

through a new lens

seeing woman abuse in the life of a young child



a learning module  
for early childhood  
education programs

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For more information, see [www.lfcc.on.ca/newlens.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/newlens.html)

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# THROUGH A NEW LENS:

## Seeing woman abuse in the life of a young child

### A learning module for Early Childhood Education programs

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The material in this module can be incorporated into any of several courses in the Early Childhood Education pre-service program in Ontario. The goals are to increase knowledge of:

- the dynamics of woman abuse
- the potential impacts of violence against women on their children
- how infants and young children are affected by exposure to woman abuse
- the role of Early Childhood Educators when there is violence in a home

**The information here includes everything you need to tailor a lecture or lectures to the desired length and content to suit your course, select handouts, assign student projects, seek guest speakers, choose videos, suggest additional readings, and set exams.**

## Early Childhood Education Program Standard

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This information in this module addresses these Vocational Learning Outcomes from the Early Childhood Education Program Standard of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities:

The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to:

- utilize a variety of observation techniques to enhance work with children, families, and co-workers;
- maintain responsive relationships with individual children and groups of children; and,
- establish and maintain safe and healthy environments which meet the requirements of current legislation, regulatory bodies, and program policies.

## Through a New Lens...

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The goal here is to encourage the next generation of early childhood educators to consider woman abuse as one of the factors which could be triggering symptoms of stress and distress in infants, toddlers, and young children while in the child care setting. For many students, this will be a new lens, one in which violence at home and problems at home are taken into account when designing strategies for the child classroom. It can be easy to assign labels to children, such as difficult temperament, hyperactive, cranky, moody, defiant, oppositional, or conduct disordered. Looking deeper and considering other possible explanations may suggest different intervention strategies.

## ... seeing woman abuse in the life of a child

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At the same time, each child is unique so do not generalize or stereotype. Not all children exposed to woman abuse are affected in the same way. Even children in the same family may have different stress symptoms and coping styles. While all children are affected by women abuse, the way an individual child is affected depends on a variety of factors including age, temperament, coping style, and the nature of the violence (e.g., frequency and the presence of direct child maltreatment).



**Not all children exposed to woman abuse will be, for example, aggressive in the classroom. At the same time, not all children who are aggressive in the classroom are living with woman abuse.**

## The Resource Package

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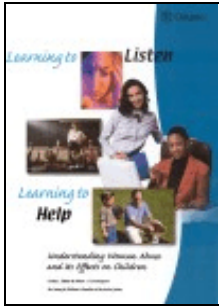
The resource you are reading is one of six resources included on a CD called:

*Through a New Lens / Seeing Woman Abuse in the Life of a Young Child: A Resource Package for Teachers of Early Childhood Education.*

In electronic format, this CD contains two resources designed for students and four resources for the professor in Ontario. Each is available in English and in French.

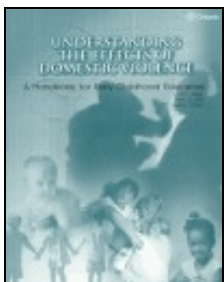
## Two resources for students

Either or both of these resources can be required or optional reading. Both were designed for post-secondary students in Ontario, funded by the Ontario Women's Directorate. Students need not incur any expense in accessing these resources. They are available free as electronic, down-loadable documents from this web site: [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca) Copies may also be ordered, in either English or French.



### **Learning to Listen, Learning to Help: Understanding Woman Abuse and its Effects on Children (2005)**

A 33-page handbook for students of the helping professions. Topics include background material on the dynamics of woman abuse, the concept of power and control, facts and figures, how to support women and help them find appropriate resources, how children are affected by violence, how children cope with violence at home, how to respond to child disclosure of abuse or neglect, standards of professional conduct, taking stock of your own attitudes, and suggestions for how you can make a difference to end violence. Students find relevant and up-to-date information and are directed to easily accessible resources for further study.



### **Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Early Childhood Educators (2001)**

An 18-page handbook where, in one user-friendly source, ECE students learn to identify and assist infants and young children who have been exposed to woman abuse. Topics addressed include implications for the childcare setting, safety planning, reporting to the Children's Aid Society, and accessing community support. This resource contains material of greater depth than is addressed in this module, including a developmental model for how violence might affect children of different ages.

## Resources for professors

The material for the professor is comprised of the module document you are now reading, PowerPoint slides to match the module, a trainer's manual, and a resource guide with background material you may find helpful as you teach this material.



**Professor's Resource Guide to Teaching About Woman Abuse and its Effects on Children (2005)**

In this document, background resource material is provided to explore the topic in greater depth, including: important points to emphasize; teaching tips; preparation for questions you may hear from students; and suggestions for further reading and topics of discussion. You can use the material in the resource guide to augment the PowerPoint slides.



A series of PowerPoint slides can be found on the CD. We invite you to adapt the slides -- add, delete or edit as required to adapt the material to the needs of your course and the length of lecture or lectures you envision.



**Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence: A Trainer's Manual for Early Childhood Educators (2001)**

This 114-page manual is the trainer's companion to the Handbook of the same name. It is designed for ECE Resource Consultants and Program Managers/Coordinators but has material of relevance for the ECE professor. The three modules have outlines, overhead masters, handouts, and step-by-step instructions for learning activities.

## PowerPoint Slides



**"Notes" are included with the slides, to guide your lecture and make suggestions to students as you teach.**

You will find the PowerPoint slides on the CD. Use the slides as the starting point for designing a lecture on the topic of woman abuse and its effects on young children. Tailor the slide show to suit the length and focus of your lecture by adding the course title and deleting slides if redundant with material taught elsewhere or if the material is not appropriate for the course. You can also add material if desired. Consult the "professor's resource guide" for material you might add, such as statistics or reference to further reading. The "notes" portion of the slide show provides greater detail that you may integrate into your lecture.

**The material in the Power Point slides has been adapted from the document called *Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Early Childhood Educators (2001)*.**



Can't use PowerPoint in the classroom? Print the slides as overheads and/or make them available as class handouts.

## Learning objectives

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1. Understand why Early Childhood Educators should learn about woman abuse
2. Appreciate the concept of power and control as a framework for woman abuse
3. Understand how woman abuse may be experienced by infants and young children
4. Identify the factors influencing how children adjust and cope during and following exposure to woman abuse

## Teaching methodology

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This unit is amenable to lecture and/or group discussions, perhaps augmented with video/DVD materials. Lecture material is provided in the PowerPoint format for modification to suit length and desired content of lecture. The PowerPoint slides can be reproduced as overheads and/or class handouts. Guest speakers might include a representative of the local Children's Aid Society or a children's advocate/counsellor from an abused women's shelter. A number of optional handouts are suggested below.

## Evaluation

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A self-evaluation is included as a potential evaluation tool. A selection of multiple-choice and short-answer questions is also provided (on the CD).

## Other recommended learning resources

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American Psychological Association (2003). *Teach Carefully: How Understanding Child Development Can Help Prevent Violence*. Washington DC: APA. [find at [www.actagainstviolence.org](http://www.actagainstviolence.org)]

Association of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario. (2000). *A Child in Need of Protection: A Handbook on Child Abuse and Neglect for Early Childhood Educators*. [this document is not available on-line but may be ordered from the Association]



Baker, L. & A. Cunningham (2004). *Helping Children Thrive / Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers: A Resource to Support Parenting*. London ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System. [find at [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)]

Cohen, E. & J. Knitzer (2004). *Young Children Living with Domestic Violence: The Role of Early Childhood Programs*. Iowa City IA: University of Iowa. [find at [www.nccev.org](http://www.nccev.org)]

Cohen, E. & B. Walthall (2003). *Silent Realities: Supporting Young Children and their Families who Experience Violence*. Washington DC: National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-centered Practice. [find at [www.cwresource.org](http://www.cwresource.org)]

Cunningham, A. & L. Baker (2004). *What About Me! Seeking to Understand the Child's View of Violence in the Family*. London ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System. [find at [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)]

## Videos/DVDs

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### **"Seen...But Not Heard" (1993), 29 minutes.**

This video will help counsellors, teachers and other adults recognize behavioural patterns in children indicating they may have seen violence at home. It also demonstrates how to proceed from that point. One in a series of five videos on woman abuse: What About Us?; Right from the Start; Time to Change; and, One Hit Leads to Another. Available in VHS or DVD formats, from Kinetic Video – [www.kineticvideo.com](http://www.kineticvideo.com) or 1-800-263-6910.

### **"What About Us?" (1993), 28 minutes.**

Companion to the video "Seen... but Not Heard," this video is designed for use with children (from grade four and up) in a group setting to help them talk about and cope with their own experiences of witnessing woman abuse. This program explains to children who have witnessed woman abuse what has happened and why they feel the way they do, while addressing common questions such as "Why can't we go home? Where's dad? Why did the police come in the middle of the night?" Available in VHS or DVD formats, from Kinetic Video – [www.kineticvideo.com](http://www.kineticvideo.com) or 1-800-263-6910.

### **"Kid's Stuff / Enfantillage" (1990), 6 minutes.**

Child impacts of woman abuse are reflected in the anguished drawings of a child. This is a short animated film without words combining puppets and drawings on paper. Available in VHS format from the National Film Board – [www.nfb.ca](http://www.nfb.ca) or 1-800-267-7710.



**Also, check out the *National Clearinghouse on Family Violence Video Catalogue* (2005) at [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nc-cn](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nc-cn)**

## Supplementary learning activities

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These activities will supplement the students' appreciation of material in the module.

1. Take a virtual shelter tour at: [www.dvshelkertour.org](http://www.dvshelkertour.org)  
  
Go from room to room, hear the voices of women who have sought shelter with Safe Horizon (in New York), see interior pictures, and find answers to questions commonly asked by women entering a shelter.
  
2. Develop a list of these resources in your community:
  - women's centre or advocacy agency for abused women
  - crisis lines (for woman abuse, sexual assault, etc.)
  - women's shelter
  - children's aid society
  - program for children exposed to violence
  - Ontario Early Years Centres
  - Legal Aid Ontario office
  - Ontario Works office
  - victim/witness assistance program
  - abusive men / batterers treatment program
  
3. Use the Internet to find the **Abuse of Children Wheel** and the **Nurturing Children Wheel**, developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Minnesota.
  
4. Find these web sites which are great sources of valuable (and often free) information:
  - Ontario Women's Directorate
  - B.C. Institute Against Family Violence
  - Education Wife Assault
  - Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women & Children (METRAC)
  - National Clearinghouse on Family Violence
  - Statistics Canada
  - White Ribbon Campaign
  - Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse
  - Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse (MINCAVA)

5. Use the Internet to access Ontario's *Child & Family Services Act* and find the sections defining "child in need of protection" and the duty to report.

## Case studies

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Use these case studies to encourage a class discussion or as part of a short essay assignment. They are typical of the scenarios an early childhood educator may encounter. They vary in the extent to which violence at home is evident and they highlight the need to be aware of the possibility of woman abuse in a child's life. These questions might guide your discussion.

1. List the behavioural and emotional concerns you have about the child.
2. How might you document your concerns?
3. What factors in the child's home life are troubling? What other factors at home may be contributing to the concerning behaviours?
4. What additional information might you collect about the family, and how?
5. Is this a case where the Children's Aid Society should be notified?
6. What specific strategies might you use in the childcare setting to support this child?
7. What strategies might you use to seek guidance or support for yourself?
8. How might you discuss your concerns with the child's mother?
9. What resources in your community might you suggest these mothers contact?
10. José's mother mentions spanking. Discuss the range of behaviours which may be defined as "spanking" by different people. How might you phrase a question or questions to ask her about the spanking?



**These cases help student appreciate that bruises are not the only indicator of woman abuse. They also convey the need for individualized responses.**

**RAYAN – age two**

Rayan's mother Trina attends classes for English as a Second Language (ESL). The family arrived in Canada five months ago. Both parents attended the intake interview. Rayan's father is fluent in English. He answered all the questions, rarely conferring with his wife. Trina drops Rayan off each day before ESL class. One morning, after being in your program for one month, Rayan becomes extremely upset. She clings to her mother, screams, and needs to be peeled off of her. This behaviour re-occurs most mornings. Trina often has tears in her eyes and seems to hesitate as she leaves. You have needed to call Rayan's mother out of her class periodically to calm Rayan down. You are familiar with separation anxiety, but this is severe and seems to be lasting too long. Rayan usually cries all morning while her mother is away in class. Lately, there are times when Rayan calms to a whimper, but she never completely stops crying. You cannot distract her with toys. She startles and will start to scream if there are any loud noises. She sits in the corner of the room and follows your every movement with her eyes. You talk with her mother one day after class, asking if she and her husband can come in for a talk about Rayan. Her mother quickly shakes her head at this suggestion. You notice that her hands are shaking. She tells you that you cannot bother her husband with this. Trina starts to cry, saying that she will quit school to stay home with Rayan.<sup>1</sup>

**JEWEL – age six months**

Jewel (6 months) has been attending your childcare centre for one month. Her 16-year old mother, Andrea, attends high school in the same neighbourhood. You have noticed that Jewel seems listless. She sleeps a lot when you are caring for her, has little appetite, and shows little interest in playing with new toys or other children. The resource consultant who visits your childcare centre on a weekly basis states that Jewel doesn't appear to be physically ill. When talking to Andrea, you learn she is living with her mother, who is supportive but who works two part-time jobs to provide for her family and is rarely home. Andrea also tells you she left Jewel's father two months ago. He is a drug user and sold drugs as well. They argued a lot about Jewel. He became angry whenever the baby cried or needed Andrea's attention. She decided to leave because his drug habit, and the people he hung around with, would have a negative effect on the baby. As the discussion continues, you learn that he has been following Andrea, phoning her repeatedly, stopping her on the way home from school, and coming to her mother's apartment when she is there alone. While there, he has hit her and broken furniture on several occasions. Andrea indicates that he is angry about her leaving and that he wants her to move back in with him. Jewel has been present on all of the occasions that her father has become abusive. At least once, she was in Andrea's arms when he hit her.

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<sup>1</sup> These case studies are adapted from: *Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence: A Trainer's Manual for Early Childhood Educators* (2001). London ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.

**LAUREN, age four**

Lauren is a delightful four-year-old with excellent verbal skills. She tends to “mother” the other children. Lately, you’ve noticed that Lauren frequently expresses worry about her baby brother and her mother. Separation from her mother is difficult in the mornings. For the last two weeks, she has been asking to go to the infant room to see her baby brother, Paul. It is becoming increasingly harder to encourage her to rejoin her group in the preschooler room. If you attempt to redirect her, she begins to cry and physically resists moving. You arrange to speak with Lauren’s mother, Joy. You describe her daughter’s behaviour and express your concern. You ask if she has noticed similar behaviour. Joy indicates that Lauren is like a little mother to Paul and has started to sleep in Paul’s room. Lauren makes a fuss if Joy tries to get Lauren to return to her own bedroom. You inquire about possible changes or events in Lauren’s life that might explain her seeming concern about Paul and her mother. Joy says everything is fine but that things have been a little rough between Lauren’s father and herself. You ask if Joy or the children are being hurt when it gets rough. Joy describes her husband as a good father who is going through a difficult time after losing his job. She explains that his nerves aren’t very good because she spends so much money on diapers and baby formula. Joy suggests this may be why Lauren is worried about Paul, but is adamant that her husband has never and would never really hurt a child. You reply that it is good her husband has never hurt the children. You ask her if he sometimes gets physically rough with her when he really gets upset and worried. Joy indicates that this does not happen very often. When you mention the local shelter, Joy quickly says she knows all that.

**JOSÉ, age four**

José has attended your centre for six months. He also attends Junior Kindergarten at the neighbourhood school every morning. The family moved to your community from Central America one year ago. His mother, Maria, works full-time. José has two brothers, ages 8 and 10. Their father, Omar, works at a local factory. José’s English has improved, but he frustrates easily when other children cannot understand him. José has difficulty playing with the children, but appears unhappy when left out of the group. He exhibits outbursts of anger and has thrown small chairs and some larger toys at some children. One day, he hits a boy with a toy shovel, leaving a bruise on his arm. The next day, you ask Maria to come and talk about your concerns. You mentioned the angry outbursts and José’s aggressive behaviour. He is a lot like his father, she says, and his older brothers fight with each other as well. You asked if José spends a lot of time with his father. Omar works shifts and often goes out with co-workers after work. You asked her if she has been able to meet other women since moving to your community. She had made a few friends since starting work and they were very supportive. They helped her find an after school program for her older sons. Their caregiver has already talked to Maria about her older sons’ behaviour. Maria then describes how difficult life was in Central America and the level of violence in her country. She said that her husband is not a violent man but will spank the children when they misbehave.

## Possible class handouts

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Links to these handouts, and the other resources mentioned in this document, can be found here:

[www.lfcc.on.ca/newlens\\_links.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/newlens_links.html)

### **Power & Control Wheel / Equality Wheel**

These models, developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, show the behavioural and attitudinal characteristics of woman abuse and the characteristics of a healthy, equal relationship. Download copies from [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org) under the “wheel gallery.”

### **How and When to Report Child Abuse and Neglect**

This information sheet from the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies can be found at their web site: [www.oacas.org](http://www.oacas.org)

### **How do I Respond to a Woman Who is Being Abused?**

This page along with answers to other FAQs can be found on the web site of Education Wife Assault at [www.womanabuseprevention.com](http://www.womanabuseprevention.com)

### **What’s Wrong with Spanking? Positive Parenting Tip Sheet**

A pamphlet available in .pdf format through the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nc-nc](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nc-nc)

### **Helping Children Thrive: Information for Mothers Who Have Left Abusive Relationships**

A pamphlet outlining 10 parenting “tips” designed to guide mothers whose children have been exposed to woman abuse. Available at: [www.lfcc.on.ca/HCT\\_pamphlet.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/HCT_pamphlet.html)

### **Potential Impacts of Violence on Infants and Toddlers**

A page outlining a model of how the development of youngsters in this age group might be affected by woman abuse. Included are key points to keep in mind, and implications for intervention with mothers. See [www.lfcc.on.ca/HCT\\_SWASM\\_19.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/HCT_SWASM_19.html) There is also a handout for mothers on the same topic.

### **Potential Impacts of Violence on Pre-schoolers**

A page outlining a model of how the development of children aged three to five might be affected by woman abuse. Included are implications for intervention with mothers of pre-schoolers. Find at [www.lfcc.on.ca/HCT\\_SWASM\\_20.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/HCT_SWASM_20.html) There is also a handout for mothers on the same topic.

## **Effects of Power and Control Tactics on a Mother**

Eight ways a woman's parenting may be compromised by the presence of an abusive partner in her life. There is also a handout for women about how an abusive partner can affect you as a mother. Find at: [www.lfcc.on.ca/HCT\\_SWASM\\_15.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/HCT_SWASM_15.html)

## **Some background**

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Here are some points to keep in mind as you teach the material in this module.

### **1. Woman abuse is caused by the inequality of women**

Refer to *Learning to Listen, Learning to Help* (Baker & Cunningham, 2005: 8-9) for more information

### **2. infants and young children are over-represented in groups known to be exposed to woman abuse**

Woman abuse is for the most part hidden behind closed doors so we will never know exactly how common it is. Official statistics suggest that young women with young children are over-represented, at least among women who reach out for help. For example, in 2000 in Canada, 41% of children accompanying their mothers to an abused woman's shelter were under five and 32% were five to nine years of age (Locke & Code, 2001). In one American study of police-reported incidents, the age breakdown of children in the home was: 47% ages 0 to 5, 35% ages 6 to 11, and 17% ages 12 to 17 (Gjelsvik, Verhoek-Oftedahl & Pearlman, 2003; see also Fantuzzo, Boruch, Beriama, Atkins & Marcus, 1997).

### **3. infants and young children are more vulnerable and less visible**

As DeVoe and Smith (2002) note, the effects of violence in the home are magnified for young children, who depend on adults for all aspects of their care. Infants are highly vulnerable to injury and cannot defend themselves or run away. Infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers have fewer innate coping strategies and adults must help them deal with the overpowering emotions associated with violence at home. Sandwiched between the infant home-visiting programs and elementary school, toddlers and preschoolers may be invisible in the community. Moreover, because woman abuse often co-exists with other family adversities such as parental substance abuse, a young child's functioning may also be impacted by other traumas (Fergusson & Horwood, 1998; Dong *et al.*, 2004).

**Children's Aid Societies sometimes recommend or require a pre-school child to be enrolled in a child care program, to increase visibility outside the home and to permit monitoring by community professionals**

#### **4. Early Childhood Educators are in a unique position to assist**

Baker, Jaffe, Ashbourne & Carter (2002: 2) observe that individuals “who care for and teach young children are in an ideal position to support their adjustment.” As Baker, Jaffe and Moore (2001: 29) note, early childhood educators can:

- recognize and act on children's signals that they are experiencing difficulties;
- use supportive strategies to assist children to cope in the program; and,
- provide information about community referrals.

Implications include providing a nurturing environment, supporting child adjustment, and helping caregivers. Special contingencies when mothers and children are in shelters may also arise. With daily contact, a teacher can build trust and rapport with a mother to suggest helpful resources in the community. Efforts to limit a child's exposure to violence, at this early point in their lives, will have a beneficial impact on later adjustment.

#### **5. children living with frequent woman abuse are likely to be maltreated also**

Two points are important here. First, there is an overlap between woman abuse and child maltreatment in that they both tend to be found in the same families. Second, the more frequent the woman abuse, the more likely there is to be child maltreatment. These conclusions are drawn from studies of the general population in the United States and the United Kingdom (no parallel Canadian data exist yet). Here are some examples:

- In the American National Family Violence Survey, among fathers who self-reported over 50 acts of physical violence against a partner over the previous year, virtually all of them acknowledged physical abuse against a child (Ross, 1996). The more frequent the inter-parental violence, the more likely it was that child abuse was present.
- Among adult women in a middle-class, health survey sample who reported having a “battered mother” while growing up, 59% said they were physically abused by a parent, and 43% reported sexual abuse. The same figures for men were 61% (physical abuse) and 28% (sexual abuse). As the frequency of reported abuse of mother increased, so did the prevalence level of each of the other abuses (Dube *et al.*, 2002).
- A major study by the National Society for the Protection of Children in England included as the first of six recommendations that “professionals working with families



where domestic violence is found should always treat any children present as at risk of maltreatment even if there is no evidence of violence having been directed at them.” Conversely, eight out of ten maltreated youth in their general-population survey reported inter-parental violence (Cawson, 2002).

**Your local Children’s Aid Society has negotiated a conciliation agreement with local violence against women’s services, to guide reporting in cases of woman abuse. Having a copy of the local VAW/CAS conciliation agreement may be helpful when teaching this topic.**

## **6. Children living with violence learn unhealthy lessons**

Refer to *Learning to Listen, Learning to Help* (Baker & Cunningham, 2005: 17) for more information

## **Strategies for the child classroom**

**This material may be too advanced for some courses or levels. The professor can be the judge.**

Infants and young children have limited coping skills in their repertoires. They cannot seek out peers for support, talk about feelings, or instinctively sublimate anger through sports, for example. It is up to adults to create the conditions to help them cope. In the ECE setting, educators can provide a nurturing environment, develop strategies to support child adjustment when challenging behaviours manifest, provide support and referrals to caregivers, and be sensitive to the unique contingencies arising when a mother and her children are living in a shelter.



This material is adapted from: L.L. Baker, P.G. Jaffe & K.J. Moore (2001). *Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Early Childhood Educators*.

### **Provide a nurturing environment**

While life at home may be chaotic and disorganized, life at school is nurturing and predictable. Young children resonate with the emotions expressed by those around them. They are comforted by a calm demeanor and reassuring tone of voice. An important

component of this task is to create predictability through routines. The use of a high-quality childcare program is often recommended by child protection agencies to provide respite for a caregiver but also to provide daily contact for the children with community professionals.

Baker & Cunningham (2004: 34) suggest that general principles of healthy adult/child interaction are especially important for children living with woman abuse. Children benefit from adult role modelling of pro-social attitudes and behaviours, having clear expectations of rules and consequences, receiving praise (but focussing on the behaviour rather than the child), understanding the rationale behind requests, hearing requests voiced in a normal tone and volume, being clear on the givens of the day (e.g., it is nap time) but having choices when appropriate (e.g., shall we wear the green or the red shirt?), holding age-appropriate expectations, having clear boundaries around adult content in discussions, and receiving the supportive attention of adults.



**The following table can be photocopied as a class handout along with the pamphlet (mentioned earlier) of 10 parenting tips for mothers.**

## Why Basic Principles of Adult/Child Interaction are Important

<b>1. Role modelling</b>	Abusive men are self-centred and constitute poor role models. A child may learn that power and control tactics are effective in getting needs met without consequence. He may model pro-criminal or anti-police attitudes, substance use, racism, selfishness, lying or victim blaming.
<b>2. Clear expectations</b>	A child may be caught between the mother's rules and the father's rules, or be confused because the rules vary with his mood.
<b>3. Praise good behaviour</b>	A child may have been called names, corrected at every turn, insulted and never encouraged or praised, perhaps causing an inordinate fear of failure preventing them from trying new things.
<b>4. Focus on behaviour</b>	Children may have been told that they are stupid when they really have learning disabilities, for example. Self-esteem will be compromised rather than good behaviour encouraged.
<b>5. Explaining requests</b>	Rigid authoritarian parents issue orders and expect immediate compliance.
<b>6. Avoid emotional reactions and yelling</b>	Children who live with anger, yelling and conflict may cope by tuning out the noise, distracting themselves with fantasy or emotional numbing, or learn to yell themselves. Discipline based on emotion may be capricious and unfair. Rather than teaching a constructive lesson, the children learn that "might makes right." This type of discipline is also inconsistent so children see they will usually get away with the bad behaviour.
<b>7. Givens and choices</b>	Children may have never been asked for their preferences or opinions about anything.
<b>8. Reasonable expectations</b>	Children may have been expected to be quiet, clean, and a host of other things they just cannot live up to. They may always feel inadequate.
<b>9. Boundaries around adult matters</b>	Boundaries at home may be poor and children will hear or be told about intimate and private matters about their mother. They may have heard or seen sexual assaults.
<b>10. Spending time with the children</b>	Children may be isolated from peers, especially if the family had to move. A mother may be exhausted and have no energy left for the children. Abusive fathers can ignore the children or make his attention contingent upon unreasonable demands (e.g., when you come live with me, you get your Christmas presents). Children may even doubt a mother's love, feel not worthy of attention, or not want to pressure a mother by seeking attention.
Source: L.L. Baker & A.J. Cunningham (2004). <i>Helping Children Thrive: Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers</i> . London, ON: Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System.	

For some children, the nature and extent of family problems will be immediately evident. For others, a sensitive and informed observer can discern when problems at home are affecting a young learner. O'Hara (1999) reminds us, however, that a proportion of children who face adversities at home will invisibly blend in with their peers. It is the general policies and daily operation of the classroom that will touch these children, not the special contingencies coming into play when family problems are identified. As someone who himself experienced family problems as a child, O'Hara (1999) reminds us that our best interventions are the attitudes, words and behaviours we use everyday:

I needed for my teacher to recognize my worth and to believe that I could and would be successful. I wanted to be free of the violence that I associated with my father. I needed a warm, caring, nonthreatening classroom. Rewards, stars, badges, and praise were wholly inadequate. Much more than that, I needed to be respected and valued by my teachers. I craved the briefest conversations with them, one that transcended curricular concerns. I wanted to have a meaningful relationship, although I could not have described it in that way then. I wanted my teacher to trust me and always to expect that I really wanted to do well in school. These needs are not so different from those of most children (O'Hara, 1999: 255-256).

Among the suggestions he provides to early childhood teachers are: model a positive outlook on life, model respectful attitudes and do not tolerate dialogue or behaviour that does not convey respect for every individual in the classroom, demonstrate to each child that they are valued and valuable, get to know each child personally, look for unique interests in each child, and as required by law report suspected cases of abuse and neglect to authorities.



**It is often challenging for early childhood educators to determine what specific problem is causing a child's distress. It could be triggered by many factors including woman abuse. Providing a nurturing childcare environment benefits all children.**

### **Strategies to support children's adjustment**

Children manifesting distress may display a range of emotions and behaviours that present challenges in the setting. These may include severe separation anxiety at drop off, wandering or aimless behaviour, a powerful need to see siblings in other classrooms, recurring violent themes in play, controlling or aggressive play, inattention, avoidance behaviours, anxious behaviours (e.g., fidgeting, defiance), and troubling behaviours at departure such as refusal to leave or anger at the parent picking them up (Baker, Jaffe, Ashbourne & Carter, 2002). These authors outline strategies to consider:

- if faced with severe separation anxiety at drop off, keep the child with you and do not push them to find an activity until they are comfortable
- help the child find and master a simple activity, to give the child a sense of control
- validate feelings and set clear limits when aggressive play is seen (e.g., “I know you are angry but it is not okay to hit”)
- model and teach problem-solving and age-appropriate conflict resolution
- to engage a child in group activities, keep the activity short, sit the child close to an adult, praise all attempts to participate, and discuss topics of interest to the child
- prepare children for transitions in the day by, for example, cuing them of upcoming changes or making a chart with pictures of the day’s activities
- do not force a sleep-avoidant child to take a nap, or have them start the nap after others have settled
- if there is another staff member with you, you might let a child stay awake during nap time

As with most children, reassurance and a sense of security is provided by simple routines, clear expectations, explanations for things that worry them (e.g., noises), and by letting children express themselves through talk and play (Baker, Jaffe, Ashbourne & Carter, 2002).

### **Provide support to mothers**

In all age groups, eliminating exposure to woman abuse and child maltreatment is the most important strategy to benefit children. You can help by being familiar with local services should the need or opportunity arise to make a referral. Most communities have services to assist abused women achieve safety, including shelters and advocacy programs to aid safety planning and decision making. Police will lay charges where abuse contravenes the *Criminal Code*. Access to batterers’ treatment programs may be helpful. While these programs are promising and necessary, program completion by a father with a history of abusive behaviour is never sufficient evidence, in and of itself, that he is ready to parent or have unsupervised contact with children.

While many helpful services exist, ultimately, it is usually a mother who helps most children cope with the effects of woman abuse and other challenges. Accordingly, a key intervention for this age group is to support abused women to meet the child’s needs for nurturance, safety, and re-assurance. Young children benefit when caregivers help them develop emotional regulation and expression, model appropriate behaviour, set limits, and define and enforce age-appropriate consequences in a fair and consistent way (Hawley, 2000).

While counselling or parenting assistance may fall outside the purview of the setting, an early childhood educator can direct or refer women to appropriate resources in the local area. Some group or self-study programs are designed for mothers in shelter settings (e.g., Crager

& Anderson, 1997) and Baker & Cunningham (2004) provide parenting material suitable for distribution to women. Referral to a parenting program or support group may be helpful for some women.

Some educators will be comfortable having a talk with a child's mother. The discussion can be framed around concern for the child. For safety reasons, it is best never to leave a telephone message or engage in such a conversation over the telephone. Baker, Jaffe, Ashbourne & Carter (2002) provide specific guidance on how to approach and assist a mother when you are concerned about woman abuse in the home. Included among their suggestions are to assure the woman that you will not speak with the alleged abuser about the violence. They also provide direction for responding to disclosures from children. Baker & Cunningham (2004: 51-57) summarize guidance for mothers of babies, children, and teenagers, suitable for use when they have left an abusive relationship. For babies and young children, the suggestions include finding other new mothers to spend time with, re-establishing familiar routines, and ensuring children believe that nothing which happened between adults was their fault.



L.L. Baker & A.J. Cunningham (2004). *Helping Children Thrive / Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers: A Resource to Support Parenting*. London ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.

### **Families in shelters**

When a mother and her children are in a shelter, special contingencies will apply. Routines are important and preschoolers may adapt neither quickly nor willingly to changes in food, nap time, bathing, etc. which will be unavoidable during shelter stays or even when refuge is sought with friends or relatives. They may have lost treasured toys, pets, clothes, pillows, or videos and their favourite foods may be unavailable at the shelter. In this time of crisis and transition, the continuity of a school program can provide familiar routines and comforting predictability for the child. A child's attendance also affords the mother much needed respite from the on-going responsibilities of child care at a time of great stress.

Women and children may be at greatest risk of harm in the period immediately after a marital separation. Shelters have tight security and families can generally feel safe on site. This means that drop-off and pick-up periods at school offer an abuser an excellent opportunity to harass or assault a woman or her children. The possibility of child abduction is also of concern. The shelter will likely have helped the woman develop a safety plan that incorporates these issues. Ensure that all staff (and volunteers) are apprised of the situation and given direction on how to respond. Baker, Jaffe, Ashbourne & Carter (2002) also suggest

developing an agency protocol for such cases, including assigning roles for important tasks (e.g., who will call the police?).

## Self-evaluation exercise

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Write a reflection piece/journal entry on “What new information did I learn in this module? How does this information affect me as a person and as a future Early Childhood Educator?”

## Test bank

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You can find 19 multiple-choice questions and six short-answer questions in a file on the CD, called New\_lens\_test\_bank. It is provided in Word (.doc) and WordPerfect (.wpd) formats.

## Feedback

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Please let us know how this resource package has, or has not, suited your needs as a professor of early childhood education. Send us an e-mail at [linda.baker@fcc.on.ca](mailto:linda.baker@fcc.on.ca) or [alison.cunningham@fcc.on.ca](mailto:alison.cunningham@fcc.on.ca)

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