High Risk Transitions: Enhancing Safety Post- Separation in Families that Have Experienced Domestic Violence

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Participants will Learn

- How to help non-offending parents develop individualized safety plans for and with their children including safe options linked to their specific "drop-off and pick-up" arrangements.
- How to assist parents, children and adolescents to develop a safety "mind-set" when it comes to phones, internet, social media, virtual visitation and other forms of technology.
Participants will Learn

- Steps survivors of domestic violence can take to nurture and strengthen their bonds with their children post-separation.
- Practical suggestions on how parents can talk to their children about the abuse/divorce/separation in developmentally appropriate ways.
Did You Know?

- Every year in the US as many as 1600 women are killed by their intimate partner, most often after a history of violence and an attempt to end the relationship (Fox & Davits, 1999).

- Studies suggest that ongoing contact with an abusive former husband for the purposes of co-parenting may leave women vulnerable to further violence and threats. (Carlson, Harris and Holden 1999)
Did You Know?

- Separation alone does not offer protection. Research indicates even when DV victims separate from DV perpetrators, their children may be exposed to equal amounts of threats and physical violence as children of parents still living together, unless precautions are taken to ensure both the children’s and the DV victims’ safety (O’Sullivan, 2002).

- Living in separate housing or being a subject of a protection order does not keep DV perpetrators out of their children’s lives. DV perpetrators actively seek opportunities to continue to exercise power and control over their victims using issues of parenting, custody, and visitation.
Protective behaviors of battered women who stay with their batterers are often misinterpreted or unrecognized. She may employ a variety of strategies - some which may be deemed “harmful” by normal social standards - to lessen the effect of the violence on the children.

These attempts to protect children may not be recognized as such unless viewed in the context of domestic violence. Often protective behaviors are misunderstood to reflect resistance or a lack of cooperation. Some examples of strategies that are susceptible to misinterpretation include:

Did You Know?

- Minimizing and denying the violence to avoid retaliation by the batterer.
- Fighting back or defying the batterer.
- Complying with and placating the batterer in order to stop the violence.
- Leaving children with a relative or friend when there is danger.
- Trying to improve the relationship or find help for the batterer.
- Refusing or not following through with services to not anger the batterer.

In a study of abusive men referred to a parenting group, the use of custody proceedings to control or harass a former partner was a strategy commonly identified by the men themselves (Francis, Scott, Crooks, & Kelly, 2002).

Research has shown that batterers are more likely to apply for custody and equally likely to be granted it in comparison to non-violent fathers (Liss & Stahly, 1993; Zorza, 1995).
Post-Separation Contact Points

- Indeed, the ongoing risks to abused women and children are so high at the point of separation that supervised visitation centers have become an essential domestic violence service.

- Although supervised visitation centers enhance safety for most clients, they are not a guaranteed safeguard; indeed, there are documented cases of domestic homicide that have occurred at such centers.

(Sheeran & Hampton, 1999)
Domestic Violence / Type II Trauma

- **Type I Trauma:** triggered by short-term or single incident (e.g. car crash, tornado)

- Domestic Violence can be seen as a Type II Trauma characterized by prolonged and repeated exposure to intimidation, coercion and violence for the purpose of obtaining power and control over an intimate partner.
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- **Self-actualization**
  personal growth and fulfillment

- **Esteem needs**
  achievement, status, responsibility, reputation

- **Belongingness and Love needs**
  family, affection, relationships, work group, etc.

- **Safety needs**
  protection, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc.

- **Biological and Physiological needs**
  basic life needs - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep, etc.

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In addition to higher order (peak) counseling issues, (base-level) core concerns must be addressed at every contact including:

- **current safety/**
- **imminent risk**
- **lethality assessment**

*(Counseling Strategies to Reduce Intimate Partner Violence Post-Separation, Janet L. Lee, LCSW, pending publication.)*
Victim → Survivor → Thriver

The trauma of domestic violence leads victims to see the world through a *distorted* lens altering:
- their view of themselves (for example: worthless, incompetent etc.).
- their perception of their abusive partner (abuser as all powerful, adoption of abuser’s distorted beliefs or idealization of abuser).

- To retain this distorted lens is to remain a *victim*.
- To identify the distortions and abuse and to move towards emotional and physical safety is to be a *survivor*.
- To clean off the lens and take a fresh look is to *thrive*.

(Schiraldi, 2000)
Protective Strategies

Evidence shows most victims use multiple protective strategies including:

- Creative responses to immediate situational strategies
- Protecting children, family, friends and pets
- Calling the police
- Seeking a restraining order
- Going to a domestic violence shelter
- Using other domestic violence program services (court accompaniment, transportation, counseling)
- Reaching out for social support
- Turning to spiritual and religious resources
- Using traditional health, mental health & social services
- Terminating the relationship

(Hamby and Bible 2009)
“Invisible” Protective Strategies

- Opening bank accounts/putting aside money
- Filing for custody of their children
- Seeking supervised visitation
- Coaching children on how to escape if violent incident occurs
- Working with partners with or without therapists to enhance safety
- Examining all of their constraints and options and deciding that staying is the safest choice for now
- Relocating

(Hamby and Bible 2009)
Safety Mindset
Best Practice

- ALWAYS collaborate with the survivor in creating and modifying safety plans (they know their batterer best).
- Assess and address safety threats or dangers.
- Discuss with the children ways that they can be safe
- Increase protective factors to support child resiliency.
Protective strategies of battered parents are often underestimated or overlooked in custody and visitation recommendations and decisions. (Van Horn and Lieberman, 2002)

Safety Planning is a fluid process and should be discussed each time you have contact with a survivor. Survivors also need to refresh safety plans each time there may be contact with the abuser.
## Dangerousness

**Past history of violence and injury**
- Bizarre acts of violence including sexual violence
- Threats to Kill
- Threats of Suicide
- Mental Illness
- Stalking
- Woman trying to leave or has left the relationship
- Use and access to weapons

## Impact on Children

**Age of children**
- Attachment to caregivers
- Level and frequency of exposure
- Direct physical or sexual abuse
- Behavioral problems
- Threats of abduction
- Cognitive issues
- Running away
- Sibling violence
- Psychological problems

## Mothers Help Seeking and Barriers To Help Seeking

**How has she tried to stop violence?**
- Who has she told?
- What has worked in the past?
- What hasn’t worked in the past?
- Are there barriers to help seeking?
- How has she tried to help her children?
- What protective measures has she taken?
- What is in the way? Trauma, substance abuse, depression, poverty, other forms of oppression

## Community and Family Support

**What has been her families response to her?**
- Friends? Community agencies?
- Court? Police? DCP&P? County DV Agency?
- Who is in her support system?
- What have been the consequences of her help seeking? Positive? Negative?
## Dangerousness
- Partner is very controlling and emotionally abusive  
  (name calling, monitoring her phone, where she goes, who she sees)
- Partner controls money
- Partner very jealous

## Impact on Children
**Age of children: Ages 3, 8 and 12**
- Current partner is father of 3 year-old only
- Three year-old child saw the father push mother and then threw something at father to divert him
- Children are connected to mother / 3 year-old is attached to father but not the other two
- Middle child is having a hard time in school with behavior problems, has been getting in fights with peers

## Mothers Help Seeking and Barriers To Help Seeking
- Client has not sought out help but has told her friends and family
- She says she can handle it
- Client seems depressed

## Community and Family Support
- Friends don’t like her current partner
- Stay at home mom of three children
- Doesn’t have her own transportation
- Family lives in another state
Safety Focused Visitation

The Model Code on Domestic and Family Violence

Safety planning is a fluid process!

1. Order an exchange of the child to occur in a protected setting.

2. Order visitation supervised by another person or agency.

3. Order the perpetrator of domestic or family violence to attend and complete, to the satisfaction of the court, a program of intervention for perpetrators or other designated counseling as a condition of the visitation.

http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/modecode_fin_printable.pdf
Safety Focused Visitation

4. Order the perpetrator of domestic or family violence to abstain from possession or consumption of alcohol or controlled substances during the visitation and for 24 hours preceding the visitation.

5. Order the perpetrator to pay a fee to defray the costs of supervised visitation.

6. Prohibit overnight visitation.

7. Require a bond from the perpetrator for the return and safety of the child.

8. Impose any other condition that is deemed necessary to provide for the safety of the child, the adult victim or other family or household member.

http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/modecode_fin_printable.pdf
Successful Interventions

Successful Interventions in Cases of Battering that Involve Children...

...Weaken
- The batterer's opportunity and inclination to abuse the mother and the children

...Strengthen
- The positive aspects of the mother's and child's lives that enable them to resist the abuse and its effects (including strengthening their relationship with each other)

Enhance all family members' quality of life

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Reducing Contact

Assisting battered mothers (parents) and their children to heal their relationships is one of the most important aspects of promoting recovery (Erickson & Henderson, 1998).

1. Avoid the exchange of children at either parent’s home.
2. Meet abuser at a busy public place preferably that is monitored by cameras.
3. Bring someone else (friend or relative; however avoid new romantic interest) with you when exchanging children.
4. Have the abuser pick children up at school and if overnights exist, return them to school.
5. Self care is a MUST!!!
Tech Safety

Technology and Safety Planning

- Look for patterns to identify misused technology.
- Use a safer computer/device. Change passwords and usernames.
- Check cell phone settings. Ensure that children's cell phones are on Survivors plan.
- Get a new cell phone. Have your car checked for hidden location devices. Limit the information you give out about yourself.
- Get a P.O. Box or use an Address Confidentiality Program.
- Hidden cameras.
- Document the incidences.
- Report the incidences.
Holden’s Taxonomy of Child Exposure to Domestic Violence: Ten Exposure Pathways

1. Exposed prenatally
2. Intervenes
3. Victimized
4. Participates
5. Eyewitness
6. Overhears
7. Observes the initial effects
8. Experiences the aftermath
9. Hears about it
10. Ostensibly unaware
Development Decides

1. The level of risk for each child. (roles)

2. Other significant adults in the child’s life.

3. Coordination with the safety plan for their mother.

4. The children’s ability, stage of development, and environment.

5. It is important for children who are going to have unsupervised visitation with a father who has battered their mother to have the opportunity to talk about the visitation and to safety plan. This can help children manage their fear and anxiety.
6. Create with child a list of trusted adults they can talk with.

7. Children should be given permission to opt out of any action in the plan at any time. S/he must be assured that this does not constitute a failure on her/his part.

8. Safe places to go in the home, or ways to get out of the home if necessary, and where to meet outside (ask children to explain what s/he will do, step by step).

9. Safe places to go near home, school, or other environments children frequent.

10. Assuring that children know how to call 911, and to use a pay phone (and has the correct change) or cell phone (practice how to do it and what to say).

11. What to do/not do during an argument or violent incident, i.e. do not try to intervene.
12. A family code word or emergency signal, and what to do if it is seen or heard.

13. Remembering important personal information: address, phone number, phone number of a safe adult.


15. Boundaries on what not to tell the perpetrator.

16. Safety planning booklets are often helpful with younger children so they can draw as younger children are concrete thinkers.

Reduce the Opportunities for Abuse

- Survivors need to establish clear boundaries between parental roles and former marital roles (if safe).

- Define and limit appropriate topics of communication to information and decisions about children.

- Restructure ways to communicate (e-mails, third party, attorney communication, texts).

- Refer to the source (teachers, activity contact, medical office).

- Recognize stress inadvertently placed on children.

http://www.parentingafterdivorce.com/pdfs/FinalParentingForHighConflictFamilies.pdf
Help children develop personal safety plans:
- Build on their current strategies
- Identify safe people, safe places
- Practice plans for different situations
- Create safety word or phrase
- Emphasize that this is a part of a family safety plan
Safety Planning Discussion Points

- It's not okay
- It's not your fault
- It must be scary for you
- I will listen to you
- You can tell me how you feel; it is important
- I'm sorry you had to see/hear that
- You do not deserve to have this in your family

- I will keep you safe
- There is nothing you could have done to prevent/change it
- We can talk about what to do to keep you safe if it happens again (ex: staying in your room, going to neighbors, etc.)
- I care about you
- You are important.

http://www.mincava.umn.edu
Family Meetings

- Let children know that the violence children have seen or are seeing in their home is not okay. Show them other successful ways to deal with problems. Share with them that you are getting help to stop the violence from happening. Make sure children know that the violence is not their fault.

- Help children understand that abuse is always the complete responsibility of the abusive parent not the responsibility of the victim and not their responsibility.

Helping Children Heal

- Always start with empathy
- Allow children to grieve losses
- See children as the individuals they are
- Identify and celebrate their unique interests, talents and strengths
- Survivors need to seek their own healing and allow time and energy for self-care
Teach New Skills

- Teach age-appropriate conflict resolution skills
- Model healthy disagreements
- Praise steps children take towards peaceful problem-solving
- Teach how men and women, boys and girls can be decision makers, clear thinkers, good communicators
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Need</th>
<th>I do</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Framework of Resourcefulness
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<th>Need</th>
<th>I do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mom getting hurt</td>
<td>I hate this family</td>
<td>Anger, rage, hate, confusion</td>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce/ separation</td>
<td>I hate one or both parents</td>
<td>Fights with peers</td>
<td>Fights with peers</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Be available, spend time with them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs in the house</td>
<td>I wish they’d just stop</td>
<td>Fights with parents or other authorities</td>
<td>Fights with peers</td>
<td>Limits, structure</td>
<td>Be a good role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One parent drunk</td>
<td>He does this again, I’m going to …</td>
<td>Suicide attempts</td>
<td>Fights with parents or other authorities</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Say I’m sorry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A parent being taken away by the police</td>
<td>I can’t let anyone else know what’s going on in my house</td>
<td>Using drugs</td>
<td>Suicide attempts</td>
<td>Availability of a significant adult</td>
<td>Be responsible for my behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suicide attempts</td>
<td>I wish she would just leave him alone.</td>
<td>Runaway</td>
<td>Doing poorly in school</td>
<td>To be listened to</td>
<td>Be assertive in communicating with them</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name-calling</td>
<td>Why doesn’t she protect me?</td>
<td>Arguing or talking back to parents</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>To speak their mind and be heard</td>
<td>Listen to how they experience their world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walls punched</td>
<td>Here we go again.</td>
<td>Doing poorly in school</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>To be held</td>
<td>Show them that they are special to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>Someone throwing things</td>
<td>Why is this always my fault?</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Skipping school</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>Let them know that I love and care about them AND don’t like what they did</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignored</td>
<td>There’s no one else to go to for help.</td>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>Dangerous and or inappropriate sexual acting out</td>
<td>Positive role-models</td>
<td>Let them know how they impact me</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yelled at</td>
<td>If I would just be good, they won’t fight.</td>
<td>Name calls, verbally abuses others, swears</td>
<td>Name calls, verbally abuses others, swears</td>
<td>Choices and opportunities</td>
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<td>Hit, slapped, kicked</td>
<td>If I do something wrong dad might leave.</td>
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<td>Assertive role models</td>
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<td>Arguing</td>
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<td>Connectedness</td>
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<td>Threats</td>
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<td>Independence&amp; Individuality</td>
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<td>Physical abuse of mom</td>
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<td>Lying, being blamed</td>
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<td>Sexual violence</td>
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ALWAYS MOVING FORWARD!!

Thriver

Safety Mindset

Post-Traumatic Growth
“The child becomes largely what it is taught; hence we must watch what we teach it and how we live before it.”

-Jane Adams
Resources


http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/modecodeFin_printable.pdf
http://www.parentingafterdivorce.com/pdfs/ParallelParentingForHighConflictFamilies.pdf

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