

In response to growing concern about children's exposure to intimate partner violence, an increasing number of domestic violence service providers have sought information about collaborative efforts between domestic violence and parenting programs, promising programs and curricula which include skill-building for parents—both survivors of domestic violence and perpetrators. While the parenting skills of battered women have been the primary focus of research and child protection investigations, the parenting of perpetrators has most often been addressed only indirectly, through the “effects of domestic violence on children” discussion. This discussion has most often resulted in recommendations about how victims could best keep themselves and their children safe. Grappling with society's limited focus on the primary caregiver's success or failure in nurturing and protecting children, victims and advocates have been placed in the position of justifying and/or defending the victim's parenting style and safety planning. In addition, they have continued to try to get authorities to attend to the dangerous behavior and inappropriate parenting practices of the perpetrator.

Grave concern for children's welfare and methodological difficulties inherent in early research regarding adult victims' parenting practices led child protective service workers to increase their scrutiny of victim behavior in regard to parenting. Adult survivors were perceived as those who “allowed” children to be exposed to violence in the home and were unable or unwilling to protect children from harm. Added to these erroneous perceptions was the belief that being battered fundamentally impaired one's ability to parent.

Recent studies, however, have challenged many of the misconceptions about the parenting skills of battered women and the methodological problems in many early studies, which led to generalizations about “the battered woman's” ability to parent. Research results now show the skills of victims to be as diverse as those of any other population and indicate that the distress they experience as a result of domestic violence, which may affect their parenting, varies widely in both intensity and frequency.

As old myths are debunked, survivors and advocates continue to seek a paradigm shift toward examining more closely the parenting techniques employed by perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Proposals and recommendations regarding the safety and welfare of children should presume the presence of batterers, as parents, in the lives of their children, whether or not intimate relationships between the parents continue. Survivors and advocates know this to be a reality in a significant number of cases. The “shift” toward monitoring parenting time and holding abusers to standards of parenting formerly reserved for victims, is advocated by an increasing number of professionals. There is growing interest in providing parenting information and support to perpetrators. While remaining strongly opposed to victim/ perpetrator co-counseling, some domestic violence programs are developing strategies to address the needs of both—as parents.

Curricula are being developed and implemented in many communities to address this need.

While concerned advocates are hopeful that long-awaited attention to perpetrator behavior toward children, and the development of perpetrator information/parenting sessions may lead to increased safety and support for children, they remain watchful. Misuse of parenting curricula, or viewing any curriculum as the solution for poor or dangerous parenting could work to revictimize the partner of the abuser and increase risks to the children. Some abusers may contend that a few sessions of parenting classes have amended their behavior with their children in positive, meaningful and lasting ways. If this contention is not valid, risk to the children may be increased through the abusers' manipulation of parenting time or visitation and custody arrangements.

In the process of examining any approach or program, advocates realize that they are operating in unclear territory and that, in instances of child exposure to domestic violence, they must work toward continued safety planning for adult and child survivors—throughout the treatment and/or education of the perpetrator. It is vital to establish secure methods of monitoring and assessing the behavioral adjustments and improvements made by perpetrators toward both children and adult victims. When programs and systems have placed attention and, inadvertently, responsibility on victims in the past, danger has increased for the innocent. Parenting “panaceas” for abusive partners hold an equally high risk. Survivors and advocates have come to realize that it is impossible to address the safety of children and mothers without developing strategies to deal with abusers as partners and parents. Further, strategies need to be designed in a way that keeps abusers contained, until there is reasonable assurance that those strategies are effective and safe.

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The following articles were chosen as representations of current research taking place on the parenting of children exposed to intimate partner violence:

- Bancroft, L. (2002). The batterer as a Parent. *Synergy*, 6(1), 6-8.
- Levendosky, A. A. & Graham-Bermann, S. A. (2001). Parenting in battered women: The effects of domestic violence on women and children. *Journal of Family Violence*. 16(2) 171-192.
- Sullivan, C.M., Juras, J., Bybee, D., Nguyen, H. & Allen, N. (2000). How childrens' adjustment is affected by their relationships to their mothers' abusers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 15(6), 587-602.
- Sullivan, C.M., Nguyen, H., Allen, N., Bybee, D. & Juras, J. (2000). Beyond searching for deficits: Evidence that physically and emotionally abused women are nurturing parents. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2(1), 51-71.