

Principles of Working with Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

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Assumptions:

- ◆ Children are actively engaged
- ◆ Crux is how young people process and cope with their experiences

Overarching Principles:

- *Safety is priority*
- *Seek to understand*
- *Adopt the child's eye view*
- *Beware, good intentions don't inoculate against harm*

. Adopt a developmental framework

- ◆ **Processing and coping varies with age**
- ◆ **Accumulative effects**
- ◆ **Impacts may re-emerge**
- ◆ **Survival strategies may be problematic later**

2. Take time to understand child's beliefs

- ◆ Attribution**
- ◆ Core self beliefs**
- ◆ Interaction between beliefs & living with violence**

3. **Work with Survival Strategies**

- ◆ **Responses that help**
- ◆ **Associated costs (?)**
- ◆ **child view --“how I am”**

4. Understand child's "role"

- ◆ Imposed or assumed**
- ◆ Impact when abuser is gone**
- ◆ Sibling or mother-child tension**

5. Understand co-existing adversity

- ◆ **Associated stressors**
- ◆ **Child maltreatment**
- ◆ **Parallel family adversities**

5. Select intervention(s) responsive to child's needs

- ◆ Developmentally appropriate**
- ◆ Reinforce or modify core beliefs**
- ◆ Learn from, build on, shape survival strategies**
- ◆ Recognize, respect, and reconcile roles**

Assessment:

Features of Violence Relating to Child

- ◆ **Type of Violence**
- ◆ **Nature of Specific Acts**
- ◆ **Presence of Injuries**
- ◆ **Timing Variables**
- ◆ **Escalation**
- ◆ **Type of Perpetrator**
- ◆ **Perpetrator's Relation to Child**
- ◆ **Victim's Role in the Assault**
- ◆ **Resolution**

Assessment: Variables Relating to Child

- ◆ Strengths/Protectors
- ◆ **Attributions**
- ◆ **Beliefs**
- ◆ Relative prominence
- ◆ **Salient Aspect**
- ◆ Worries
- ◆ **Survival strategies)**
- ◆ **Role(s) in family**
- ◆ Adjustment

Range of Intervention Intensity for Children of Differential Need

- ◆ **No intervention required (or not currently)**
- ◆ **Support to mother to support child**
- ◆ **Violence specific intervention**
- ◆ **Concern/Symptom specific intervention with understanding of context of and potential relation to violence**

Violence Specific Interventions

- ◆ Identify and name violence
- ◆ Provide a safe place to talk about violence and feelings
- ◆ Teach that violence is learned and the responsibility of the abusive adult. Violence is not the child's fault.
- ◆ Teach that violence is not okay
- ◆ Teach anger conflict resolution skills
- ◆ Teach safety skills and plans
- ◆ Provide socially positive experience (if group, with peers)

Possible Counter-indications for Violence Specific Groups

- ◆ **Traumatized child**
- ◆ **Depressed child**
- ◆ **Poor fit with group composition**
 - Only child also sexually abused
 - Only child whose mom was the perpetrator
 - From ethno-specific cultural group where informal norms at odds with the group
 - Different developmental stage
 - Markedly different exposure
- ◆ **Lack of memory of violence**

Lessons Learned from Children:

Do NOT –

- ◆ **Say you know how she/he feels**
- ◆ **Create force choice responses (either or)**
- ◆ **Rely on checklists**
- ◆ **Judge or condemn abuser**
- ◆ **Inadvertently leave children with message violence against their mother is more serious than against themselves**
- ◆ **Make assumptions based on violent incidents, and adult survivor or siblings' reports (Case Study Example)**
- ◆ **Blame child or feel child will turn out bad**
- ◆ **Take one child out of home and leave rest**
- ◆ **Come to house and not talk to children alone**
- ◆ **Put all children in child witness to violence groups**
- ◆ **Think children can tell them stuff when they are not safe for sure**
- ◆ **Forget to ask about what else happened**