “silos” thus created have, in most cases, prevented our field from engaging in more integrated efforts to ensure that the mothers and children receive responses that honor their connections to one another and the reality that children’s well-being can also deeply affect the mother’s safety and well-being.

## About Resilience

The importance of recognizing the strength, resilience, and potential of all members of a family affected by domestic violence has been well documented in this country and elsewhere. This underscores the need to pay close attention to the terms we use to refer to our work with families and to ensure that we build on these important assets and support the most positive outcomes. Lupe Serrano, the late Executive Director of Casa de Esperanza, used to emphasize the fact that “if we start with needs, we get programs; if we start with strengths, we get possibilities.” Strength-based approaches that focus on the qualities and assets of both the children and the mother/caregiver, as well as those of their community, offer a much richer potential for creating true social change.

Additionally, studies have found that when both mother and children are given adequate support, about half of the children exposed to violence at home were found to be “resilient” in functioning and coping, showing no evidence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Some authors see these strengths as potential entry points in designing more specific prevention and intervention strategies that target these youth and their families (see, for example, Finkelstein et al., 2005; Gerwitz & Edleson, 2007; Kerig, 2003; Martinez-Torteya et al., 2009; Nugent et al., 2009; among others).<sup>6</sup>

Some domestic violence organizations in this and other countries, especially in immigrant communities and communities of color, have been working closely with mothers to engage them in collaborative decision-making, safety planning, and parenting skill building, among other areas. Some programs and organizations in the U.S. that use this approach have indicated that it is most effective when the woman and her children are seen and treated as a family, rather than as individuals, since there appears to be an “additive effect” when the whole family is considered in any decision that concerns them. In community-focused work, there have been many instances in which survivors have become community leaders, expanding and strengthening community capacity. At the same time, increasing recognition of collaboration offers huge benefits and intentionality in culturally specific ways. If service providers, academicians, and allied professionals are able to see each survivor as a true



<sup>5</sup> A helpful guide can be found at <http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/advocacy-matters-helping-mothers-and-their-children/>.

<sup>6</sup> A new resource for organizations committed to using trauma informed practices with adults and children using their services are a set of Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) Scales, developed by Drs. Cris M. Sullivan and Lisa Goodman, found at <http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/201503/new-resource-for-dv-programs-a-guide-for-using-the-trauma-informed-practice-tip-scales-by-drs-cris-m-sullivan-and-lisa-goodman/>.

partner in their joint task of creating safety and well-being for the entire family, survivors are often very willing and interested in participating in collaborative endeavors that result in information/data that will continue to enhance the field.



## Engaging Participants in Program Development for Children's Services

Given the above, the voices of survivors should be integrated into this work so that the development of programs can be guided directly by the people who will be using them. There have been many instances in which women who have experienced violence have provided critical feedback to program staff regarding the services they are providing to them, their children, and in some instances, their abusive partners (see Lyon et al., 2008; Lyon et al., 2011). When programs partner with survivors in this endeavor, the possibility of exciting community-service provider collaborations will be

created, and increase understanding of what is needed and what needs to be changed about DV programs; this approach will also enhance the capacity of communities and serve as a blueprint for other programs.

Partnering with survivors has been advocated and practiced in many places, but not consistently for program development. The idea of a survivor-defined process honors the belief that individuals who have been deeply affected by violence in their own home are, by right, the true experts about their lives (Davies & Lyon, 2014). Who better than the survivors themselves to be the ongoing collaborators with programs and institutions that are attempting to provide services and other support mechanisms to this population (Edleson, Nguyen & Kimball, 2011)? In addition, general approaches and “models” overwhelmingly do not work for everyone who is seeking our services. The diversity of participants is increasing at previously unexpected rates. At the same time, domestic violence occurs within an intersectional dynamic with myriad social, political, ethnic, and other contexts which are in constant flux. It is clear, then, that the best work will only be possible if service providers are actively engaged in learning from the families with whom they are working — not only from the stories of their experiences as survivors, but also the everyday reality of their whole lives. In doing so, not only will social justice and attention to the human rights of women and child participants be enhanced, but also more about their immediate and longer term needs and aspirations will be learned. In this manner, programs will be able to go beyond the “one-size-fits-all” approach and have the opportunity of creating solutions and ideas that may make it possible to jointly create true social change.

## IMPROVING SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH<sup>7</sup>

### Key considerations

Following directly from these understandings, several fundamental principles can guide domestic violence programs' work with children and youth:

- **Recognize children as more than just “secondary” victims.** Ensuring more focused attention on the specific needs of children and youth will require a significant shift for many domestic violence programs. For some, this will involve recognizing that children exposed to domestic violence have also experienced trauma and are not just “secondary” victims, and that strengthening the child-parent relationship and recognizing the rights and needs of *both* parents and children are key to an effective response.

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<sup>7</sup> See also related considerations for children's safety by MacMillan et al., 2013.

- **Involve children, youth and parents in program design.** Programming for children, as well as adults, will be even more effective when it is informed by the ongoing collaboration with the people for whom it is designed. This partnership ideally starts at the beginning of program development and continues through repeated systematic efforts to learn about program impact and gain ideas for program improvement.
- **Design all aspects of programming intentionally.** Domestic violence program rules and structures that make sense to both mothers and their children and are non-punitive, as well as the overall physical environment, are all important elements of good programming for children and youth exposed to domestic violence.
- **Recognize cultural relevance as an essential characteristic of successful programming.** The cultural traditions, history, and lived experiences of different ethnic/racial groups must be respected and taken into consideration in our programming and evaluations so that it can be both effective and responsive to the needs of the mothers and children of these communities.<sup>8</sup>
- **Recognize that people from different cultural backgrounds may have vastly different experiences, including multiple types of oppression that can affect access to resources, support, and, ultimately resilience.**
- **Ensure that programming is developmentally appropriate.** All programming for children and youth is best guided by consideration of their varying developmental needs. Knowing that even infants are affected by violence in their home, providers must be ready to address the needs of the entire family.
- **Invest in advocates working with children and youth.** A key barrier to creating, sustaining, or expanding services to children and youth is the reality of limited resources available to most domestic violence programs. In addition, fluctuating funding leads to starts and stops of programming, especially for children and youth. Despite limited resources, paid staff, including those working with children, deserve livable wages.
- **Work to provide a network of support for children and youth staff.** Children and youth advocates often report feeling isolated, undervalued, and accorded less respect within their programs, which contributes to higher rates of turnover and undermines the continuity of programming.
- **Focus on enhancing well-being in addition to safety.** Domestic violence policy and practice must reflect an understanding that “safety” is not solely about physical protection for mothers and their children, but includes basic human needs. Best programming, staffing, and training are derived from the desire to promote resiliency, resources and well-being for all family members—individually and in their community.
- **Incorporate positive and supportive responses to challenging behaviors.** Challenging behaviors of children and youth are influenced by the stress and trauma present in the family. Domestic violence programs will be more effective if they address these behaviors in respectful and helpful ways.<sup>9</sup>
- **Integrate response to childhood exposure to domestic violence into all programming.** As many of the mothers seeking services from domestic violence programs were also child witnesses of domestic violence, there is increased urgency to incorporate work with children and youth as part of the movement to end violence.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/> for a range of resources related to the development of culturally relevant programs.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/advancing-the-field/communities-in-action/>

- **Include awareness of the potential for sexual abuse.** Advocates who work with families in which domestic violence has occurred need to be knowledgeable about signs in children who have experienced sexual abuse. In addition to supporting the mother for the violence she has experienced, programs must also be ready to provide support and referrals to organizations that address child sexual abuse.
- **Provide program planning and infrastructure that support stable, durable programming for children and youth.** Programming needs to be “institutionalized,” so that it survives transitions in staffing.
- **Don’t be afraid of drawing from “science” and evidence-based practices.** A lot of valuable lessons have already been learned from researchers and advocates who have pioneered this work over the past 15 years or more. For example, the importance of toxic stress, and teaching survivors and children how to sooth and calm themselves, has become well established.<sup>10</sup>
- **Recognize the vital role that coalitions can play in local program development.** For example, coalitions can promote an understanding of child development and parent-child relationships as part of core competency training they provide to member programs.

These fundamental principles provide an important framework for the program development strategies that follow, as does the reality that access to resources will often constrain what domestic violence organizations can do with programming focused on the needs of children and their mothers/caregivers.

The strategies are organized into three levels, determined by program capacity and experience:

- Getting Started
- Next Steps in Program Development
- Continuing to Enhance Your Program

Each level in turn is grouped into 6 key sub-categories: *Overall Approach, Programming, Staffing, Training, Partnerships, and Evaluation/Research*. At each level, questions for participants will reflect the understanding that their involvement is part of an ongoing process for program design and improvement. Questions will also consider the families and the context in which they live, such as dealing with poverty in urban areas, immigration-related stresses or risks, or rural areas with limited resources and confidentiality.

## GETTING STARTED

**These preliminary steps may take a significant amount of time for a program to accomplish, since it is the beginning of a cultural shift and there are many details involved. In addition to talking with program participants (perhaps via an advisory group) about what they most want and need, it will be important to involve all program staff in discussion about why this change is important, and what it will mean in practice—in the short-term and over time. Program readiness includes intentional determination of: program infrastructure (core values, the physical environment and personnel policies), program practices (including service approaches, policies about child abuse and reporting, and cultural considerations), and community connections.<sup>11</sup>**

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/> for a range of resources, and <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/files/2012/01/Comprehensive-Review-of-Interventions-for-Children-Exposed-to-Domestic-Violence-FINAL.pdf> for a review of promising program models, as well as the 16 Strategies paper found at <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/files/2012/07/16-Evidence-Based-Strategies-for-Advocates.pdf>.



## Overall approach

- Reflect a commitment to working with abused parents and their children/youth in organizational mission and values statements.
- Recognize that, whether they plan to leave the relationship and/or remain in contact, abused parents are thinking about their children's safety and well-being when they seek services, and prepare all advocates to talk with parents/caregivers about their children as part of their ongoing contact with them.
- Use intake forms, assessments, and approaches that reflect a strengths-based (rather than a deficit-based) approach. Prepare all advocates to explore the strengths and challenges facing each member of the family, including young children, as well as what would be helpful to them.
- Always retain openness to each survivor's perspective and respect her decisions regarding her relationship, including decisions to stay in the relationship or stay connected to her partner.
- Create rights and responsibilities, rather than rules, for program participants, that are trauma-informed, allow flexibility, and ease stress.
- Attend to staff/volunteer self-care and support through policies and practices that provide flexibility and understanding that this work can be traumatizing.
- Create an environment that is family-friendly, reducing stress wherever possible for both mothers and their children/youth.
- Create an explicit plan for how the program approaches children, including how and when they are included in conversations (especially conversations about violence), and the considerations that will guide decisions about inclusion, such as their developmental stage.

## Programming

- Assess all aspects of current programming for their impact on children and youth, including, for example, considering the impact of protection orders or housing advocacy, and ensuring that crisis line workers are trained to ask about children.
- Coordinate comprehensive safety planning for mothers and children.
- Provide age-appropriate emotional and advocacy support, safety planning and skills/tools for children/youth. Develop a safety protocol for children/youth that helps them understand the safety features of the shelter or program that will help them feel as safe as possible in that environment.
- Develop an age-appropriate packet of tools and information, such as community resources, strategies for relationship-building, and common triggers and reactions, that mothers/caretakers and their children/youth can take with them when they leave the program.
- Incorporate information and support to rebuild/build/strengthen parent-child bonding. Reinforce the mother's listening skills as a critical component of strengthening the parent-child bond. This includes helping the mother listen to and believe what her son or daughter needs to tell her about

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/program-readiness/> for more information and questions to help guide this deliberation process.

any sexual or other abuse they have experienced, all the time reassuring the child that what has happened is NOT their fault and that they will assist them in getting the help they may need.

- Provide basic support and advocacy assistance to mother to enhance the safety of both the mother and child related to child protective services and family court issues (custody, access and visitation).
- Prepare all staff to provide advocacy and support to children with disabilities beyond basic access issues and reflect this organizational commitment in policies, programming, and training.
- Designate specific physical spaces, both inside the shelter/program, for children/youth, including safe outdoor play areas.

### Staffing

- Provide dedicated staff or volunteers for working with and spending time with the children/youth participating in the program.
- In hiring for all staff positions, include questions about attitudes toward children/youth and parenting.

### Training<sup>12</sup>

- Ensure that all staff are well-trained in active listening skills and empathic support, and have good training in how to talk with children.
- Provide training for all staff on child development and child trauma responses across ages and stages, and ensure that all staff are able to share this information with parents. Include information about:
  - Identifying and reinforcing strengths in a resiliency-based framework;
  - Identifying supports within the family and in the community;
  - Supporting parents so they can nurture and support their children;
  - Risk and protective factors affecting children's safety and well-being;
  - Culturally-based beliefs about DV and its impact, including a trauma perspective that builds understanding of current parenting in the context of a history of trauma;
  - Culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate approaches for working with diverse and historically marginalized communities;
  - Talking to children/youth participating in the programs with sensitivity to their age and development, as well as to disabilities; and
  - How to establish safety and work with parents on the broader context of safety, both at home and in the community.

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<sup>12</sup> See training resources included on Promising Futures: Futures Without Violence at <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/tools/browse-by-topic/training-curriculums/>.

## Partnerships

- Build connections with schools, recreational programs, childcare programs, children's mental health agencies, child sexual abuse service providers, child protection, legal advocates, attorneys and others that can help address the individual needs of children and build a broader community to serve as resources for children and youth exposed to domestic violence and their mothers. This is likely to include cross-training to ensure that each partner understands the roles, perspectives, legal mandates, resource limitations, culture, and potential contributions of the other partners.
- Establish partnerships with culturally specific community based organizations or tribal programs to better enable a program to support the needs of families from diverse and historically marginalized communities.

**Here are some questions that could be asked of mothers/caregivers and/or their children to help develop and modify the program at this stage:**

### **To help with design -**

**[For mothers/caregivers]:**

- How can we build a program that would best help you and your children? What do you most want and need: For yourself? For them?
- [For children/youth]: What can this program do to help you feel better in your family?

### **To help modify the program:**

**[For both]:**

- What has this program done that was especially helpful for you? What changes might make this program more helpful to you?

## **NEXT STEPS IN PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT (build on “getting started”)**

### **Overall Approach**

- Instill a commitment to integrate services and supports to adult survivors and to their children and youth. Avoid “silos”, or narrow sets of services that create artificial separation in programming for mothers and their children and fail to recognize the centrality of the bonds between them.
- Ensure regular contact and collaboration between advocates working with adults and those working with children/youth. Use supervision and other meetings to build and sustain relationships and integrated services. Consider developing “family advocates” instead of separating the work by family role and age.

### **Programming**

- Provide research-informed programming for children/youth, beyond a play room or area, and adopt evidence informed tools and approaches:
  - Include age-appropriate groups for children/youth that take a trauma-informed approach.
  - Provide age appropriate group discussions about safety—who can help them be safe, and how?
  - Schedule age-specific support groups for children simultaneously with the group(s) for adult survivors, in addition to groups for adults and children together.

- Offer such programs for both children/youth in the community and in shelter.
- Help parents and children establish routines and stability. Assist mothers to recognize their own trauma responses, as well as those of their children, and strategies for coping through relaxation and/or grounding skills.
- Provide protected time and staff for talking with children/youth, so that they can talk about what's going on with them.
- Provide teen-specific programming—especially, but not only—in shelters, recognizing that teens face unique challenges, especially being in shelter with their mothers.
- Provide age- and culturally-specific activities and resources to reinforce skills, modes of expression, and engagement, including music, arts and drama.
- Create opportunities for families to do enjoyable things together to reinforce a positive relationship.
- Provide parenting groups focusing on relationships, nurturing, attachment and mutual support instead of the more common focus on disciplinary practices.

### Staffing

- Provide dedicated CY advocates to work with the children/youth participating in the program and from the community, or have only “family advocates” who consistently do this work.
- Provide dedicated staff to work with mothers to provide advanced advocacy related to child protection and child custody issues, or ensure that family advocates are prepared to do this work.
- Assist staff to engage in reflective practice involving consistent reflection on how their work is affecting children and themselves.

### Training<sup>13</sup>

- Ensure that all staff are able to recognize their own trauma responses, and help with coping through relaxation and/or grounding skills.
- Ensure that all staff are well-trained on how to talk with mothers in a trauma-informed way about their children's exposure to domestic violence.
- Ensure that all staff know the strengths and practices of other relevant agencies in the community, will draw on these resources.

### Partnerships

- Educate first responders and child serving agencies on mothers' decision-making, the needs of children exposed to violence and strategies for enhancing their safety and well-being.
- Establish linkages with the community and identify community resources and support to help build collaborative advocacy for the family.

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<sup>13</sup> For training resources included on Promising Futures: Futures Without Violence at <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/tools/browse-by-topic/training-curriculums/>.



**Here are some questions that could be asked of mothers/caregivers and/or their children to help develop and modify the program at this stage:**

**To help with design -**

[For teens and mothers/caregivers]: What can the program do to make it easier for you to—

- Learn about and access the services and supports we provide?
- Feel more safe and comfortable in program spaces?
- Use technology safely to get things you need?
- Stay safely involved with people and programs at school/in your community?

**To help modify the program:**

[For children/youth]:

- What do you like best about this program and why?

[For both]:

- What has this program done that was especially helpful for you? How might this program be more helpful?

## **CONTINUING TO ENHANCE YOUR PROGRAM (build on “getting started” and “next steps”)**

### **Overall Approach**

- Adopt a program perspective that provides family-centered programming that focuses on strengthening the bonds between parents and children rather than separating them.
- Fully recognize that domestic violence is only one of the issues with which families have to contend.
- Provide long-term support and follow-up, including home-based support.
- Using a trauma-informed framework, fully support parent-child relationships regarding information, advocacy, assistance, and mental health support integrated into the program.
- Develop safe strategies that acknowledge the roles of fathers in children’s lives, such as working with Batterers Intervention Programs (BIP)s on the importance of non-violent fathering and/or involving fathers who no longer use violence in family-focused programming.<sup>14</sup>
- Develop opportunities for children, youth and parents to mentor and give back to their communities
- Explore alternatives to the shelter as the only or best way to provide services. Consider using more small apartments where families could live as families. With fewer rules, more attention could focus on support for mothers and children.

### **Programming**

- Integrate research-based and evidence-informed interventions and trauma assessments into programming for mothers and their children, such as approaches to developing self-regulation skills.

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<sup>14</sup> For useful resources related to fatherhood, children and domestic violence, see Center for Family Policy and Practice (CFFPP) at <http://cffpp.org/pubdomviol.php>.

- Provide deeper therapeutic interventions, such as Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), for children who would benefit from them.
- Provide support groups for mothers and children/youth together designed to help support/strengthen relationship building, such as Kids' Club.
- Develop an advisory group of teens to provide leadership on teen-focused program content and offer mentoring to younger children.



### **Building Dignity: Design Strategies for Domestic Violence Shelter**

Thoughtful design dignifies survivors by meeting their needs for self-determination, security, and connection, while supporting parenting and minimizing the need for rules. This project of the Washington Coalition Against Domestic Violence reflects a commitment to creating welcoming,

accessible environments that help to empower survivors and their children, and have their origins in conversations with shelter residents and advocates. The site is designed to be useful to advocates, executive directors, architects and designers.

<http://buildingdignity.wscadv.org/>

- Provide “after-planning” for children to help children build their skills and pursue their interests and to build social networks for both adults and children to support resiliency.

### **Staffing**

- Support a clinical position within the program to do trauma assessments and clinical interventions that are strengths-based when needed and follow up with the needed/desired services and supports after the survivor and children leave the shelter or community program. Include the survivor's perspective in all trauma assessments.

### **Training<sup>15</sup>**

- Design and conduct comprehensive protocol-driven cross-training programs for domestic violence program staff and all collaborative partners, including child protection and law enforcement, about how to best support the safety and well-being of parents and their children.

### **Partnerships**

- Build a multi-disciplinary response team that includes representatives from Children and Youth (CY) advocacy organizations and advocates, adult and child health and mental health providers, culturally-specific community based organizations, sexual assault service providers, law enforcement, child protective services, legal advocates, and others.
- Build a working collaborative relationship with a mental health organization to provide real and quick access to support for adults and children when they need it. Establish third party payment structures.

<sup>15</sup> See training resources included on Promising Futures: Futures Without Violence at <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/tools/browse-by-topic/training-curriculums/>.

- Develop comprehensive MOUs between the domestic violence program and key community agencies and systems, such as child protective services, child serving agencies, and others, spelling out roles and responsibilities, communication, procedures for cross-referral and training.

### **Evaluation/Research**

- Conduct a 3-5 year community assessment on needs and strengths of, and community supports for, children exposed to domestic violence and their supportive parent.
- Conduct evaluation of existing and new children's services at domestic violence programs and within the community.
- Partner with researchers to build the evidence base of what works; include evaluation funding in federal grants to help accomplish this.

**Here are some questions that could be asked of mothers/caregivers and/or their children to help develop and modify the program at this stage:**

#### **[For mothers/caregivers]:**

- Did this program help you support your children? Did it provide what you most wanted or needed: For yourself? For them?
- What additional community resources, services, and/or supports would be most helpful?
- What can we do to support you and your children when you are no longer directly connected to the program? Do you need/want help with reconnecting with your community or your network of support?

#### **[For children/youth]:**

- What do you like best about this program and why?

#### **[For both]:**

- What has this program done that was especially helpful for you? How might this program be more helpful?

# Breaking the Cycle:

## Prioritizing Children and Youth for Over 10 Years



In October 2003, the United States Post Office issued a “Stop the Violence Stamp” as directed by the Stamp Out Family Violence Act of 2001, to provide the public with a direct and tangible way to contribute funding for domestic violence programs. The proceeds from the stamp sales over a two-year period were transferred to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to carry out the purposes of the Act with a focus on enhancing services to children and youth impacted by domestic violence.

In 2005, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Programs/Family and Youth Services Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released funds for the development of demonstration projects to enhance services to children and youth who have been exposed to domestic violence. Three-year grants were awarded, after a competitive process, to projects in California, Colorado, Washington, D.C., Michigan, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Virginia to explore innovative approaches to intervention and prevention for families in both shelter and non-shelter settings. Across all programs, project staff and partners worked to:

- Develop and enhance assessment and intervention strategies for children and youth exposed to domestic violence and their parents;
- Train domestic violence program staff and community partners on the effects of being exposed to violence on children and youth and intervention strategies; and
- Develop or enhance community-based interventions specific to issues of domestic violence in order to meet the needs of children and youth impacted by such violence.

In 2010, three year grants were awarded to four statewide capacity-building projects — in Alaska, Idaho, New Jersey, and Wisconsin — and one national technical assistance provider to expand services for children and youth exposed to domestic violence. These five grantees have provided leadership in creating a broader network of support and for developing evidence-based interventions for children, youth and parents exposed to domestic violence.

Each of these funded projects has contributed new knowledge and experience to helping children and youth exposed to domestic violence. This knowledge and experience has strengthened the relationship between domestic violence victim advocates and other partners in the community serving children and youth exposed to domestic violence. Further, each collaboration has reinforced the shared mission of protecting abused women and their children from violence by providing them with the interventions, tools and resources to move their lives and their futures forward in positive, productive and violence-free directions.



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Best Practices for Serving Children, Youth,  
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A capacity building and resource website for advocates, domestic violence programs on advancing their practice on serving children and their families.

For more information about Promising Futures or Futures Without Violence, please call 415-678-5500, or email [childrensteam@futureswithoutviolence.org](mailto:childrensteam@futureswithoutviolence.org)

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