

Key Issue

Intervention with Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence

Intervention has been shown to be one of the deciding factors in children's successful survival of the violence and abuse in their lives. Children exposed to domestic violence reap the same rewards from intervention as do children surviving any other kind of threat to their health and well-being. Children's advocates, counselors and volunteers in their work to end intimate partner violence have developed strategies to assist children in:

- ***understanding that no one deserves abuse—no matter what;***
- getting and staying safe;
- avoiding self-blame, by placing accountability with the perpetrator of abuse;
- enhancing self-esteem;
- succeeding in school; and
- gaining personal empowerment necessary in making positive life decisions

Throughout the past three decades, children's advocates have sought to provide meaningful interventions for children exposed to intimate partner violence. Domestic violence programs have historically concentrated on assisting children in safety planning, identifying and understanding the dynamics of domestic violence, breaking the secret of abuse by sharing their stories, learning alternatives to violence in conflict resolution and realizing that the abuse is not their fault. As programs have grown they have incorporated not only discussion, but also art, music, play, movement and other enriching activities in their work with children.

Individual (one-on-one) time with children is usually tailored to the needs of the particular child. Advocates and counselors realized early that "one-size-fits-all" programs were less effective than those that concentrated, as much as possible, on the specific needs of each child within each family.

Individualization is particularly important in the development of safety planning. This planning should be the primary focus of domestic violence program working with children. Initially, children's advocates and counselors work to assess the level of risk presented to each child. With input from both the child and the mother, the workers help the children to develop plans, which are appropriate to their age, ability and environment. The inclusion of safe adults in planning is important to assure facilitation and support for the children in implementing plans. Ideally, the children's plans are coordinated with the safety planning done with the mothers. Finally, in any action to be carried out by children, it is vital that they be given permission NOT to act. They need to be assured that inability to carry through does not constitute a failure on their parts. Children's implementation of safety plans is often thwarted by perpetrators.

Group work with children has taken many forms and is vital to the social skills of children whose models are frequently poor. Research has shown that some successful changes in children's self-esteem, sense of responsibility for the violence, attitudes about

use of violence, safety skills and peer support occur and that group provides children with a safe and fun environment in which to have positive social experiences. (Peled, 1997) Many curricula are available to guide children's advocates, counselors and volunteers in establishing successful intervention/prevention groups. Group work specific to the needs of children with disabilities, children of diverse cultures and children of varied ages is emerging. In this packet, we have included information on one program that addresses the needs of children with disabilities: *Kid & TeenSafe: An Abuse Prevention Program for Youth with Disabilities*, developed by SafePlace: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survival Center, Austin, TX

Though great strides have been made in children's services, since the inception of domestic violence shelters and outreach programs, services for children remain largely inconsistent. Some programs are restricted by financial constraints to the provision of only basic services, perhaps only having one staff member who provides occasional childcare. Other programs are able to hire child advocates and counselors to oversee a wide variety of counseling and advocacy services for child clients.

REFERENCE

Peled, E., (1997). The battered women's movement response to children of battered women: A critical analysis. *Violence Against Women*, 3 (4), 424-446.

The following articles and resource lists were chosen as representations of current research taking place on intervention with children exposed to intimate partner violence:

- House of Ruth. (n.d.) *Intervention with children who have witnessed abuse*. Baltimore, Maryland. Jackson, Jann.
- Schewe, Paul A. & University of Illinois (Champaign) Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Team. *Interventions for children exposed to domestic violence*. Paper presented to Illinois Department of Human Services. Retrieved March 26, 2002 from <http://www.uic.edu/depts/psych/idhs/Childwitnesses.htm>
- Domestic Violence Enhanced Response Team. (2000). *Safety Champion Coloring Activity Book*. Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Springs Police Department.
- NRC Children's Web Site Resource List
- NRC Children's Video Resource List
- NRC Children's Direct Service Tools Resource List