

Principles of Working with Mothers

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Principles

- Some principles apply to intervention with abused women in general
- focus here is on specific principles pertaining to mothers
- begin with quick review of general principles

Community-level principles

- Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (Minnesota, U.S.A)
- 5 principles
- Adherence to these principles -- as a community -- helps to produce consistent results regardless of the beliefs or values of an individual practitioner

DAP Principles

- Whenever possible, the burden of confronting abusers and placing restrictions on them should rest with the community, not the victim
- Individual practitioners must work co-operatively, guided by training, job descriptions, and standardised practices that are all oriented toward the desired changes
- Intervention must be responsive to the totality of harm done by the violence rather than be incident or punishment focused.
- Protection of the victim must take priority when two intervention goals clash
- Intervention practices must reflect a basic understanding of and a commitment to accountability to the victim

Advocacy Wheel

- Principles of intervention for abused women
- Developed in the medical context to be opposite to “medical power & control wheel”
- www.pathwaysofcourage.org

Components of Advocacy Wheel

- respect confidentiality
- believe and validate her experiences
- acknowledge injustice
- respect her autonomy
- help her plan for safety
- promote access to community services

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- These principles address women's needs as mothers
- they can guide interventions in a variety of contexts and assume that

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1. Safety is the first priority

- prior to any other intervention, we must ensure that children are safe from maltreatment and exposure to violence and woman are safe from woman abuse
- any intervention must not compromise safety

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2. Work with mothers

- it is extremely worthwhile and in children's interests to support and assist mothers, even when the child is the primary "client"
- healing the mother/child bond is an important goal not to be forgotten

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3. don't "rake women over the coals" about the "damage" done to their children
 - some programs "educate" women by reviewing the research on children exposed to family violence. Why?
 - women need, instead, to understand the needs, emotions, coping styles, etc. of their own children and how to identify them

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4. encourage women to believe they can make a difference in their children's lives
 - abused women may need extra support to see themselves as proactive parents instead of reactive parents
 - abused women may need extra support to see themselves (as opposed to professionals) as able to help their children heal and cope

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5. Help women understand how an abusive partner affects family dynamics and how an abusive partner affected them as mothers
 - identifying how one's parenting was put off kilter is a good first step to being able to adopt healthier parenting skills

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6. help women understand each child as a unique individual
 - different children in the same family can have dramatically different memories, beliefs and feelings about the violence
 - support women to understand how each child was affected (then and now) and what roles they took in the family (then and now)

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7. help heal the mother/child bond

- children may have loads of unresolved feelings such as anger, fear, self-blame, and confusion over why a mother did not protect them from abuse / believe their disclosures of abuse
- children must believe their mothers love them, don't blame them for anything, and will do her best to keep them safe

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8. Help women understand how each child “coped” back then and copes today
 - helping children replace unhelpful coping strategies (e.g., numbing) with healthier ones (e.g., talking) may be the key to healing from living with violence
 - mothers can be supported to encourage healthy coping in their children

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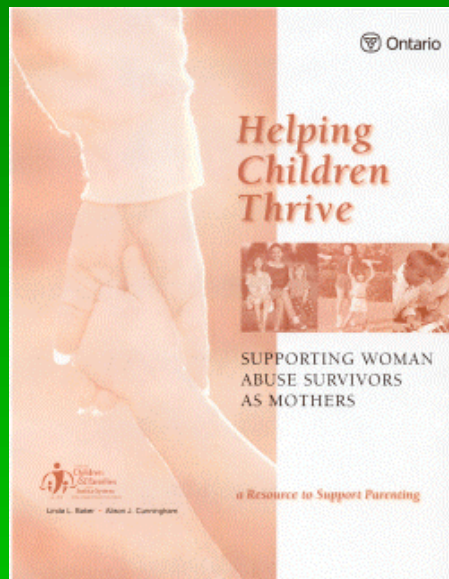
9. teach parenting skills when appropriately needed
 - children who have lived with violence benefit greatly from parenting that is the opposite of abusive parenting
 - See 10 Everyday Essentials for parenting children exposed to violence at www.lfcc.on.ca/HCT_pamphlet.html

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10. Encourage women to start today

- “parenting” means everything you say and everything you do in front of your children
- start with the simple things: don’t spank, tell your kids you love them, let them know you are there if they need to talk, and point out the good things they do more often than you reprimand them

Helping Children Thrive



- Most of these topics are addressed in this resource from 2004
- it is available for download at no cost
- www.lfcc.on.ca