Engaging men who use domestic and family violence in child protection settings

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About No To Violence

- Victorian peak body that supports work engaging men who perpetrate domestic and family violence
- Increasing amount of interstate work
- Fundamental aim is to work towards the safety, wellbeing and human rights of women, children and others who experience and respond to domestic and family violence
- We engage in training, sector capacity-building, practice resource development, standards of practice, advocacy and research
- Major focus on the intersect between stakeholders (men’s behaviour change programs, specialist women’s services, police, courts, child protection, corrections, etc.) in engaging men
- Assist service system responses, primary prevention and social change
  - ntv.org.au/pages/about-us/ntv-resources.php
- November Australasian conference ntv.org.au/conference/
Objectives of this webinar

- Summarise the links between domestic & family violence and child abuse
- Mention some relevant contextual issues
- Explore the dynamics of men’s use of domestic & family violence
- Identify what it means to hold perpetrators accountable within a coordinated systems response
- Briefly consider responses to women experiencing and responding to violence
- Touch upon some objectives and principles of engaging men
- Close with a discussion of strengthening integrated service system responses
Assumptions

• Domestic and family violence is a gendered issue
• Our focus is on the child’s safety and welfare, and the mother’s
• Some, but not all, violent men will change if supported to do so … of those who change, some will change to a greater extent than others
• It is possible to weave together a healthy ‘cynicism’ regarding abusive men, a determined focus on assessing men’s ability to parent safely, and a strengths-based approach that sees positive roles for men as fathers
• Despite some misunderstandings and tensions between sectors, there is a lot of common ground and considerable goodwill
• Resources are (very) stretched – there is a gap between what we’d like to do, and what we are able to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of violence</th>
<th>Tactics of violence</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional violence</td>
<td>Manipulation, humiliation, lying, ridicule, withdrawal, shaming, punishment, blame. All forms of violence are implicitly emotionally violent and controlling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical violence</td>
<td>Any actual or threatened attack on another person's physical safety and bodily integrity; also physical intimidation such as threatening gestures, and harming or threatening to harm pets or possessions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual violence</td>
<td>Any actual or threatened sexual contact without consent. Note that some forms of sexual violence are criminal acts, for example, sexual assault and rape, many other forms – such as using degrading language – are not.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social violence</td>
<td>Any behaviour that limits, controls or interferes with a woman's social activities or relationships with others. Includes controlling a woman's movements and denying her access to family and friends, excessive questioning, monitoring her movements and social communications (including phone use, emails, texts or social networking), and being aggressive towards men who are viewed as 'competition'.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial violence</td>
<td>Any behaviour that limits women's access to her fair share of the family's resources. Includes incurring debts in her name, spending money without her knowledge or consent, monitoring her spending, and expecting her to manage the household on an impossibly low amount of money and/or criticising and blaming her when she is unable to.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual violence</td>
<td>Any behaviour that denigrates a woman's religious or spiritual beliefs, or prevents her from attending religious gatherings or practising her faith. Includes harming or threatening to harm women or children in religious or occult rituals, or forcing them to participate in religious activities against their will.</td>
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Links between DFV and child abuse

• Approximately 60% of child physical abuse occurs in homes where there is family and domestic violence.

• This includes intentional harm of children to ‘punish’ the mother, and when children are injured during the man’s assault against the mother (e.g. when they are being held or try to intervene).

• High correlation between child sexual abuse and DFV: violence against the non-abusive adult victim contributes to the perpetrator’s ability to conceal the child sexual abuse.

• DFV is a significant contributor to child deaths.

• Neglect is commonly associated with DFV, due to financial abuse, control & isolation, and perceiving the children as ‘competition’ for the mother’s time.
Violence towards children and women-as-mothers

- Making their child witness the violence
- Demanding that their child monitor or report on her movements, or to use physical or emotional violence against her
- Involving the child in the violence, as a means of deliberately adding to women's distress and trauma
- Attacking women's confidence in their capacity or effectiveness as mothers
- Undermining women's actual and felt relationships with their children
- Dominating women's attention and time so that they have little to spend with their children
- Making women physically or psychologically unavailable to parent
- Harassing women via child contact and financially exhausting them by pursuing repeated family court appearances
- Repeatedly denigrating women's character and worth as a mother—to her and/or to her children
- Undermining women's felt and actual parental authority (for example, by constantly over-ruling them in front of children)
- Using the family law and child protection systems against women (for example, by threatening to expose them as 'bad mothers' or to report them to child protection)

Domestic Violence Resource Centre, 2009
‘Maternal Alienation’ and the Abusive Household Gender Regime

• Long-lasting effects of abuser’s attempts to undermine her relationship with her children: ‘maternal alienation’

• Children are caught up in men’s tactics to avoid responsibility and shift blame for their use of violence

• Some, perhaps many perpetrators actively attempt to influence both their partner’s and their children’s perspectives about his use of violence – to agree with his violence-supporting narratives

• As a result there can be a substantial gap between both the mother’s and children’s actual lived experience of his violence, and the propaganda he is trying to make them believe

Morris, 2009
Contextual issues

• Gendered nature of parental responsibility: ‘if the children are going haywire, it’s the mother’s fault’
• Biological fathers, step-parents and social fathers
• Sometimes he is the main parent
• Sometimes, but not often, it is difficult to determine whether he or she is the primary aggressor
• Aboriginal men’s use of family and domestic violence
• Being part of a family from a culturally and linguistically diverse community
Dynamics of men’s use of domestic and family violence

- Core beliefs held by men who use violence: Victim Stance, Male Entitlement, Righteous Anger
- These core beliefs are shaped by social structures, embedded patriarchy in cultural institutions and settings, social norms and peer influences, and men’s family-of-origin experiences
- They combine to form the violence-supporting narratives, or stories, that men use to conceal their violence, minimise responsibility, shift blame and to pathologise her
- Result is the attempt, through violence and fear, to maintain power and control over her, and sometimes/often to punish her
- Men who use violence choose to respond to their feelings of anger, jealousy, etc. through violence, blaming her for ‘making him’ feel these things, and using violence to control her actions
Violent men as fathers

• While many violent men claim to be good fathers, with this sometimes an important part of their self-identity, their construction of love and care for their children is often based around their own needs – not their children’s

• Children perceived as a possession or ‘investment’ of the man

• Failure to acknowledge the impact of their violence and abuse on their children

• Prioritising their ‘right’ to have contact with their children over considering the impact that this might have on them

• Romantic notion of their children’s unconditional love towards them

• Unaware of how their violence against their partner constitutes abuse towards their children

• Tend to have unhelpful characteristics of parenting
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Characteristic of parenting</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Authoritarianism</strong></td>
<td>Expecting to be obeyed</td>
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<td>Being intolerant of children's behaviour or needs</td>
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<td>Being unwilling to accept feedback or criticism from family members</td>
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<td><strong>Disinterest, neglect, irresponsibility</strong></td>
<td>Being less physically affectionate</td>
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<td>Taking no responsibility for attending to the child's needs or caring for the child</td>
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<td>Paying no or little attention to the child</td>
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<td><strong>Unrealistic expectations</strong></td>
<td>Expecting behaviour that is inconsistent with the child's developmental stage (such as requiring a toddler not to spill food, or an infant not to cry)</td>
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<td>Expecting a child not to be upset after experiencing verbal abuse</td>
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<td><strong>Sabotage (of mother)</strong></td>
<td>Insulting, degrading and ridiculing woman in relation to her mothering role – including in the presence of the child</td>
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<td>Overruling child's mother's parenting decisions</td>
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<td><strong>Self-centredness</strong></td>
<td>Being unwilling to modify their own lifestyle to accommodate the child's needs</td>
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<td>Being insensitive to the child's feelings and experiences</td>
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<td>Not establishing emotional boundaries with the child</td>
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<td>Making theatrical displays of own distress</td>
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<td>Taking personal credit for successes of the child and blaming failures on their mother</td>
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<td><strong>Manipulation</strong></td>
<td>Making child confused about who is responsible for the violence</td>
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<td>Making child lose trust in their mother and/or their mother's care for them</td>
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<td><strong>Performance under scrutiny</strong></td>
<td>Behaving in a gentle, caring and attentive manner in public and during supervised access</td>
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Holding men accountable

- Domestic and family violence is a choice
- Holding men responsible for this choice
- Supporting men to take responsibility for their behaviour
- Assertive, proactive engagement with men
- Civil justice system responses (protection orders)
- Criminal justice system responses – DFV as a crime
- Referral to men’s behaviour change programs
- Ongoing assessment of the man’s capacity to parent and be with their child safely
Supporting and empowering adult victims and the mother-child bond

• Why women often don’t choose to leave
• Barriers preventing them from leaving
• Risk to herself and her children often increases post-separation
• Women as actively resisting and responding to the violence – they are not passive victims
• She has an active and vital role in working towards the safety of her children – her previous and ongoing safety planning that can be built upon, resources and strengths, her knowledge of the perpetrator, etc.
• Some women’s protective capacities are low - e.g. substance abuse or depression as a result of his use of violence
• Support women and children to reclaim their realities of the violence and abuse – rather than believing his propaganda

…but sensitive and empowering work with her is not enough
Objectives of engaging men

- Minimise risks of causing harm
- Enhance risk assessment
- Enhance safety (at least in the short-term)
- Emphasise men’s responsibility for their behaviour
- Enhance men’s readiness to use services
- Enhance men’s readiness-to-change
- Work with other relevant agencies to hold men accountable for their behaviour
- Refer men to appropriate men’s domestic and family violence services
- Monitor men’s capacities to keep their children safe
Principles and practices of engaging men

- Have realistic and clear expectations
- Stay within the parameters of your role – change is only likely to come about through the work of specialist men’s DFV services
- Separate the man from his behaviour
- Interview those affected by his violence first
- Interview him alone – not with those affected by his violence
- Build rapport while minimising collusion
- Keep the conversation on the man’s responsibility for his use of violence
- Do not lock horns or use combative approaches
- Align with a common desire to explore what’s in the best interests of the child
- Be cautious about signs of remorse
- Be cautious in interpreting men’s progress
Referral practices

- Refer to a men’s behaviour change program if one is available, Men’s Referral Service, DV Connect or the WA Men’s Domestic Violence Helpline
- Do not refer him to an ‘anger management’ program – this is not indicated for men who perpetrate DFV
- Do not refer to couple counselling or mediation – this could reduce her safety, provide a disempowering experience for her, and confirm his violence-supporting narratives that hold her at least partly responsible for his violence
- As the referrer, support his participation in the men’s behaviour change program or other intervention – stay involved, and assist with case planning
- Expect that some men will not take responsibility, or will make no or insufficient changes to their behaviour
Safe and Together™ Principles

1. Keeping child Safe and Together™ with non-offending parent
   - Safety
   - Healing from trauma
   - Stability and nurturance

2. Partnering with non-offending parent as default position
   - Efficient
   - Effective
   - Child-centered

3. Intervening with perpetrator to reduce risk and harm to child
   - Engagement
   - Accountability
   - Courts

www.endingviolence.com/our-programs/safe-together
Safe and Together™ Critical Components

- Perpetrator’s pattern of coercive control
- Role of substance abuse, mental health, culture and other socio-economic factors
- Actions taken by the perpetrator to harm the child
- Adverse impact of the perpetrator’s behavior on the child
- Full spectrum of the non-offending parent’s efforts to promote the safety and well being of the child

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Strengthening the intersect between DFV and child protection sector responses

• There are promising signs and much goodwill
• Understanding each other’s legislative requirements, bottom lines, core drivers and worldviews
• Systems development work, leadership and investment in governance processes
• Getting down to the nitty-gritty of working with each other through high-risk client strategies / multi-agency risk management responses
• Developing information sharing practices that do not create significant new administrative burdens (easier said than done!)
• Joint and separate trainings to enhance skill in the core components of a multi-pronged approach towards addressing children’s safety in the context of DFV
• Co-location and specified bridge-building roles
References

- Safe and Together www.endingviolence.com/our-programs/safe-together