

**Report-back Seminar -
3rd International conference on Children Exposed to
Domestic Violence cum
Post- conference Study visit on working with Child
Victim in Domestic Violence**

Supporting Woman Survivors as Mothers

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- Reference mainly from:
- Helping Children Thrive- Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers: A Resource to Support Parenting, 2004
 - Information for service providers and handouts for women, can be used in individual or group intervention
- By Centre for Children & Families in the Justice system

www.lfcc.on.ca

Goals for today-brief introduction

- A framework for understanding how woman abuse affects parenting and children
- Strategies to promote engagement of women in parenting to support children who have lived with violence

Safety takes priority

- Help with parenting is relevant only after safety is addressed.
- Danger assessment questionnaire, reference: www.dangerassessment.org

Parenting support for Woman survivors

1. Engaging by providing hope and a framework & narrative for her and her children's experience
2. Describe impacts of abuse on mother-child relationships and mothering
3. Enhance understanding of her children- developmental stages, potential impacts, and roles, coping
4. Present guidelines for talking with children about abuse
5. Offer parenting strategies to help children thrive
6. Give permission for personal care

For woman survivors

We can't change the past, but we can change how we understand what happened, how we think about it and how it makes us feel now.

Paradoxes of Abuses

Paradox

- Paradox: A statement seeming to be false or defying common sense while still being true.
- The choices and actions of an abused woman can seem illogical.
- Use paradox as a framework to understand the dynamics of woman abuse
- Women are punished by paradox

10 Paradoxes About Abusive Relationships:

1. Many believe male violence against women is okay or justified in some circumstances
2. The more severe the abuse, the harder it can be to leave

10 Paradoxes About Abusive Relationships:

3. Even when abuse is severe, a woman may not see herself as abused

4. Staying can be safer than leaving

10 Paradoxes About Abusive Relationships:

5. Women can stay in abusive relationships to protect their children

6. Abuse in a relationship can be completely hidden from family and close friends

10 Paradoxes About Abusive Relationships:

7. Children can love a man who is or was abusive to them or their mother

8. Children can blame their mothers as much or more than they blame their fathers

10 Paradoxes About Abusive Relationships Cont't:

9. Abused women are not “perfect” in every way and abusive men are not bad to the core in every way
10. Difficulties in children can get worse after a man is gone.

How understanding paradoxes might be helpful to women:

- Shows you “get it”
- Gives her a framework to better understand
 - Why she might have felt “crazy”
 - Why those who haven’t experienced abuse often seem to not “get it”

Power and control wheel

- Developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota using the experiences of women in their program, 2002
www.duluth-model.org
- It shows how physical or sexual violence often takes place along side non-physical tactics of control.
- A relationship can be abusive even if there is no hitting or physical violence
- Control tactics are abusive and erode a woman's confidence in herself and leave her 2nd guessing everything she says or do
- No victim blaming, held abusers accountable for the abuse

Customizing the Power& Control Wheel to Inform Parenting

- The Approach
- Customize the wheel- (drawing by women)
- Select relevant pieces
- Scale slice proportions
 - how it affected me then & now
 - how it affected my children then & now
- Parenting strategies to counter the effects on children or mother-child relationship

Effects of Power & control Tactics On a Mother

- Woman believes she is an inadequate parent
- Woman loses the respect of some or all children
- Woman believes twisted excuses abuser provides for his behavior
- Woman changes her parenting style in response to abuser's parenting style

- Woman's capacity to manage is thwarted or overwhelmed
- Woman may use survival strategies with negatives effects
- Woman's bond to children is compromised
- Woman gets trapped in competition for the children's loyalties

Children's Roles in the Family

- Understanding children's roles can positively inform parenting after violence.
- It is a framework for understanding how a child interprets and copes with violence and how tension can occur between siblings or in the mother-child relationship

Children's Roles:

- Imposed or assumed
- More than one role
- Strategy for coping
- Continue outside of violent context
- May lead to guilt, grief, other hurtful emotions

Examples of Roles:

1. Caretaker
2. Mother's confidant
3. Abuser's ally
4. Abuser's pawn
5. Perfect child
6. Referee
7. Scapegoat

- Roles may be changed in work on parenting, to support child and improve relations with mother
- When modifying roles, so gradually by strengthening or adding a healthier role as targeted role is diminished.

Children's Survival strategies

- Feelings, thoughts, actions
- Help children cope
- May have cost
- May involve distortion
- Vary with age

Some Survival strategies

- Mental blocking or disconnecting emotionally
- Anger/aggression
- Fantasizing is better
- Physical avoidance
- Re-directing into positive activities

- Reaching out for help
- Crying for help
- Looking for love in all the wrong places
- Trying to predict, prevent or control the behavior of an abuser

Understanding a child's coping can

- Help mothers understand what may be driving a child behavior
- Help explain conflict between family members
- Help a woman to better understand her childhood and current coping
- Help a woman recognize, celebrate and strengthen coping in herself and her children

“Ten Everyday Essentials” Strategies for mothers to use with children

1. Positive role modeling (respect, healthy expression of emotion, human value)
2. Clear expectations
3. Praise good behavior
4. Focus on misbehavior not qualities of the child
5. Explanation for requests
6. Avoid emotional reactions and yelling
7. Given chances to choose
8. Reasonable expectation
9. Boundaries around adult matters
10. Spending time with the children

Healing & Strengthening the Mother/Child Bond

- Moving forward may mean leaving the past behind. But some parts of the past may have to be dealt with

Healing & Strengthening the Mother/Child Bond

1.Children need to know these things. They must...

- Trust you will take care of them and protect them
- Know you won't leave them
- Believe nothing that happened was their fault
- Be sure you love them, forever and unconditionally

2.Don't be afraid to talk about the violence

3. Ask how the violence made them feel

- dealing with anger

4. Listen show you are ready to listen
whatever they need to say

5. Encourage healthy ways to cope

6. Be the best “you” possible

- Start a new life shows you respect yourself and care about them
- Do something to take care of yourself and to be healthy

7. Don't

- Don't confide in children or use them for emotional support

- Don't be drawn into a competition with your ex-partner for your children's love
- Don't tell them bad things from the past they don't already know about
- Don't' rush into a new relationship just because you think children need a father

To conclude:

1. Abused women will benefit from parenting support that:
2. Offer hope
3. Starts where a woman is
4. Supports expression of her narrative
5. Supports both the woman and her children
6. Provides an explanatory framework for her experience that can be personalized
7. Enables bridging to her children's experiences
8. Includes peer support
9. Leads to actions

Implications to HK

- Comprehensive resource package for professionals, also reference and checklists for women, grounded on the expressed needs of women
- Specialized service workers
- Use of individual and group intervention
- On-line resource platform for professional/ clients