

Key Issue

Collaboration Between Domestic Violence and Child Protection Workers

As information regarding the harmful effects of children's exposure to domestic violence has been gathered, children's advocates in both the domestic violence and child protection fields have searched for ways to work together to keep children and their mothers safe. Collaboration has been difficult because methods for protecting children have been seen from different perspectives by the two groups. Child protective services (CPS) works to protect children while preserving the family unit. Domestic violence (DV) programs search for ways to facilitate victim safety and often may support the adult victim in her decision to leave the abuser. Though differing mandates and missions make collaboration challenging, workers in both fields continue to strive to find common ground in the common mission of adult and child safety.

In the attempt to develop cooperative ways to protect children and their mothers, CPS and DV agencies in communities across the country have entered into relationships that involve:

- cross-training of the two disciplines;
- development of domestic violence screening procedures and protocols to be used in routine intake procedures at social service agencies;
- assistance from CPS for domestic violence workers in identifying and appropriately addressing indications of *reportable* child abuse, as opposed to poor parenting practices;
- integrated efforts to provide women and their children with comprehensive, well coordinated and feasible service plans when multiple issues are faced by the family; and
- integration of DV workers into child protection review teams, which are comprised of child protection workers, law enforcement officers and other community members and service providers.

Such cooperation and relationship-building has allowed CPS and DV workers to develop approaches which provide the safety and support necessary for shared clients — particularly for children exposed to domestic violence.

Though collaborative efforts have increased and shown promise in the past 10 years, one consistent barrier to collaboration is the issue of client confidentiality. Confidentiality is paramount in assuring the safety of battered women and their children. Information shared with a DV advocate by a child is secure and great effort is made to protect that information from perpetrator access. Children's disclosures of reportable abuse or threats of such abuse are acted upon appropriately by advocates, but children's expressions of personal beliefs and feelings, as well as their safety planning is held in confidence. This honoring of their confidentiality is important in preventing their abusers from using information to manipulate, threaten or endanger them. On the other hand, information collected by CPS may be accessed by perpetrators, especially in cases where court

involvement exists. For CPS and DV agencies to work together effectively, issues of privacy and confidentiality will require careful consideration. Policy agreements must be developed to provide optimal safety for children and their mothers.

Success in the joint efforts of domestic violence service providers and child protective services will also require commitment and time investment from other community service providers, public officials and policy makers in order to promote and enhance the extensive collaborations necessary in addressing issues of child exposure to domestic violence. A number of pilot projects that utilize the expertise of a wide variety of community agencies have been recently established across the nation. Overviews of a few of these projects and contact information for them are included in this packet.

The following papers provide research findings, examples of promising projects and referral materials that offer basic information for those concerned with the protection of children.

- National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, et al. (rev. 2000, February). *Building bridges between domestic violence organizations and child protective services*. (Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence, Policy and Practice Paper, No.7). Spears, Linda.
- National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. (2000, December). *Expanding solutions for domestic violence and poverty: What battered women with children need from their advocates*. (Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence, Vision Paper, No. 13). Schechter, Susan.

Additional information on these and other child-related issues is available through the Technical Assistance/Public Education Team of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and the Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody, ph: 800-52-PEACE (527-3223).