Child-focused approaches when working with parents affected by family and domestic violence

29 May 2019 | Sarah Wendt, David Tully

Comments

"is it possible to see a copy of the DOORS screening tool?

Emma | 2 July 2019

Yes, you can register for the Family DOORS app at https://familydoors.com/

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"due to a lack of services for men how do you suggest that generic services attempt to engage perpetrators? especially if there are safety concerns around doing so?

Amanda | 2 July 2019

"We believe that having child-focused conversations with men in general services is an important preventative factor in supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of children. Having said that, we also understand that having these conversations in a safe and respectful manner is challenging for practitioners, who need to be supported by consistent family violence frameworks and practice policies, robust supervision and training and development if they are to work with fathers around violence. David talked about the difference that the Family DOORS screening tool has made for generalist practitioners at Relationships Australia (SA) when having conversations with fathers about the safety of their children. Emerging Minds are releasing an eLearning course in late June which has a module on having child-focused conversations with fathers who use violence.

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"I work with victims of DV often women in legal area, often in assessments women don't want to answer questions regarding the children's wellbeing (mental and physical) - women are often afraid that the children then will taken away from them. Do you have any specific assessment tools that can be used without it being too intrusive or blaming the women for the DV.

Genoveva | 2 July 2019
This is a real challenge for working with mothers. There is significant work being done at a policy level to ensure that mothers are not made responsible for the use of violence perpetrated by male partners. Assessment tools are important but so too are consistent messages to mothers about legal and ethical responsibility for violence being located with the perpetrator.

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I work within a mental health framework that supports the emotional and social learning of children between the ages of 5-8yrs old. I work with teachers at school and a lot of children who I work with have experienced domestic and family violence. Their behaviours can range from violent external behaviours to internal anxieties. Teachers have undertaken trauma informed training. How should the teachers be approaching the students behaviours within the classroom? Keeping in mind that teachers aren't always aware of the violence or severity of violence within the home.

Webinar participant | 2 July 2019

You raise and excellent point here. Many children who witness FDV exhibit behaviours such as acting out or withdrawal which can all be interpreted in many different ways by family, friends and teachers. Consistent understandings of the effects of violence on children are important for teachers and other professionals. Emerging Minds is currently developing an eLearning course regarding the effects of FDV on the mental health of children 0-12 and this will be available in mid-July.

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How might you engage men in interventions when women have disclosed experiences of control and abuse confidentially. Also when there is a fear of placing the woman at further risk of abuse if he learns that she has been talking about it.

Mel | 2 July 2019

This is certainly a complex and difficult practice challenge. Men need to be ready to engage and to take some responsibility for their use of violence if there is to be success. When women share their stories of violence it is obviously important that the safety ramifications of all practice decisions are discussed, as well as their effects on women and children.

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Is there professional development on how to engage men?

Dianne | 2 July 2019
“Yes, there is much work being done at the moment in engaging men who perpetrate violence and most states and territories can access training and support from experience men's behaviour change practitioners. In South Australia and nationally, the work of Alan Jenkins has been critical in engaging men in holistic and accountable ways and his books, 'Invitations to Responsibility,' and 'Becoming Ethical' have been seminal in the development of practice.

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“I have had conversations where the idea that engaging men by discussing their role as a parent is often fraught with risks, as some men will use their access to children as a way of controlling their partner / ex partner. Any advice on seeing through this circumstance?

James (Jim) | 2 July 2019

“Yes, this can be true. But, alternatively, many men are motivated to change because they want something different for their relationship with their child. The ability and confidence of practitioners, being supported by practice policies and assessment tools are vital in having safe, accountable and responsible conversations with fathers about their children's social and emotional wellbeing. Practice understandings about working with fathers who use violence have only really developed in the last forty years and their is still much work to be done in the field, but their is general practice agreement that we need to be able to engage men positively if we want safer outcomes for children and mothers.

Emerging Minds | 2 July 2019

“Once you've mapped survivor's protective capacities and resistance to the violence, how can you use this information in the journey towards safety and healing?

Sachini | 2 July 2019

“Mothers who have been affected by FDV, childhood trauma and poverty invariably have long histories of resilience, despite significant adversity. A position of curiosity can create space for examples of resilience and connectiveness between mothers and children, as well as the strategies that women have used to protect their children.21 Practitioners taking a relational stance characterised by curiosity and respect are more likely to listen and enquire about skills, strengths and know-how that mothers have drawn on in responding to the hardships they have been facing. This practitioner curiosity is possible even where parents are behaving in ways that make their children feel scared or insecure. Once stories of skills, strengths and know-how are available to parents they can be replicated, and a blueprint for safe and nurturing care of children can be developed. These stories can contain rich descriptions of how parents and children have overcome adversity and practitioners can therefore become interested not only about intergenerational disadvantage, but intergenerational capacity and contribution. Parents can feel less trapped in their current circumstances and less limited in what might be possible for the care and wellbeing of their children.

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These conversations can challenge fatalistic perceptions of children’s circumstances for both parents and practitioners.

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“**How would you start a discussion around the perpetrators actions, without blaming & without causing shame - upholding dignity?**

*Daniel | 2 July 2019*

“Emerging Minds are currently developing a course with a specific module about engaging fathers about their use of violence and its effects on the social and emotional wellbeing on their children. This will be released in mid-July.

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“**I noticed a strong bias towards the position that family violence is perpetrated by men against women. Any thoughts about controlling violence perpetrated by women?**

*Joanne | 2 July 2019*

“**I'm not sure how you answer this but how do we engage men in a patriarchal system that doesn't threaten masculinity?**

*Tina | 2 July 2019*

“There is much work being done at the moment in engaging men who perpetrate violence and most states and territories can access training and support from experience men's behaviour change practitioners. In South Australia and nationally, the work of Alan Jenkins has been critical in engaging men in holistic and accountable ways and his books, 'Invitations to Responsibility,' and 'Becoming Ethical' have been seminal in the development of practice.

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“**If Family violence is prevalent as you mention, how can we not regard this as a serious public health issue and gear our responses accordingly?**

*Tina | 2 July 2019*

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Absolutely agree. Which is why Professor Wendt advocates for common understandings of the problem and support for generalist practitioners to be able to identify and respond to the issues, using a child focused lens.

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How do you bring the perpetrator "safely" in the room with the victim without traumatising them?

Tina | 2 July 2019

This requires an understanding that a perpetrator is willing to listen to what his partner or children have to say, and so intensive work with the perpetrator may be necessary first. There is much debate regarding the appropriateness of couples or family therapy where there is violence.

Emerging Minds | 2 July 2019

I'm just really interested if you can please give some examples of how you respond to people who minimize the violence or give a completely different interpretation of it? Thanks in advance

Bree | 2 July 2019

Being generally curious in a man's hopes for his children is often a good place to start. If we can develop a shared understanding with a father about his preferences for respectful and safe parenting he might become less inclined to minimise his behaviour.

Emerging Minds | 2 July 2019

How do you assess if it is safe to ask about domestic violence in the context of a family therapy setting? Could this increase the risk for women and their children?

Joanna | 2 July 2019

This requires an understanding that a perpetrator is willing to listen to what his partner or children have to say, and so intensive work with the perpetrator may be necessary first. There is much debate regarding the appropriateness of couples or family therapy where there is violence.

Emerging Minds | 2 July 2019

Are the results of the client survey undertaken by Relationship Australia are publicly available?

Ellen | 2 July 2019

Yes, please access rasa.org.au

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It seems that same-relationships where there is DV become eclipsed within the model. How do you theorise these relationships within in the model to acknowledge these within a gendered model?

Gloria | 9 July 2019

We would recommend looking at the CFCA paper on intimate partner violence in LGBTIQ communities which discusses the conceptualisation of violence that occurs in LGBTIQ couples. You can find a link to the paper under the related resources heading of this webpage.

CFCA | 9 July 2019

Can you please recommend any QLD programs or websites, resources/tools for perpetrators of DFV for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander families (cultural sensitivity)?

Sylvia | 9 July 2019

The following may be of some assistance, the Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (http://www.qifvls.com.au/) and this directory of support services (https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/support-victims-abuse/domestic-family-violence/find-local-support)

CFCA | 9 July 2019

I’m interested in the study Sarah mentioned about social workers and the role of field experience as well as workplace training in shaping their understanding of issues facing their client groups.

Ellen | 9 July 2019

The data from the study is still being analysed, you can find out more about the project at the following link https://www.flinders.edu.au/swirls/partnerships-and-projects

Emerging Minds | 9 July 2019