

Family and Domestic Violence

The purpose of this module is to give CASAs a better understanding of domestic violence. The training will present the results of several different studies and give suggestions as to how to interact with children exposed to domestic violence. The module is divided into two main areas. The first area deals with domestic violence, what it is, how it cycles, and why women stay. The second area deals with how domestic violence impacts the children.

Definition

Domestic violence is the repeated use of forceful physical or psychological behavior for the purpose of coercion without regard for the individual rights of another. Battering can be physical and escalate to a high degree of intensity. The result can be fatal, ending either in suicide or murder.

- One in three women is a battered woman.
- Ninety percent of children living in violent homes are aware of what is going on.
- Thirty-five percent of the children are also abused in some way.

Problems Related to Domestic Violence

Alcohol and other drug abuse often occur in violent homes. Substance abuse is separate from the battering and must be brought under control before the physical and/or emotional abuse can end. Batterers will claim that drinking or drugs "make them do it," but this is absolutely not the case. Drugs give the abuser excuses not to accept responsibility for his/her actions. The abuse will not automatically cease because the drinking and drug abuse stop. Sexual abuse is another problem that may occur in conjunction with domestic violence. Most children are particularly afraid to mention sexual abuse.

Abusers

Batterers come from all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, races and religions. The problem is not limited to any particular walk of life. There are incidents in which women are the batterers. They are just as capable of yelling, hitting, and throwing things as men. They can also be psychologically abusive toward their partners. However, their ability to seriously injure their partner without using a weapon is limited. Male batterers, on the other hand, have the advantage of physical strength and can cause grave injury or death by using their bare hands.

- physical assault;
- sexual assault;
- damage to a person's property;
- threats to damage property;
- verbal abuse and put downs;
- humiliation;
- forced isolation from family and/or friends;
- financial abuse - withholding or controlling against your will access to money, food, clothes, and personal items such as car keys or bankbook; and
- harassment such as constant phone calls to your work or home, or repeated visits to your home or workplace.

(Taken from 1996, Domestic Violence and the Law)

Why Do Victims Stay?

There are many reasons why a victim remains in an abusive relationship. Here are several of the most commonly stated reasons.

1. Despite the abuse, they love their husband/partner.
2. Hope things will get better.
3. They grew up in a similar environment and feel "this is how things are" (the term for this is "learned helplessness").
4. Emotionally dependent on the abuser.
5. Financially dependent on the abuser.
6. Low self-esteem.
7. They don't want anyone to know because there is considerable social stigma attached to domestic violence.
8. Religious beliefs keep them from leaving.
9. They are afraid of what the abuser will do after they leave.
10. Want their children to have a father.
11. Deny being abused because they are afraid to make the changes necessary to break out of the pattern.

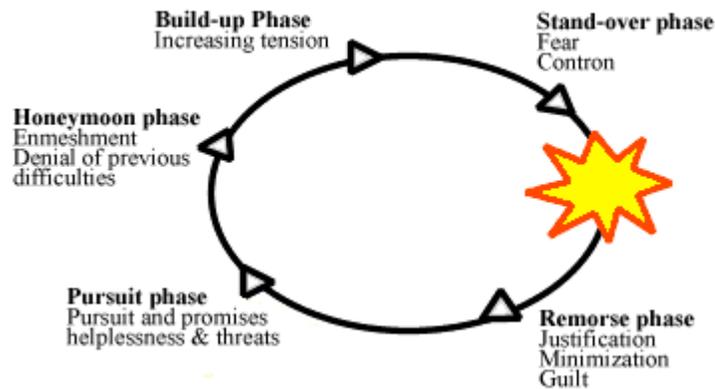
There are other reasons, each dependent upon the individual situation. Men who are battered and choose to stay do so for many of the same reasons that women stay.

Some of the pressures that battered people face come from society and the people around them. There is resistance to deal with situations of domestic violence. Levels of resistance can be influenced by workload, strength of agency supports, beliefs about children and families, and stress levels.

Four basic levels of resistance are:

1. **Existence** - There is no problem. A natural and human reluctance to believe that unpleasant and horrible things happen.
 - o Sounds like: "you can prove anything with statistics"; "life isn't always fair"; or "I've never been affected by this problem."
2. **Significance** - There is a problem, but it is not big and not of a high priority.
 - o Sounds like: "kids tend to exaggerate"; "nothing really happened"; or "he was just kidding around, he didn't really mean it."
3. **Solvability** - There is a problem, but there is nothing that can be done about it.
 - o Sounds like: "violence is part of human nature"; "maybe we can alleviate it some, but solve it completely...no"; or "don't be naive, we have to live in the real world."
4. **Self** - There is a problem, but I cannot do anything about it.
 - o Sounds like: "well maybe there are solutions.. but there's nothing I can do"; or "why me? it's their job."

Cycle of Violence



Build-up phase - This time is characterized by increasing tension between the couple.

Stand-over phase - The offender uses aggression and violence to frighten and control his partner. Following the assault the offender moves into the remorse phase.

Remorse phase - The offender feels ashamed of his behavior, tries to minimize it, and blames it on the survivor; e.g., "She knows I get mad when she does that," or "It was only a bit of a shove." The woman may go along with her partner because to do otherwise could mean acknowledging the terror and the danger with which she is living.

Pursuit phase - The offender attempts to convince his partner that he needs her. If the buy-back attempts seem not to be working, he is likely to resort to threats and violence. This can be a life-threatening time for women as many are murdered in this phase.

Honeymoon phase - There is a high degree of intimacy, as the couple cling to each other after the near separation. Eventually, and sometimes very quickly, the cycle resumes itself.

Note: The cycle of violence does not apply to all violent partnerships. The length of each phase is an individual factor; some couples may experience the entire cycle several times in a day, and others may take weeks to complete one cycle.

Domestic Violence Myths and Facts

MYTHS - Your beliefs may affect how you interpret a situation and how you form your opinion of what is best for the child. Be sure that you understand the following principles:

1. Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) is a crime and victims should expect full protection from the justice system;
2. FDV is unacceptable and is the responsibility of the perpetrator for whom the appropriate consequences must apply under law;
3. All citizens have the right to live free from all forms of violence and the fear of violence;
4. All situations should:
 - o consider the immediate and ongoing safety of victims and survivors;
 - o empower the survivors to make their own decisions;
 - o recognize and meet the language and cultural needs of survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
 - o acknowledge and support the rights of individuals to information and resources to change violent circumstances.

Myths within the community serve to reinforce widely accepted beliefs, which protect the offender and/or blame the survivor of FDV. The impact of these myths will affect how the survivor copes with the assault(s), the support received from family and friends, and the quality of service if assistance is chosen.

MYTH - Only a small percentage of women are subjected to FDV.

FACT - Because of the private nature of FDV and the shame and embarrassment that inhibits many victims from talking about the issue, it is impossible to tell exactly how many women are subjected to violence.

A number of studies ranging from women using hospital services to women in the church suggest that from one in three to one in five women are likely to experience violence in intimate relationships.

MYTH - FDV only happens within poor or working class families.

FACT - FDV occurs across all socioeconomic groups. This myth developed because people on low incomes are more likely to come to the attention of official agencies. Those families with access to more resources are sometimes better able to hide the violence.

MYTH - The offender is not a loving partner.

FACT - Researchers have become aware of a cycle of violence in abusive relationships. During the "buy back" and "honeymoon phases" of this cycle, the offender can be a loving and attentive partner. Many violent men are described by their partners as Jekyll and Hyde characters, capable of being charming and caring but also capable of violence and abuse.

MYTH - Violent men cannot control their violence.

FACT - Violent men often believe that this is true. It is the belief in this myth which enables offenders to continue to avoid taking responsibility for their behavior. The large majority of offenders who beat their partners control their violence with others, such as friends or work colleagues, where there is no perceived right to dominate and control.

Offenders are also able to control the way in which they abuse, including limiting physical assault to certain, often hidden, parts of the body and by limiting the amount of damage inflicted. Violence is also frequently premeditated although it may seem to the survivor to happen out of the blue.

MYTH - Violent men are mentally ill or have psychopathic personalities.

FACT - Clinical studies of men who abuse their partners do not support this view. The vast majorities of violent men are not suffering mental illness and could not be described as psychopaths. Most offenders present as ordinary, respectable men who are very much in control. They are represented in all occupations and social classes, and the violence usually manifests itself only within their relationships with their female partner and children.

MYTH - Women enjoy being abused.

FACT - This myth developed from the observation that many women remain in violent relationships despite constant abuse. There are many reasons why abused women stay with their violent partners. Many women are too afraid to leave violent relationships. Research confirms that leaving a relationship is a dangerous time for a woman, and that from half to five out of seven women killed by their spouse were separated or in the process of separating at the time of their death.

MYTH - A woman could always leave if she really wanted to.

FACT - Approximately one-third of the women who responded to a NT Domestic Violence Phone-In in 1983 stated that they stayed in a violent relationship because they were afraid of what their already violent partner might do if they were to leave.

Abused women are usually constrained from leaving home by a number of factors including:

Fear or reprisals

Threats of injury and actual violence to themselves or their children if they choose to separate prevent a great number of women from leaving violent relationships.

Social isolation

Abused women are often at home with dependent children. Their partners may deliberately isolate them from friends, family, and the wider community. Many survivors choose to hide at home because of their sense of shame of visible injuries, or their belief that the violence is their fault. As a result of their isolation, abused women often have no one to turn to and are unaware of available services.

Financial dependence

Women generally do not have equal access to the same earning capacity as men. To leave their partner condemns many women and their children to a substantial decline in their standard of living.

Social stigma

Women often experience social pressure not to separate and deprive their children of a father.

Emotional dependence

Like women in non-violent relationships, abused women are generally committed to their relationship, love their partner, and hope for a change in the relationship. Some abused women are fearful that their partner will not cope with a separation and that he will attempt suicide as he has often threatened.

Low self-esteem

Many survivors, after years of beatings and verbal abuse, have lost their self-confidence and doubt their ability to cope on their own.

MYTH - Some women deserve to be abused. They provoke the abuse.

FACT - There are no excuses for FDV. Violence is rarely the culmination of a mutual argument and women often have no warning of an attack. Many women who are abused try to do everything to avoid violent episodes. In abusive relationships, it is often perceived that the man has the right to dominate and control his partner. Survivors of FDV are at risk of abuse from the offender regardless of their actions.

In the 19th century, British law stated that a man could discipline his wife by hitting her with any reasonable instrument provided that it was not thicker than his thumb. While such a law no longer exists, many social beliefs still condone the use of violence to control women and to keep them in their place.

MYTH - Alcohol abuse causes FDV.

FACT - There is no single or simple reason for FDV and no evidence that alcohol is a direct cause of violence. There is evidence to suggest that alcohol coexists with, and may be seen to precipitate, FDV.

An Australian 1994 Northern Territory Living with Alcohol Violence Survey found that 85 percent of the group surveyed said that alcohol is a major cause of FDV. However, 98 percent said being drunk is not an excuse for hitting a partner or a child. Alcohol was involved in domestic violence for three out of four callers to a domestic violence hotline.

MYTH - Survivors of FDV exaggerate the abuse.

FACT - Survivors rarely describe themselves as victims of FDV, and tend to underestimate rather than to exaggerate violence, even when violent episodes escalate in intensity and frequency.

Survivors are much more likely to omit, deny, minimize, and even excuse FDV rather than disclose or exaggerate it.

Addressing the Parents

Approaching the mother (or both parents) with suspicions that violence is going on in the home is risky. Many times the mother is denying to herself that she is the victim of abuse. She may also be ashamed, guilt-ridden, confused, afraid, or just cannot deal with the reality of her situation.

If you wish to get involved with her, try starting by expressing concern about her child's behavior. Be specific. Describe actual events where inappropriate behavior has been observed. If the child is enrolled in a school, reference the child's schoolwork, grades, and interaction with peers to indicate that something is wrong. After presenting your concerns, ask the mother to help determine what may be the source of these problems. Describe actions and feelings associated with domestic violence. Also ask about how she and her husband or partner disciplines the child.

If met with immediate resistance from the mother, seek help from the CASA coordinator and a domestic violence agency. Report to them the specifics on the case and they can advise on how to deal with the child.

If the mother actually opens up, proceed cautiously. Listen to what she has to say. If you feel you are not capable of dealing with her problems, empathize with her but let her know that domestic violence agencies are much better prepared than you to help her. Often victims of domestic violence are very sensitive to rejection. How you encourage her to seek help makes a great difference as to whether she will or not.

Effects on Children

Children living in violent homes often grow up exhibiting the same behavior as their parents. This is especially true for boys.

1. Eighty percent of batterers either were abused or witnessed abuse in their homes as children.
2. Boys often become hostile toward the women they are closest to--their mothers, sisters, and wives. They may also abuse their children.
3. Girls may take on the role of victim or be abusive themselves.

No matter what their age, children in violent homes receive the message that violence is an effective means to get control over other people. The following are some statistics from a study of teenagers who have grown up in domestically violent homes.

- 90% of the teens were sexually active. Their steady partners were described as runaways, prostitutes, alcohol or drug abusers, or school drop-outs.
- 60% of the boys frequently were in trouble with school authorities. Problems included rowdiness, open hostility to teachers and peers, and chronic truancy.
- 85% of the teens said that they have been drinking alcohol since they were eleven; two percent started as early as nine years of age.
- 10% of the teens still had problems with bedwetting and chronic insomnia.

Evidence from the study group also indicates that the teens are becoming the next generation of wife-beaters and battered women.

- 83% of the boys who were dating revealed that they hit their girlfriends when angered. They also minimized the behavior by calling it nothing serious.
- 52% of the girls had boyfriends with whom they argued, with the argument escalating into pushing and shoving, screaming at each other, and using profanities.

Symptoms of Abuse in Children

Infants:

- Injuries to body
- Lethargy
- Physical neglect (sores, diaper rash, dirty, etc.)
- Slow to develop
- Fretful sleep
- Fearful reaction to a man's voice
- Vaginal or rectal discharge (often indicates sexual abuse)

Toddlers:

- Injuries to body
- Frequent illness
- Low self-esteem
- Reluctance to be touched
- Severe shyness
- Extreme interest in sex play
- Trouble in day care or preschool
- Social difficulties (argumentative, hitting, biting, etc)

School Age:

- Injuries to body
- Frequent illness
- Lying
- Stealing
- Hitting
- Nightmares
- Lack of motivation
- Eating disorders
- Repetitive self-abuse
- Poor grades
- Self-abusive behavior
- Depression
- Withdrawal
- Need for a lot of attention
- Nervous disorders
- Sophisticated knowledge of sex

Children from violent homes learn to believe that:

- It's acceptable for men to hit women;
- Violence is the way to get what you want;
- Big people have power they misuse;
- Men are bullies who push women and children around;
- Expression of feelings signifies weakness;
- Don't talk about violence;
- Don't trust;
- Don't feel.

Children living in violent homes may have witnessed verbal threats of injury, objects thrown, floggings, threats with weapons, sexual torture, suicide attempts, and murder. Children are not only witnesses to the violence but may also be assaulted during violent incidents.

Effects on children survivors when they become adults:

- Higher stress levels;
- Higher levels of anxiety, depression, and psychiatric illness;
- Five times more likely to commit suicide;
- Frequently present to medical caregivers with somatic complaints such as headaches;
- Experience twice as many miscarriages;
- Have reduced coping and problem-solving skills;
- FDV survivors are more likely to: be socially isolated; use alcohol and drugs; abuse dependent children.

(Taken from Beyond These Walls, 1988)

Children's Needs

Children from violent homes need a person they can talk to. The children need to be able to discuss their feelings and what is going on in their homes. Usually they are not able to talk with their mothers because children see their mothers as victims like themselves. They need to be able to confide in someone who can assess the problem and give them ideas for taking care of themselves both physically and emotionally.

Be Honest

The child or children you work with will be observing you as well. If you are honest and consistent in dealing with them, there is a good chance that they will open up to you as they learn to trust you.

Notice Details and the Child's Interests

Most children like to be noticed. Comment on things that you like about the child and be supportive of what the child likes. Make them feel special while you are with them. The following is a list of possible areas that children like or are concerned about regarding themselves.

- Their clothing and appearance.
- Whether you like being with them.
- Their games and interactions with others.
- Their hobbies and personal things that they do.

Communicate to Children

Discuss their Interests

Familiarize yourself with what is popular with children so you will be better able to start conversations and get the child to relax with you. Topics that children are more likely to discuss are popular things that they are exposed to (i.e., movies, songs, games, clothing styles, toys, sports, etc). When they are comfortable around you, they will be more open and willing to discuss personal issues. By discussing topics that make impressions on children, you can learn about their beliefs and views of what is happening around them.

Be fun when needed

It is beneficial to show children of domestic violence that they have the ability to have fun and enjoy themselves. They often need an adult role model who is willing to have fun before they will join in. Seeing that an adult can do a fun activity allows them to do the same thing.

Let children know that you will listen

Children are more likely to be open if they feel that they will be listened to and believed. The subject of domestic violence makes many people uncomfortable. Children pick up on this and keep everything inside instead of talking through the difficulties. Many children will keep quiet to either protect their

parents or to prevent retribution from their parents. Let the children know that you are willing to listen and discuss the issues that are of concern to them. Be patient and supportive with them and do not be judgmental of their reactions to domestic violence.

Child's Self-Esteem and Safety

Building a child's self-esteem

Many children growing up in domestically violent households have not received the guidance, attention, and positive input needed to develop strong self-images. The physical and verbal abuse caused by a parent only damages their self-esteem further. These children need help from other adults to help create and build their self-esteem. Here are some possible ways to help children do this:

- Provide children with opportunities and activities in which they can succeed.
- Reinforce appropriate behavior.
- Be gentle and specific when it is necessary to criticize. Offer them alternative methods to succeed.
- Be clear, honest, and direct when you interact with them.
- Encourage children to get in touch with their negative feelings and find constructive ways to deal with them.
- Allow enough flexibility for children to explore and have a feeling of freedom within the settings you provide for them.
- Teach children that they can control how they react in all situations. Let them know that they can choose their own response and that it does not have to be a negative one.

Teaching safety measures

One of the most important things children living in a violent home can do for themselves is to have a safety plan. To help a child create a safety plan, ask them the following things:

1. How do you know when you feel unsafe?
2. Where can you go when you feel unsafe (a friend's house, a relative's house, the police, etc)?
3. Who can you talk to when you feel unsafe (a teacher, a friend's mom, etc)?
4. Who do you call for help? (Have the child show you how to call, and that the child knows their own phone number and address.)

Childhood Behavior

Children who have grown up with domestic violence have witnessed poor behavior by adults and will tend to use that same behavior when dealing with their own problems. The children may be hurtful or disruptive when they encounter problems. The adults around them must learn to be consistent and patient when trying to change this behavior. Maintaining consistent limits and encouraging better behavior can help.

When children become angered or difficult over an issue, try to teach them to cooperate and use problem-solving skills to deal with them. An example would be to ask the child to explain how the child sees the situation and then ask about other options to deal with the situation. If the child cannot think of any positive actions, you can suggest a couple and discuss how the child could try using them. Encourage positive responses, but be cautious not to demean negative responses.

You can also use rewards as a method of teaching/reinforcing positive behavior. But keep in mind that you must be consistent with using rewards. A child will test the limits to see if the child can still get a reward. The child will also stop trying to achieve rewards if the child feels that you are unfair or inconsistent with when and how you give them out.

Remember: hitting, slapping, or verbally humiliating a child from a domestically violent home is not acceptable. By getting close to one of these children you are becoming a role model. You are also trying

to demonstrate non-violent methods of behavior and interaction. By doing this you can help remove the child from the future cycle of violence that the child could grow into.

Personalities

While each one is different, children can develop similar personalities and responses to domestically violent situations. Listed below are three personality types and suggested methods for dealing with them should you encounter a child that fits a specific type.

The Ethnic Child

Dealing with children from various ethnic backgrounds can be delicate. Aside from their physical and emotional needs, you will need to consider the values and traditions of their ethnic heritage. Some things to be aware of:

- Any potential language barrier; some languages do not have words for domestic violence characteristics (such as incest).
- The role expectations of men, women, and children within the family.
- The general distrust of the American system by people from other cultures.
- The social and environmental isolation of the mother and children.
- A potential problem with U.S. residency and citizenship.
- The possibility that the children will be placed in a foster home of a different ethnic background.

Ethnic children may first turn to a relative or family member. But some cultures do not allow for relatives to get directly involved. When an ethnic child turns to someone outside of the family it is very important that the child be brought to someone who meets the following criteria:

1. Speaks the child's native language.
2. Knows the traditions, beliefs, and values of the ethnic culture.
3. Understands domestic violence.

The Aggressive Child

Children from violent homes grow up with a violent role model and learn that aggression is an effective way of controlling others. This leads to the child being aggressive. An aggressive child needs to be taught that while anger is okay, it is not okay to hurt others when the child is angry. Here are some tips to working with aggressive children:

- Encourage the child to talk about or act out what makes the child so angry using art, creative acting, or play.
- Communicate your limits and what you expect of the child and then stick to those limits.
- If the child has too much aggression, give the child some room to express anger where others will not be hurt. It may be necessary to give the child an inflatable bat or pillow to help vent rage. Afterwards discuss other options that can be tried after the child has burned off some energy.

The Silent Child

A silent child is retreating as a method of protection. Although the child may not be verbal, the child does listen and observe what is happening. The key to interacting with this type of child is trust. Once the child trusts you, the child is more likely to begin to open up to you. Keep these points in mind:

- Do not push the child to respond to you. Be gentle and caring and allow the child to choose the pace. The child may start communicating with just a smile or whisper.
- Provide access to art materials. The child's drawings and creations may give you a tip as to how the child feels and what is important to the child.

- Use positive reinforcement whenever you can find a reason. But keep it low key in the beginning, or you may frighten the child.
- Read the child stories to convey messages and feelings. You might also try using puppets or stuffed animals to get the child to feel comfortable.

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