

**NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION FOR  
CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SPECIALIZED  
TRAINING: DAY ONE**

**SAFETY ENGAGING ADULT VICTIMS  
AND THEIR CHILDREN**

The development of this curriculum was made possible by the Grafton County Greenbook Project, funded by the Office on Violence Against Women, US Department of Justice grant 2004-WE-AX-KO35. Authored by Gary Calhoun, Greenbook Training Consultant.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SPECIALIZED TRAINING DAY ONE**

**Training Title:** Safely Engaging Adult Victims and Their Children

**Section I:** Introduction and Goals of Training

**Timeframe:** 9:00-10:30

**Learning Objectives:** At the end of this section participants will be able to:

- 1) Identify the goals of this training;
- 2) Understand how this training builds on earlier training modules and prepares them for future training;
- 3) Understand the complex realities an adult victim faces as she interacts with multiple family and community systems;
- 4) Appreciate the difficult choices involved in an adult victim's decision to leave an abusive partner;
- 5) Identify ways that domestic violence can negatively impact an adult victim;
- 6) Identify ways that children are negatively impacted when they are exposed to domestic violence; and
- 7) Identify strengths, resources and sources of support that are present in families' lives

**Handouts:**

Handout I 1: *Rachael's Voices*

Handout I 2: *Rachael Discussion Questions*

**Activity Overview:** This activity provides participants with an overview of the training day and provides an important bridge from Core Training to this new learning. A brief videotaped case scenario is used to demonstrate the difficult challenges and decisions faced by adult victims of violence as they interact with multiple family and community systems. Small and large group discussions also identify the negative impact of violence on the family as well as strengths, resources and sources of support that are often present in families' lives

**Trainer Instructions:**

- 1) Welcome participants to the training and conduct introductions of the trainers and participants.
- 2) Explain that today's training is the second in a series of three trainings designed to prepare them to conduct effective interventions with families in which there are concerns about the co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence. Explain the following progression:

The day on domestic violence in Core Training provided an overview of domestic violence, the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment, and the DCYF response to those cases.

Today's training focuses in more detail on the knowledge and skills related to effective and collaborative work with adult victims of domestic violence and their children. A special emphasis will be placed on these earliest interactions as those first interactions often set the stage for the ongoing work.

A third day, *Accountability and Connection With Abusive Men* will focus specifically on building the skills to work effectively with abusive men.

- 3) Explain that you will begin the day by viewing a brief video, *Rachael's Story*. This video demonstrates some of the difficult and complex realities women and their children face when they are exposed to domestic violence.

Request that as they watch the video, they pay attention to the stressors the family experiences as well as the strengths, resources and sources of support that are evident in and around this family.

- 4) Show *Rachael's Story*.
- 5) Inform participants that in a minute you will give them a chance to share some reflections from watching the video. Note that you would first like them to think a little bit more about some of the voices that may be going through her head.

Ask for 10 volunteers each of whom will read one of the prepared statements "Voices of Rachael."

Provide each person with Handout I 1: *Rachael's Voices*, and assign one of the "voices" statements to each volunteer. Ask them to read them aloud (one-by-one) to the large group.

- 6) Conduct a large group discussion in which you ask for and briefly respond to the participants' reactions to *Rachael's Story* and to the "voices" statements.

If necessary, use the following questions to generate discussion:

- What key learning points are demonstrated in this video and by the voices Rachael is experiencing?
- What were some of the very difficult realities being faced by Rachael and her children?
- How was the violence negatively affecting their lives?
- Describe the types of interactions Rachael and her children experience as they interact with systems outside of the family.

- How does her experience reflect the experience of families you have been working with?

7) Direct participants to form four small groups and refer to Handout I 2: *Rachael Discussion Questions*. Assign one of the following questions to each group. Ask each group to assign one person to take notes and be prepared to report on the group's discussion. Allow 15 minutes for this small group discussion.

Question 1: Prior to this current crisis, what is the richness that makes up Rachael's family life?

Question 2: What would Rachael identify as the greatest needs of herself and her family?

Question 3: What strengths, resources and supports do you see in the children's lives? What risk factors do you see?

Question 4: Was Rachael really being uncooperative? What is a more accurate and productive way to write the last case note?

8) Direct each group to present a brief report back to the large group. Invite others to respond after each group's report.

Be sure that the following points are addressed:

Question 1: Prior to this current crisis, what is the richness that makes up Rachael's family life?

- A close relationship with her children
- Involvement with her church
- A home and the financial resources to provide for her family
- Involvement in her children's school life
- Family ... a sister on the phone
- A bright and caring personality
- Strength and resolve

Question 2: What would Rachael identify as the greatest needs of herself and her family?

- Safety for her and her children
- Financial stability
- Interventions that support her and her children

Question 3: What strengths, resources and sources of support do you see in the children's lives? What risk factors do you see?

Strengths, resources and sources of support:

- A positive and nurturing relationship with a mother who appears very tuned in to them.
- Supportive relationships with extended family.
- Intelligence and academic and social success in school.
- Positive community connections: Sports, band, church, and friends.

Risk factors:

- Exposure to domestic violence
- The emotional strain their mother is under
- Financial instability
- Risk of loss of supportive activities
- Family conflict ... being in the middle.

Question 4: Was Rachael really being uncooperative? What is a more accurate and productive way to write the last case note?

- She is not being uncooperative ... she is overwhelmed.
- Best way to write the last case note: Rachael is making strong efforts to keep herself and her children safe. The experience is a stressful one and she needs resources and supports.

- 9) Explain that this exercise helped us focus on just how complicated and difficult it can be for women living with abuse as they strive to keep their children and themselves safe.

One specific point that the video raises is just how complex the decision is to separate from an abusive partner. For many women in this situation the only choices a woman feels she can make are bad choices ... they all have a cost.

Draw 2 columns on the flip chart. At the top of the first column write, "Costs of Staying." At the top of the second column write "Costs of separating."

First, ask them to identify all of the "costs" that would be associated if Rachael decides not to separate from her abusive partner. Write those in the "Costs of Staying" column.

Be sure that the following are included:

- Continued abuse
- Worries about the effects of the violence on her children
- Worries about child protection's response and reaction to her staying

Then, ask them to identify all of the “costs” that would be associated if Rachael decides to separate from her abusive partner. Write those costs in the “Costs of Separating” column.

Be sure that the following are included:

- Economic instability
- Potential loss of housing
- Parenting alone
- Complex and stressful interactions with outside systems (Court, DCYF, TANF, etc.)
- Continued pressure by husband

Ask for reactions and emphasize how terribly complicated and difficult what may seem to outsiders as a relatively clear and simple decision actually can be.

10) Summarize and transition to the next activity:

Safety engaging women who are dealing with domestic violence in their lives takes skill and understanding. We are off to a good start as it begins with empathy and understanding some of the difficult realities that a mother who is being battered faces is an extremely important place to start. In the next activity, we will look more closely at conducting early assessment activities with adult victims in safe and engaging ways.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SPECIALIZED TRAINING DAY ONE**

**Training Title:** Safely Engaging Adult Victims and Their Children

**Section II:** Safety and Collaboration in Early Family Contacts

**Timeframe:** 10:45-12:15

**Learning Objectives:** At the end of this section participants will:

- 1) Identify situations in which the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment warrant DCYF intervention.
- 2) Plan an interview in ways that create a safe environment.
- 3) Recognize protective factors and safety strategies that the adult victim has relied on to increase safety for herself and her children.
- 4) Understand and assess the impact of past help-seeking efforts.
- 5) Identify four supportive interventions with adult victims.
- 6) Understand the importance of not holding the adult victim responsible for the violence of the abusive partner.

**Handouts:**

Handout II 1: *Working Premises/Basic Concepts for Intervention*

Handout II 2: *Child Abuse/Neglect Report*

Handout II 3: *Police Report*

Handout II 4: *Police Responses*

Handout II 5: *Screening For Domestic Violence*

Handout II 6: *Assessment of Domestic Violence for CPS Decision Making*

Handout II 7: *Information Needed For Risk Assessment of Domestic Violence in CPS Cases*

Handout II 8: *Creating a Safe Environment*

Handout II 9: *Purposes of Interviews with Adult Victims of Domestic Violence*

Handout II 10: *Interview Questions For Assessing Domestic Violence Perpetrator's Pattern of Assaultive and Coercive Behaviors;*

Handout II 11: *Interview Questions for Assessing the Impact of Domestic Violence on the Adult Victim;*

Handout II 12: *Interview Questions for Assessing the Impact of the Domestic Violence on the Children;*

Handout II 13: *Information to Consider in Assessing Protective factors;*

Handout II 14: *Interview Questions for Assessing the Outcome of the Victim's Past Help-Seeking;*

Handout II 15: *Assessing the Lethality Risk of Domestic Violence;*

Handout II 16: *Domestic Violence Lethality Assessment; and*

Handout II 17: *Factors to Consider and Criteria to consider in Determining High Risk to Children in CPS Domestic Violence Cases.*

Handout II 18: *Initial Contact with Mother*

Handout II 19: *Interview With Mother*

Handout II 20: *Four Supportive Interventions With Adult Victims of Domestic Violence*

**Activity Overview:** Through small and large group discussions they identify interview methods that are safer and more likely to lead to collaborative relationships with families.

**Trainer Instructions:**

- 1) Explain that in this activity you will use the fictional case of Rachael and her family to think about how to safely engage adult victims in collaborative work.
- 2) Display and briefly review Handout II 1: *Working Premises/Basic Concepts for Intervention*. Note that as you think about these activities you should review the agency's "working premises" for intervention in cases of domestic violence. These basic principles for intervention in cases of domestic violence are included in the agency's Domestic Violence Protocol.

The first premise which prioritizes the safety and well-being of family members is clearly a bottom line in all our work with families. Thinking about the safety and well-being of children and adult victims is especially important in work with families where domestic violence is occurring.

The second premise notes the importance of including adult victims of violence as active participants in safety planning.

*Ask participants to explain the rationale underlying this premise.*

- Adult victims are "experts" on themselves and their families.
- They know their abusive partners better than anyone else.
- Inclusion in the planning process will lead to the development of safety plans for themselves and their children that they believe in and are likely to carry out.
- Through the use of violence, the abusive partner has limited the adult victim's ability to direct her own life and to protect her children. Including her in the planning process is a key part of helping her regain control of her life. As she regains control of her life, she is more able to use what she knows about herself, her children and her abusive partner to plan and carry out effective strategies to support the safety and well-being needs of herself and her children.

The third premise reminds us to hold the domestic violence perpetrator, not the victim accountable for the violence. When we overtly or covertly hold the victim accountable for stopping the domestic violence perpetrator's violence, we end up colluding with him, and thus reinforce his behavior.

*Ask for examples of how we may sometimes (even unwittingly) hold a mother responsible for the abusive partner's violence against her and her children.*

The fourth premise recognizes the importance of a coordinated community response to domestic violence. Law enforcement, the court, the child welfare system, women's crisis services, batterers intervention programs, health care providers as well as other systems may all play a key role in providing safety and support to adult victims and their children while ensuring accountability and assistance to abusive partners.

- 3) Refer participants to the following handouts:

Handout II 2: *Child Abuse/Neglect Report*

Handout II 3: *Police Report*

Handout II 4: *Police Responses*

Handout II 5: *Screening For Domestic Violence*

- 4) Assign participants to small groups of 4-5 people and ask them to read and discuss their thoughts and concerns about the report and the history of police responses. Ask the groups to discuss the following questions:
- What are your general concerns about this family?
  - Should this case be screened in as a child protection situation? Does it meet the agency's mandate? Would it be accepted for assessment? Why or why not?

Allow 15 minutes for reading and the brief discussion.

- 5) Gather and discuss feedback from small group discussions. Be sure that the following points are addressed.

- It would be screened in and referred for assessment.
- Both children were present, witnessed the violence and were crying and very upset.
- The police report responding on several occasions.
- Darryl was pushed and received a bruise on his forehead.

- 6) Explain that in our case scenario the situation was screened in for assessment and have them put themselves in the role of the assessment worker.

In this activity we will focus on how to conduct assessment interviews with adult victims of violence.

- 7) Refer to Handout II 6: *Assessment of Domestic Violence for CPS Decision Making* and Handout II 7: *Information Needed For Risk Assessment of Domestic Violence in CPS Cases*. Note the importance of these assessment questions in situations of domestic violence.

- 8) Because abusive partners might retaliate against adult and child victims for disclosing information, CPS workers must conduct interviews about domestic violence very carefully. Conducting those interviews in ways that do not compromise the safety of the children, the adult victim, or the worker is an important priority. Make the following points.
- When there is good reason to suspect domestic violence we should refrain from joint interviews.
  - In cases of domestic violence, whenever possible interviews should happen in the following order: The adult victim, children, and then the abusive partner.
- 9) Direct them to form small groups. Note that one of the first steps in their assessment would be to contact Rachael and arrange an initial interview.

Ask the groups to discuss the following and be prepared to report back to the large group:

- Describe how you would contact Rachael, what would you say, and how would you arrange an initial interview?
- Describe how you would conduct the initial interview, the goals of the interview, and specific information you would seek to gather.
- How would you conduct the interviews in ways that address the mandate of DCYF, addresses the safety of all concerned, while making a collaborative relationship more likely?

Allow 15 minutes for this discussion.

- 10) Gather feedback from the small groups reinforcing good practice.
- 11) Refer to Handout II 8: *Creating a Safe Environment* and note that creating a safe environment is essential when planning to conduct interviews with victims of violence. Engage participants in a discussion of these guidelines. Be sure the following are addressed:

Interview her privately and not in the presence of her batter:

- Joint interviews can be very unsafe.
- Any disclosure by the adult victim could lead to retaliation by the abusive partner.
- Abusive partners may also react violently to the perceived loss of control that they may experience with this kind of intervention.
- Whenever possible, the order of interviews should be the adult victim, the children, and finally the abusive partner.
- Interviewing the adult victim alone also increases her safety when a child is controlled by the abusive adult and the child may feel responsible to tell the abusive partner about the interview content.
- Workers often need to be creative (meeting adult victim in the office, a coffee shop, or some other location that she considers to be safe and confidential.)
- Always ask the adult victim for her ideas on identifying a safe location.

- An inability to arrange private, separate interviews might indicate that the adult victim is in danger and that the abusive partner is using threats to control the worker's access to family members. A worker should consult with a supervisor and the Domestic Violence Specialist when private interviews are unusually difficult to arrange.

Assure confidentiality and discuss its limits:

- Adult victims should be told about their confidentiality rights as well as the limits to those rights.
- Explain that information shared by the adult victim will not be shared with the abusive partner unless a court requires disclosure or case planning requires so.
- If disclosure is necessary, safety planning will occur prior to the disclosure.
- It is important to explain to adult victims that DCYF workers are required to protect children from harm and that victim disclosures will be used to plan for the children's safety.

Dispel myths about DCYF and explain the process:

- Adult victims may fear that their children will be immediately removed if they disclose the domestic violence.
- Explain that whenever safely possible, the agency has the goal of supporting adult victims to provide safe care for their children.
- Timely referrals to the Domestic Violence Specialist and women's crisis services demonstrate the worker's interest and concern for the adult victim and her children.

Value her experience in knowing her family:

- Adult victims are the best source of information regarding their abusive partners and their children. She has lived with and survived his abusive behavior and has the best information available on the triggers to his violence and how he may react to the DCYF intervention.
- The adult victim should always be consulted as the worker plans the contacts with other family members.
- The adult victim also is an important source of information about the needs of her children.
- The victim also knows best what her resources are (formal and informal), safety strategies that have worked and those that have not, and what her needs are.

Inform her of contacts DCYF will have with her abusive partner and engage her in planning for how those contacts can be carried out in the safest way possible:

- The adult victim should be a partner in the planning process.
- She has a need to know about the types of contacts that will be made with the abusive partner as they may have an impact on the safety of her and her children.
- Her knowledge of her abusive partner may help the worker find ways to engage the abusive partner in safer ways.

- Never share information provided by the adult victim or children with the abusive partner.
- A follow up call to the adult victim after the interview with the abusive partner may be necessary.

12) Review Handout II 9: *Purposes of Interviews with Adult Victims of Domestic Violence.*

- Reinforce the previous discussion on the importance of engaging her around her expertise about her batterer, what she thinks can increase safety for herself and her children, and the coping and safety strategies she has been employing to increase the safety of her children and herself. This is one of the huge benefits of a collaborative relationship. She is an expert on her batterer, her children, herself and on what might help increase safety. You need her knowledge and skills combined with your knowledge of the dynamics of abuse, resources available, and the system.
- Note the importance of exploring past help seeking efforts. Understanding what has worked and has not worked provides you with important information for current and future planning. While positive experiences with helping systems may make one more hopeful about seeking help in the present, negative experiences may lead to negative expectations and a hesitance to seek help again.
- The worker should be prepared to engage the adult victim in safety planning at any point when her safety or that of her children may be threatened. It is an ongoing process.

13) Provide participants with the following handouts.

- Handout II 10: *Interview Questions For Assessing Domestic Violence Perpetrator's Pattern of Assaultive and Coercive Behaviors;*
- Handout II 11: *Interview Questions for Assessing the Impact of Domestic Violence on the Adult Victim;*
- Handout II 12: *Interview Questions for Assessing the Impact of the Domestic Violence on the Children;*
- Handout II 13: *Information to Consider in Assessing Protective factors;*
- Handout II 14: *Interview Questions for Assessing the Outcome of the Victim's Past Help-Seeking;*
- Handout II 15: *Assessing the Lethality Risk of Domestic Violence;*
- Handout II 16: *Domestic Violence Lethality Assessment; and*
- Handout II 17: *Factors to Consider and Criteria to Consider in Determining High Risk to Children in CPS Domestic Violence Cases.*

Note that while you won't review each handout, they suggest a range of interview questions and areas to explore when assessing the risk to the children and the adult victim, the range of protective factors that may increase the safety of children and the adult victim, and the potential lethality of the abusive partner. Encourage them to

keep these handouts as resources as they interview families where there are questions of domestic violence.

14) Direct participants to return to their small groups. Ask them to read Handout II 18: *Initial Contact with Mother*, and Handout II 19: *Interview With Mother* and provide the following directions for an extended small group exercise:

- Read and discuss the initial contact and interview with mother.
- Using the two handouts, (Handout II 8: *Creating a Safe Environment*) and Handout II 9: *Purposes of Interviews with Adult Victims of Violence*), identify, underline, and discuss the ways in which the assessment worker attempted to create a safe environment, accomplish the purposes of an interview, and effectively used questions and strategies related to *Handouts II 10 – II 17* with Rachael.
- Discuss the types of responses that the worker's efforts elicited from Rachael.
- What did you really like about how the worker conducted the phone call and the interview?
- What might you have done differently?
- Have you had similar experiences?
- What questions do you have about these early contacts with the adult victim of violence?

Allow 30 minutes for this discussion.

15) Debrief in the large group.

16) Refer participants to Handout II 20: *Four Supportive Interventions With Adult Victims of Domestic Violence*. While briefly reviewing the main points of the handout ask participants to identify places in the phone call and interview where the worker employed these interventions. Be prepared with examples if necessary.

17) Note that to design an appropriate service plan, the worker must solicit from each family member, additional information about the family's other strengths and problems. Because CPS workers are trained to conduct this kind of inquiry, we won't address specific skills or questions related to this topic. Typically, the additional information about a family included:

- Alcohol/drug use by a family member
- Health and mental health problems; current medications
- Educational, health, or developmental issues of children
- Finances, housing, and other material resources
- Language and cultural issues
- Legal issues
- Prior experience with counseling and other interventions
- Relationship factors: length, marital status, cohabitation, others living in the household, children, family support

18) Summarize and transition to the next activity.

In this activity we focused on conducting safe and effective interviews with adult victims of violence. We identified ways to plan and conduct safe and effective interviews and used the Rachael case to identify examples of effective interviewing skills.

In the next activity, you will work together to practice those skills in small groups.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SPECIALIZED TRAINING DAY ONE**

**Training Title:** Safely Engaging Adult Victims and Their Children

**Section III:** Safety Planning With Adult Victims

**Timeframe:** 1:15-2:45

**Learning Objectives:** At the end of this section participants will be able to:

- 1) Engage adult victims in a collaborative safety planning process
- 2) Demonstrate the use of supportive interventions when conducting interviews with adult victims
- 3) Be aware of their own reactions as they provide support and assistance to adult victims.

**Handouts:**

Handout III 1: *Rachael's Story, New Developments*

Handout III 2: *Safety Planning Tool With Adult Victims*

**Activity Overview:** Through the use of small group role-play simulations participants will learn and practice effective interviewing skills. They will specifically focus on engaging adult victims in a collaborative safety planning process.

**Trainer Instructions:**

- 1) Note that for this activity, you will follow the Rachael case as it takes another turn. You will then provide the participants with an opportunity to practice some of the interviewing skills that we have been discussing in small group role-plays.
- 2) Instruct participants to read Handout III 1: *Rachael's Story, New Developments*.
- 3) Lead a large group discussion of the following questions:

- Based on the story and the video, what factors led to Rachael's decision for him to return?
  - How might the worker react upon learning about this decision?
- 4) Note that it is not uncommon for victims of violence who have separated from their partners to return at some point to the relationship. Some may remain with their partners while others will eventually leave their partners permanently. For many, the process of permanently ending the relationship is one that happens over time and there may be a number of separations along the way.

As we discussed a moment ago, this may be a time when helping professionals may struggle with their own feelings about the woman's decision. Workers who have been supportive, empowering and non-judgmental as the woman was making the decision to leave her partner may find themselves feeling frustrated, angry or even blaming as she considers returning to the relationship. Workers who have respected the victim's rights to make her own decisions may find themselves wanting to tell her what she needs to do ... not because they are controlling people, but because they want her and her children to be safe. It is very important that workers are aware of any of these reactions and to not let them get in the way of effective intervention.

- 5) Instruct participants to form small groups and discuss how they might conduct an interview with Rachael at this point in time? What do they feel should be addressed in the interview? How would they go about conducting it? What are some specific comments and observations they may make? What are some of the questions they may ask?
- 6) Allow 10-15 minutes for the discussion and then gather feedback from the small groups.
- 7) Refer participants to Handout III 2: *Safety Planning Tool With Adult Victims*. Note that given this change of circumstances and the renewed presence of father in the home, it would be important to engage Rachael in a new round of safety planning.

Allow participants time to review the entire handout. Instruct them to pay particular attention to Section A and Section D (safety planning issues when the abusive adult remains in the home).

- 8) Divide participants into groups of 3 to conduct a safety planning role-play.
- One person will play the role of Rachael. That person can base their portrayal of Rachael based on their impressions from the video and the case discussions. The person should feel free to "create a character" and build in details that bring the character and the situation to life.
  - One person will play the role of the CPSW Assessment Worker. The worker has the goal of engaging Rachael in safety planning while working to implement the

guidelines discussed in Handout II 20: *Four Supportive Interventions With Adult Victims of Domestic Violence* (discussed in Section II).

- One person will play the role of consultant/observer. At any point in the role-play the person playing the role of CPSW Assessment Worker may stop the role-play and ask for advice/guidance/ideas from the consultant/observer. The consultant/observer should also take notes on the ways in which the CPSW Assessment Worker effectively engages Rachael in safety planning and the ways that she implements the types of supportive interventions described on that handout.
- Allow 20 minutes for the role-play.
- Allow 10 minutes for the consultant/observer to lead a feedback session within the small groups.

9) Reconvene the large group and ask for feedback from the role-plays. Focus the discussion around the following questions:

For the consultant/observer:

- What were the best things you saw the workers do during the interview?
  - o Safety planning?
  - o Supportive interventions?

For Rachael:

- What were the best things the workers did during the interview?
- What did the worker do that engaged you effectively in safety planning?
- What did the worker do that felt supportive and empowering?

For the worker:

- What were the major challenges of this interview?
- What skills or interventions did you “practice” in the role-play that you would use again in similar real-life situations?

10. Summarize and transition to the next activity.

In this activity you got a chance to think about how you might deal with a difficult situation. As adult victims struggle to make good decisions in hard circumstances, you as workers will be challenged to deal effectively with your own reactions while continuing to work in empowering and supportive ways. You also practiced good interviewing skills, specifically applied to safety planning.

In the last activity of the day we will focus on conducting interviews and developing safety plans with children who are being exposed to violence in their families.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SPECIALIZED TRAINING DAY ONE**

**Training Title:** Safely Engaging Adult Victims and Their Children

**Section IV:** Interviewing Children

**Timeframe:** 3:00-4:30

**Learning Objectives:** At the end of this section participants will be able to:

- 1) Identify effective questions and strategies for conducting early interviews with children who are exposed to domestic violence.
- 2) Recognize children's strategies to keep themselves safe.
- 3) Engage children in a collaborative safety planning process.

**Handouts:**

Handout IV 1: *Tips For Communicating With Children*

Handout IV 2: *Questions and Strategies for Interviewing Children*

Handout IV 3: *Safety Planning With Children*

Handout IV 4: *Messages For Children*

**Activity Overview:** Through this activity, participants are prepared to plan and conduct interviews with children exposed to domestic violence. A specific focus will be on helping children develop safety plans. Co-trainers will demonstrate effective skills for conducting interview with children.

**Trainer Instructions:**

- 1) Explain that this activity will focus on conducting interviews with children who have been exposed to domestic violence. Note the following:

In your Core Training on domestic violence you talked about interviewing children who are witnessing violence and briefly discussed some guidelines for interviewing and safety planning with these children.

In this activity, we will build on that training by asking you to observe and critique an interview with a child role-played by your trainers.

- 2) Explain that interviewing children exposed to domestic violence requires a great deal of skill and sensitivity. Ask participants why sensitivity is so important when interviewing children exposed to domestic violence. Be sure the following are addressed:
  - They may be living with a great deal of fear ... for their mother, for themselves, and for their siblings.
  - They may be experiencing symptoms of trauma.

- They may feel that they need to keep their family situation secret and may be very worried that things will get worse if they share this awful secret.
- They may be very conflicted and confused about both parents as they try to cope with and make sense of what is happening in their families.
- They may be targets of violence themselves.
- Sometimes they may be reluctant to talk about the violence (for all of the reasons above).
- Other times they may express relief in talking with an understanding adult.

- 3) Direct participants to form small groups. Provide a flip chart page, a marker and masking tape to each group, and conduct the following exercise.

Explain that in this activity, you would like to draw on their experience as DCYF workers. You want to provide an opportunity for them to “teach each other.”

Instruct the groups to discuss the experiences that they have had interviewing children ... about domestic violence or about other issues.

Based on their experiences have them develop a list of “best practice tips” for interviewing children exposed to domestic violence that they can share with each other?

Allow 15-20 minutes for the discussion and then instruct them to write these “tips” on the flip chart page and hang the pages on the wall.

After all of the pages are completed and hanging, allow all participants to walk around the room reading the different lists of “best practices.”

Reconvene the large group and ask people to share what they see as some of the best ideas produced by a group other than their own.

- 4) Refer to Handout IV 1: *Tips For Communicating With Children*. Note that these are some “good ideas” about conducting child welfare interviews with children in general, that also have relevance for interviewing children about domestic violence. Reinforce “tips” similar to those that the groups developed and briefly discuss any that were not identified by the groups.

- Talk to children at their level using age appropriate questions.
- Make eye contact but understand that they may not be able to do that with you.
- Respect the child’s space.
- Speak slowly and simply.
- Engage in small talk to establish rapport.
- Explain what is happening including who you are and the reason for your involvement.
- Let the child tell her/his story.

- Believe the child.
  - Validate the child's feelings.
  - Be willing to explore all the complicated and conflicted feelings that the children have about their home lives. Children from violent homes often experience divide loyalties, loving and resenting both parents. Reassure them that it is normal in their situations.
  - Remember that the children may have been expected to keep secret the abuse that is occurring at home. Every action you take should be considered in light of its potential to jeopardize the safety of the children and their families.
  - Do not make promises that you cannot keep.
  - Reassure the child.
  - Be clear with the child about what information you will have to share with others.
- 5) Explain that you would now like to focus on the content of early interviews with children exposed to domestic violence. Ask participants to identify what content areas should be addressed in early interviews with a child who is being exposed to domestic violence. Write responses on the flip chart and discuss.
- 6) Refer participants to Handout IV 2: *Questions and Strategies for Interviewing Children*. Review the following content areas that may be addressed as well as the suggested questions.

Assessing the pattern of domestic violence perpetrator's abusive conduct:

At times children can provide important information regarding the nature of the violence in the home. Helpful questions may include:

- What happens when parents (the adults) fight?
- Does anyone yell?
- Does anyone throw things or damage property?
- Has anyone used a knife or a gun?
- Tell me about the last big fight between them.
- Have you ever been made to take sides?

Assessing the impact of the domestic violence on the adult victim:

Children may provide information about how the violence is impacting on the adult victim.

- Has anyone gotten hurt or injured?
- Is your parent afraid?
- Have you seen the police or anyone else come over because of the fights?
- Have you seen injuries or damaged property?

Assessing the impact of the domestic violence on the children:

Children may provide direct information regarding the degree to which they have been harmed by the domestic violence.

- Have you been hurt by any of their fights?
- What do you do when the fights happen?

- What do your brothers and sisters do?
- Are you ever afraid when your parents fight?
- How do you feel during the fight? After the fight?
- Do you worry about the fighting?
- Do you talk to anyone about the fights?
- Do you feel safe at home?
- Have you ever felt like hurting yourself or someone else?

Assessing the children's protective factors (including survival and safety strategies):

It is very important to identify the types of protective factors that help children cope with the violence in their families and the strategies and behaviors they may use to increase their own safety.

- Where do you go during their fights?
- Have you tried to stop a fight? What happened?
- In an emergency for your parent, yourself, or your brothers and sisters, what would you do? Whom would you call?
- Have you ever called for help? What happened?

Assessing dangerousness:

Children may be one more source of information that can help you assess the dangerousness of the violence in the home.

- Has anyone needed to go to a doctor after a fight?
- Do the adults have or use guns, knives or other weapons?
- Do you know where the weapons are?
- Has anyone threatened to hurt someone? What did the person say?

- 7) Note that one final aspect of interviewing children that should be talked about is safety planning with children. State the following:

Developing safety plans with children who are exposed to domestic violence in their homes is somewhat controversial. It is important to recognize that children should not be responsible for assuring their own safety. When children are unsafe adults around them are responsible to assure their safety, not the children themselves.

However, in situations where children are remaining in their own homes and there is a risk of domestic violence workers should talk with children about what they can do if they should feel unsafe.

Workers should not insist on safety planning with children. The child who engages in safety planning should be a volunteer who is interested in learning about how to manage fear or anger and how to protect themselves from further violence.

Safety plans must be realistic and age appropriate. The plan should be simple. It is helpful with children to safety plan with the children and their mother together.

8) Note the following purposes of safety planning with children:

- To enable children to keep safe when the violence is happening in their homes.
- To educate children about domestic violence to assure them that they are not responsible for the violence.
- To let children know that they need to stay out of fights.

10) Refer participants to Handout IV 3: *Safety Planning With Children*. Remind them that this acronym SAFE (helpful for using with children in safety planning) was discussed in their Core Training. Briefly review it with them now.

“SAFE”

- S Stay out of the fight.
- A Avoid getting trapped.
- F Find a phone.
- E Everyone knows it’s not your fault.

11) Refer to Handout IV 4: *Messages For Children*, and discuss the following messages that workers can give children:

- You don’t need to keep secrets when you feel scared or sad.
- You are not to blame for the violence in your home.
- Don’t get in the middle of a fight.
- Identify escape routes from the house and where to meet outside.
- Identify an adult you trust and tell when something is happening in your house.
- Anger and frustration are okay but violence is not.
- It is okay to feel angry with mom and/or dad. It doesn’t mean you don’t love them.
- There are safe places for mom to take you.
- It’s okay to feel mixed up about things.
- It is okay to like dad and at the same time not like him when he is violent and hurting family members.
- You need to keep yourself safe when dad hurts mom.
- There are ways to call for help:
  - o Call the police (911).
  - o Go to your safe place you have planned about before.
  - o Go to a neighbor’s home.
  - o Keep your younger brothers and sister in a safe place.

- 12) Explain that at this point, the co-trainers will conduct a role-play interview of 12-year-old Portia Wiggins (the daughter in the Rachael case). One trainer will play the role of Portia while the other plays the role of the assessment CPSW meeting with Portia for the first time in response to the concerns of domestic violence in the home.

Explain that to flesh out the character of Portia a bit, you will replay the Rachael video from the morning and ask people to listen this time from Portia's perspective.

After reviewing the video, ask the participants what they remember about Portia's situation from the case materials that you used earlier in the training.

- 13) Describe the purpose of the role-play interview. Note that as in the last activity, for this role-play scenario the trainers will conduct an interview with 12-year-old Portia at the time father has returned home

In this interview, the worker will try to accomplish the following:

- Develop rapport and establish a beginning relationship
- Implement ideas from the Handout IV 2: *Questions and Strategies for Interviewing Children* as appropriate.
- Particularly assess the survival and protective strategies that Portia has used to cope and remain safe in her home.
- Assist Portia in the development of a safety plan.
- Implement other interview techniques and "tips" described in handouts and discussions.

Participants should observe the role-play and make notes of effective interventions, as well as any questions or concerns about the interview.

They should refer to the handouts provided during the activity and note where and how recommendations from those handouts were effectively implemented.

Conduct a 15-minute role-play as described above.

- 14) Instruct participants to discuss their observations of the role-play in small groups. Allow 10 minutes for this discussion.

- 15) Gather feedback from the small group discussions.

- 16) Summarize the training day and encourage participants to attend the specialized training, *Accountability and Connection With Men Who Batter*. Thank participants for their participation and state the following:

As DCYF workers, you play such important roles in supporting victims of violence and their children to gain access to the resources and services they need to be safe and supported.

Today we have tried to provide you with an opportunity to expand your knowledge and skills for working with and interviewing adult victims and their children. We have emphasized principles and skills that have the goal of engaging adult victims and their children in collaborative and supportive relationships. While our specific focus was on the earliest interventions, the principles and skills that you learned and practiced are very applicable to the work that you do throughout the helping process.

While responding to the needs of adult victims and their children are essential, it is also vitally important to attempt to engage abusive partners in a productive working relationship. That is the specific focus on the next training in this specialized series, *Accountability and Connection With Abusive Men*. We would encourage all of you to continue your learning process by attending that very important training.

