

Domestic Violence Perpetrators

Pose the Following Risk to Children

- Domestic violence perpetrators may physically abuse children.
- Domestic violence perpetrators may sexually abuse children.
- Domestic violence perpetrators may endanger children through neglect. The domestic violence perpetrator may focus so much attention on controlling and abusing his adult partner that he ignores and neglects children.
- Some domestic violence perpetrators may also prevent adult victims from caring for the children, resulting in neglect.
- Domestic violence perpetrators may harm children by coercing them into abusing their mothers or other adult caretakers.
- Domestic violence perpetrators may endanger children emotionally and physically by creating environments in which children witness assaults against their mothers.
- Domestic violence perpetrators may endanger children by undermining the ability of CPS and other community agencies to intervene and protect children.

Possible Symptoms in Children Who Witness Their Mother's Abuse

- sleeplessness, fears of going to sleep, nightmares, dreams of danger
- headaches, stomach aches
- anxiety about being hurt or killed, hypervigilance about danger
- fighting with others, hurting others or animals
- temper tantrums
- withdrawal from other people and activities
- listlessness, depression, little energy for life
- feelings of loneliness and isolation
- substance abuse
- suicide attempts or engaging in dangerous behavior
- fears of going to school or of separating from mother, truancy
- stealing
- frozen watchfulness or excessive fear
- acting perfect, overachieving, behaving like small adults

- worrying, difficulties in concentrating and paying attention
 - bed-wetting or regression to earlier developmental stages
 - eating problems
 - medical problems like asthma, arthritis, ulcers
 - denial of any problem or dissociation
 - identification with the aggressor
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Adapted from Jones, A., and Schechter, S., 1992. *When Loves Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can't Do Anything Right*. New York: Harper Collins.

align=center> **Guiding Principles for CPS Intervention in Domestic Violence Cases**

1. to protect children
2. to increase the safety and well-being of children by increasing the safety of their mothers
3. to increase the safety of children by supporting the autonomy of the adult victim
4. to hold the domestic violence perpetrator, not the victim, responsible for the abusive behavior and for stopping it.

Assessment of Domestic Violence for CPS Decision Making

1. What is the nature of the risk to the child?
2. Who is responsible for causing the child to be in danger?
3. Is emergency intervention needed?
4. When is further assessment needed?
5. Which intervention would ensure the safety of the child?
6. How best can the risk to the child be monitored over time?

Guidelines for Interviewing Families About Domestic Violence

1. Safety for the child and the adult victim is the priority when CPS workers conduct domestic violence interviews.

2. Routinely inquire about domestic violence during the initial reports and in assessment interviews with every adult family member, whether or not an adult male lives in the household. Interview adult victims and perpetrators separately when inquiring about domestic violence. Explain calmly that CPS routinely asks questions about domestic violence with all families on the caseload.
3. Whenever possible, children, friends, and other relatives should not be present during assessment interviews because of the need to inquire about domestic violence.
4. When domestic violence is revealed, the worker should immediately make a safety plan for the adult and child victims.
5. Tell adult victims about their confidentiality rights, as well as limits to those rights. Explain that information shared by adult domestic violence victims will not be shared with the domestic violence perpetrator unless a court requires disclosure. Give adult victims contact numbers for victim advocacy services where victims can discuss domestic violence issues confidentially. However, also explain to adult victims that CPS is required to protect children from harm and that victim disclosures will be used to plan for the children's safety.
6. When domestic violence is suspected or known, interview family members in the following order if possible. First, interview the adult victim (unless the worker believes that this will cause risk to child victims. If so, begin with the children). Next, interview the children. End by interviewing the domestic violence perpetrator.
7. If domestic violence is disclosed during a session with other family members present, acknowledge concern for family members' safety. Try to determine if persons are at immediate risk and plan for their safety. Try to determine if persons are at immediate risk and plan for their safety. If there is no immediate safety concern, explore the disclosure in separate, individual sessions with family members.
8. Adult victims may be reluctant to talk with CPS because of losing their children and/or of being punished by the batterer. By focusing on the safety concerns, the worker can build an alliance with the adult victim. Also, some adult victims minimize and/or deny the violence as a way to survive the abuse. Make stronger connections with adult victims by informing them that they do not deserve the abuse, that they and the children are in danger, and that the CPS worker will try to help the woman protect herself and her children.
9. In interviews with the adult victims and older children, explain any CPS requirements about interviewing and DV perpetrators. Ask adult victims if they feel endangered by worker interviews of the perpetrator. If the worker already knows about the domestic violence through police, CPA and other agency reports, explain to the adult victim that only information received from these sources will be shared with the perpetrator. Tell the adult victim how and when the worker will be conducting an interview with the domestic violence perpetrator. Ask the victim about possible consequences to them and the children of such interviews with the perpetrator. Plan for the victim's safety. If it appears that an interview about domestic violence with the alleged perpetrator will endanger adult victims or the children, delay it until safety is secured.
10. Interview the domestic violence perpetrator in a way that encourages him to disclose his own abusive conduct. ***Do not confront the domestic violence perpetrator with information provided by the victim.*** While workers can sometimes use police reports or other agency reports about the domestic violence in the interviews with the perpetrators, do not use any information from a victim's statements.
11. If an identified perpetrator denies domestic violence, do not try to force disclosure, but move on to other subjects. Angry confrontations with the domestic violence perpetrator often result in retaliation against the child or adult victims. The worker does not need the perpetrator's disclosure to confirm that domestic violence occurred. Such confirmation comes from adult and child victim statements, worker observations, and other agency reports.
12. If the domestic violence perpetrator reveals information that indicates imminent danger or harm to a known victim, then the worker is in a duty-to-warn situation; the adult victim and appropriate authorities must be notified. Workers should notify their supervisors and follow their agencies' policies and procedures.

Interview Questions for Assessing the Impact of

Domestic Violence on Children

1. Injuries or health impact to children?

What kind of health issues does your child have? Medical problems due to the domestic violence? Injuries or other health effects? Bruises, broken bones, black eyes, burns, pain, unconsciousness due to hitting or choking? Injuries from weapons? Has your child's health changed in recent months?

2. Psychological and emotional impact?

Have there been any emotional changes? Withdrawal, depression, increased irritability, anxiety, nightmares? Are you aware of any suicidal thoughts or acts by the child?

3. Behavioral Problems?

Have your children had behavioral problems in family, school, and peer relationships? Have your children used physical force or threats of physical force against you or others? Are the children dealing with anger in ways that disturb you? Problems in eating, sleeping, running away, alcohol or drug abuse, cutting themselves, harming animals, destroying toys?

4. Social Problems?

Have your children suffered social disruption due to the domestic violence: moves, changing schools, isolation from friends, loss of family members, etc.? Social relationships with family, peers, other adults? Problems in learning?

5. How does the domestic violence impact the adult victim's parenting of the children?

Is the domestic violence interfering with your ability to take care of the child, to consider the child's best interest, to keep the child safe? Do you feel supported in parenting the child? By the perpetrator? By others?

6. How does domestic violence impact the parenting of the domestic violence perpetrator?

Is the perpetrator able to take care of the child, to consider the child's best interests, to keep the child safe? Does the perpetrator support the parenting of the adult victim? Does the perpetrator undermine the parenting of the victim or expect the victim to be the sole parent? Does the perpetrator use the children to control the adult victim? Does the perpetrator use physical force against the children?

Questions and Strategies for Interviewing Children

1. Assessing the Pattern of Domestic Violence Perpetrator's Abusive Conduct

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

2. Assessing the Impact of the Domestic Violence on the Adult Victim

Has anyone gotten hurt or injured? Is your parent afraid? How do your parents act after a bad fight? Have you seen the police or anyone come over because of the fights? Have you ever seen injuries or damaged property?

3. Assessing the Impact of the Domestic Violence on the Children

Have you been hurt by any of their fights? What do your brothers or sisters do during a fight? Are you ever afraid when your parents fight? How do you feel during the fight? After the fight? Do you worry about the violence? Do you talk to anyone about the fights? Do you feel safe at home? Have you ever felt like hurting yourself or someone else?

4. Assessing the Children's Protective Factors

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

5. Assessing Lethality: Child's Knowledge of the Danger

Has anyone needed to go to a doctor after a fight? Do the adults use guns or knives? Do you know where the gun is? Has anyone threatened to hurt someone? What did the person say?

Practice Applications for Child Protective Services Where Domestic Violence Is Present or Suspected

The following are specific practice applications for child protective service workers. These have been identified as crucial to achieving the primary goal of safety for children, which may be accomplished by enduring the safety of the mother.

1. The guiding principles: to protect children; to increase the safety and wellbeing of children by increasing the safety of their mothers; to increase the safety of children by supporting the autonomy of the adult victim; and to hold the domestic violence perpetrator, not the victim, responsible for the abusive behavior and for stopping it, should always be considered an intervention with a case involving domestic violence. When conflict occurs among the principles, child victim safety is the first priority.
2. The worker should routinely inquire about the existence of domestic violence with every adult female client whether or not there are allegations of domestic violence in the initial child abuse report. This inquiry should be done in a confidential session alone with the woman. This should be done even if there is not an adult male living in the home.
3. The worker should conduct thorough assessment in cases involving domestic violence. The assessment should include information on the perpetrator's assaultive and coercive conduct, impact of domestic violence on the adult victim and on the children, protective factors, and lethality.
4. When domestic violence is suspected or confirmed, the worker should interview the family members in the following order if possible. First, interview the suspected adult victim (unless the interview will endanger the children), then the children, then the suspected perpetrator.
5. When there is domestic violence, a safety plan should be developed with each adult victim and the child(ren).
6. If the adult victim and/or child(ren) tell the worker about domestic violence, this information should be kept confidential and should not be shared with the perpetrator unless the adult victim so requests, and then only after the consequences of such disclosure are discussed with the adult victim. Adult victims and children should be told that information may not be kept confidential in court proceedings. In these cases, workers should help victims plan for their safety during and following any court proceeding.
7. If the perpetrator reveals information to the worker about domestic violence, the worker should discuss this with the adult victim and develop a safety plan with the adult victim and the child(ren). This information should never be discussed while the perpetrator is present.
8. Where there is domestic violence, if safety can be reasonably assured, the relationship between the adult victim and child(ren) should be supported and preserved and the adult victim should be supported in her efforts to protect the child(ren) and herself.
9. Interventions that require discussion of the domestic violence with both the perpetrator, and the adult victim present, such as couples counseling and mediation, should not be utilized or recommended by the worker, as they can increase the danger to the adult victim and the child(ren).
10. Workers should understand state domestic violence and stalking laws and should use the law as a resource to provide protection for adult victims and their child(ren).
11. Child protection workers should collaborate domestic violence programs, batterer intervention programs, and the justice system both to increase safety for adult victims and child(ren), and to hold the perpetrator responsible for the violence. Local domestic violence programs should be used as a resource for both adult victims and child(ren).