

# The Heart of the Matter



Working with women and children who are  
responding to violence and abuse

In 2018 Rosie's Place approached Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) with an idea for developing a resource for workers regarding responding to women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence. With little more than a one page blurb of what the resource entailed DVSM took a leap of faith and funded the initiation of this project. Finally, this resource is now complete. Rosie's Place wishes to extend our heartfelt thanks to DVSM for supporting the development of this resource.

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ISBN: 978-0-9875883-4-0

Author: Catherine Want

Illustrator: Anna Marquez

Edited by: Danielle Bragg

Graphic design: Josene Perri

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# The Heart of the Matter

## About this book

The purpose of this book is to join the wisdom that is evidenced from both literature and practice regarding ways of responding to women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence.

Each practice chapter covers a theme that appears constantly in the work and within that theme there is both a review of what the literature and research tells us and also what women and children tell us about what makes a difference.

The book is seen as complementing what services and workers are already doing but is situated within a socio-political understanding not only of interpersonal violence but also the varying responses experienced by women and children which can add to (or indeed release them) from their existing struggles of isolation, fear, responsibility and powerlessness.

The title of this resource, 'The Heart of the Matter', encompasses many themes:

- The critical importance of sustaining and strengthening the connection between mothers and children who have lived with domestic and family violence;
- The conversations which are important to share about those experiences;
- The readiness of services and workers to listen, seek to understand and support women and children as they navigate safety from this harm.





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# *Practice 1:* *Rethinking History*



## Rethinking History

This resource focuses on a now critically recognised aspect of practice wisdom with mothers and children who have experienced domestic and family violence: strengthening their relationship which has been a casualty of the violence they have been subjected to.

It has been made increasingly visible in the research that one of the tactics used in the execution of domestic violence by a perpetrator is to dismantle the identity and worth women hold about themselves as mothers. Therefore, children are deliberately brought into the arena of the violence, not as passive witnesses, but as people who experience the many layers of harm that perpetrators of violence inflict. They can see, hear and often actively intervene against the abuse of their mothers and siblings. They can be physically, verbally and sexually abused themselves, and they can be deliberately used as a tool in the execution of the violence itself.

Such extensions of the perpetration of domestic and family violence clearly add child protection concerns to the architecture of harm that is exerted and joins together the ongoing protection and wellbeing of the mother to the ongoing protection and wellbeing of her children.

***“The attack on the mother-child relationship as an aspect of domestic violence highlights the need to link the protection and support of women with the protection and support of children”  
(Humphreys & Houghton, 2008).***

In looking at the history channels concerning domestic and family violence, it has been a relatively short period of time that this violence has gained overdue visibility. Making visible the abuse of women in their homes by their partners demanded a reappraisal of the sanctity of the family and brought attention to the fact that women were being harmed by people who violated their relationships of intimacy, trust, safety and dignity. Almost as an afterthought, questions were then being raised about the experiences of children who also held close connections to the person who was abusing their mothers.

Yet the history channels concerning the establishment of services for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence maintained parallel but separate pathways of support.

Historically, domestic violence services focused on the right, safety and needs of women whereas child protection services held the mantle for the safety and wellbeing of children. But this separate development of service provision for women and children set in motion responses where the needs of mothers and their children were addressed independently of one another. Further to this, women were often charged with responsibility for the protection of their children so that even in the context of domestic violence, while male perpetrators escaped accountability, mothers were demonised as “failing to protect” (Radford & Hester, 2006).



*As stated by Radford & Hester (2006),  
“Mothers are set up to fail, individually  
because of their abusive partner’s tactics  
of control, and more generally, by the  
general policy context that compounds  
the experiences of abuse”.*



More recently, researchers and writers in the field have argued that not only is it imperative that the perpetrators of the violence assume responsibility for the harm women and children are exposed to but, rather than being separate entities, there is a need to link the protection and support of women as mothers with the protection and support of their children (Humphreys & Houghton, 2008).

A prevailing idea about mothers who have experienced domestic violence is that because of that violence their parenting capacity will be impaired. There is no doubt that women's parenting, including their thoughts about themselves as parents, is impacted by the violence. But through this they also find ways to hold onto whatever they can as mothers to their children and these spaces of defiance against the power of the violence must be acknowledged.



## Responding to domestic and family violence

An ecological model of intervention places the individual within a broader system which includes family and community.

Such a model recognises that a key to healing for families who have been subjected to domestic and family violence is to build their connection to:

- Themselves (who I am, what I believe, what I value, what I need)
- Mothers and children (who we are, what we believe, what we value, what we need, who we belong to)
- Broader supports within their community (what women and children need, how we get those needs met).

Such positive responses and the building of safe and supportive connections has been shown to challenge and change the meanings held by people about what they have experienced, their identity, self-respect, strengthened connections to others and enhanced ongoing wellbeing and safety.

Research has demonstrated that mothers and their children promote recovery for each other by reassuring each other about the past, present and future, rebuilding each other's confidence and assisting each other to overcome the ongoing struggles arising from the violence they have been subjected to (Katz, 2015; McManus et al., 2013; Sharp et al., 2011).

As workers, it is important to acknowledge that connection between mothers and their children may be impacted but not destroyed by violence. Even while the violence is happening, bonds between mothers and children can buffer the full weight of the harm and distress and work with mothers and children to identify those bonds and how they can be strengthened is vital to purposeful work.



## Service and worker responses

Responses to women, children, and young people who are dealing with the impact of the violence involves a labyrinth of practice considerations. These can include:

- Timing, changing demands and needs in accordance with the movements of families
- A focus on practical support and action plans to deal with the next crisis or challenge that threatens to corrode their hopes for change
- The ebb and flow of the work, with moments of intensive support, periods of separation between workers and families, sudden and often unexpected reunions, ongoing connections, experiences of shared grief and anguish at the unjust challenges and losses, and celebrations of determination, gains and achievements in moving toward safety.

*The complexity and wide-ranging factors regarding impact, especially in the context of ongoing safety issues, involves a holistic and pragmatic approach to the work involving practical issues, advocacy and support as well as counselling intervention.*



Whatever the form of intervention, occurring either separately from or complementary to each other, the following outcomes for women and their children will guide the work:

- Enhancing their safety and ongoing protection
- Increasing their understanding and utilisation of resources and supports available
- Recognising the dynamics of the violence in terms of tactics and the legacies of the violence impacting on wellbeing
- Helping parents understand the impact of domestic violence on their children and themselves
- Supporting parents in talking to and listening to their children about their experiences of the violence
- Strengthening relationships between the mother and her child/ren
- Identifying acts of resistance by women and children and their sense of agency toward safety, connection and the co-construction of family resiliency
- Reducing their isolation and enhancing their connection to family, social and community networks.

The domestic and family violence service system has been built upon a broadly feminist framework. In focusing on client strengths and empowerment, emphasises that a critical aspect of service delivery is the voluntary nature of women's and children's engagement and choice as to how such connection may be of help for them.

In the context of domestic and family violence, workers are asked to listen to the voices of women and children who are living in, who are considering leaving, or who have fled domestic violence. Workers are asked to listen to the voices of women and children, seek to understand their current stresses and strains and provide them with the space to make decisions that emphasise strengths, agency and movement toward safety and wellbeing.



When working with women the purpose is to assist them with support, care, information and advocacy to maximise their opportunities for positive and lasting change. The purpose is not to decide for women particular choices or actions that “would be in their best interest or the interests of their children”.

The work may continue even when knowing that they remain potentially unsafe. Indeed, it is well recognised that it may take years for a woman to move to a place of absolute safety. The impact of her partner’s violence on her children is often a precipitating factor in assisting women to find ways to leave. Allowing her space to reflect on what options are either available or impossible at this time and to be supported while she navigates those different pathways is considered good practice.

For some women and children, they can find a higher level of safety and protection once they leave the violence. However, there is also evidence which shows that separation does not stop the violence and in fact, research shows that approximately one third of separated women continue to experience violence, harassment and abuse.

Further to this, workers must also hold a lens of understanding the complexity of domestic and family violence that extends beyond the actions of harm inflicted by an individual. The social context of people’s lives further determines other struggles and barriers which adds to the burdens imposed by the violence and, therefore, further incapacitates hopes for moving away from harm. The intersectionality of other forms of oppression and discrimination such as race, culture, sexuality, age, disability and poverty which further enable violence to remain invisible must be acknowledged.

When viewed through this broader lens, possibilities for achieving freedom from harm and the gifts of empowerment and self-determination would seem to be a hoped for possibility rather than absolute.

However, workers need to be mindful that their work and their beliefs concerning human rights and the promotion for peoples lives to change must remain unwavering. To this end “small acts of living” (Wade, 1997) against the challenges of the work must continue to adhere to empowering practices of respect, hearing women’s and children’s voices, and sustaining hope.

# Key Principles Guiding Best Practice

1

## Rights

Domestic and family violence is a fundamental violation of basic human rights where people, including children, are entitled to live in dignity and freedom from fear and harm.

2

## Justice

Some forms of domestic and family violence are criminal actions which warrant a criminal justice system response.

3

## Responsibility

Responsibility for violence rests with the perpetrator and they should be held accountable for their actions, the impact of those actions upon both adults and children, and take measures to ensure that they do not continue to offend.

4

## Power

Acts of domestic and family violence are a most blatant abuse of power and responses must address the power imbalance and gender inequality between those using violence (predominantly men) and those experiencing violence (predominantly women and children).

5

## Safety

The safety of women and children who experience such violence and the protection of their rights are the paramount considerations in any response.

6

## Empowerment

Any form of intervention must use principles of empowerment, supporting women and children to experience a sense of being in charge of their lives, building on their strengths, enhancing their capacity to make informed decisions and exercising their right to self-determination.

7

## Child Protection

Children need to be protected from domestic and family violence, to have their rights protected and to have their opportunities for development promoted. While the first priority of child protection intervention will always be to ensure the child's safety and wellbeing, every effort should be made to achieve this through enhancing the mother's capacity to protect her child.

# Key Principles Guiding Best Practice

## Empowerment of Mothers

Women should be supported and empowered to respond to their children's needs. They should not be blamed if unable, at a particular point in time, to do so.

8

## Access & equity

Domestic and family violence crosses all classes, cultures, religions, ages, abilities and sexual preference. All victims must be entitled to access services which are provided in a fair and equitable manner.

9

## Diversity

A person's experience of family violence, and their understanding of service system responses, may be profoundly influenced by their culture. Cultural issues should be acknowledged, respected and sensitively addressed, but not used as an excuse for family violence. Violence is not acceptable in any community or culture.

10

## Professional Advocacy & Support

Victims are entitled to confidential and professional services relevant to their circumstances that are delivered by trained, skilled and supervised workers

11

## Collaboration

Intervention must support a coordinated and collaborative response both within and outside the local community, to affect the best outcome for clients. Responses require a multi-faceted approach which are integrated and specifically designed to enhance the safety of women and children whilst addressing responsibility and accountability by perpetrators.

12

## Community Responsibility

The community has a responsibility to work towards the prevention of domestic violence and to demonstrate the unacceptability of all forms of violence.

13

## Prevention of family violence is political

Prevention requires changing community attitudes and behaviour to improve responses to women and children who experience violence and to the men who perpetrate it. Such changes are vulnerable to patriarchal interference, where male dominance and ownership compete with social justice and human rights on the political stage.

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# Reflections

- How do my values, beliefs and social identity (class, culture, gender, sexuality) influence my work?
- How do I listen to and value client knowledge about their own needs and about the ways these needs can be best met?
- What do I offer the women and children I meet with who do not know me at first but rely on me to listen to them as they share their stories?
- How do I maintain an awareness of the privilege and power I hold in relation to the families I work with and the ways my social position may enable or inhibit them from discussing issues related to racism, social disadvantage, sexuality and other social marginalisation?
- How do I not let my social position or personal views about violence impose on them my ideas of what is right and wrong for them and what they should do and not do?
- How am I committed to transparency so that the people I work with know what I am doing, how I am doing it, and can share their thoughts on what I am doing and how I am doing it?
- How do I find a place of being comfortable with the discomfort of this work in hearing stories of the violence committed against people?
- How do I talk about my work with my colleagues and other people which maintains the dignity of the families I work with?
- In what ways does the workplace provide the space to speak about the challenging and complex experiences of the work?
- What sustains me in this work?
- How do I know what I know and know what I don't know but need to find out?

# *Practice 2:*

*Understanding the experiences of women  
subjected to domestic and family violence*



# Understanding the experiences of women subjected to domestic and family violence

## Defining domestic and family violence

*“Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear and to be made to do things against their will. DFV can happen to anyone and can take many forms. It is often part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour (DVSM, 2018).”*

The term “family violence” is preferred in an Indigenous context. It is used to describe the range of violence that takes place in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including the physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that may be perpetrated within a family. The term also recognises the broader impacts of violence on extended families, kinship networks and community relationships.



There are several clear points that we need to hold when considering domestic and family violence:

- Domestic and family violence is unilateral and not mutual in that it is the actions of one person against another
- Domestic and family violence is deliberate and intentional in its execution
- It is about a person being in control and not out of control
- Domestic and family violence is not an incident (that is, it does not have a start and finish)
- It involves episodes that are part of a series of events that are entwined together
- It has a history and a future
- Whenever people are harmed by violence enacted against them they will always resist.

(Wilson et al., 2015).

### **Tactics and entrapment**

Understanding the intentional and planned execution of violence and the many disguises of that violence ( emotional, economic, sexual, social, economic,& spiritual) looks like helps to understand the reality of entrapment and isolation for victims. As identified by Laing (1987), those “power-over” tactics used by the perpetrator means that victims live in a climate of fear, intimidation and uncertainty (Lesley Laing, 1987).

Examples of those tactics include:

- Scrutiny and control of bodily functions (eating, sleeping, appearance, going to the toilet, washing, sexual violence)
- Instilling fear by threat of harm to victim or others
- Inconsistent, unpredictable outbursts of violence
- Providing solace, such as kindness, remorse and promises to change
- Isolation such as jealous surveillance, stalking, eavesdropping, intercepting letters and phone calls
- Forcing isolation by giving up friends & family
- Destroying belongings of meaning from the present, past and for the future.



It is imperative that even when disguised as being reactive and “out of control”, violent and abusive behaviour is intentional and controlled.

Examples of such “out of control” controlled behaviour includes:

- Suddenly changing their behaviour from enraged to calm and friendly
- Threatening to “get upset” but remaining calm
- Not abusing others or, conversely, targeting everyone when “feeling stressed”
- Having rules about how far they will go, such as never physically hitting but throwing objects, verbally abusing, stalking, criticising but then praising, pushing, grabbing, holding up their hands but not hitting
- Selecting where they will hurt someone - bruising where bruises do not show or deliberately hitting someone in the face to enforce isolation and shame
- Selecting when and where they will be violent, such as waiting until a later time when either in a private or public space.

## The dynamics and legacies of domestic and family violence

In the field of sexual abuse, Lesley Laing first explored the interaction between perpetrator tactics of violence and the dynamics and ongoing restraints or legacies they created for victims of that violence. Her work was significant to those working with victims of sexual abuse who were struggling with ongoing impacts stemming from the violence, such as fear, guilt, responsibility, loss of identity and disconnection from others.

It removed the belief held by victims that it was “something about me” that caused them to be harmed as well as an ongoing sense of permanent damage and failure as a human being.

Her work is easily transferrable to the tactics, dynamics and restraints apparent in the context of domestic and family violence. It provides a useful practice map to hold conversations with women and children who have been subjected to such violence.

**The more visible connection between the tactics of the violence and the legacies left for victims dramatically shifted the view of the victim’s experience from an individual perspective only, constructing a new understanding of how their identity, relationships and ongoing struggles were shaped. It generated an awareness of how their subjection to the violence created not only a falsely constructed identity for the victim and a falsely constructed reality of their life but also a falsely constructed connection to others.**

**NOTE: This topic is based on the writings of Lesley Laing (1987), Unpublished paper, Education Centre Against Violence, who extended thinking about the dynamics of child sexual assault and explored four key areas illustrating the interaction between the perpetrator and his victim and the resulting legacies of those dynamics. Her work holds similar potency in the area of domestic and family violence.**

**NOTE: Lesley Laing was to later change the last dynamic and the legacy of power and powerlessness to identify that whenever power operates there is always resistance.**

The dynamic of **RESPONSIBILITY** where the perpetrator denies responsibility for the abuse and gives victim/s the message that his use of violence is the fault of others, most especially the victim themselves.

As a consequence, the victim is left with a legacy of guilt and self-blame.

The dynamic of **SECRECY** which ensures that the violence continues and he maintains his control over what is happening and separates his victims from any sources of support and protection.

As a consequence, the victim is left with a legacy of isolation and ongoing doubt about their own reality.

The dynamic of **PROTECTION/LOYALTY** where the victim holds the protection of others, including the perpetrator, as their responsibility. They do not hold any sense of entitlement for themselves but what they have to

As a consequence, the victim is left with a legacy of self-erasure and super-responsibility for others.

The dynamic of **POWER** in which the victim's relationship with the perpetrator is characterised by his use of "power over" tactics, which discount her experience and create a climate of fear and intimidation.

As a consequence, the victim is left with a legacy of fear, a sense of violation and powerlessness

## **Social responses to violence: Language and meanings**

The term “social responses” refers to the responses of “others” to victims who are experiencing violence or to those who perpetrate the violence (Wade, 2007).

The “others” can include family members, friends or people within institutions or organisations (i.e. police, judges, domestic violence workers, child protection caseworkers etc).

Given the debilitating isolation experienced by victims of domestic and family violence, it would seem that the natural and accessible antidote is forming safe and supportive connections with others. The quality of social responses to victims is, therefore, imperative to a positive or negative outcome in regards to their ongoing safety, dignity and wellbeing (Coates & Wade, 2007; Wade, 2013).

In regard to language that silences and shifts responsibility, Coates & Wade (2007) describe how language is more often than not used to support four discursive operations:

- Conceal violence
- Confuse and diminish responsibility
- Blame and pathologise victims
- Hide resistance.

Their development of “Response Based Practice” tries to counter these four positions regarding domestic and family violence by always using language which highlights the violence, holds perpetrators accountable, challenges victim blaming and reveals and honours the resistance displayed by victims of that violence.



Victims can not only be harmed (physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually) from the actions of the perpetrator but also from the responses of others toward them when the violence is revealed. People may deny or minimise what has occurred, blame the victim, or make excuses for the offender. Or they may believe and validate the experience of the victim and provide support.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conceal the violence</b></p> <p>All couples have conflict from time to time</p>     | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reveal the violence</b></p> <p>This isn't conflict. This is someone choosing to be violent toward their partner</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Blame the victim</b></p> <p>She has a reputation for losing her temper herself;</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Align with the victim</b></p> <p>There is nothing she could have done to casue this to happen to her</p>            |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Deny responsibility</b></p> <p>He is such a nice guy and such a good father;</p>    | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reveal responsibility</b></p> <p>Good fathers don't hurt the mother of their children</p>                           |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Hide resistance</b></p> <p>If it was that bad then why doesn't she leave</p>        | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reveal resistance</b></p> <p>She is giving me money to save for her when she needs it,</p>                          |



Heward- Belle et al (2015) noted that the dynamics operating in the context of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim are also paralleled at the broader socio-political level, “where patterned gender inequalities intersect with other inequalities such as those based on race, class, ability and sexuality”.

These include:

- Using male privilege: Mothers are made more accountable than fathers for the protection and safety of their children whilst prioritising father’s rights to have contact over women’s and children’s rights to safety and wellbeing
- Using children: Making women feel responsible for the impact of the domestic and family violence on their children and for holding primary responsibility to care for their children and respond to their needs
- Minimising and blaming: Failing to respond to requests for AVOs, instructing women to minimise or not to disclose the violence in Family Court proceedings and women being urged to improve their parenting in response to the violence, which remains invisible
- Negating men’s responsibility: Failing to assess the tactics of domestic and family violence, excusing the violence, using mutualising language and separating men’s violence towards women from their fathering
- Using isolation: Controlling who women can live with, where they can live and who their children can see and can’t see
- Using emotional abuse: Women as failing to protect, pathologising their responses to the violence and further disempowering them by service responses which coerce them to comply
- Using intimidation: Making unannounced home visits, gathering information about women and their children behind their backs, risk averse responses that negate women’s and children’s strengths and resources, threatening to or removing children from their care or coercing women into treatment practices that focus on trauma and poor parenting rather than root causes
- Using economic abuse: Providing an insufficient safety net, unaffordable safe housing or defunding or reducing funding of specialist services.

It is imperative as workers that the awareness of revealing these restraints is supported by the accurate understanding and associated language used to talk about domestic and family violence.

### **Making resistance visible**

People will always find some way to resist violence and abuse. They will stand up against the violence, not comply with the perpetrator and try to stop or prevent the violence.

*“They attack signs of strengths (assertiveness leads to increased physical abuse), being verbally abusive in unpredictable ways, instill fears of repercussions for reporting, remove any money, labelling abuse in other ways, report her as the abuser, showing remorse, appear as perfect to the outside world and she as crazy”  
(Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter, 2007).*



Skilled in their surveillance of the people they harm, perpetrators of violence know that victims resist and try to stop or suppress that resistance.

Therefore, many acts of resistance are more covert in their execution and often concealed not only from perpetrators but also others, creating the false notion that victims are passive and helpless, perhaps even resigned to accepting the ongoing harm they are subjected to.

It is also a false notion that people's acts of resistance means that they are able to stop the violence and find safety. Many victims will say that they did nothing to make themselves or their children safe. They never fought back or took steps to leave. A person's resistance does not and cannot stop violence but this does not mean it lacks importance.



*Wade et al. (1997), defines resistance as:  
“Any mental or behavioural act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible, may be understood as a form of resistance”.*

When people resist the violence they are subjected to they are endeavouring, even in small ways, to find some moments of safety or reprieve from the harm they endure, to maintain connections to others and to discount the many tricks and lies perpetrators foster to deny, shift blame and escape responsibility and accountability for their actions.

As noted by Wade (1997), such responses to violence serve to maximise one’s sense of dignity and preserve the integrity of their needs and the needs of others on physical, spiritual, emotional, and social levels.

## Practice Profile

Honouring resistance: How women resist abuse in intimate relationships (2007) Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter. Alberta.

| What the perpetrator does | The person shows resistance by  |
|---------------------------|---|
| Isolate                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Retaining relationships</li><li>• Remembering times with loved ones</li></ul>   |
| Humiliate                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinking or acting in ways that sustain self-respect and dignity</li></ul>  |
| Control                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinking or acting in ways that refuse control</li></ul>  |
| Shift responsibility      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinking or acting in ways where the perpetrator is seen as responsible</li></ul>   |
| Make excuses              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinking or acting in ways that show there is no excuse for violence, and abuse is wrong.</li><li>• Refusing to understand the reasons given for the violence</li></ul> |
| Hide the violence         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinking or acting in ways that expose the violence and physical harm</li><li>• Doing things to reduce, endure and or escape the pain</li></ul>                         |
| Unpredictability          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creating predictability and routine or becoming unpredictable themselves</li></ul>  |

At times acts of resistance can be wrongly interpreted by what others witness rather than understanding those actions as responses to the violence they are being subjected to. People may therefore be wrongly labelled as being emotionally detached, difficult, passive or even mentally unstable rather than finding ways to retain some sense of themselves that will not surrender to the offender's power.

| Resistance   | Labels/opinions   |
|--|---|
| Not sharing emotions in relationship<br>(I will not let you know what I am really feeling) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional detachment, an inability to express emotions, avoidance</li> </ul> |
| Not doing what perpetrator wanted<br>(I will not let you see what I am really doing)       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Passive-aggressive, difficult, unco-operative</li> </ul>                     |
| Doing nice things for perpetrator<br>(I will not let you see what I am really thinking)    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-dependency</li> </ul>   |
| Numbing feelings<br>(I will not let you control all of the real me)                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dissociation/ borderline personality disorder</li> </ul>                     |



# Reflections

- When holding a conversation with a woman about her experience of domestic violence how do we use language to discover the potency of the offender's tactics?
- What questions do we ask? How do we respond?
- How do we honour their descriptions of their experiences without imposing our own definitions?
- How do we ensure that our understandings do not take away from women their actual views about what they have experienced?
- Language can be useful in clearly identifying the perpetrator as the principal aggressor and enabling the victim to identify the tactics he used to maintain his control and the levels of entrapment he created
- Language can invite women to see how these tactics:
  - \* make them feel about their sense of responsibility for violence
  - \* make them feel about their right to be treated with respect
  - \* make them feel about their right to be safe
  - \* make them feel about themselves as a woman, partner, mother, daughter, friend
- Being interested in the ways the victim resisted the violence can often provide the first opportunity for the victim to acknowledge that they did find ways to oppose their captivity, even if seen as "small acts of living" (Wade 1997)
- Revealing tactics, dynamics and acts of resistance can provide relief for victims from the burdens of secrecy, guilt, responsibility and shame
- Revealing the levels of control and resistance can give victims a sense of agency, self- respect and dignity
- Language is about ways of connecting to people, the speaker sharing their stories but also hearing the stories of the listener



# Reflections

- Connection through conversations involves the actions of listening and speaking:
  - \* What is good listening?
  - \* Listening to what is being said, not said
  - \* Good listening often means being silent
- Speaking gives meaning about connection:
  - \* Empathy
  - \* Clarifying comments to show what is being said is important and matters
  - \* Questions or tentative comments usually work best
  - \* Comments can be challenged by questions that seek to understand the person's meaning and where/ from whom that meaning comes
  - \* "Thinking out loud" comments or "just wondering" comments allow deeper exploration than sitting with unsaid disagreement
  - \* Reflective comments can pull out themes or find greater meaning
- We need to be in the moment of what is happening for people, what they have questions about, to listen without giving answers, to ask without knowing, to be silent
- To recognise they are in pain
- To listen and respond to their distress, their questions, their thoughts, their solutions
- To be interested in the story or many stories they are speaking about without judgement, impatience, or frustration
- How can we ask, "Why don't they get it?" when they don't know and we don't know, at that point, what they are trying to get?
- How can we give advice to solve problems if we don't know what the problem is?
- Answers or advice may satisfy our sense of agency but may take away the agency of the person with whom we are speaking
- The purpose of our work is to break the silence of violence, to understand the anguish of despair, of pain. Such connections must always convey genuine interest, respect and uphold the dignity of the primary storyteller.

# *Practice 3:*

*Understanding the experiences of children  
and young people subjected to domestic  
and family violence.*



## Understanding the experiences of children and young people subjected to domestic and family violence

*“Society has to recognise them (children) as real, individual human beings with rights of their own, rather than appendages of parents who have a right to own them” (Leach, 1990).*

Once upon a time...

Once upon a time we thought that children were at best, oblivious to the violence that was happening around them or at worst, witnessing (seeing and hearing) but not really understanding the true extent of the harm that was occurring before them.

But that was once upon a time and not what we now know.

Children experience domestic and family violence. They aren't a passive audience who lack understanding of what is happening. They also have an understanding of who is ultimately responsible for the harm.



## What children experience

### Children will experience:

- Hearing the violence
- Directly seeing their mother abused
- Observing their mother's injury or distress
- Living with tension and fear in the home
- Themselves being hurt by the violence either directly or by trying to intervene
- Experiencing threats to their mother, other family members and / or pets
- Being used by the perpetrator to "collude" in the violence (e.g. provide information about their mother, criticise their mother)
- Being used as a hostage
- Dealing with a parent who alternates between violence and a caring role
- Seeing the parents being arrested, not coming home or not hearing from them for days, weeks or months
- Having to leave home with a parent and/or dislocation from family, friends and school.

## Children's responses to violence

### Children's responses to the violence will be influenced by:

- The age at which the violence began and the length of time it continues
- Their thoughts and feelings about what is happening
- Their relationship with the person who is using violence
- Their relationship to the other parent and extended family members who can buffer their exposure to the violence and the meanings they hold about it.

They may try really hard to convince people that they are not responding at all to the violence they are experiencing, giving the false comfort to others that, as children, they are in their own “bubble wrap” of ignorant bliss.

They may try to pretend that nothing has in fact happened to their “level of awareness”, usually trying really hard to deliver the silent message to their parents that everything is normal. They may work really hard to reassure others that the last ten minutes or ten hours of what they were exposed to has been forgotten. They wake up in the morning, get dressed for school, eat their breakfast and say goodbye to their parents. But what are they thinking, feeling, worrying about, wanting to do instead of pretending everything is normal.

The release of their responses may happen away from the time and place of the violence and therefore will spill over into other parts of their life and show themselves in other ways. This may involve having difficulty concentrating at school, trouble making friends, developing somatic responses such as stomach aches and headaches, not wanting to leave the house, nightmares and sleeplessness, being hyperactive and restlessness or shutting down and withdrawing.

A child centred lens holds the child as a person with their own entity and therefore, identity, a “being” rather than someone yet to grow into adult status. A child centred lens acknowledges that children are impacted by their experiences of violence, separate to, and perhaps differently to, their mothers who are also victims.

*In consideration of a child centred lens, practices with children should involve directly speaking with them ( if deemed age appropriate and safe) about their experiences of domestic and family violence, seeking their perspective and letting them have a voice about the views they hold and the questions they would like answered. Studies also suggest that children being able to “have a voice” concerning their experiences is crucial to their rights to be believed, to be validated and to be supported to cope with their experience of domestic violence (Mullender et al., 2002; Cashmore, 2014).*

# Practice Profile

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The air that they breathe:  
Consultations with  
children concerning their  
experiences of domestic  
and family violence  
(Want & Escartin, 2017)

In seeking to bring the voices of children into a place of expertise and, therefore, guidance for us as workers, Rosie's Place held a series of consultations with several children attending our service. The following is a description of what they told us.

Interestingly, in our consultations with children, none of them saw themselves as victims and were very clear that they did not hold responsibility for the violence that was occurring in their home.

They didn't understand why certain things happened in their home but they did see their father/ stepfather as the person primarily responsible for the harm that was happening.

They didn't want the violence to continue and some saw that perhaps the only way for this to occur was for their parents to separate but, for most, this did not equate with them wanting their relationship with either parent to end. They wanted their father/stepfather to be "less angry" and "less hurtful" in what he said and did to their mother but did not want him to be out of their lives. At the same time, they believed that if he did not change it would be hard to really feel they could trust him as they had heard him make many promises to be different but nothing had really changed.

They weren't sure how they should have dealt with things that happened and rarely, if ever, talked with either their mother or father about what they had experienced, other than to perhaps ask them : "Are you OK?". This wasn't because they didn't want to talk about their worries or fears but because they weren't sure if the adults in their lives could manage these conversations. **In the main, they didn't want to make their mothers "even more upset" or "feel bad" and they didn't want their fathers to "get angry" and "lose it".**

We quickly learnt that they weren't interested in understanding why it happened in terms of the many excuses they had heard from their parents and extended family members such as grandparents and aunts and uncles. They didn't really identify with the "power and control" wheel and felt that it missed out on so much of their own stories of what they experienced.

They had their own wheels of dealing with it operating at full throttle and this is what seemed important to them to share with each other and with us. As one child stated, **"It seemed to be in the air that we breathed and sometimes you just couldn't breathe at all".**

Our consultations with children were to better understand what that air looked like and felt like and it became a discussion of the many ways the intrusion of the violence into every part of their being occurred, most notably through their natural sensory antennas: sound, sight, gut, smell, touch, muscles and movement. These gasps of sensory input then travelled to their feelings and thoughts which they grappled with continuously.

## Feelings:

- Sad when you hear your mother cry
- Worried that someone will hear what is happening
- Scared that the hurting will get worse
- Angry that you can't do anything to stop it from happening
- Anxious when you decide to try something
- Confused about how it started when everything seemed OK

## Thoughts:

- What if I just sit in my room and wait till things settle down?
- Should I go out and see what's happening and do something to try and stop it?
- Maybe I can get dad to stop?
- Should I peek through the door and make sure mum is OK?
- If things get worse do I ring my nan or maybe the police?
- How do I know when the time is right to do something?

## When being in a family is hard:

- Keeping your brothers and sisters with you all the time
- Not playing or making too much noise in case it causes trouble
- Not talking to your mum but watching to see what she wants you to do
- Knowing you can't have friends over in case something happens
- Forgetting to do homework because there's too much going on



But they also held other thoughts and feelings which informed us that despite the hold violence had on them they still found ways to stay connected to their childhood and also attached to their family.

### Different feelings:

- Excited when I was allowed to go to camp
- Happy when I saw my dad come and watch me play soccer
- Proud when I got that reward at school
- Relieved when it feels over
- Safe when I'm cuddling mum on the lounge

### Different thoughts:

- I wonder what's for tea? I hope we are having spaghetti
- If I get my homework done maybe I can watch that TV show?
- Better take my dog for a walk
- Isn't that birthday party on tomorrow?
- What do I want for Christmas?

### When being in a family is not so hard:

- Playing cricket in the front yard
- Getting that pencil case I really needed for school
- Being in my room and nothing or no one bothers me
- Playing lego with my brother and building a spaceship
- Being read to at night
- Having good dreams

## Social responses to children

Children are often seen as requiring protection and as passive recipients of everything that they experience rather than being seen as active agents of opinion and change. Children can be both the receivers and givers of support and comfort from and to their mothers, the connections between them an ongoing exchange of communication, care and safety.

In the brief history timeline regarding responses to domestic and family violence, research and practice has been criticised for an emphasis on the failure of mothers to be effective parents due to the violence, including a failure to protect, to care and nurture, and attend to their child's needs. (Johnson & Sullivan, 2008; Lapiere, 2008; Semaan et al., 2013; Callaghan, 2015). This gender biased discourse further situates children as not being agents of change themselves and passively “putting up” with what is happening and “waiting for their mothers to make things change”. (Mullender et al., 2002; Overlien & Hyden, 2009; Katz, 2015; Callaghan et al, 2015)

Correspondingly, fathers who inflict the violence too often escape accountability or responsibility for the harm experienced by their children, becoming invisible not only as perpetrators of the violence but also in their role as carers and nurturers of their children.



Research with children in regard to their fathers, however, does not hold the same veils of disconnection from responsibility. Children's views of their fathers was disjunctive, being able to shift between recognising them as a "good dad who does good things for me" whilst at the same time recognising that "sometimes he can yell at me and my mum".

This balance that children hold has been noted by Wendy Bunston (2006) who developed many group programs for all family members when domestic and family violence was occurring, including for the perpetrators of that violence.



*“When an infant or young child is in great distress, they will almost inevitably seek out their parent or carer so as to be physically connected to another human being. The terrifying dilemma for some children is that it may be this very parent or carer who has created their fear and alarm in the first place. Children will continue to seek out a relationship with their parent, even if they are the perpetrator of violence. It is not the relationship that a child wants stopped, it is the violence” (Bunston, 2006).*

## Making Resistance Visible

“The violence distress responses that are labelled ‘disorders’ or ‘mental health’ problems do not arise from deficits or effects within the child. Rather, they are responses by the child to complex and devastating experiences of violence. They are a cry from the heart, so to speak. They reveal the child’s experience of violence as wrong and adverse. And they reveal the child’s desire for safety for themselves and their loved ones” (Wade, 2013).

There are many ways children resist the violence they are being subjected to, and in the same ways as their mothers, often find ways that are covert and invisible to the adults in their lives.

**Callaghan et al, 2015 identified some of the ways that children showed acts of resistance:**

- Managing disclosure: Telling seen as risky so they learned to manage what to say and not to say, how they said it and to whom
- Redefining and managing relationships: Who they kept close to, who they kept distant, included those who were supportive and excluded those who were not
- Caring gave them a sense of empowerment, validation and competence rather than taking on premature adult roles
- Often described as having poor social skills but their relational experiences and relational coping was subtle and complex when living with domestic violence
- Children made use of the space around them and their embodied experiences to create safe spaces for themselves and their siblings and to give them a sense of escape
- Moving in their physical spaces both as a target of control and as resistance. They were aware of the spaces in their home and how they were used at different times of the day. Shared spaces often more controlled by the perpetrator and, therefore, avoided by the children
- Creative and embodied coping-drawing, music, sport and play to help them feel safe and more in control of themselves and their environment.

Rather than seeing such responses as behaviours that are limiting of children and, therefore, needing to be removed or corrected, the approach should instead acknowledge the many ways they try to hold places of safety for themselves, to battle for connection to their home and to others and to developing skills that sustain hope.

*As noted by Loretta Perry (1999 ), “I have seen time and time again professionals wanting to put Humpty Dumpty together again. But so often children and young people tell me that Humpty Dumpty’s cracks cannot be fixed, but that Humpty Dumpty can consult on the effects of the fall and act on ideas, knowledge and abilities to prevent further tumbles and/or find ways to free fall”.*



# Reflections

- What assumptions are wrongly held about children's experiences of domestic and family violence?
- How influential are those dominant views to directly engaging with children and speaking with children about their experiences?
- Do children carry the same stories as adults about their experience of domestic and family violence and how do we give them the opportunity to tell us their truths?
- Do the strongly held adult views about children cause us to dismiss the many capabilities they have and which they can effectively utilise in dealing with their experiences of violence, both whilst it is happening and then when they speak about it?
- What messages are we conveying to children about their ability to deal with their experiences if we occupy, or only invite other adults to hold the position of expert as to "what is in their best interest?"
- How do we ensure that conversations with children don't take them further from an understanding of their knowledge and skills?
- How do we privilege the knowledge and views held by children when speaking with adults?
- How do we engage with children in ways which honour them with respect and dignity and promote for them a sense of personal agency where they can act on their own behalf rather than be acted upon?

*Practice 4:*  
*Strengthening connections between*  
*mothers and their children*





## Strengthening connections between mothers and their children

*“The attack on the mother-child relationship as an aspect of domestic violence highlights the need to link the protection and support of women with the protection and support of children.”*

*(Humphreys & Houghton, 2008)*

Given the impact on children who experience domestic violence, it is important for workers to recognise when children are at risk and intervene as early as possible. However, research is united in acknowledging that the greatest protective resource is the child’s positive relationship with their mother and, therefore, one of the best ways to protect children is to support women who are experiencing domestic violence. Further to this, it is also acknowledged that ongoing protection and wellbeing of both women and their children relies on the strength of their connection to each other.



## The legacies of domestic and family violence on mother-child connections

There are clear and potent ways that perpetrator tactics undermine mothering and subvert the mother-child relationship.

Women have identified the following ways their role as a mother has been sabotaged by the actions of the offender and what has been termed “externally controlled motherhood.”

- Trying to control children’s behaviour, such as being quiet and cleaning up their “mess”, to stop partner being abusive
- Keeping toys and possessions invisible when he is home
- Sending children to bed early so they are not the targets of criticism
- Hitting and shouting at children before her partner arrives home so they will experience less harm in the end
- Not intervening when they see their child being wrongly disciplined as this will make things worse
- Feeling numb, emotionally exhausted and uncommunicative
- Giving their partner their full-time attention to avoid violence
- Withdrawing to protect themselves.

In the context of the dynamics of secrecy, fear and responsibility created by the violence, mothers and children are often intentionally divided and remain isolated in terms of talking to each other about what is happening in the home and how they are all being impacted. Those separations can create legacies of witnessing the same violence but holding different meanings, children not being aware of the extent or severity of the violence their mother is experiencing and, therefore, having to try to make sense of the experience and to find meaning for the violence by themselves.

Mothers may not be aware of the decisions and actions taken by their children which can include: intentionally starting arguments with them, siding with their father, not coming home or refusing to leave their room.

Children may also not be aware of the decisions and actions taken by their mother which can include: different parenting decisions (strict, lenient, inconsistent), times of action and then inaction (leaving or staying) and the reasons why their mothers have not spoken to their children about their thoughts or made plans with the child (Irwin et al., 2002).

Such differences and lack of clarity as to the reasons for certain actions are further exacerbated by the intrusive actions of the perpetrator who will often be the carrier of the information between mothers and children.

### **Bringing mothers and children together**

Even while the violence is happening and there are “degrees of separation” there are also moments when the bonds between mothers and their children do serve to mutually support each other and mitigate the ongoing distress.

Research with children is unanimous in finding that children see their mothers as their main source of support and want to be able to talk to their mothers and be comforted by them. Their main concern is that their mothers, wanting to protect them, don't talk to them about the violence. They are, in turn, tentative to talk to their mothers as they want to similarly protect them.

Working with mothers and children to identify those bonds and how they can be strengthened is vital to purposeful work. It is certainly possible to work with the mother and support her to increase her parenting strengths and provide whatever buffers she can to emotionally and physically comfort and support her child/ren.

For children, encouragement to talk to their mothers, asking questions when they need to and seeking comfort and support are seen as further strengthening their connection to each other.

*“Grown ups think they should hide it and shouldn't tell us, but we want to know. We want to be involved and we want our mums to talk with us about what they are going to do- we could help them make decisions”  
(Mullender, 2012).*

**It is recognised that the following issues are important for MOTHERS to give voice and action to:**



Helping them understand the impact of domestic violence on their children, themselves and family connections



Supporting them in talking to and listening to their children about their experiences of the violence



Supporting them in talking with their children about their current relationship with their father, if the perpetrator of the violence, and their thoughts, fears or wishes about their ongoing connection



Identifying the many ways they resisted the violence and kept their children as close to them (physically, emotionally, thoughtfully) as they possibly could when the violence was occurring



Increasing those connections in both old and new ways that are of their choosing and not determined by the violence they lived in

**It is recognised that the following issues are important for CHILDREN to give voice and action to:**



Helping them understand the impact of domestic violence on their mothers, themselves, and family connections



Supporting them in talking to their mothers and sharing not only their experiences of the violence but their worries and fears and how they managed them



Supporting them in talking with their mothers about their current relationship with their father, if the perpetrator of the violence, and their thoughts, fears or wishes about their ongoing connection



Identifying the many ways they resisted the violence and kept their mothers as close to them (physically, emotionally, thoughtfully) as they possibly could when the violence was occurring



Increasing those connections in both old and new ways that are of their choosing and not determined by the violence they lived in



## Identifying “Readiness to change” (Humphries, 2007)

An action research project was undertaken by Humphries (2007) to look at the timing for shifting practice from an individual focus on women and children to a joint focus on strengthening their relationship.

This research, based on an evaluation of their program, “Talking to my mum”, found there were several layers of “readiness” which need to be considered:

- Organisational readiness: Siloed services which separate work with women and children need to hold a holistic direction and offer joint work
- Worker readiness: Workers understanding the impact of domestic and family violence on women and children and therefore are committed to strengthening their relationship and bringing them together in all aspects of work
- Mother readiness: Post crisis period and greater stability with a sense of safety to enable mothers to feel able to talk to their children and face the questions and concerns they hold
- Child readiness: Children were the readiest party to engage in the program as they saw it as an opportunity to spend more time with their mothers, help their mothers and talk about their own past experiences.

# Practice Profile

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Research by Emma Katz (2015) identifies a triangulation of repair and recovery.

Research by Emma Katz (2015) identifies a triangulation of repair and recovery: of the mother, the child and the mother-child relationship. This shifts from a unilateral model of understanding the relationship between mothers and children (parent to child) to a bi-lateral model where parents influence children and children influence parents. This understanding of mothers and children as active recovery promoters for each other, recognises the skills and resources they all bring to foster mutual support and enhance wellbeing.



**She identified a timeline of what she termed “Stages of Recovery” which included Creating Safety, Early Recovery and Becoming Recovery Promoters:**

| Stages  | Role of Practitioners  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Creating the conditions required for recovery: more safety and less abuse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety from perpetrator and reduction of exposure to his abuse</li> <li>• End of perpetrator distressing children by abusive parenting and undermining the mother-child relationship</li> <li>• Have a place where the mother and children feel secure and settled and can manage daily living needs</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable mothers and children to achieve safety from harm and to have stable and safe housing, financial independence and connection to ongoing support (formal/informal)</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Beginning to recover: mothers, children and mother/child relationship</b></p> <p>Gain the emotional capacity to start to alleviate the strains that had built up in the mother-child relationship during the abuse (Humphreys, 2011).</p> <p>Children need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help to understand what happened between their parents and to understand that it wasn't their fault or their mother's fault</li> <li>• Support to manage behaviours which may arise.</li> </ul> <p>Mothers need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help to rebuild their health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Parenting confidence</li> <li>• Support to deal with feelings of loss and guilt about what their children have experienced.</li> </ul> <p>Mothers and children need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support to talk to each other constructively about the violence and develop positive ways of relating to each other</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable mothers, children and mother/child to begin steps towards recovery from the harm of DV</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Becoming recovery promoters:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers and children promoting each other's recovery as part of their everyday lives and interactions with one another</li> <li>• Reassurance about responsibility</li> <li>• Mood lifting and overcoming negative impacts</li> <li>• Rebuilding confidence (how much they loved them, praised their achievements, recognised what they were doing right and how hard they were trying, supporting them doing things for themselves)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop skills to support each other to continue recovering and boosting each other's wellbeing in the long term</li> <li>• Acknowledging strengths and skills</li> <li>• Reinforcing identities as people who have a positive impact on those around them</li> </ul> |



# Reflections

- There is a need in the work to hold a place for women and children to be able to talk about their experiences of the domestic and family violence whilst also holding a place for them to restore and strengthen their connections between each other
- Workers may have concerns that they will jeopardise their relationship with women they are supporting if they move to a focus on their children
- The reality is that women cannot be dissected into different parts depending on whether they are talking about themselves as a partner of someone who was violent toward them or as a mother of children who also experienced violence from the same person. Both are entwined
- Conversations with women about their children should come from a place of always acknowledging their role and their relationship with their children, including their understanding of their children's experiences and struggles, as the primary foundation
- This is not the time to give information or suggest ways that mothers can "improve their parenting"
- This is not the time to provide them with pamphlets or websites from which to read about the onslaught of "trauma symptoms" their children will suffer because of the violence they have experienced
- This is not the time to suggest that other people, such as counsellors would be the best people to talk to their children and "find out what is wrong with them"
- This is not the time to suggest to women that their children's understandable concerns for them and efforts to care for them need to stop so that "your children can just be children"
- This is the time to remind women that children, like all human beings, have the right to be concerned for people they care about and be allowed to act upon those concerns, guided by the safe adults in their life
- This is the time to support women so they can find the space to take time to speak with their children, listen to them and provide them the reassurance and comfort they may need.

# *Practice 5:*

## *Recognising and establishing safety*



## Recognising and Establishing Safety

*Being safe is no simple or single decision, or task  
A good step is to learn more about my world  
And how the violence harms my safety and wellbeing.  
(Follow My Lead, 2018 DVSM Insight Exchange)*

The safety of victims subjected to domestic and family violence must be the first priority of any response. The measures of such safety, what is sufficient safety, is critical to our work but is not an assessment that can be made without close consultation with women who have been subjected to the violence. Focusing on women is not to discount the experiences of children and their ideas regarding safety but comes from the recognition, strongly identified in the literature, that protecting mothers may also be the best way to protect children.

In discussing their review of resources concerned with responding to victims of domestic and family violence, the DVSM Sightlines (2018a) Rapid Evidence Assessment noted: “However, the idea that people experiencing violence are active agents with rights and responsibilities who are constantly making decisions and taking action to protect, preserve and maintain their dignity, safety and wellbeing was largely under explored or missing from the majority of resources reviewed for this project”.

**In another document by DVSM (2018b) Concepts of Safety, three main actions that people take to increase their safety were identified:**

- ➔ Safety assessment: Anticipating and self-assessing their safety and watching for changes in risk and forecasting risk
- ➔ Safety awareness: Building safety awareness through information and experience
- ➔ Safety strategies: Inventing and implementing ways to keep themselves and those they care about safe.



## Safety Assessment

When working with women and children who are victims of family violence, it is imperative that an effective safety assessment is undertaken at the initial stages of contact.

Primary consideration should be given to the woman's own assessment of her safety and risk levels, acknowledging that victims are usually the better predictors of their own level of risk than any risk assessment tool yet developed.

It is important to acknowledge and build on the person's own ideas about the perpetrator and his violence and what have been their past and current responses to that abuse. Just as every person is unique, so too is the violence they experience. The actions of the perpetrator may be similar to others but is also completely unique and specific to the person experiencing the violence. It is also important to discuss the different tactics of violence that perpetrators use against a mother compared with her children, creating different dynamics of entrapment.

We must acknowledge that women are also undertaking ongoing strategies of surveillance, planning and responses to keep themselves and their children as safe as is possible without fear of further escalating the level of harm. It is important to discuss past protective measures used by the woman for herself and her children and not assume that the woman has, in fact, been unable to keep herself or her children safe. For example, workers need to be mindful that a woman staying in the home had made a decision that this was a safer option than leaving and being at greater risk of harm from an escalation of the offender's violence.

An assessment of children's safety needs to be separate to that of the mother, especially when they have ongoing contact with the perpetrator of the violence. However, such discussions should always occur with the input and advice of their mother as the primary protective person in their life. It is also important to hold the position that ongoing safety of children relies primarily on the ongoing safety and support of their mothers.

**When assessing safety the following areas of potential harm need to be considered, as this changes the levels of risk:**



**Places:** Where people live and where they go and whether the perpetrator knows and also frequents those places (such as home, work, school, online, mobile, in the community)



**People:** Who in their life is seen as:

- Safe (believing, confidential and holding responsibility with the perpetrator)
- Potentially unsafe (being potentially influenced or threatened by the perpetrator) and under the influence of the perpetrator
- Unsafe (loyal to the perpetrator's story, threatening or providing surveillance on behalf of the perpetrator)



**Time:** The risks a person faces change over time and can change rapidly. The violence they have experienced in the past might be similar to or different to, the current or future threats they face.





**Relationship status:** A person's relationship status with perpetrator creates different levels of risk, This may include:

- A new relationship with early warnings of potential harm,
- A longer term relationship with escalation of the violence over time, Having left the relationship but forced to return due to increased threats, concerns for the wellbeing of the children or concerns for the wellbeing of the perpetrator. Staying in a relationship with no intention of leaving, or planning to leave when they can, Having left the relationship but maintained ongoing contact due to the shared parenting of the children



**Perpetrator presence or absence:** It is imperative to gain some idea about the whereabouts of the perpetrator and discuss with the woman her immediate safety or heightened risk of harm depending on her knowledge of where he is, who he is contacting and the information he is seeking. It is anticipated that once a perpetrator becomes aware that a partner is seeking advice or leaving the relationship the violence may escalate.



**Turning Points:** There can be an incident (severe physical assault, harm to children) or a series of incidences (deprivation of basic needs, drug and alcohol misuse, gambling, stealing money) by the perpetrator which causes a victim to take a sudden step away from the violence. There may also be a moment when mothers face the possibility of having their children taken from their care, be it through their ongoing underestimation of strengths, resources and personal well being, involvement by Family and Community Services concerning the safety of their children, or relinquishing their care to safe family members.

Such turning points may be the final catalyst that alters the current responses of women and urges them to take a more pronounced step toward change. Such turning points can provide a brief or longer term reprieve from the harm but there must always be awareness that repercussions from the perpetrator, or others, may follow. This is not to dissuade women from the choices they are making but to ensure that they receive the increased support and (hopefully) protection they require at this time.

## Safety awareness

*“Without an adequate understanding of a person’s wellbeing, experience, resistance and responses to violence may mean that any advice given or action taken by a responder may unintentionally or unknowingly increase the harm and threat that a person may face as a result of not fully understanding a person’s situation and context” (DVSM Sightlines, 2018b).*

Building safety awareness involves:

- Providing the opportunity for victims to share the stories of the violence they and their children have experienced.
- Validating what they believe at this time as well as providing information that may both affirm but also shift certain beliefs and concerns they may hold.
- Revealing the ongoing legacies they carry due to both the dynamics of the violence they have been subjected to as well as the social responses they have previously received from others.
- Maintaining connections to those who provide supportive and affirming responses, and increasing their connections to additional supports that enhance their resistance and strivings toward safety and ongoing wellbeing.



The skills, knowledge and experience to effectively undertake safety assessments in consultations with women who have experienced violence is a critical part of working with families to move toward safety.

Professional judgement by the worker and trust in the assessment of risk and safety by victims and, more importantly, allied services such as police and domestic violence support services, is a responsibility that requires diligence to both evidence based practice and practice based wisdom.

**Attention to evidence based risk factors which indicate the possibility of ongoing or heightened violence for both women and children, and raising heightened concerns with the woman by sharing this information with her, is a role workers need to be committed to. Any risk assessment process should consider the victim's assessment of risk, consideration of key evidence based indicators and worker judgement.**

**Workers conducting risk assessments must have a solid understanding of:**

- **Domestic and family violence and its common patterns and dynamics**
- **Factors that escalate risk**
- **Issues or factors that may make some population groups more vulnerable.**

Risk assessment tools (eg: DVSAT) are often criticised for not being broad enough to ascertain risks external to the knowledge of victims but nor can they be dismissed and replaced with sole reliance on more conversational based assessment procedures which may not identify areas of concern that perhaps the victim herself has never considered.

Once a risk assessment is complete, the outcome should be used to inform the response (risk management). Where immediate safety concerns are identified, the worker and service must take all necessary steps to ensure the immediate safety of the victim and any accompanying children.

An ongoing risk management plan needs to consider current safety strategies used by the victim, their right to access external supports, especially in the legal domain, and ongoing supports such as Start Safely, Staying Home Leaving Violence and Victims Services for immediate attention to their practical needs such as security in their home, rent assistance and other income support.

When determining risk it is also important to identify protective factors which can buffer the degree of current harm. This is most ardently achieved when families are not forced into ongoing isolation and, therefore, connection to safe people such as extended family members and friends, as well as services, is important.

## Safety strategies

Achieving safety is very unpredictable and almost impossible to gain when the violence is still “active,” with the offender maintaining strong surveillance and accompanying tactics of entrapment over mothers and their children. Given the reality of such control, the limitations and also risks of implementing safety strategies requires careful consideration.

It is imperative to gain some idea of the whereabouts of the perpetrator and discuss with the woman her immediate safety or heightened risk of harm.

It is anticipated that once a perpetrator becomes aware that a partner is seeking advice or working toward leaving the relationship the violence may escalate. Therefore, “finding safety” may in fact prioritise staying in the home and continuing to face the battle lines that occur, at least for this moment in time.



It is important to support women forced into the decision to remain in the home but still make visible the many ways they are, in fact, “leaving the violence”.



Working with women and children to identify different safety strategies they have used, or talking with them about other safety strategies they might find useful, needs to be fluid and constantly reviewed given the unpredictable and ever changing ways violence occurs. The idea of victims having a variety of different safety strategies they can resort to rather than relying on a predetermined “safety plan” would seem to be a better fit with the way violent offenders think, plan and operate.

Safety strategies must hold a comprehensive view of “risk” outside of the focus on just physical risk of harm and to learn from victims what they assess as safety and as risk. They need to be given the right to make their own decisions at the time but also be further supported by continuing to have conversations that remain focused on other strategies that might enhance the safety of both themselves and their children.



# Practice Plan

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When discussing safety strategies with women, it is important to gain some idea of the different strategies they have tried as well as which strategies have been helpful and which have achieved little gain for them or even increased their lack of safety.

Such conversations can be guided by questions such as:

- What have you done in the past? How did it work?
- Do you have several strategies that you can resort to when faced with different experiences of the violence? How does your partner react when you do this?
- Is he aware of what you are doing or do you manage to keep it secret from him? How do you do that?
- Have you been thinking that what you have been doing works to a degree but still doesn't make you feel safe enough?
- What would feeling "safe enough" be like?
- How would being "safe enough" make a difference to you and your children?
- Do you have any ideas of how I could help you or work with you to talk more about "being safe enough?"



In further assisting women, safety strategies can consider:

- Physical safety: lock changes, safe room in home, sensor lights, safe places to go to in emergencies, how to get to safe places, a place to store valuables and important documents together
- Cyber safety: keep mobile on person, change passwords, save emergency contacts
- Legal safety: call police in emergency, record incidents, report breaches
- People safety: emergency contact numbers, letting neighbours know what is going on, support with pet care, having a code word for friends and family that indicates you need help
- A word of caution: Less is more. Engaging other family members and friends as allies to the safety strategies should be considered carefully. They may not be aware of the abuse and/or may not understand the full extent of it. They might overtly or covertly condone the violence, disclose information to the perpetrator or there may be risks to their own safety.



## Children and safety strategies

It is important for mothers to plan for the safety of their children as well as themselves, and share with their children some of the strategies they will hold together as a family seeking safety.

Sharing such strategies with children is not about children having responsibility to keep themselves or siblings safe or do anything that may create further risk.

Just as mothers develop safety strategies so also do children, but it is important to recognise that those strategies, as much as is possible, should involve some connection to safe adults, including their mother, extended family members, neighbours or school staff.

**When talking with mothers about developing safety strategies with their children questions can include:**

- **What things can make your children feel safe and unsafe?**
- **What have they told you? What have you asked them?**
- **In what ways do your children let you know they are safe and unsafe? What do they do? What are the words they use, the sounds they make, the movements they make, the faces they make?**
- **How safe will children feel if they see or hear that you as their mother and protective parent, is also feeling or being unsafe?**
- **How can you talk to them about this and work out ways they can best keep themselves safe, which is your priority at this time?**

### **When talking with children about safety strategies:**

- Use language familiar to the child or language that is clearly used by the child, including some of their sayings as “code words”.
- Children may not be able to “make sense” of what is happening in the same ways as adults but they do have a strong and reliable resource which is their “early warning signs”.
- For most children they would have received some form of protective behaviours education at school which helps children identify these signs and then act upon them. Early warning signs or physical symptoms of fear (butterflies in the stomach, weak knees, heart beating fast, tingling in their arms and hands etc.) help children identify they need to utilise a safety strategy before the violence escalates.
- People close to the child such as their mothers or family members will know their children and what they are experiencing better than anyone else. If they don’t know or feel unsure then they should be encouraged to talk with their children.

Talking to children about safety strategies with the involvement of the people who know them and can best support them is important. They can also provide ideas of other safe people (and potentially unsafe people) in the child’s network.

### **A children’s list of strategies should include:**

- **Identifying a safe place to go to when things at home become unsafe**
- **A trusted adult to go for help, and their telephone number**
- **A code word to indicate the need for help and direction for what type of action to take**
- **That they have access to money to make phone calls, catch public transport or catch a taxi.**



# Reflections

Safety strategies and/or the development of safety plans, which are often a more formal list of the ways people should respond to both the “early warning signs” and execution of violence, need to be developed with care and consideration to the following cautions:

- Women are often not considered to best know how they try to gain safety for themselves and their children and may be given suggestions of what to do rather than relying on what they are already doing, as a starting place.
- They can often be told to stop doing what they have done and do something else, which can actually increase the risk of harm to them and others. [DB note: These two bullet points appear contradictory. Please review].
- Safety plans which emphasise reliance on protection from external agents (police, housing, crisis accommodation) are seen as empowering of victims in enabling them to secure the assistance to seek protection and in many incidents, to stay alive. When women are responded to, such empowerment and protection can be secured.

However, when the system fails to respond or provides further barriers to resources (forms, waiting lists, outside of referral criteria, time frames etc), not only can the ongoing sole responsibility for safety stay with the woman on her own, but can also heighten the risk of harm to herself and her children.

In the worst scenarios of system responses, the dictum of “failing to protect” can be held over women as negating their protective parental responsibilities, at times culminating in them losing the care of their children. To add “insult to injury” fathers who inflicted the violence may then have the children placed in their care.

- Safety strategies can conceal the degree of harm that offenders are capable of enacting, particularly those seen to be of high risk. Safety strategies are not something that offenders agree to or take notice of but usually, if they gain an awareness of what the mother and/or children are doing, will escalate the threats or actual physical harm.
- Gaining safety sits in different contexts in women’s lives, including the degree of psychological entrapment, the usually unpredictable possibility of the offender escalating his levels of harm, the quality of their social relationships, the existence of actual support systems and their ability and freedom to connect with legal, accommodation and health services. Working toward safety is not something that women and children can do in isolation.

# *Practice 6:*

## *Cultural respect*



## Cultural Respect

*“Domestic violence is not acceptable no matter what cultural or traditional background and as a community we need to keep finding ways of challenging beliefs which perpetuate or normalise domestic/family violence”.*  
*(Fiorito, 2000) Migrant Women’s Lobby Group*

An inclusive and holistic response to women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence must involve considerations of culture and race, their associated histories and legacies, and the significance of cultural connection and identity.

“Cultural competency” is the most common term relied on when encouraging workers to extend their practice base to be inclusive of the intersectionality of race and culture in addition to other significant identities such as gender, age, class, sexuality and disability. There is also an argument that cultural competency may not be possible for workers to achieve, especially in the face of cultural contexts that are not static in that they are “forever changing, emerging, transforming and political” (Dean, 2001).

Dean (2000) argues instead that we should persist with the paradox of being informed and not knowing simultaneously. He states, “From this position we acknowledge our lack of cultural competence, yet continue to seek better understanding and build trusting relationships across cultural divides, through respectful, deeply interested, non-judgmental exchange of beliefs and ideas”.

*Rather than focusing on competency, Furlong and Wright (2011) argue that cultural respect as an ethic of practice is far more useful, enabling “an ongoing process of seeking knowledge and gaining partial understanding of how culture influences people’s values, beliefs and actions”.*

Central to this understanding is maintaining an awareness of how our own cultural background and identity influences our ease, hesitation or indeed resistance to be open to hearing, acknowledging and respecting the culturally informed stories of others.

### **Domestic and family violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children**

*“The term ‘family violence’ in an Indigenous context, is used to describe the range of violence that takes place in Indigenous communities including the physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that may be perpetuated within a family. The term also recognises the broader impacts of violence; on extended families, kinship networks and community relationships” (Cripps & Davis, 2012).*

When responding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children who have experienced family violence, workers must have insight into our shared history and the legacy that colonisation has left on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



*“Family violence is not part of Aboriginal culture. However, the disadvantage, dispossession and attempted destruction of Aboriginal cultures since colonisation have meant that family violence has proliferated in Aboriginal communities” (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2015).*

The following statistics reported for the year 2015 are a testimony to the burdens carried by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children subjected to family violence. (Family Violence Response and Prevention, 2017):

**4.9x** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were significantly more likely to be the victim of assault compared to other Australian women: 4.9 times in NSW; 9.1 times in SA; and 11.4 times in the NT.

**32x** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were 32 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of injuries caused by family violence and 10 times more likely to die from violent assault than other women in Australia.

**42%** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to experience violence against their mother (42% reported seeing violence against their mother compared with 23% of all children).

**15x** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 15 times more likely to access homelessness and crisis housing than non-Indigenous women, impacting their ability to flee violence and access safety for themselves and their children.

**10x** Family violence is a major contributor to children being removed from their families, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being over 9 times more likely to be on care and protection orders and 10 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

**90%** Official statistics under-represent the level of violence in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with an estimate that up to 90% of violence may not be disclosed.

Sensitive and effective practice also requires an awareness of the many barriers facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced family violence, which include:

- Poverty and social isolation
- Poor police responses and discriminatory practices within police and child protection services
- Fear of child removal if disclosing family violence
- Community pressure not to go to the police in order to avoid increased criminalisation and incarceration of Aboriginal men
- Lack of understanding of legal rights and options and how to access supports when experiencing family violence
- Lack of culturally appropriate housing options
- Language and communication barriers
- Mistrust of mainstream legal and support services to understand and respect their needs and validate their opinions and wishes.

(Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2018).

Cultural respect and, therefore, practice must also hold as pivotal Aboriginal traditions and practices concerning healing, in particular adherence to a holistic understanding that the wellbeing of a person must encompass their physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual needs. Equal significance must also be given to relationships which extend beyond the immediate family and are inclusive of connection to kinship systems, the wider community, the land, and spirituality.

*“For Aboriginal people culture is about family networks, elders and ancestors. It’s about relationships, languages, dance, ceremony and heritage. Culture is about spiritual connection to our lands and waters. It is the way we pass on stories and knowledge to our babies and children; it is how we greet each other and look for connection. It is about all the parts that bind us together”. (Jackomos, 2015).*

Herring et al. (2012) point to three main practices that workers should abide by when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- To “become informed” in understanding how trauma and racism experienced by Aboriginal people are barriers to access as well as needing to “learn about local Aboriginal communities, their history, cultural practices, local organisations, and spokespersons”.
  - To “take a stance” against discriminatory practices within the workplace and “demonstrate they are safe places, where culture will be respected and individuals are not blamed for their situations”.
  - To “reach out to local cultural brokers, introduce themselves, spend time and identify ways to consult with and support the local community”.
- (p10)

The duality of cultural respect and, therefore, cultural safety is imperative when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Bennett (2011) argues that to hold a position of cultural safety workers must:

- Build the relationship in environments where the person feels comfortable
- Be aware of community protocols regarding with whom to consult
- Work alongside people
- Not be outcome and process driven
- Provide choices about with whom they might like to work (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal people)
- Give accurate and timely information
- Work from a position of humility and responding to people with dignity.



When working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the entire life span (including children and young people), there must also be associated practices such as:

- Acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land on which a service is based
- Seeking out and making contact with elders, community leaders and other key people in the community
- Gaining an understanding of the demographic and geographical profile of the community, the cultural traditions held by the Aboriginal community (including places of cultural significance), and the history carried in terms of white settlement and its associated impact (including current social issues)
- Understanding how integral cultural identity is to individual identity, influencing ways Aboriginal people think and act, including child rearing, managing behaviour, and communication styles
- Recognising that connection to cultural identity is a source of resistance and strength
- Responding holistically to the wellbeing of adults, children and young people that includes the whole family and the whole community.



## **Domestic and family violence against culturally and linguistically diverse women and children**

Australia is a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) nation with each cultural and ethnic group having their own history, traditions, beliefs, connections and identity.

*“The term ‘CALD’ is generally defined as people born overseas in countries other than the main English speaking countries. It can be used more broadly to refer to people who are Australian-born and have at least one parent who was born overseas, or those who speak a language other than English at home. It is also increasingly used to refer to religious diversity” (Department of Social Services, 2015).*

Data regarding the prevalence of domestic and family violence experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse women is limited, with the Personal Safety Survey (2012) recognised as the best source of prevalence estimates at this time. The comparisons are based on gender and whether individuals come from “Main English speaking countries” or those for whom English is not their main language, restricting the complete picture of cultural diversity.

In the 12 months prior to completing the 2012 Personal Safety Survey:

- 0.3% of all women who were born overseas experienced male partner violence (34,600), compared with 1.6% of women who were born in Australia (94,800)
- The majority of these women were from countries where English is not the main language spoken (78.3%)
- The rate of male partner violence for women where English was not the main language (1.5%) was almost double that of women from main English speaking countries (0.8%)
- 0.7% of all women born overseas had experienced sexual assault (20,100), compared with 1.1% of women who were born in Australia (67,600)
- The rate of “multiple incident physical assault victimisation” for women born in Australia (61.9% or 1,107,200 who had experienced physical assault) was not statistically significantly different compared to women born overseas (57.1% or 345,900 who had experienced physical assault). These figures refer to the proportion of women who experienced one incident of physical assault, followed by at least one other incident of physical assault (perpetrated by either one person or multiple people)
- The rate of “multiple incident sexual assault victimisation” for women born in Australia (56.2% or 648,600 who had experienced sexual assault) was not statistically significantly different compared with women born overseas (57.8% or 190,900 who had experienced sexual assault). Again, these figures refer to the proportion of women who experienced one incident of sexual assault followed by at least one other incident of sexual assault (perpetrated by either one person or multiple people) (as cited in Cox, 2015).

The under-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse women in population studies concerning the prevalence of domestic and family violence is a shortcoming that reflects their ongoing marginalisation and potential invisibility within mainstream services. The risk is then to make generalisations, regarding both their experiences and their needs, that do not consider the many variations of their lived experiences in terms of socio-economic, familial, communal and cultural identities, and connections.

The barriers confronting women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who have experienced domestic and family violence will be as varied as their individual stories of who they are, where they come from, where they live now, who they live with, and the violence they have been subjected to.

*As stated by Rees & Pease (2008), “Our review of the literature did not find that domestic violence was higher among refugee communities. However, it was specific experiences, including lack of host-language skills, unemployment, isolation from mainstream society, and prior experiences of trauma related to oppressive political structures, fundamentalist beliefs and civil wars that reinforced strategies by perpetrators and prevented women seeking assistance and early intervention”.*

**The literature identifies the following restraints existing for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds seeking safety from the violence:**



Different perceptions and understandings held within their community as to what constitutes domestic and family violence, such as excluding emotional, psychological and economic abuse



Strongly defined and restricted gender roles such as the right of the husband to be the head of the family, primary decision maker and the sole breadwinner



Women being economically and financially dependent on their spouses which may include not having their own bank accounts and, therefore, ready access to money if needed



For many women, due to visa restrictions, they are not permitted to work and if not permanent residents, there are limited options for income, ongoing income support and other services such as medical coverage, public transport, public housing or homelessness programs



Concerns about bringing shame to their family or community, not only if the violence is revealed, but also if they make choices that lead to separation and/or divorce



Real or perceived fear of losing the right to remain in Australia, especially for those on partner visas or dependants of other temporary visa holders, such as international students or skilled workers



Isolation and living away from their families who could be sources of comfort and support



Lack of social interaction for them with others, adding to their isolation and disconnection from support





Fear of strong disapproval and retribution from their families and communities for leaving the relationship



Fear that if they were to leave or return to their country of origin they may lose custody of their children who could remain with their father or paternal extended family



Spiritual and religious leaders often consulted with or asked to determine the current safety concerns and mediate between the victim and offender to resolve the concerns



Reluctance to report to police due to exposure to systemic violence in their country of origin, including unsafe experiences with law enforcement agencies



Language barriers, with limited English language skills and lack of awareness of accessing interpreter services



Limited availability of culturally sensitive translation and interpretation services, with interpreters conveying inaccurate information to protect their community, not wanting interpreters of similar culture but different religious sects, and children being used as interpreters



Lack of awareness of their own rights and the legal system in Australia, including criminal laws which prohibit domestic and family violence and immigration laws which may provide them with protection.

(Ghafournia, 2011; Ogunsiyi et al., 2011; Zannettino et al., 2013; Pillay, 2014; Vaughan et al., 2015).

The above barriers provide testimony to the fact that women face so many fears, uncertainties and struggles should they leave that the only option available to them is to stay in an ongoing violent relationship. The dictum “Why don’t they leave?” seems such an ignorant statement in the face of these restraints and very real fears that the consequences for them should they leave renders that decision to be impossible.

# Practice Plan

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## Think: Cultural Humility

- Gain knowledge about the cultural background of the woman you are meeting with in order to gain some understanding of their customs but never assume that one's country of birth defines their experiences or the entirety of who they are.
- Avoid cultural generalisations that ignore cultural diversity, individual identity and lived experiences.
- Promote a sense of safety, understanding and respect by taking a position of “not knowing but seeking to find out” from the people you work with and their connection to their culture and influence in their lives, their decisions and their identity.
- For mothers, seek to understand the values, priorities and practices in raising their children that are informed by their cultural traditions and beliefs regarding parent - child relationships.

- Be cautious with the information you provide regarding domestic and family violence that may not fit the experiences and views of the victim, which may run the risk of them disengaging from you and your service.

### **Example: The cycle of violence**

**This is a commonly used description of domestic and family violence which explains that men who use violence go through a series of steps from tension build up, explosion of anger, remorse and seeking forgiveness and then returning to the tension build up stage of the cycle.**

**This cycle is flawed for many reasons in that it is inclusive of all women who experience domestic and family violence, including:**

- **Focusing on a narrow definition of violence (physical only)**
- **Does not consider the fact that violence is intentional and controlled behaviour**
- **Places responsibility on women, as well as children, for containing the perpetrator's "out of control" behaviour so that the violence does not escalate.**
- **For women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the position of men in their families and their exploitation of "culture" to justify their violent behaviour, means that there is often no apology stage as they do not see their behaviour requires an apology.**

- Ensure clients feel welcome to engage and re-engage with your service, in the time frame of their choice, be it weekly or an initial contact and then no further contact for weeks or even months.
- Recognise your own cultural values and connections and how they influence you both personally and professionally.
- Recognise and repair the cultural mistakes you may make.
- Empower the social and emotional well-being of women and children by ensuring that your responses to them, and the responses of others, incorporate traditional and culturally appropriate beliefs and healing practices.

## Think: Space

- The agency is physically accessible to everyone.
- The agency's materials, décor, reading material, and other physical aspects of the environment reflect the diversity of the people being served.
- There are processes within the service which support consultations with women from diverse backgrounds regarding accessibility, inclusiveness, and cultural safety of the organisation and worker responses.
- Use of space that may be more familiar to women such as a community centre may support them to meet with you but it is important to ensure that any other setting is safe and provides space for private conversations.
- Important cultural and spiritual needs are being met, such as providing cultural food and prayer materials for women, particularly if they are staying in refuges or have regular contact with services.
- Women may need to bring their children with them so it is important that children can be cared for if seeing a woman by herself and/or there are child friendly spaces for children to use when visiting the service.
- Don't overwhelm women with pictures or materials that are too explicit in the messages regarding violence, and which may evoke feelings of fear, embarrassment and shame.
- Provide culturally appropriate information that can be given in the privacy of a room and encourage women to take or discard the information offered, as they choose.
- Address any fears they may hold about sharing their stories and ensure they are aware that the information they disclose is confidential, unless you are concerned for their safety or the safety of their children. This may alleviate concerns of possible reprisal from the offender or community backlash.
- Be cautious with words and meanings such as using the word "shelter" or "a place to stay" instead of "refuge" as this latter word may make women associate the term with refugee camps.
- Deep listening is a term used by Aboriginal people that describes the process of deep and respectful listening that relies on "inner, quiet, still awareness, and waiting" (Creative Spirits, 2019). It may take several meetings with a woman before they feel comfortable disclosing details of their abuse, so just "being there", patience and active listening is crucial to helping women feel heard, valued and respected.

## Think: Openings for engagement

- It is your role to ensure that you can provide women with any support they need if language is a barrier for them being able to access information and services, including using resources that are in their language or being able to access an interpreter.
- Even if someone has conversational English skills and appears to understand you (i.e. nodding, saying yes) it is still their right to be offered interpreter services.
- Women may feel embarrassed to say they do not understand the conversation, especially when people are talking with different styles, such as pace, tone of voice and accent.
- Avoid using children and extended family or community members and others, who may have ongoing contact with the offender or can be influenced, by him to minimise the violence.



## Think: Interpreter support

- Build rapport with the interpreter (i.e. introduce yourself and ask how they are doing).
- Give the interpreter context to the situation and ensure they are comfortable continuing to interpret for someone who has been impacted by or has experienced, domestic and family violence.
- It is important that the interpreter understands that they are there to repeat exactly what the woman and you have said and not to give their own versions or give advice.
- If the woman seems to be uncomfortable with the interpreter, stop the conversation and end the appointment.
- Always look directly at the woman with whom you are speaking as personal connection is important and can often be stronger than words.
- Discuss with the woman if she would like to be called by her name or another name, as well as the name(s) of her partner and children, to ensure confidentiality and enhance safety.
- If the interpreter is on the phone, try to request an interpreter who does not live locally.
- Try to find out from the woman if she would prefer a male or female interpreter.
- Allow the interpreter to translate sentence by sentence as large amounts of words can become difficult to translate and they may forget certain points.
- Let the interpreter know that if they are not sure of either what you or the woman are saying that they need to seek clarification by asking questions rather than guessing what is being said/asked.
- If the woman is speaking while you are still asking something or in the midst of your response to her, stop what you are saying and let her speak. It can be difficult for the interpreter to manage two conversations at the one time and it is also important that the woman feels she is being listened to.
- Avoid professional language that may be unfamiliar to the interpreter and difficult to translate. Also avoid Australian “slang” which is unlikely to have a corresponding word in another language.
- Ensure that the interpreter is aware that the conversation could be emotionally charged and include issues concerning acts of violence against the woman you are meeting with.
- Prior to starting the conversation with the woman, discuss with the interpreter how they can manage what is being discussed and if they feel comfortable or anxious about proceeding.
- If possible, give the interpreter an opportunity to debrief at the end of the session.
- If you believe an interpreter is ineffective, terminate the appointment and re-engage someone else.

## Think: Support systems

- For women forced into isolation by both domestic and family violence and cultural marginalisation, connect them with both formal and informal social networks and supports including friends, family, and support organisations.
- Critical information to consider includes:
  - Financial status (resources, bills and debts, access to ongoing income support, Centrelink arrangements and other subsidy eligibility)
  - Visa status (residency stability, restrictions to accessing government support)
  - Legal rights (immigration laws, criminal actions regarding domestic and family violence, access to free legal services)
- Knowledge about the support services available which provide housing, health, financial support, legal assistance, services for their children.
- Gain an understanding of how their past experiences with services and organisations, including police and government agencies, may impact on how they may be either cautious or welcoming of involvement with agencies in the present.
- Assist them to manage the rigours of living in Australia by encouraging them to pursue English language, education and employment goals as well as linking them with relevant health and social programs.
- Offer a connection with local faith and cultural organisations, activities and support groups.
- If possible, assist women to attend new services and organisations to help them establish strong referral connections, including services specifically for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as well as mainstream services.
- At times, mainstream services can offer benefits such as neutrality, greater assurance of confidentiality and an 'outside' perspective in situations of domestic and family violence.
- Follow-up all referrals with women to get their feedback on their experiences and if the service or initiative they took met their needs.

# *Practice 7:*

## *Talking with mothers*





## Talking with mothers

**This chapter seeks to further extend our responses to mothers by looking at the different ways we can hold conversations with them to reveal the violence, identify the dynamics and legacies of the violence, and reveal their acts of resistance.**

The purpose of these conversations include:

- \* To challenge the secrecy imposed on them by the violence by enabling them to share their experiences and understand similar experiences are also owned by other women and families.
- \* To reveal the violence and explore how it has infiltrated and distorted their fundamental views of themselves as a partner and as a mother.
- \* To explore their understanding of the violence experienced by their child/ren.
- \* To identify the legacies of the violence on their relationship with their child/ren.
- \* To identify that responsibility for the violence belongs to the perpetrator of that harm and thereby shift the guilt and self-blame held by victims.
- \* To reveal their acts of resistance to the violence that challenged the intention of the offender to take from them their sense of self and dignity.
- \* To validate their right to grieve the many losses because of the violence.
- \* To restore and strengthen their connections to family, friends and other social supports.
- \* To reaffirm their identity including their values, knowledge, resources and skills.

## To challenge secrecy



What were the ways that the person using violence made it clear that you could not talk to anyone about what was happening to you and your children?



What did he do? What did he say?



Did he use force or threats to intimidate you and isolate you from people who could have given you support?



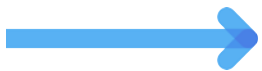
Were there times when you broke the secrecy about the violence that was happening?



What did you do? Who did you talk to?



What did the person/people say to you when you told them about what was happening?



Did they believe you and seem to understand what was happening?



Was anyone not believing or tried to minimise what was happening or shift responsibility away from the offender to you or others?



What did they say?



What did you think about their response?



What did you say or do?



How did you manage their responses so they didn't take you back into further secrecy about the violence?



How were you able to stand up to the secrecy and not let it make you keep the violence hidden?



What resources or values did you hold onto that enabled you to keep on finding ways to not have the violence stay a secret?



What other people and resources were made available to you that supported you to not keep the violence a secret?



What are the messages you believe people should know about supporting women so they can talk about their experiences of domestic and family violence and not be forced to keep it secret?



What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful to encourage women and children to break the silence and be able to talk about their experiences of domestic and family violence?

## To reveal the violence



What can you tell me about the violence you and your children have experienced?



What type of violence occurred-physical, sexual, economic, psychological?



When did you first start to notice behaviours by him that made you question his actions were disrespectful or harmful to you?  
What words could you now give to those behaviours?



When did you realise that what was happening was abusive or violent?



What were your thoughts at the time?



How did those thoughts change and what made them change?



What do you think now?



What has caused you to make this shift?



How do these violent behaviours make women and children feel about their right to be treated with respect?



How do these violent behaviours make women and children feel about their right to be safe?



What are the messages you believe people should know about women living with domestic and family violence?



What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for women to receive that enables them to understand the many ways domestic and family violence is perpetrated?

## To explore their understanding of their child/ren's experience of the violence

-  When the violence was happening were your children in the home?
-  Did they see things? Hear things?
-  What did your children do?
-  What would you do?
-  What would happen when the violence was over?
-  What would you say to them?
-  What things would they ask you?
-  What did they say to you?
-  What did you say to them?
-  How did you respond to your children when they would bring up their worries?
-  What did they say? What did they do?
-  What did you do? What did you say?
-  If it felt hard or unsafe to talk to them at the time what would you think is important to ask them now?
-  What do you think is important to say to them now?
-  What are the messages you believe people should know about children living with domestic and family violence?
-  What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for mothers and children to receive that enables them to understand the many ways domestic and family violence is experienced by children?

## To identify the legacies of the violence on their relationship with their children

- How do you think the violence has interfered with your relationship with your children?
- What have you noticed?
- What are the ways you and your children were able to still hold on to each other when the violence was happening?
- Is there anything that made your relationship stronger?
- What ideas do you have about what they think about you as their mother?
- Have you ever asked them?
- If you could say one thing that they believe or one thing they have held onto, as mother to your children, what would it be?
- How were you able to keep those things when the violence was
- What are the different ways you have comforted and supported your children?
- What are the different ways they have comforted and supported you?
- Tell me the things you feel proud of as a mother.  
→ Tell me the things you feel proud of about your children.
- What do you see as hopeful in being a mother to your children?
- If you could say one thing that you believe has helped you, as a mother to your children, what would it be?
- What are the messages you believe people should know about how the violence impacts on relationships between mothers and their children?
- What are the messages you believe people should know about how mothers and their children find ways to retain and strengthen their connections to each other despite the violence?
- What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for mothers & children that enables them to understand the many ways domestic violence impacts on the relationship between mothers and their children?
- What are the messages that you believe are most helpful for mothers & children that enables them to acknowledge the ways mothers and their children retain and strengthen their connections to each other despite the violence?

# Practice Plan

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## When women harm their children

When working with women who have experienced domestic violence we, as workers, are also made aware that women may also harm their children. This often challenges us as strong advocates for women and children to be safe from harm to simultaneously hold a position that anyone inflicting harm on others must hold responsibility and accountability for their actions.

Any consideration of violence against children should address both the violence of men and women. Acknowledging women's violence does not deny the seriousness and prevalence of men's violence towards them but nor does the existence of domestic and family violence inflicted upon women excuse any violence they perpetrate against their own child.

A most thoughtful exploration of this issue has been written by Lee FitzRoy (2005) which summarises the link between domestic violence and women's use of violence against their children. She also offers suggestions for practice, which include:

- Workers must be available to hear and respond appropriately to women's disclosures of their abuse or fear of abuse to their children
- The harm must be named for what it is in terms of the impact on their child and ensure children remain safe
- To deny or minimise or excuse such harm is not helpful or indeed respectful to the mother and may in fact increase the child's risk to ongoing harm
- Access to supervision and training is essential for workers to maintain clarity around this issue
- Organisational policies and practices must reflect the possibility that some women may harm their children.

## To identify that responsibility for the violence belongs to the perpetrator



In what ways did the person who used controlling or violent behaviour against you deny responsibility for his behavior?



What did he say?



Who or what did he blame instead for his violent behaviour?



How did his words or actions make you feel about yourself as his partner and as a mother?



Would he always blame the same thing or person or did he tend to blame lots of things or people?



Would he only blame you or would he also blame the children?



How would he do this?



What did you think about this at the time?



What would you think? What would you do? Did you believe him or believe he was responsible for what was happening?



What do you think your children thought? Did they ever say anything or do anything that told you they knew who was solely responsible for the violence that was happening?



What did they say? What did they do?



Did you ever say anything or do anything that told your children that you knew who was solely responsible for the violence that was happening?



What did you say? What did you do?



What are the messages you believe people should know about the ways offenders shift responsibility for the violence away from them and onto others?



What are the messages from others about responsibility for the violence that you believe are most helpful for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence?

## To reveal their acts of resistance



When thinking about acting with resistance against the violence what does this mean to you?



If resistance is not about keeping yourself and your children totally safe from the harm then how did you manage to find ways to not have the violence totally control you?



When your partner was violent towards you and your children were there actions, thoughts or plans held by you that showed those acts of



What did you do? How did you feel? What kind of expression was on your face? What did your body language convey? What went through your mind?



Did he ever see those acts of resistance?  
What did he do?



Again, how did you respond?



Were there times when he had no idea of those acts of resistance?  
What were those times?



What did you do?



How did you know he had no idea?  
How did that make you feel about yourself but also about him?



How did that make you feel about yourself but also about him?



What is it like for you to think about your resistance to the violence?



Has your resistance been wrongly labelled by others as something else that devalues or blames you? What do they say?



How do you respond to this? How could you respond without letting go of your self-respect and retaining your dignity?



What are the messages you believe people should know about the ways women and children resist the violence they are subjected to?



What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for mothers and children to receive that enables them to understand the many ways they resist the violence they have been subjected to?



## HONOURING THEIR RESISTANCE

We may say or think if they don't take our advice they are stuck or resistant to change.

What they may be resisting is to yet again be told how to feel, what to think and what to do.

They may be resisting the possibility that change may evoke more violence.

They may resist having to let go of a relationship that has meaning to them or meant something or could again meaning something.

Trying to keep those connections does not cause violence to happen.

Violence happens because the person in that relationship makes decisions time and time again to do harm.



## To validate their right to grieve the many losses because of the violence

### Disenfranchised grief

This has been described by Doka (2002) as a person experiencing loss but where there is no socially recognised right or space to mourn for this. Doka (2002) argues that as a society there are clear rules about what can be grieved for, how long the grieving should last, with whom the grieving can be shared and honouring the loss of what was and is no longer.

In the context of domestic and family violence women are not able to publicly mourn for the loss of the relationship they held as important to them, the person they have loved or still love and the hopes they held about what their lives together would be. Therefore, the grief they undergo is disenfranchised.

Allowing women to express and acknowledge what they have lost does not mean that we minimise or “forget” the seriousness and wrongness of the violence they were subjected to.

Acknowledgement must be given to the right of a person to have the feelings they feel and be able to express those feelings without judgement or timeframes. As noted by Herman (1992), mourning in the context of interpersonal violence and abuse must be reframed as “An act of courage rather than an act of humiliation”.



**Many mothers and children who have experienced domestic and family violence identify many things in their lives that the violence has taken from them:**



When thinking about the losses in your life that the violence has taken from you what would they be?



Have you been able to talk about these losses with other people or have you felt cautious to do so because of how people might respond?



When you have been able to share what you have lost how have people responded to you?



If you talk about the loss of the relationship from the person who was violent to you, do people understand or find it difficult that you would grieve for someone who harmed you and who you have left or are needing to leave?



What have people said that enables you to grieve for the loss of this relationship?



What have people said that makes you feel you cannot share this grief?

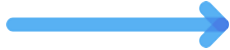










What are the messages you believe people should know about the many losses experienced by women and children because of the violence and their right to grieve?



What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for mothers and children to receive that enables them to grieve for the losses they have experienced because of the violence?

Loss, Grief and Domestic Violence (Hollinger, 2010).  
Losses which are grieved

|                               |   |  |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Independence                  |    | The parent you were supposed to be                       |
| Security                      |    | The life your children were supposed to live             |
| Intimate relationship         |    | The future that you will have in an abusive relationship |
| Support of family and friends |    | The future you expected to have                          |
| Social networks               |    | The way it was   |
| Hope                          |  | The way you wish it had been                             |
| Belief systems                |  | The person you thought they were                         |
| Trust                         |  | The person you expected them to be                       |
| The happy ending              |  | The relationship you deserved to have                    |

## To restore and strengthen their connections

-  In what ways did the violence that you experienced lessen or remove your contact with people who were important to you?
-  How were you able to resist the secrecy and isolation held over you by the offender and find ways to keep in contact with people?
-  What did you do? What did they do?
-  Were you ever able to share with them what you and your children were experiencing?
-  Did they ever ask you if you and your children were being hurt in any way? If they did what did you say to them?
-  Did anyone ever say to you that what they had seen or been told about your partner's behaviour was violent and abusive?
-  What was it like for you to hear someone say that to you? What did you think at the time? What did you say back to them?
-  Did anyone ever say to you that you were a good person and mother and that what was happening to you was not OK and not your fault in any way?
-  What did you think? What did you say?
-  Did anyone ever ask you if you needed anything and how they could support you? What did you think? What did you say?
-  What were the things that held you back from being able to talk to
-  Have you been able to now share more of what you experienced?
-  How have they responded? How has this made a difference to you?
-  What are the messages you believe people should know about the importance of having and strengthening connections with other people who recognise the violence and speak about it with victims?
-  What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for mothers and children to receive that reveals the violence and offers words and actions of validation and support?
-  What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for mothers and children to receive that enables them to grieve for the losses they have experienced because of the violence?

# Practice Plan

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## Responding to those seeking freedom from Family Violence, Sexual Violence.

Reference: Family Violence, Sexual Violence and Violence within Whā -nau (2017)

- Take the abuse seriously.
- Don't underestimate the danger she may be in.
- Help her to recognise the abuse and understand how it may be affecting her or her children.
- Tell her you think she has been brave in being able to talk about the abuse, and in being able to keep going despite the abuse.
- Help to build her confidence in herself.
- Help her to understand that the abuse is not her fault and that no-one deserves to be abused, no matter what they do.
- Let her know you think that the way her partner is treating her is wrong.
- Don't blame her for the abuse or ask questions like 'what did you do for him to treat you like that?' or 'why do you put up with it?' or 'how can you still be in love with him?'
- Don't keep trying to work out the 'reasons' for the abuse.
- Don't be critical if she says she still loves her partner, or if she leaves but then returns to the relationship. Leaving an abusive partner takes time.

- Don't criticise her partner. Criticise the abusive behaviour and let her know that no-one has the right to abuse her or her children.
- Don't give advice, or tell her what you would do. This will only reduce her confidence to make her own decisions.
- Listen to her and give her information, not advice.
- Don't pressure her to leave or try to make decisions on her behalf.
- Focus on listening and supporting her to make her own decisions. She knows her own situation best.
- Help her to protect herself.
- Talk to her about how she thinks she could protect herself.
- Help her to think about what she can do and see how you can help her to achieve it.
- Offer practical assistance like minding the children for a while, cooking a meal for her, offering a safe place to stay, transport or to accompany her to court, etc.
- Respect her right to make her own decisions, even if you don't agree with them.
- Respect her cultural or religious values and beliefs.
- Maintain some level of regular contact with her. Having an opportunity to talk regularly to a supportive friend or relative can be very important.
- Tell her about services that are available to her.
- Remind her that if she calls a service, she can just get support and information, they won't pressure her to leave if she doesn't want to.
- Keep supporting her when either staying or leaving the relationship.
- Whether she is staying in the relationship or has separated, it is important to think about how she can be protected from further abuse.
- Help her to plan where she and her children could go in an emergency, or if she decides to leave.
- If she needs to stay at a secret location, tell her about emergency accommodation services.
- Agree on a code word or signal that she can use to let you know she needs help.
- Help her to prepare an excuse so she can leave quickly if she feels threatened.
- Help her to prepare an 'escape bag' of her belongings, and hide it in a safe place. If she leaves she will need money, keys, clothes, bank cards, driver's license, social security documents, property deeds, medication, birth certificates, passport and any other important documents for herself and her children.
- Stay connected to her and be available when she needs you to be there for her.

## *Migration of Identity*

*Michael White (1995) described the process of separation from the violence and the accompanying false creation of who they were as a “migration of identity”.*

*“...when women take steps to break free, they are doing a great deal more than breaking free from the ongoing trauma, they are doing a great deal more than breaking free from a familiar social network, and they are doing a great deal more than stepping into material insecurity...women are also embarking on a migration of identity. And, in this migration, there is always some distance between the point of separation from the abusive context and the point of arrival at some preferred location in life, and at some alternative and preferred account of one’s identity”  
(White,1995).*





## To reaffirm their identity



Tell me what has been happening for you at the moment?



What is still the same and what has changed?



How have you been managing everything you have to deal with at the moment?



What have you been doing to keep yourself and your children safe?



What would you need to feel safer from now on? How have you found the strength and stubbornness to stand up for yourself and your children against the violence that has been happening to you?



Who else notices these strengths about you?



What do they say to you about your strengths?



How does that help you stay stubborn in trying to find ways to keep yourself and your children safe?



How has this changed your ideas about your relationship with your partner?



Do you use different words now when talking about your relationship with your partner and the violence he has subjected you to?



How has this changed your ideas about who you are and what is important to you?



Do you use different words when talking about yourself now and your actions against the violence?



How would you describe yourself as the woman at the start of the relationship with your partner?

## To reaffirm their identity



How did you see yourself when the violence began?



How did you see him when the violence began?



How do you see yourself now that his violence toward you and your children is clearer?



How do you see him now?



What qualities do you hold that have got you to this point?



Who do you want to be in your future for yourself and your children?



What do you think you can do to reach this point?



Who can help you with this?



If you keep taking steps forward what does this say about you and what you want for yourself?



How did you overcome the messages from your partner and perhaps others that would have kept you trapped and unsafe?



How would you now describe what you think an intimate relationship with someone should be like?



What would your partner say about his views on what an intimate relationship should be like?



What is something you would now to say to him about those beliefs?

*Caged bird*  
*By Maya Angelou*

*A free bird leaps on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream till the current ends  
and dips his wing in the orange sun rays and dares to claim the sky.*

*But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.*

*The caged bird sings with a fearful trill  
of things unknown but longed for still  
and his tune is heard on the distant hill  
for the caged bird sings of freedom*



*Practice 8:*  
*Talking with children*



## Talking with children

**This chapter seeks to further extend our responses to children by looking at the different ways we can hold conversations with them to reveal the violence, identify the dynamics and legacies of the violence and reveal their acts of resistance.**

The purpose of these conversations include:

- To break the silence and isolation imposed by the violence by providing them with the opportunity to talk about their experiences
- To explore children's different experiences of the violence
- To acknowledge their responses to the violence
- To identify the ways the violence impacted on children and their relationships with others
- To affirm their identity including their values, knowledge, resources and skills.



## To break the silence and isolation

Children have lots of fears and worries that make it hard for them to talk to people. They might worry that they won't be believed or they will get into trouble or telling someone will make things worse.

-  What made it hard for you to be able to talk to anyone about the violence?
-  Did anyone lie to you and/or deny that the violence/abuse/fighting was
-  Did anyone tell you not to let people know what was happening?
-  What did they say?
-  What did you think when they told you this?
-  Did you talk about the violence/abuse/fighting with anyone in your family when it was happening?
-  Who did you talk to? What did they say? What did they do?
-  Did you talk to anyone outside of your family about the violence when it was happening in your home?
-  Who did you talk to?  
What did they say? What did they do?
-  Did talking to someone make things feel safer or less safe?  
What happened?
-  What did you do then to try and keep things as safe as possible?
-  Did anyone help you with this or did you do it on your own?
-  What are the messages you believe people should know about supporting children so they can talk about their experiences of domestic and family violence and not be forced to keep it secret?
-  What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for children to be able to talk about their experiences of domestic and family violence?

## To explore children's different experiences of the violence

-  When did you first start to notice that some things were happening in your house that weren't okay?
-  What would happen in your house when shouting or hitting started?  
What do you first remember?
-  What did you think at the time?
-  When other children talk about violence happening in their home they talk about lots of different ways it happened. Sometimes it was their dad shouting at or hitting their mum. Sometimes things were thrown or walls were punched. Sometimes it was very quiet and then all of a sudden the yelling or the hitting happened all over again.
-  If you were not in the room how did you know what was happening?  
What did you do?
-  Did the same things happen over and over again or did things change?
-  If there wasn't yelling or hitting then what else happened in your house that made people feel unsafe?
-  What would your dad say or do to make people feel upset or worried?  
What would your mum do?
-  What would you and your siblings do?  
What would your dad do then?
-  Were there ways you knew that the violence was going to start? Get worse?  
About to end? Were you ever worried about anyone's safety in your home?
-  Who did you worry about the most?  
What made you worry about them?
-  Did you talk to anyone else in your family?  
If you did, what did they say back to you?
-  What are the messages you believe people should know about children and their experiences of domestic and family violence? What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for children to better understand their

# Practice Plan

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**The Three Houses Tool  
(Weld & Greening,  
2004)**

**The Three Houses tool  
was created by Nicki  
Weld and Maggie  
Greening when they  
were working with the  
child protection service  
in New Zealand.**

**Based on the Signs of Safety approach  
(Turnell & Edwards, 1999), the tool  
includes the same key questions by  
using houses as the metaphor. They are:**

**The House of Worries  
(What are we worried about?)**

**The House of Good Things  
(What's working well?)**

**The House of Hopes and Dreams  
(What needs to happen?)**

**Children respond to these three  
questions by drawing or writing their  
responses within the Three Houses.**



## Three Houses



**The House of Worries**  
(What are we worried about?)

**The House of Good Things**  
(What's working well?)

**The House of Hopes and Dreams**  
(What needs to happen?)

## The House of Worries (What are we worried about?)

- In this House you can draw or write down all of the things that are worrying you at the moment, or the things that are going on in your life that don't feel so good.
- Worries might be things that make us feel sad, a bit scared, angry, or a maybe a bit bad. Are there any worries that you have at the moment?
- Can we put those in your 'house of worries'?
- What are you feeling worried about at the moment?
- So, what is happening that is worrying you at the moment?
- What else is happening that is worrying you?
- Are there any things that make you feel sad, bad, scared or worried at home?
- What is worrying you about living with mum (or mum and dad)?
- What is worrying you about where you are living at the moment?
- Is there anything or anyone who makes you feel sad, bad, scared or worried at school?
- What is worrying you about your visits with dad?
- What is worrying you about the friends you have?
- Is there anything that is worrying you about having me come to meet with you?
- Is there anything else you think needs to be in your 'house of worries'?



## The House of Good Things (What's working well?)

- In this House you can draw or write down the things that are going well in your life and the things that make you feel happy and okay.
- What are the good things that are happening in your life?
- What are the things in your life that make you feel happy?
- What is going well in your life at the moment?
- What else is going well in your life?
- What things make you feel happy or good?
- What is good about living with mum (or mum and dad)?
- What is good about where you are living at the moment?
- What are your favourite things to do with mum/dad?
- What is good about your visits with dad?
- Who are the people in your family that you like spending time with?
- What is good about spending time with them?
- What is good about the friends you have?
- What are some things you like about school?
- What are your favourite things to do at home?
- Who do you most like doing those things with?
- What would other people say you are good at?



## The House of Hopes and Dreams (What needs to happen?)

- In this House you can draw or write down how you would like things to be in the future and all the things that you want to happen in your life, particularly if all the worries were gone.
- What are the important things that you want to have happening in your life that we need to put into your 'house of hopes and dreams'?
- What would you like to have happening in your life?
- How would you like things to be in your life?
- If all the worries were gone, what would you want your life to look like?
- What would be different in your life if all the worries were gone?
- If all the worries at home were gone, what would you want to see taking their place?
- What else would you like to have in your 'house of hopes and dreams' that would help with the worries?
- Are there things in your 'house of good things' that you think could help with the worries?
- What are the important things from your 'house of good things' that you want to make sure are happening in the future?
- Is there anything else you'd like to put in your 'house of hopes and dreams'?



## Drawing the session with the child to a close

Acknowledge the importance of what the child has shared with you and how valuable it is to know what they think about everything that is happening. Check whether the child would like to have a copy of their Three Houses. If the child wants to keep the originals, you can take a photograph of their Three Houses and then save and print them for the file/for others.

If there are safety concerns that could arise by someone seeing the child's Three Houses, make a plan with the child about taking care of their copy for them and about when they will receive their copy. The child understands what is happening next, including who else you will need to talk to if there are any child safety concerns.

Key considerations when using the tool

- Listen to the child's views.
- Use language that is simple and brief so that the child doesn't become confused by a long explanation.
- Ask open-ended questions that cover all of the relevant areas of the child's life and to explore more things with the child.

**Such questions include:**

- **Could you tell me more a little bit more about that?**
- **Could you explain what's happening in this picture?**
- **Could you describe this picture a little more for me?**
- **Could you explain a little bit more about what you mean by that?**

**The Three Houses within the tool interconnect and are informed by and from each other.**

The child can choose which House to start with as they are connected and therefore as long as all Three Houses are completed it doesn't matter where the child starts.

If you are concerned that the child may have been told not to speak openly, then focusing on what is going well is a good place to start as it would be unusual for a child to be told not to talk about things they are happy with within their family.

In using the Three Houses tool with children, always make sure to use the child's exact words and ideas.

If the worker is writing the information, they should read this back to the child at the end of each statement. This gives the worker an opportunity to ensure that they are accurately reflecting the child's views and it also provides an opportunity to gain further information about an issue the child may have raised, for example by asking "tell me more about that"

- Stay open to new information and possibilities.
- It is important to remember that the Three Houses tool is about creating an opportunity for the child's views to be heard, not for our information gathering needs to be met.

***“Children are spirited and dignified beings who invariably respond to, and resist violence of all kinds, on their own behalf and on behalf of those they love”.***

***Wade, A (2018). Object to agent:  
Honouring child and adult resistance to violence.***

## To acknowledge their responses to the violence.

Sometimes children have lots of questions and worries about the violence such as: Is it my fault? How come my dad gets so mad at my mum? Is this what happens in most houses?



What questions did you have about the violence that was happening in your house?



When the violence was happening what did you feel?



What did you think?  
What did you do?



Did you have a plan of what you could do when the violence was happening?  
How did you work out to do those things?



Did you work it out on your own or did someone else in your family help you?



Who was that person? Or were there a few people?  
What did they do or say to help you when you were worried, frightened or hurt?



What did you do to help other people in your family when they were worried, frightened or hurt?



Was there a room or a place in your house or somewhere else where you felt the safest? How did you get to that place?



What did you do when you were there? How did you know when you could leave that place?



Did you have to listen and to look for things to be different or did someone come and get you? What did you do then?



If you had a chance to say what would have been helpful for you when the violence was happening, what would you say?



From whom would you have liked help or think should or could have helped?



What are the messages you believe people should know about children and the ways they try to respond when the violence is happening?



What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for children to receive about the ways they respond/ed when the violence was happening?

## To identify the ways the violence impacted on children and their relationships with others

Children talk about the many different ways the violence that was happening in their home made their lives harder in other ways. This could be: dealing with nightmares, feeling anxious, getting upset with other people, not eating or sleeping properly, problems concentrating at school or difficulty spending time with friends



What were some of the ways you knew that the violence was making things harder for you in other parts of your life?



Did your mum talk to you about what she was noticing about you? What did she say? What did she do?



What about your siblings? What did you notice about them?



Did you ever talk with them about these struggles and what you could do about them?



Did your dad do things to keep you apart from your mum or your siblings or cause fights between you? What did he do? What would you do?



What would your mum and siblings do? Did you work out together the best way to do things when this was happening?



Did anyone else notice you and your family were struggling and ask you if you were okay?



Did anyone guess that it was because of what was happening at home and try to do something about it to try and help you? What did they do? Did it make things better or worse?



Do you think the violence was anyone's fault? If so, whose fault was it? Did you feel like you had to take sides? Was it safer to take sides?



Did you ever feel like you needed to protect either of your parents? Did you ever feel like you needed to protect your siblings? How would you do this? How would they protect you?



Did you ever feel angry at your mum for leaving or staying with your dad?



Did you ever feel that she didn't do enough to keep herself and you and your siblings safe? Did you ever talk to her about this?



Other children will say that they love their dad but know that what he did was wrong and he should have stopped. What do you think about your dad and his use of violence?



-  Did you ever say anything to him or think about saying something but felt it was better not to say anything?
-  If you still see your dad what is that like for you?
-  Is he different now or sometimes does some of the violent behaviour happen again, such as talking badly about your mum or being unfair and getting angry with you?
-  What is it like now? What do you do to manage things if his violence happens again?
-  What do you say or not say? What do you think?
-  Do you talk to anyone about this? What do you say?
-  What do they say back to you that helps you manage those times?
-  How did the violence make it hard for you and your mum and siblings to just do normal family things together?
-  How did your dad's violent behaviour make things hard for you and your siblings to spend time together with him and just try to do normal things?
-  Was it always hard or were there times when things did seem normal and okay?
-  What were those times?
-  What was it like to have those times in your family?
-  What are the messages you believe people should know about how violence impacts on children and their relationships with other people?
-  What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for children to receive about the ways violence can impact on them and their relationships with other people?

## To affirm their identity including their values, knowledge, resources and skills

-  What do you think it is about who you are and what matters to you that you know that the violence that happened in your home was wrong?
-  What are your ideas about how people should treat each other, both in and outside of their family, that your father doesn't do when he is violent?
-  Many children who experience violence in their home are wrongly told that when they grow up and form a relationship with a partner they will either be hurt by their partner or be violent toward their partner and their children. Has anyone said this to you?
-  If so, what do you think about this?
-  What do you hope for when you are older and have a close relationship with someone as your partner?
-  What qualities do you see in yourself now that you want to keep with you as you grow older?
-  How did you get those qualities and values?  
Do you think you were born with them or did you learn them from other people?
-  Who taught you about these qualities and values?  
What do you have now as hopes for yourself and your family?
-  What do you want to leave behind and what do you want to take with you as a family? What are your ideas about how you can do this?
-  What are the messages you believe people should know about the ways children can have values and beliefs that know that violence against anyone causes harm and is wrong?
-  What are the messages from others that you believe are most helpful for children to receive about the ways they can have values and beliefs that know that violence against anyone causes harm and is wrong?

# Practice Plan

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## Children's responses to violence.

“The ways in which children respond to trauma are based on certain skills. These skills reflect what the child gives value to. And what the child gives value to is linked to the child's history, to their family, to their community, and to their culture” (White, 2006).

The following table was developed by Angel Yuen (2007) as a guide to assist workers to talk with children about their experiences of violence. The guide consists of four levels with questions to support conversations with children to move from one level to the next. The highest level provides the opportunity for both the worker and the child to reflect on the child's values, skills, knowledge, and also to link them to significant people in their lives.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>LEVEL 1: Discovering children's responses and actions</b></p>   |  |
| <p><b>To name the responses and actions of trauma</b></p>   | <p>How did you respond? What did you do?<br/>         What did you do when you were scared?<br/>         What did you show or not show on your face during the abuse?</p>  |
| <p><b>Exploring places of safety</b></p> <p><b>Places of safety during fear; feel less like a passive recipient to trauma.</b></p> <p><b>What did you do or think about while you were hiding/ comforting yourself?</b></p> | <p>What did you do when you were scared?<br/>         Where did you hide when you were scared?<br/>         How did you try to keep yourself safe?<br/>         What did you do once you found a place to hide?<br/>         Even though it was not possible for you to stop the abuse how did you attempt to protect yourself or others?<br/>         How did you comfort yourself and your siblings?<br/>         How did your brothers and sisters comfort you? How did you comfort yourself?</p> |
| <p><b>Lessening the effects</b></p>   | <p>What did you do or are you doing to lessen the effects of the abuse?<br/>         How did you make yourself feel better?<br/>         Is there anything you are doing now to help you get through it?</p>   |
| <p><b>Skills of living</b><br/> <b>Acts of resistance</b><br/> <b>Significant stuffed friends and pets</b></p>  | <p>Do you have any imaginary skills?<br/>         Did you have a safe place that you thought of?<br/>         How did you stand up to the abuse/not let it totally take over you?<br/>         Did you have a stuffed friend/pet that helped you?<br/>         How would your friend/pet try to comfort you?<br/>         How did you help each other?</p>   |
| <p><b>LEVEL 2:</b></p> <p><b>Making links of responses to knowledge and skills</b></p> <p><b>Provide a summary of the child's descriptions and knowledge to give meaning to their responses to trauma.</b></p>              | <p>How did you know how to do that?</p> <p>What name would you give this skill?</p> <p>What do you think of yourself being able to do those things?</p> <p>How do you feel about this knowledge that you have?</p>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>LEVEL 3</b></p> <p><b>Linking skills and knowledge to preferred ways of being (values, beliefs, hopes)</b></p> <p>Personal agency is raised when skills, knowledge and values are made known.<br/>Provide a summary and give meaning to values.</p> | <p>Why was this skill important to you?</p> <p>What do you think of yourself knowing, at that age, how to keep yourself as safe as you could?</p> <p>What do you think this says about the kind of person you are?</p>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>LEVEL 4</b></p> <p><b>Rich descriptions of responses which reflect values, skills and knowledge</b></p>   | <p>What is the history of this skill/value?</p> <p>Who introduced you to this skill?</p> <p>Where did you learn this skill?<br/>When did it first become important in your life?</p> <p>Who would know that this value is important to you?</p> <p>What would they say they appreciate about you and your value?</p> |

### Responding to children’s disclosures of violence and abuse

Given the strong correlation between domestic and family violence experienced by children and other forms of abuse, it is important to always be available and attentive should a child or young person ever seek you out to speak to you. Most importantly, be alert and notice signs displayed by a child or young person (behaviours, affect, anxiety, sleeplessness etc.) that may indicate something is bothering them. It takes only a step toward them to ask them if there is anything troubling them and that you are there to listen to them.

## Creating safety, time and attention

- Provide a safe place for children and young people to talk, away from parents, and possibly with another adult that the child knows and trusts.
- Be fully present and actively show an interest in them by asking questions about who they live with, what school they go to, friends, social activities, interests etc.
- Use age and developmentally appropriate words and communication styles and regularly “check out” with the child or young person not only if they understand what you are saying but also if you properly understand what they are saying to you.
- Provide a space to talk that is private with limited opportunity for sudden intrusions such as other people walking in, phone calls or pagers.
- Directly ask them about any worries they may have or problems they are trying to deal with at the moment (e.g. is there anything that you would like to ask me about or talk to me about?).
- Notice and bring attention to some of the non-verbal cues of distress and anxiety the child or young person may be displaying (e.g. when I asked you about any worries you might have you seemed to get anxious and showed this in the way you were breathing/ holding your head down, holding your stomach. Can you tell me about anything that may be causing you have such distress?).
- Bring attention to any physical signs visible to you (e.g. I noticed a mark/ bruise/scar/ scratches on your arm. Can you tell me how those marks got there? Did you do it to yourself or did someone give you those marks?).
- 



- Bring attention to some of the worries other people may have about them and ask them what they think those worries are about (e.g. I have heard that there are some people who are a bit worried about you. What do you think about that? Do you know what they are worried about?).
- Use open-ended questions such as “can you tell me more about this?” rather than a more closed question which usually requires a yes or no response.
- When talking with them about any behaviours of concern ask them more about the behaviours from their point of view (e.g. is there anything behind this? Is the behaviour you are showing trying to say something or tell us something?).
- Provide information about appropriate boundaries and safe and unsafe behaviours from others and ask them if they could tell you about any times they may have ever experienced feeling unsafe.
- Provide information to children and young people about their rights to protection and how and where they can get help and support.
- Ask them who they consider to be safe people in their life and if they were to tell someone about being unsafe or worried who those people might be.
- Ask them if there is anything they would like to ask you about or talk to you about?
- Let them know that if they would like to see you again or feel at any time they would like to talk to you or someone else about any worries, a clear plan is drawn up about how this could happen.

**When a child discloses significant harm that they have experienced**  
**If a child does disclose significant abuse it is important to be clear about the process of reporting and ensuring that the child’s ongoing safety remains the priority.**

**It is also important to consider that speaking about what the child has told you at this time to parents may not be the appropriate action and consideration of the child’s safety, especially if the abuse is current, must be made in consultation with child protection authorities and the police.**

## **Strategies (Hunter, 2011; Quadara, 2008) for ensuring appropriate responses at the time a child or young person discloses include:**

- \* Listen and stay calm as they try to explain what has happened.
- \* Record the actual words the child or young person uses to describe the abuse.
- \* Let them know if you don't quite understand what they are saying and ask if they can help you understand as what they are saying is important.
- \* Make notes recording what the child or young person has said in regard to the possible date, time and place where the abuse last occurred.
- \* Let them know you need to do this because it is important that you don't get anything wrong in what they are saying.
- \* If the child or young person can't speak with words and is disclosing using non-verbal means, such as drawing or gestures, then record how they have communicated the abuse.
- \* Reassure them at all times that they are doing the right thing by telling someone but avoid phrases such as "being brave" or "strong" as this may be far away from what the child is actually experiencing and can seem to dismiss the enormous fears and anxiety they may hold by disclosing.
- \* Stay attentive to what may be happening for the child through their body language, such as putting their head down, shaking or lowering their voice. This may be caused by the shame and guilt for telling or the fears they hold.
- \* Notice what they seem to be experiencing and ask them if they need time to have a break, take some deep breaths or have a glass of water.
- \* When the child or young person seems to have said all they could at this time let them know that they are believed.
- \* Never push for further details or for the child to say more than what they have been ready to disclose at this stage.
- \* Ask them if there is anything else they would like to say or ask, even if not about the abuse, such as worries they hold or questions they have about what will now happen.
- \* Never make promises that you have no control over and if you don't know an answer to a question let them know that you don't know but can try to find out for them.
- \* Tell them what you plan to do next and make sure if you have to leave the room that someone can stay with them.
- \* Reiterate that you believe what they have told you.



*Finding First*  
(*A Hand to Hold*. (2003): A Rosie's Place Publication)

*The first lot are people in your life who believe you  
Some you may already know really well,  
Others just a bit, And others not at all.  
They believe you and listen to the important things you have to say.*

*The second lot are others in your life  
Who can't believe you.  
Maybe they're not strong enough or not ready enough to believe,  
Or he's tricking them too.*

*You've got to find the first lot because  
they're the ones you need around when you tell.  
If you tell the second lot you're wasting your time  
and you could get in more trouble.*

*You've got to find first.*



*“In meetings with children, the invitations for adults to reproduce dominant cultural practices of marginalisation are ever-present. This is true for all children by nature of their age and size, and is particularly true for some children more than others when experiences of gender, class, race, cultural background are considered.”*

*Morgan, A. (2006).*

*Narrative therapy with children and their families*



# Reflections

- It's not enough that we talk about being inclusive of children who, in their own right, have experienced domestic and family violence.
- We need to intentionally and actively engage with them and be interested in listening to what they have to say.
- We need to acknowledge that for many children who may still feel unsafe that they may stay silent for a reason. This is not because they don't want to talk but they are aware that speaking to someone about what they have experienced may put them at further risk.
- In every conversation we have about or with children and in every plan we develop in partnership with their mother and other adults we must also be inclusive of the right of children to participate and have a say about what they think should and can happen.
- "Shoulds" and "cans" are different in terms of what children do compared to what they are able to do and we need to never reduce the significance of their own self- created measures to protect themselves and other family members.
- Evidence stemming from conversations with children who have experienced domestic and family violence commonly reach three significant conclusions:
  - Children want to talk, be listened to and be acknowledged for what they have to say about domestic and family violence
  - Children do not seem to withdraw from such conversations because they are too distressing to speak about
  - Their distress would appear to come from having never been asked.

*Practice 9:*  
*The heart of the work*



## The Heart of the Work

*“We are amazingly alive in our work when we are able to be fully and relationally engaged, stay connected with hope, and be of use to clients across time. Being amazingly alive in our work embraces a rich engagement with a spirit of social justice, and openness to the transformations we may experience as practitioners in this difficult work”.*  
*(Richardson & Reynolds, 2012)*

This final chapter provides the opportunity to bring into focus the worth of the work that we do. The work that keeps us “amazingly alive”.

Throughout this resource there has been repeated reference to fundamental principles of practice that are strongly wrapped around by the ethics and values we hold as both workers and as organisations.

In determining what workers need to guide them in their work there are foundational principles that are particular to responses to women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence:

- A socio-political understanding of violence which identifies the many nuances of social context in which that violence thrives, including gender, age, socio-economic wellbeing, race, culture, sexuality and disability.
- A clear identification that the execution of violence by perpetrators is intentional, planned, controlled and continually revised based on their ongoing surveillance of the behaviours of others, including those who they harm and those who may protect.

- That whenever violence occurs there are responses of resistance by victims which must be made visible and honoured for their stand against such oppression.
- That the infliction of interpersonal violence against women and children is a violation of fundamental human rights, and therefore a violation against humanity itself.

The totality of our work comprises a mosaic of questions that consider:

- Why do we do what we do?
- How do we do what we do?
- When do we do what we do?
- Where do we do what we do?
- With whom do we do what we do?
- How do we measure the worth of what we do?
- When do we need to change what we do?
- How do we change what we do?
- Who guides this change?
- How do we measure the worth of such change?

These considerations are welded together by many different practices which will include the direct work we undertake with women and children, the unity of practice between colleagues, the collaboration we undertake with other agencies and services, the policies and procedures that hold the organisation we work within together, and the ways we continue to challenge and be challenged about our practice, driving us to ask more questions and seek to learn more.

The different layers of the work we do are all valid in their own right but it would be an arrogant mistake to ever underscore the “amazingly alive” worth of our direct work with women and children and the “steps of change” we witness as visitors in their lives.

- **We step forward to meet with women and children who are doing all they can to find safety from the harm they have been subjected to.**
- **We step back to ensure that we are guided by their voices and their wisdom as to what they require of us and “the others” who represent the service system families find they must traverse.**
- **We step to the side as we advocate on their behalf with “the others” to address the obstacles that may hinder their progress.**
- **We step forward again to move with them to the next challenges they have to face.**
- **We step back to applaud their stubborn determination to continue to fight for their rights and the rights of their children to be free from the violence that has overshadowed their lives.**

In the entirety of these often marathon dances with the women and children we work with we may lose sight of what indeed is the purpose of what we do.

**What are we actually hoping to achieve?**

**What changes are we hoping for the women and children we meet with?**

This pathway of change starts the moment a woman contacts our service. We immediately need to consider: what does our service have to offer that may be of some assistance or value to her?

At the same time, we also have to consider: what does she currently have within herself that she brings to our ongoing partnership together?

What will this partnership look like, at least for now?

How will we both decide when that union needs to change or alter course?

Who will guide the direction?

Who will lead the dance?

Noticing the many changes women and children are both confronted with and the ways they respond can often go unnoticed by what has been described as the “emotional noise” that arises in our conversations together.

That “emotional noise” (Holmes, 2008) can be almost deafening amidst the intensity of the stories they share, the feelings that arise when they are spoken, and the aftermath of the raw testimony of their pain that has made a presence in the space we occupy together for such a relatively short period of time in the totality of their lives.

“Emotional noise” is not necessarily negative when it exists between workers and families but it is important to be aware of the various ways it can appear so that it is noticed, spoken about and shared.

In her writing about working with adult victims of sexual abuse, Sue Mann (2005) describes the roller-coaster of emotions that workers can experience when victims of violence share their stories. Those words and emotions include:

- Outrage
- Shared excitement
- Inspiration
- A sense of pleasure
- Distress
- Laughter and joy
- Concern, worry and fear
- Hopefulness
- Despair
- Deep sadness

*“Shared pleasure as a woman puts a name to another story of her life that reflects her commitments to care for herself and others, and that can be traced back to acts she took to protect herself and her siblings during their childhood. Such a story might be named ‘the great escape’ or ‘a life dedicated to protecting and caring for children’ ”.*

It is argued time and time again that the presence of the worker against the tide of words and emotions that may arise involves certain skills and responses, examples of which have been defined by Moore (2017).



He identifies ten features which include:

- Attunement/ engagement
- Responsiveness
- Respect and authenticity
- Clear communication
- Repairing any communication breakdowns
- Understanding one's own feelings
- Empowerment and strength-building
- Assertiveness/ limit setting
- Building coherent narratives.

*Moore (2017) further discusses the different ways that we can work with people and argues that “Whether we do things to people, for people, with people, or through people makes a major difference to the outcomes that can be achieved”.*



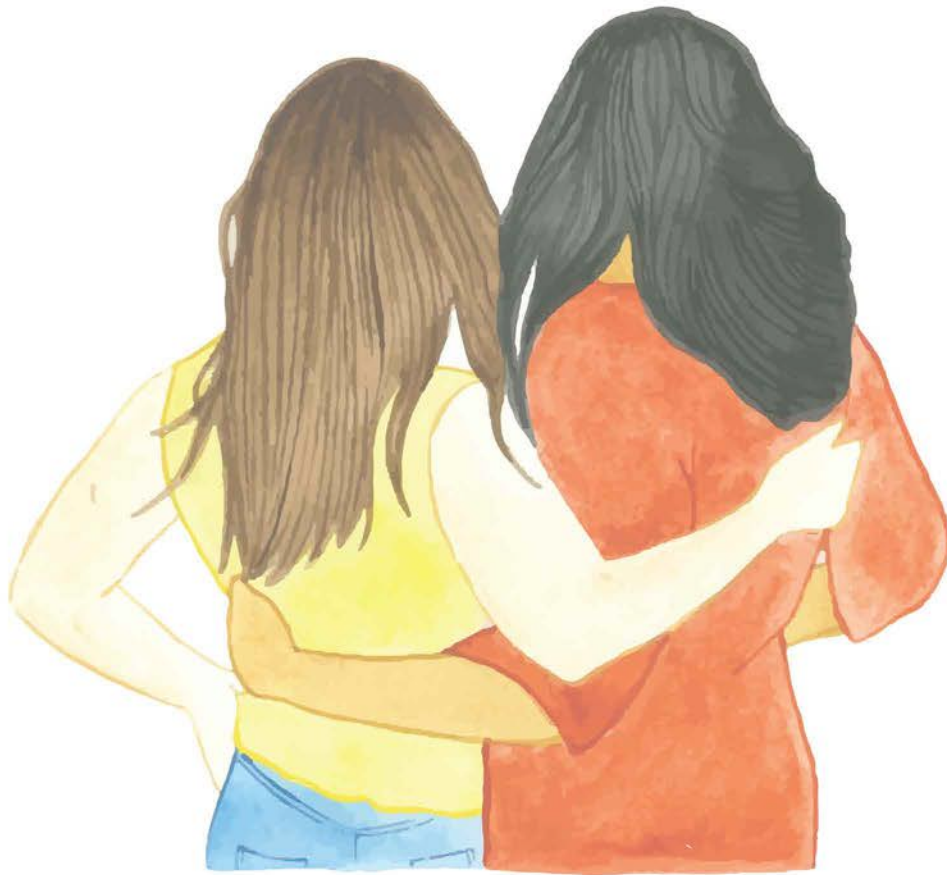
The following table is an adaptation of his argument.

|                             |   |  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| DOING THINGS TO PEOPLE      | If we direct or advise others, or if we have a covert agenda to change people to the ways we think they need to change... | ... then we will get either compliance or resistance, but no real sense from the person of being validated for their own ideas and hopes regarding change                        |
| DOING THINGS FOR PEOPLE     | If we do charitable work, with no expectation of the person to do anything or reciprocate in any way...                   | ... then we may provide temporary relief, but no recognition of the many ways people have already responded to the challenges they have faced and therefore the wisdom they hold |
| DOING THINGS WITH PEOPLE    | If we establish partnerships with the families we work with and the other workers and agencies also providing support...  | ... then we will strengthen trust, build mutual goals and plans and maintain the dignity of the families we work with  |
| DOING THINGS THROUGH PEOPLE | If we consult with mothers and their children and work together with others...  | ... then we will see a unified and strengthened resistance against the beliefs and values that enable violence to fester and continue to harm                                    |

“Ivey, Ivey and Morgan (1993) wrote that the ‘Core ethical responsibility is to do nothing that will harm the client or society’. I would name this a reactive model of ethics that is a model that tells us what not to do. A proactive model of ethics on the other hand asks of the practitioner not to limit their ethics to merely being satisfied with not doing harm but seeks to do something that will enhance the person’s quality of life within and beyond the confines of the therapeutic relationship” (McVeigh, 2006).

The pivotal contribution of any worker in supporting women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence is to always respond in ways that enhance their sense of agency and self- respect. Such “relational ethics” (Reynolds, 2014) are often ‘taken for granted’ epilogues that workers may too readily and too easily say they embrace. Unfortunately, it is often only when such practices are devalued or abandoned, that their true worth is recognised.

*As stated by Reynolds (2014), holding relational ethics, requires “That clients are centred and that we are effective in creating relationships of dignity and respect across the chasms of difference and privilege that divide us. The aim is to assist clients to change their relationships to suffering”.*







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## *The Heart of the Matter*

*This resource is for workers who are working with women and their children who are seeking freedom from violence and abuse. It focuses on strengthening the relationship between mothers and children which has been a casualty of the violence they have been subjected to.*