FATHERING AFTER VIOLENCE

Working with Abusive Fathers in Supervised Visitation

Family Violence Prevention

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Lonna Davis and Juan Carlos Areán
Project Directors

II. INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to assist the grantees of the Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program (Supervised Visitation Program or SVP) that want to enhance the safety and well-being of women and children by working more deliberately with abusive fathers who use the centers to visit their children. Although fathers are not always the visiting parents and, in fact, in some centers mothers make up almost half of the visiting caseload, this document was designed to target in particular visiting fathers who have been violent with their intimate partners.

This publication takes as a point of departure the minimum practice standards outlined in the Guiding Principles of the Supervised Visitation Program (Guiding Principles or GP)[1] and builds upon that document to propose a continuum of more advanced interventions for the engagement of abusive fathers in visitation centers. These interventions are based on the learnings from the Fathering After Violence Initiative,[2] developed by the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) and five current and past SVP grantees with funding from the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW).

Fathering After Violence is a national initiative that aims to help end violence against women by motivating men to renounce their abuse and become better fathers (or father figures) and more supportive parenting partners using fatherhood as a leading approach.

Men who use violence can be held accountable for their behavior and simultaneously be encouraged to change it; and women and children can benefit from this approach.

The work described in this guide is grounded on two key premises: Men who use violence can be held accountable for their behavior and simultaneously be encouraged to change it; and women and children can benefit from this approach.

[1] Office on Violence Against Women, US Department of Justice. *Guiding Principles. Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program* (2007). Washington, DC.
[2] For more information, see http://www.endabuse.org/programs/display.php3?DocID=342.

What is accountability in supervised visitation?

Accountability is a concept frequently used in the domestic violence field, and yet there is a dearth of definitions in the literature. One noteworthy definition by Brenda Hill appears in *Domestic Violence Awareness: Actions for Social Change*:

Batterers' accountability means that perpetrators take responsibility for violence in all its forms. This requires honest self-examination, and directly, openly owning violent behaviors. It includes acknowledging the impact their violence has on partners or other victims, children and other relatives. True accountability requires accepting the consequences of their behavior, and making significant changes in their belief systems and behaviors based upon non-violence and respect for women and all other relatives.[3]

In the context of the criminal justice system, accountability often means being subjected to the consequences imposed by the system, such as arrest, imprisonment, probation, compliance with mandated treatment, and restitution to the victims.

Although supervised visitation is not directly related to systemic accountability relative to criminal justice, it can be a clear consequence for someone's abusive behavior and visitation centers must hold abusive parents accountable to the program's policies and procedures and the court order. Perpetrators need to know in no uncertain terms that if the center's rules or the court order are broken, they might lose the right to see their children.

However, it is not a prerequisite to start or continue supervised visitation that abusive parents take responsibility for their past behavior, acknowledge the impact of their violence on their families, or even take steps to change outside the visiting time.

For this reason, it is imperative that visitation centers work not in isolation, but as part of a larger system that holds abusive men accountable and guarantees safety for the children and adult victims. Supervised visitation centers that are part of a functional coordinated community response have much greater means to achieve these goals.

Due to the limitations that visitation centers have in creating a traditional framework of accountability, developing significant relationships with the visiting fathers can enable staff to clearly communicate the legal and non-legal consequences that continued abusive behavior can produce.

[3] Domestic Violence Awareness Project (2005). *Domestic Violence Awareness: Actions for Social Change*. Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, p. 79. Retrieved February 23, 2007, from http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/ActionForSocialChange.pdf.

III. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Supervised visitation centers have traditionally served the function of providing a safe space for children who have experienced physical or sexual abuse from their parents and/or have witnessed domestic violence (DV). Under close observation, the visiting parent can see, interact, and play with the children in a way that minimizes the possibility of creating further harm.

According to Campbell, Gordon, and McAlister-Groves[4], the first supervised visitation program in the United States was founded in Denver in 1970 to provide "services for families involved with child protection cases." Other programs with the same goals appeared across the country in the 1970s and '80s. But it was not until the last decade of the twentieth century that supervised visitation centers started to proliferate, "due in large part to custody and visitation issues between separated parents."[5]

"In the early 1990s, attention shifted to the development of supervised visitation for families in which there had been domestic violence. This happened in conjunction with increased pressure on the courts and other providers to gain a better understanding of the unique safety needs to be considered in these cases in order to keep mothers and their children safe."[6]

In 2000, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA 2000) directed the Office of Violence Against Women to establish the Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program, which "provides an opportunity for communities to support supervised visitation and safe exchange of children, by and between parents, in situations involving domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, or stalking."[7]

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[4] Campbell, J., Gordon, D. and McAlister-Groves, B. (2007) *Beyond Observation: Considerations for Advancing Practice in Domestic Violence Supervised Visitation Centers.* San Francisco, CA: Family Violence Prevention Fund.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Office of Violence Against Women, United States Department of Justice. *Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program*. Retrieved September 29, 2006, from http://www.usdoj.gov/ovw/safehaven_desc.htm.

From 2002 to date, the Supervised Visitation Program has funded more than one hundred grantee communities, with the central goal of helping the SV centers make their highest priority the safety of "*both* the children and the adult victim."[8]

The Supervised Visitation Program has created a series of guiding principles, developed in consultation with a National Steering Committee comprising recognized leaders in the field, SVP grantees, and technical assistance providers. The guiding principles include, among others, the above-mentioned equal regard for the safety of children and adult victims; valuing multiculturalism and diversity; and respectful and fair interaction with everyone using the center.

"…responses to battering behavior need to be accomplished in a manner that does not dehumanize the batterer."

When working with abusive fathers, part of the latter principle is based on the idea that "responses to battering behavior need to be accomplished in a manner that does not dehumanize the batterer. If a batterer has a positive reaction to using the visitation center, safety for child(ren) and adult victims may be enhanced."[9]

Furthermore, the Steering Committee recommended practices that include working with visiting fathers to help them prepare for the visits and, when safe and appropriate, supporting conversations between the visiting parent and the children about what brought them to the center.

[8] See supra note 1, p. V.
[9] See supra note 1, p. 19.

What about neutrality?

According to the *Standards for Supervised Visitation Practice* developed by the Supervised Visitation Network, "neutrality as used in the context of supervised visitation means maintaining an unbiased, objective, and balanced environment, and when providing the service, not taking a position between the parents in providing the service." The Standards add that "[b]eing neutral does not mean providers disregard behaviors such as abuse or violence of any kind."[10]

The expansion of safeguards to include adult victims and the deeper understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence require further examination of the concept of neutrality. The Safe Havens Supervised Visitation Program has established that grantees should treat all parties with "fairness and respect," with the recognition that the perpetrator is the only person responsible for the violence. SVP centers can create a neutral "environment" for parents to visit with their children, but they cannot remain neutral toward the actual violence, whether it is perpetrated against children or adult victims.

The Safe Havens Supervised Visitation Program Learning Communities

The FVPF received two grants from OVW to look at the possible application of the Fathering After Violence framework in the context of supervised visitation and to provide targeted technical assistance (TA) to four SVP visitation centers across the United States. The four sites chosen were Advocates for Family Peace in Grand Rapids, Minnesota; the City of Kent Supervised Visitation Center in Washington State; the San Mateo County Family Visitation Center in California; and the Walnut Avenue Women's Center in Santa Cruz, California. The YWCA Visitation Centers in Springfield and Northampton, Massachusetts, were originally part of the collaborative and contributed important lessons to this project.

The goal of the TA has been to enhance the safety of victims of DV and their children by developing strategies for working with non-custodial fathers who use the centers.

[10] Supervised Visitation Network (2006). Standards for Supervised Visitation Practice. Retrieved February 23, 2007, from http://www.svnetwork.net/Standards.html.

Many abusive fathers who use visitation centers have neither been involved with the criminal justice system nor attended a batterers intervention program (BIP). Therefore, visitation centers might be the only institutions available to begin a process of accountability for their behavior and offer them the possibility to renounce their abuse. By focusing on the fathers' abuse and its impact on their children, the centers can create opportunities to assess their violence and control, as well as their potential for change. Giving abusive fathers (and all men) more opportunities for change and healing is an essential component of ending violence against women and children.

In the last three years, in collaboration with our partners, we have been able to design, redesign, and test innovative implementation plans for working with fathers, including the use of universal messages, orientation sessions, nonviolence groups, and a multicultural mentoring project.

By focusing on the fathers' abuse and its impact on their children, the centers can create opportunities to assess their violence and control, as well as their potential for change.

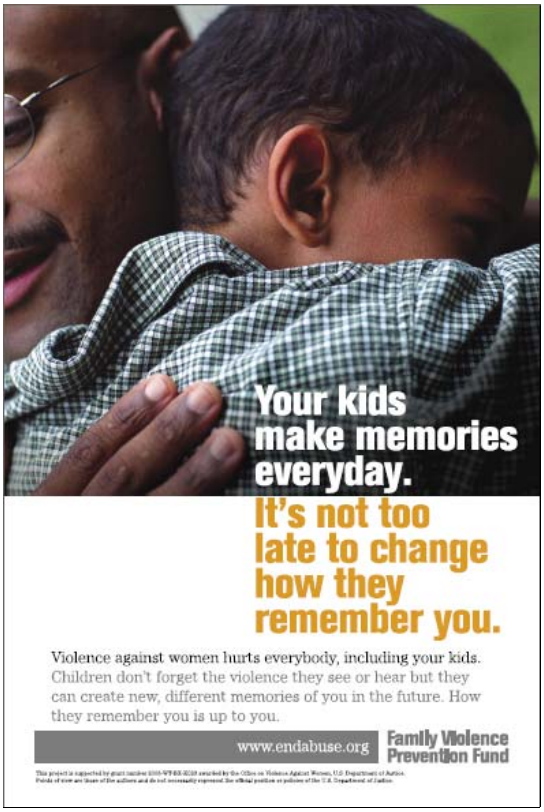
Some of the main lessons that have emerged include the importance of always keeping the safety of victims and accountability of perpetrators in the forefront; the significance of supporting mothers who use the centers; the need to understand organizational readiness to carry out this work; the consequence of using effective assessment tools for families; the relevance of having a solid domestic violence and cultural analysis; and the value of undertaking community mapping and creating true collaborations with other providers.

Guiding Principles of the Fathering After Violence Initiative

The working collaborative behind the Fathering After Violence Initiative developed the following guiding principles to inform its work:

- The safety of women and children is always our first priority;
- This initiative must be continually informed and guided by the experiences of battered women and their children;

- This initiative does not endorse or encourage automatic contact between the offending fathers and their children or parenting partners;
- In any domestic violence intervention, there must be critical awareness of the cultural context in which parenting happens;
- Violence against women and children is a tool of domination and control used primarily by men and rooted in sexism and male entitlement;
- Abuse is a deliberate choice and a learned behavior and therefore can be unlearned;
- Some men choose to change their abusive behavior and heal their relationships, while others continue to choose violence;
- Working with fathers is an essential piece of ending violence against women and children; and
- Fathers who have used violence need close observation to mitigate unintended harm.



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IV. ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONNECTION WITH FATHERS

The first key premise of this guide—that men who use violence can be held accountable for their behavior and simultaneously be encouraged to change it—comes, in part, from the lessons of more than thirty years of work with men in nonviolence programs (commonly known as batterers intervention programs or BIPs). Although the research on the outcomes of BIPs is mixed[11], most researchers agree that, at the very least, programs have a modest positive effect on men who batter. Some serious research conducted by Edward Gondolf suggests that, in fact, the long-term positive effects of BIPs can be very significant. For forty-eight months, he studied 840 men who completed BIPs and found that 52 percent did not re-assault their partners and an additional 26 percent re-assaulted their partners once over the four-year follow-up period.[12]

Most researchers will agree that BIPs are an important part of the system to keep women and children safe, provided that they don't work in isolation.

The discrepancies in outcome measures of BIPs in the more than seventy studies that have been conducted to date might have more to do with research methodologies than with actual program effectiveness.[13] However, most researchers will agree that BIPs are an important part of the system to keep women and children safe, provided that they don't work in isolation. Rather, they ought to be an active part of the coordinated community response. Furthermore, it is essential that courts monitor both the men who batter and the BIPs and that noncompliance with the program rules be followed by swift judicial sanctions.

Research on BIPs' effectiveness is made more complicated by the fact that the philosophies and designs of the programs can vary widely. On one hand, they can range from purely educational to almost totally process-oriented, and on the other, from models based on heavy confrontation to designs guided by compassion for the participants.[14]

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[11] Aldarondo, E. (2002). Evaluating the Efficacy of Interventions with Men Who Batter. In Aldarondo, E. and Mederos, F. (Eds.). *Programs for Men Who Batter*. Kingston, NJ: Civic Research Institute, pp. 3-1 to 3-20.

[12] Gondolf, E. W. (2002). *Batterers Intervention Systems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

[13] Gondolf, E. W. (2004). Evaluating batterer counseling programs. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 9, pp. 605–631.

[14] For more information on BIP models, see Aldarondo, E. and Mederos, F. (Eds.). (2002). *Programs for Men who Batter*. Kingston, NJ: Civic Research Institute.

Many BIP practitioners with vast experience working with men who batter have concluded that the best approach might be to strike a balance between confrontation and support for change, and between pedagogical and counseling methodologies. Although there are some mainstream BIPs that have pioneered this approach,[15] a balance between accountability for the abuse and assistance in renouncing it has been almost universally practiced by the few programs started and led by providers of color.[16] This suggests that a cultural analysis can help programs achieve an equilibrium that might be effective in engaging men who batter and enhancing the safety of their victims.

Likewise, it seems that many programs for men who batter outside the United States have adopted variations on this approach. In one instance, Einat Peled and Guy Perel from Israel have proposed the concept of "Duality in Practice." Their methodology "implies a condemnation of the harm the fathers cause to the children and the children's mother and strives to put a stop to the abuse, while also being attentive to the father's distress and providing them with support."[17]

Fernando Mederos and the Massachusetts Department of Social Services Domestic Violence Unit have proposed a similar approach when working with men who batter in the context of child protection services.[18] Based on this framework, which Mederos and his colleagues have named "Accountability and Connection," the FVPF has been exploring for some years the concept of using fatherhood as a leading approach to engage abusive men in renouncing their violence. The Fathering After Violence Initiative[19] has been looking at ways to help abusive fathers understand the effects of witnessing and experiencing domestic violence on

[15] A partial list of programs includes the Men's Resource Center for Change in Amherst, Mass., the Domestic Abuse Project in Minneapolis, Menergy in Philadelphia, Christians Addressing Family Abuse in Eugene, Oregon, and Men Overcoming Violence in San Francisco.
[16] A partial list of programs includes Caminar Latino in Atlanta, EVOLVE in Connecticut, CECEVIM in San Francisco, the National Compadres Network, the Institute for Family Service in New Jersey , and the Batterer Education Program for Incarcerated African-Americans.
[17] Peled, E. and Perel G. (2007). A Conceptual Framework for Intervening in the Parenting of Men Who Batter. In Edleson, J. and Williams O. (Eds.). *Fathering by Men Who Batter*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 90.
[18] Mederos, F. et al. (2004) *Accountability and Connection with Men Who Batter*. San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund.
[19] Areán, J. C. and Davis, L. (2007). Working with Fathers in Batterer Intervention Programs: Lessons from the Fathering After Violence Project. In Edleson, J. and Williams O. (Eds.). *Fathering by Men Who Batter*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 118–130.

children, and therefore create an impact that might persuade them to renounce their violence.

This idea has come in part from the experience of many BIP providers, who have observed that abusive fathers seem to be able to develop empathy toward their children more easily than toward their partners and that this pathway to empathy can help some men reflect upon and change abusive and violent conduct.

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V. MAKING THE CONNECTION TO SAFETY FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The second key premise of this document—that women and children can benefit from the approach in working with abusive men described above—is based on research, practice wisdom, and common sense.

Domestic violence practitioners and activists have pointed out that many women in abusive intimate partnerships want the abuse to end but not necessarily the relationships. In other words, they want their partners to change for the better. Even after the intimate relationship has ended, some mothers who have experienced violence still want their ex-partners to change and become better fathers for their children.

As part of the Fathering After Violence Initiative, the FVPF conducted a series of focus groups with mothers who had experienced violence. Though the sample was small (thirty-two participants), most of the women expressed that they wanted their children to have contact with their fathers, if it could be done in a safe way.[20] Recent research by Carolyn Tubbs and Oliver Williams points to similar conclusions. Their findings from focus groups with African-American mothers who had suffered abuse "indicated that shared parenting was perceived as a necessary obligation of parenting, even with heightened concerns about one's own and one's children's safety."[21]

Even after the intimate relationship has ended, some mothers who have experienced violence still want their ex-partners to change and become better fathers for their children.

It seems logical that if supervised visitation centers have the opportunity to take steps toward the goal of helping abusive men become better fathers and ex-partners, they might want to explore such a possibility. Any improvement in the fathers' positive interactions

[20] Atchison, G., Autry, A., Davis, L., & Mitchell-Clark, K. (2002). *Conversations with Women of Color Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence Regarding Working with Men to End Domestic Violence.* San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund.

[21] Tubbs, C. and Williams, O. (2007). Shared Parenting After Abuse: Battered Mothers' Perspectives on Parenting After Dissolution of a Relationship. In Edleson, J. and Williams O. (Eds.) *Fathering by Men Who Batter*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 40.

with the children is likely to be welcomed by most mothers. Furthermore, a comprehensive response in conjunction with batterers intervention might assist fathers in renouncing their violence and other forms of abuse and therefore enhance the safety and well-being of their children and ex-partners. In the study mentioned above by Gondolf, the majority of women partners of the men who completed the BIPs studied expressed that "they were better off or felt safer" than before the intervention.[22]

Supervised visitation centers that choose to remain completely silent about men's abusive behavior may be unintentionally colluding with the batterers and going along with their avoidance. By not challenging the visiting fathers' abusive behavior, they can send the implicit message that the problem is not serious enough and that the victim shares some of the responsibility for the abuse. Using the "accountability and connection" approach, visitation center staff can be truthful and direct with the fathers and at the same time show that they care about them. This might help defuse escalations and make it easier to share advice and model positive parenting.

[22] See supra note 11, p. 129.

VI. ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

Visitation centers that want to engage visiting fathers, even at a basic level, need to look at their readiness in various areas, including understanding domestic violence dynamics, characteristics and tactics of men who batter, effects of violence on children, and positive engagement of fathers. Centers need to pay attention to staff training and buy-in, physical space, and connection to local resources.

Organizational preparedness should not be taken lightly. In the words of one center director who implemented advanced strategies for the engagement of fathers, "don't do it if you don't think you are ready."

Understanding Fathers Who Batter

Before attempting to do any work with abusive fathers, every supervised visitation practitioner needs to have a solid understanding of the characteristics, tactics, and parenting styles of men who batter. An excellent source for understanding domestic violence dynamics within the family is the book *The Batterer as Parent* by Lundy Bancroft and Jay Silverman.

Bancroft and Silverman offer the following definition of a batterer:

A batterer is a person who exercises a pattern of coercive control in a partner relationship, punctuated by one or more acts of intimidating physical violence, sexual assault, or credible threat of physical violence. This pattern of control and intimidation may be predominantly psychological, economic, or sexual in nature or may rely primarily on the use of physical violence.[23]

Another great resource is the aforementioned *Accountability and Connection with Abusive Men* by Fernando Mederos and colleagues. The authors emphasize that determining whether someone is a batterer is a behavioral, and not a clinical decision. "It is not a diagnosis of a psychological disorder, but an assessment based on reviewing information provided by collateral sources, by the alleged abuser, by victims and/or children and by observing and

[23] Bancroft, L. and Silverman, J. (2002). *The Batterer as Parent.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, p. 3.

documenting abusive or coercive conduct that appears with social workers and other CPS personnel."[24]

Mederos goes on to list some key characteristics of abusers, including intimidation, psychological abuse, an inflated sense of self-entitlement, and physical abuse.[25] Bancroft and Silverman mention these additional characteristics: control, selfishness, superiority, possessiveness, confusion of love and abuse, externalization of responsibility, denial, minimization and victim blaming, and serial battering.[26]

In specifically describing abusive men's parenting styles, Bancroft and Silverman include the following traits: authoritarianism, under-involvement, neglect and irresponsibility, undermining of the mother's parenting and authority, self-centeredness, manipulativeness, and ability to perform under observation.[27]

On the one hand, understanding the unique characteristics of men who batter and their potential to continue harming their family members ought to be the baseline from which any strategies of engagement are developed.

On the other hand, it is important not to create rigid stereotypes from these characteristics. Stereotyping and over-generalizing could hinder the possibility of change for men who might be willing and ready to start modifying their behavior.

Staff Training

All the staff (including administrators) can benefit from specialized training in how to work with abusive men. Part of this training must include a process of "buy-in" from the staff at all levels, including personnel who don't work directly in the visitation center. The implementation of enhanced engagement strategies for abusive fathers can only be successful if a majority of the staff understand and embrace such an approach.

[24] See supra note 17, p. 9.
[25] Ibid., p. 7.
[26] See supra note 23, pp. 5–19.
[27] Ibid., pp. 29–37.

The City of Kent, Washington, one of the SVP demonstration sites and one of the FVPF Learning Communities, implemented a series of half-day trainings that included topics such as the impact of violence on children, tactics of fathers who use violence, positive engagement with men who batter, using culture to work with fathers, de-escalation of potentially dangerous situations, and motivational interviewing.

As they opened a brand-new center, staff members benefited from the trainings and regular debriefings and, according to the director, "were able to be very intentional about working to build relationships with the parents using the center. They found that not all men were interested in changing, but were able to offer support and compassion for those who were."[28]

Advanced strategies to engage abusive fathers logically require a higher degree of organizational preparedness, particularly concerning staff training and buy-in and community partnerships. As stated before, the dual approach of holding men accountable for their violence and supporting them in renouncing it has been practiced by a number of BIP providers across the country and abroad. However, it is not a simple approach to apply and it should not be required of all the staff at the center.

All the staff (including administrators) can benefit from specialized training in how to work with abusive men.

For a myriad of reasons, some visitation center staff members might feel that they don't want to establish further relationships with the visiting fathers. It might be because of their personal experience or belief system, or because of fear of being manipulated or appearing insincere in their interventions. For whatever reason, and especially after receiving basic training on working with abusive men, staff should be able to opt out of utilizing this approach.

Staff who show interest in further engaging visiting fathers should receive specialized training, preferably from a BIP provider that espouses the "accountability and connection" approach, or if this is not an option, from an out-of-town consultant with experience in this

[28] Private communication with Tracee Parker, director of the City of Kent Supervised Visitation Center.

methodology. Ideally, visitation center staff should participate in a comprehensive training for facilitating batterers groups, even if their goal is not to actually become facilitators.

Centers that are committed to further engaging men might consider evaluating new hires on their interest and potential to work with fathers as well as recruiting male monitors. Although women can clearly master the accountability and connection approach, there are advantages to having some male staff. In a focus group of visiting fathers conducted in Minnesota by the FVPF, a chief complaint of the participants was that there were no male staff at the center.

Hiring male staff has its own challenges, as in general, male practitioners tend to collude with men who batter more than women, both consciously and unconsciously. Special attention has to be given to the accountability (and support) of male staff, and it is imperative that the male monitors be open to constructive criticism and to being transparent in front of their female coworkers.

Physical Surroundings

Another area of basic preparedness involves paying attention to the physical appearance of the centers. Beyond the necessary issues involving security, it is important to consider whether the physical space is inviting for all members of the family, including fathers. It's important to ask: "Will men (as well as women and children) feel welcome in this space?"

It's important to ask: "Will men (as well as women and children) feel welcome in this space?"

A simple change that all centers can accomplish is to provide literature and posters that address men specifically. If reading materials are available, some should reflect the fathers' interests, such as sports and home improvement magazines. There could also be newsletters, brochures, books, and local resource information that address issues of positive fathering, violence prevention, and masculinity.[29] It goes without saying that publications that glorify negative stereotypes of masculinity should be avoided.

[29] Examples of recommended publications include *Voice Male,* the magazine of the Men's Resource Center for Change, and *CONNECT,* a mini-magazine produced by the FVPF.

VII. CULTURAL CONTEXT

Some of the most important basic practices and standards for doing effective cross-cultural work in visitation centers are clearly spelled out in the SVP Guiding Principles, under their second principle, "Valuing Multiculturalism and Diversity." Particularly important are the concepts that "[f]ailure to understand the social and cultural context of those who use visitation centers can lead to decisions that increase the risks to child(ren) and adult victims and reduce the usefulness of services;" and that "[i]ncorporating multiculturalism and diversity into center practice can enhance safety and lead to better outcomes for children, adult victims, and batterers."[30]

The idea of fully valuing cultural differences and considering culture an asset for healing families affected by violence constitutes a clear paradigm shift in the provision of services for such families. Historically, culture has been almost exclusively seen as an obstacle to designing effective interventions and/or as the source of negative role models and oppressive representations of masculinity. It is important to credit the hard and incessant work of activists of color for helping move the field to a more holistic approach.[31]

Practitioners… can simultaneously challenge the concept of culture as justification for violence and use culture as an agent for change.

It is also relevant to point out that organizations in the domestic violence arena have had an easier (though not easy) time applying this framework to their work with women and children. Agencies that work with men who batter (such as BIPs and visitation centers) are still struggling to understand the value of using culture to help men renounce their violence. In fact, because many men use their culture as an excuse for their abuse, there is a generalized fear that validating cultural considerations and acknowledging racism and oppression could provide abusive men with further justification for their violence.

[30] See supra note 1, pp. 9-10.

[31] A list of individuals doing this work is beyond the scope of this guide. However, we want to recognize the collective work of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, the National Latino Alliance to Eliminate Domestic Violence, the Women of Color Network, INCITE, Sacred Circle, and the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence.

However, practitioners who espouse a cultural approach for working with abusive men have shown that one can simultaneously challenge the concept of culture as justification for violence and use culture as an agent for change.

Here are some examples of cultural-based statements that SV staff can use to encourage self-reflection and change in fathers who batter:

- I know that not all men in your culture believe that it's acceptable to use violence in the family.
- Do you know any men from your culture who do not use violence in their families?
- Why do you think some men in your culture choose not to use violence in their families?
- Every culture has men who choose to use violence and men who refuse to do it, including my own culture (give concrete examples).
- Do you want your children to believe that it is acceptable to use violence in your culture? How will this affect them?

The Guiding Principles spell out basic practices for making supervised visitation centers more "culturally competent," but clearly, much more can be done. Some of the important basic practices recommended by the Steering Committee include allowing extended families to participate in visits, facilitating families in using their primary language, providing interpretation services and forms and literature in different languages, and allowing clients to bring their traditional food, music, and religious traditions into the centers.

The Committee goes on to recommend that centers hire multilingual, culturally diverse staff, promote ongoing internal discussions about diversity, and provide "culturally relevant, up-to-date, practical training" to staff. These recommendations are essential for doing cross-cultural work, especially when they include an understanding of "the nature of power imbalances, social oppression, prejudice, and discrimination."[32]

It is important to point out that multicultural training and internal discussions often shy away from dealing with some hard issues, especially naming racism, classism, heterosexism,

[32] See supra note 1, p. 11.

and other forms of oppression when they happen at the center and in the community. Instead, training and conversations on culture tend to gravitate toward cultural differences and misunderstandings.[33] It is essential that staff at visitation centers (and other agencies) find ways to move beyond these superficial approaches and delve into the more difficult issues, but not without skillful facilitation.[34]

Likewise, it is not uncommon for domestic violence agencies to try to fulfill their responsibility for having diverse, multilingual staff by hiring individuals from different cultures and then not adequately supporting them in navigating systems and organizations governed by dominant-culture norms. It is often very difficult for these individuals to find their voices and their power within their agencies, especially when the management positions are almost exclusively filled by people from the dominant culture.

Staff who come from different cultures should not carry the full burden of adapting to the dominant culture of the agency. Organizations also have the responsibility of creating a flexible working environment and providing training to all the staff in cross-cultural issues. Ultimately, for an organization to achieve authentic cultural "competence," there has to be real power sharing, with diverse staff represented at every level, including in the governance of the agency.

It is strongly contraindicated that supervised visitation centers (or any other organization) adopt advanced strategies for working with fathers cross-culturally if they have not integrated a cultural framework and received basic training in cultural competency. Without the proper internal work and self-reflection, working with men, women, and children across cultures is likely to be ineffective, if not counterproductive and possibly unsafe.

When the foundational work has been achieved and an organization is moving toward providing truly culturally relevant services, culture can become an important tool in the

[33] For a critique of this approach, see Areán, J. C. *Beyond Cultural Competence*. Available at http://toolkit.endabuse.org/Resources/Beyond/view?searchterm=competence.
[34] For a roadmap on how to approach this work, see *Cross-Cultural Solidarity*. Available at http://toolkit.endabuse.org/BuildPartnerships/Cross-Cultural/.

engagement of fathers. As it has been eloquently articulated by ALIANZA, the National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence, *"la cultura cura,"* or culture heals.

Ultimately, for an organization to achieve authentic cultural "competence," there has to be real power sharing.

Proponents of this approach when working with men who batter have emphasized that it is particularly important that interventions be based on values from within, rather than without, the given culture. If men of color are court-mandated to use centers run generally by white women, it will be easy for them to dismiss any intervention (and challenge) as one more imposition from an oppressive dominant culture. If, on the other hand, a center reflects the diversity of the communities it serves throughout its structure and philosophy, and the staff are skillful at using culture as a tool of engagement, the chances of creating a meaningful connection and enforcing effective accountability will significantly increase.

FAV Poster, created in collaboration with Mending the Sacred Hoop

Culture and DV 101

Here are some key concepts to understand when working cross-culturally in domestic violence, as presented by Fernando Mederos in *Accountability and Connection with Men Who Batter:*[35]

- Domestic violence occurs in heterosexual, gay, and lesbian intimate relationships, among all ethnic and racial groups, and at all socioeconomic and educational levels.

- Poverty is associated with higher reported levels of violence for all racial and ethnic groups.

- The association between poverty and higher reported levels of intimate partner violence suggests that there is a positive connection between employment, vocational stability, and the capacity to resist engaging in or escalating violent behavior in a relationship.

- Race and ethnicity are not associated with higher reported levels of domestic violence, but certain racial and ethnic groups are disproportionately impacted by higher levels of economic disadvantage and adverse life circumstances. These factors can act as an additional stressor for men and can complicate the change process for them.

- In each culture, there are values, traditions, and practices that facilitate abusive and coercive relationships, and there are also values, traditions, and practices that support and promote functional and respectful relationships. It is important for SV staff to become knowledgeable about these aspects of different cultures and be able to use protective resources of diverse cultures in their interventions with men and with families in general.

- With respect to physically abusive men of color, it is important for SV staff to take care to separate the men's culturally based explanations or justifications for violent conduct from assessments of dangerousness. Culturally based explanations or excuses for violent behavior should not be used as primary indicators of dangerousness or of capacity to change, since cultural origin is not a predictor of capacity for violence. Racial and cultural differences in how men and women experience, explain, or justify domestic violence challenge social workers to become aware of their own culturally based assumptions about domestic violence and to avoid applying these assumptions in practice with diverse populations.

[35] For an extended discussion of these concepts, see Mederos, F. et al. (2004) *Accountability and Connection with Men Who Batter*. San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund. www.endabuse.org

VIII. ASSESSMENT

Deepening the work with fathers who batter requires good assessment at many different levels. Assessments have to be multifaceted and ongoing to capture the complexities of a person's life and needs. Some aspects of assessment can be based on formal instruments, but others need to be less formal, based on observation and common sense.

Assessments have to be multifaceted and ongoing to capture the complexities of a person's life and needs.

Assessment at the onset of visitation will look different from evaluations during later periods. Some of the key considerations for initial assessments must include determining the appropriateness of a referral, the level of intervention, and the level of risk.

Assessing Risk

There are two types of risk that should be considered: risks of traumatization and intimidation of children and partners that stem from the abuser's coercive control of his family, and safety risks that stem from the abuser's violent behaviors. Coercive control is a pattern of psychological abuse, intimidation, and some form of entitlement (exaggerated and/or intrusive sense of what one deserves) that men who batter use to establish power over their families. Understanding these behaviors is important because they can have a traumatic and intimidating impact on the custodial spouse and the children, and because these behaviors often continue after separation and during visitation. If visitation personnel understand the preexisting pattern of coercive control, they can stop or limit new behaviors during visitation and mitigate their impact. It is also important to understand these behaviors because visiting parents may utilize different forms of coercive control with visitation center staff. In visitation settings, these behaviors can take the form of threatening, intimidating, or disrespectful behavior with children and/or visitation center staff, attempts to unilaterally control visitation schedules, constant anger coupled with the expectation that people will work hard to placate and accommodate the visiting parent, attempts to control the mother through messages given to the child, and so on.

Some of the assessment risk issues are:

- What is the level of the abuser's pattern of coercive control?
- What is the past level and history of violence and injury?
- Is he willing to stop such behaviors once they are pointed out?
- Alternatively, is he willing to get help (e.g. attend a batterers intervention program) to change his behavior?
- Has there been direct abuse to the children?
- What is the impact of his behavior on the child(ren)? On his partner? On staff?
- If the behavior continues, should visitation be terminated or limited? Should the matter be referred back to the court?

For a comprehensive article discussing some of these issues, see "Assessing Risk to Children from Batterers" by Lundy Bancroft and Jay Silverman.[36]

Assessing Dangerousness and Lethality[37]

Assessing risk with respect to dangerousness is complex. Some key questions include:

- Is the abuser moderately violent and more likely to change or moderate his behavior?
- Is he an ongoing assaulter?
- Is he potentially lethal?

Moderately violent men have low levels of coercive control and have less frequent violent behaviors that do not cause physical injury. Ongoing assaulters are abusers whose violent behavior and patterns of severe coercive control may continue despite treatment and other interventions. Their violence may not be highly injurious, but their refusal to stop magnifies the fear and traumatic impact of their behavior and suggests that continuing precautions are critical. Ongoing assaulters usually have a history of prior assaults marked by arrest or police intervention; they may have attended treatment previously with little impact; assaults may be accompanied by substance abuse (particularly binge drinking); and they may have a history of recent unemployment. Though some potentially lethal abusers have *never* been violent

[36] Bancroft, L. and Silverman, J. (2002). Assessing Risk to Children from Batterers. Retrieved February 23, 2007, from http://www.vawnet.org/DomesticViolence/ServicesAndProgramDev/ServiceProvAndProg/RiskToChildren.pdf.
[37] For a validated danger assessment tool by Jacqueline Campbell, go to www.dangerassessment.org.

prior to a lethal assault, most have a pattern of recently escalating and injurious violence (in addition to a past history of violence) and a pattern of stalking or following/monitoring a spouse along with threats or abusive behaviors. They have usually made threats to harm the partner and the children; have access to weapons such as guns; and may be escalated by "triggers" such as the partner's filing for divorce, filing for custody of children, getting a job or better education, dating another man, or showing any sign of becoming more autonomous. Potentially lethal men may also have become unemployed or unstable recently and may have ongoing problems with substance abuse or recently worsening problems with substance abuse.

Dangerousness, in many instances, is not static.

It is also important to consider visitation-specific risks: Has the abuser threatened to abduct child(ren)? Has he threatened to hurt children? Specific risks like these must be addressed carefully in conversations with the visiting parent and taken into account in decisions about visitation supervision.

It should be apparent that there is some overlap between all the categories of assaulters. Whether the abuser appears moderately violent or not, it is critical to be aware that trigger events may escalate violent behavior suddenly. Dangerousness/risk assessment is helpful and essential, but not always definitive or certain. Dangerousness, in many instances, is not static. For that reason, it is important to consider this type of assessment an ongoing task. As people work with an abuser and his partner in visitation over a period of time, more information may become available and the visitation center's staff's perception of risk may change.

Most men who are moderately violent and many ongoing assaulters may be appropriate for visitation with appropriate supervision, adequate safety planning for partners, and careful attention to substance abuse issues. Most potentially lethal men will not be appropriate since they are too volatile and the risk for custodial parents and children is too severe. The appropriate action with potentially lethal men may be to focus on safety planning for the spouse and to encourage the man to attend a batterers intervention program before engaging in visitation.

Once the basic topics of assessment have been covered, programs will benefit from adding other evaluation topics such as parental capacity, motivation, and life background issues.

Assessing Parental Capacity

This evaluation has to do with the basic building blocks of parenting. The underlying issues are empathy with a child, capacity to connect, tolerance for opposition or non-responsiveness, and capacity to set limits and discipline appropriately.

The following questions can guide the parental capacity assessment:

- Can the visiting parent play with the child and do age-appropriate activities?
- Can he tolerate the child's different moods, including fear, lack of interest, and refusal to agree with suggestions?
- Does he engage genuinely with the child?
- Can he shift activities with a child as s/he becomes bored or wants to do something else?
- Is he somewhat sensitive to the child's needs and moods?
- Is there some capacity to follow the child's pace?
- Does he show interest in the child's world?
- Can he set limits and discipline appropriately?
- Does he confuse fear and respect?

Assessing Motivation

A specific area that should be addressed in an advanced visitation assessment is the man's experience of being fathered, either by a father, stepfather, mother's boyfriend, uncle, older brother, or other paternal figure. A positive vision of fatherhood may provide a gateway for setting aside anger at a partner or at the courts and focusing on children (who are considered innocent and blameless by most men). For this reason it is very important to explore these issues and help the man connect with and/or put together a positive, functional, nurturing, and non-coercive model of fatherhood.

Questions to consider when assessing a man's motivation:

- What was his experience of being "fathered," either by a father or by a father figure? What messages did he get about himself and about being a father?
- Does he have a positive vision or ideal of fatherhood?
- Is this a motivating factor for him?
- How would he like to be remembered by his child(ren)?
- Did he get exposed to good fatherhood skills?
- Does he have some good models of fatherhood from his culture?

This exploration calls for identifying, encouraging, and building upon strength and experience; it establishes the basis for positive change. It is also an opportunity to bring to the surface fatherhood ideals and models that are coercive, neglectful, or deeply authoritarian. If no sense of a positive vision of fatherhood can be elicited and attempts to help the man develop such a vision are unsuccessful, this may be the basis for concern with respect to the motivation for fatherhood.

Considering Life Background

Life background has to do with issues that have a strong impact on a person's life and parenting capacity. They do not "cause" violence, but they can act as obstacles for change or they can destabilize the change process. It is important to address them, that is, to identify different issues that may be a factor for the man and to have a referral process that directs the man to helping and supportive resources.

Life background issues are very wide-ranging, as the following questions illustrate:

- Is there trauma associated with witnessing abuse or violence or with being the victim of violence in childhood or later?
- Is there a history of oppression related to race, class, ethnicity, or other factors?
- Are there issues or concerns related to poverty or risk of poverty, such as a history of unemployment, low educational achievement, the need to upgrade job skills, or the need to learn English?
- Are there mental health issues for which there has been inadequate treatment?
- Are there problems with immigration status or with the adjustment process for immigrants?

If any of these issues are present, they should be followed by rapid referrals. Again, providing support and referrals for these problems can improve the chances of long-term change.

Finally, as one looks back at the issues that have been addressed in this assessment framework, it is important to remember that it is a work in progress. It will change as practitioners gain more experience. Nevertheless, as this process moves forward and the framework becomes more comprehensive, it will be important to avoid assessment models with rigid benchmarks. Assessment should be an ongoing practice.

Men who batter can change. Situational factors (such as the partner's becoming more clearly autonomous in some fashion) may trigger threatening behaviors that increase concern about risk and safety. Conversely, positive participation in treatment coupled with consistent and positive behavior change may signal a lessening of risk. The factors that influence judgments are too complex and diverse to be encapsulated in a model with rigid benchmarks.

IX. COMMUNICATION WITH MOTHERS

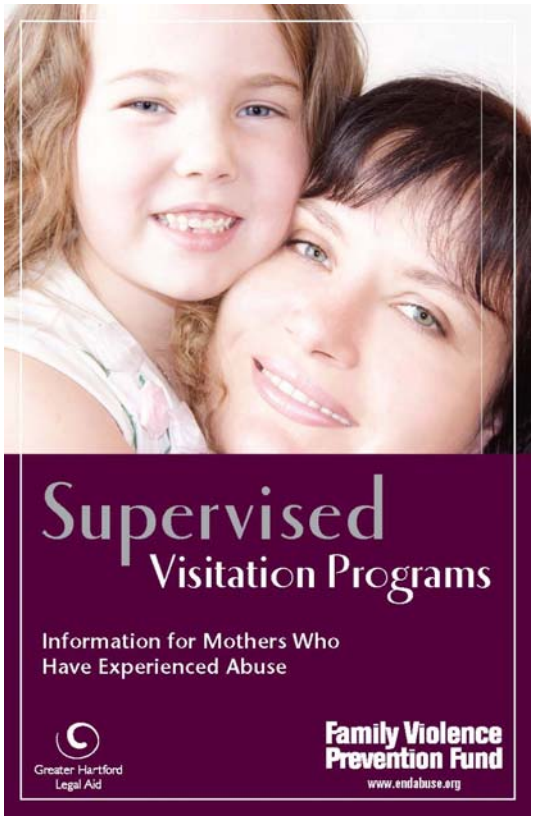
The SVP Guiding Principles do an excellent job of establishing basic practices and standards in creating meaningful communication with custodial mothers who use the center. These include informing adult victims and children of the safety features in the facilities, checking in with the victim to make sure the batterer is complying with center policies, encouraging the victim to check in with the center about the batterer's compliance with center policies and the visitation/exchange plan, performing a comprehensive intake and/or orientation, offering support during transitions, and understanding the needs of the mother to provide adequate referrals and safety planning.

It is important that centers also inform custodial mothers about their scope of work with visiting fathers. Mothers need to understand what to expect and not expect from the centers and the visits, and especially they need to be helped not to develop false hopes regarding the role of supervised visitation in helping the men become better fathers. To help visitation centers to inform mothers on this and other issues, the FVPF has prepared a guide for mothers who have experienced abuse and use the centers.[38]

If a center is planning to implement any kind of targeted intervention that goes beyond the basic practices and universal messages, it is imperative that they talk with the custodial mothers first. There might be safety concerns that have not been revealed until the mother is asked her opinion about working with the father to improve his parenting skills. It is important that the mothers understand the exact scope of the work planned and the fact that such work will not necessarily improve the skills and change the behaviors of the father. Talking to mothers about any work with their abusive ex-partners can also alleviate any unnecessary worries they may have. For example, some mothers have expressed concern that their abusive ex-partners have tried to "fool" visitation staff into believing they have changed their behavior when they have not. This could be particularly troublesome in the context of fathers' trying to get unsupervised visits or shared custody arrangements from the courts.

[38] Davies, J. (2007) S*upervised Visitation Programs. Information for Mothers Who Have Experienced Abuse.* San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund.

Research has shown that many mothers who have suffered violence want their ex-partners to be involved in their children's lives and become better fathers, *if* it can be done in a safe way.[39] Other mothers do not want their children to continue to have contact with their fathers, but have been mandated by the courts to allow visitation. In either case, the voices of custodial mothers and children should always guide the process and should be taken very seriously, especially with respect to safety.



Guide for mothers who use visitation programs

[39] See supra notes 19 and 20.

X. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Once again, the Guiding Principles provide an excellent starting point for establishing basic partnerships. Under the "Community Collaboration" principle, they establish the importance of having both "core partnership (state, tribal, or local unit of government, visitation centers, courts, and domestic violence or sexual assault programs) and a community collaborative (other community members and services)."[40]

Basic practices in working with fathers who batter require that local batterers intervention programs be part of the community collaborative. If there is an especially good relationship, they could even be invited to participate in the core partnership. Every member of the coalition would benefit from the others' expertise, cross-referrals, and cross-training.

As stated earlier, supervised visitation centers need to rely on strong partnerships to fully operationalize accountability for men who batter. Visitation centers are only one part of a larger puzzle designed to keep children and adult victims safe. Clearly, SVP sites that have developed strong partnerships with their local courts and other DV providers are able to better create a strong accountability framework from which advanced strategies for the engagement of abusive men can be developed.

Visitation centers should also consider the possibility of establishing a dialogue and a relationship with local responsible fathering programs. These programs are different from so-called "fathers' rights" groups and can offer expertise and materials on positive father engagement and often on culturally appropriate practice. Most of these programs could also clearly benefit from receiving training to advance their understanding of domestic violence dynamics.

Supervised visitation centers need to rely on strong partnerships to fully operationalize accountability for men who batter.

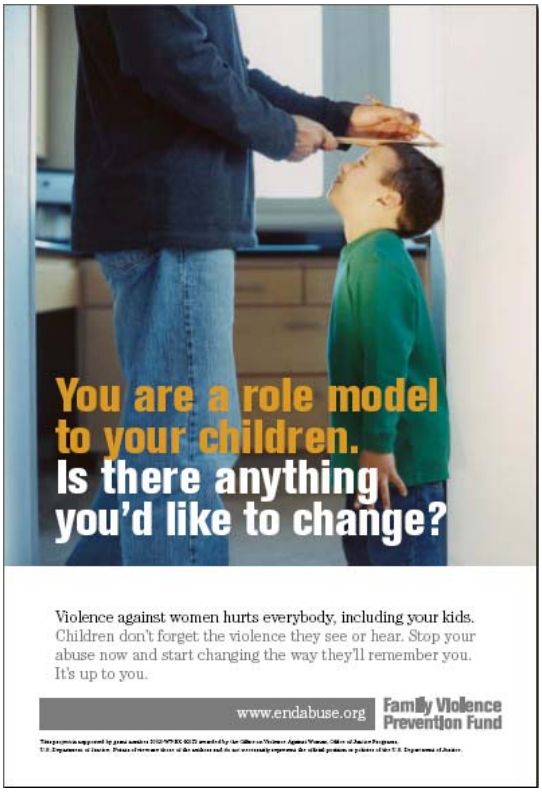
As the work with fathers becomes more involved, centers need to increase their efforts to create stronger partnerships with BIPs and fathering programs. BIPs can be an important source of expertise regarding work with men who batter, both for staff

[40] See supra note 1, p.23.

training and case consultation. In some cases, it might be possible and desirable that trained facilitators at a BIP become monitors at the visitation center.

Some centers might want to use referrals beyond batterers intervention, fathering, and substance abuse services. In that case, it might be helpful to do some research in advance to find out what resources are available in the community and how helpful they might be. Valuable nontraditional collaborations might include cultural-affinity organizations, antipoverty agencies, and family resource centers.

As an example, a BIP in New Mexico was able to develop a relationship with a local antipoverty agency that operated a food pantry and offered free clothes for indigent members of the community. The BIP solicited and accepted donations of clothes and food on behalf of the other agency, and the agency gladly accepted referrals of indigent clients from the BIP.



FAV Poster

XI. CONTINUUM OF PRACTICES IN ENGAGING ABUSIVE MEN

The SVP Steering Committee recommended as part of their "Respectful and Fair Interaction" guiding principle that visitation centers "offer various levels and types of monitoring and select a level in consultation with the victim parent that meets the safety needs of the parent and children, yet is the least intrusive as possible." They went on to say that "[c]enters should periodically re-assess the safety needs of child9ren) and adult victims and transition families through various levels or types of monitoring as needed..."[41]

Under the same principle, it was recommended that monitors get training "to lessen the impact of their presence during the visit by engaging with the visiting parent and children only when necessary to redirect the visiting parent's conversation, when asked to do so by the parent or children, or to provide supportive assistance to the parent and/or children."[42]

Within the framework of this guide, there is also a continuum of possible interventions with non-custodial fathers, mainly outside the visiting times. As with the levels of monitoring, these interventions should be chosen in careful consultation with the custodial parent and always putting the safety and well-being of the children and adult victims in the forefront.

Basic Practices for Working with Abusive Fathers

Basic practices in working with fathers who batter are those that every Supervised Visitation Program grantee can do and should consider doing. Some of them are outlined in the SVP Guiding Principles, especially under the "Respectful and Fair Interaction" principle already discussed in this document. For instance, the Guiding Principles state that "[f]air and respectful treatment of all individuals, while not ignoring the circumstances that bring families to the center, promotes the overall goal of the center—ensuring the safety of child(ren) and adult victims of domestic violence and holding batterers accountable for their actions.."[43] In fact, this also holds true when visiting fathers are offered the opportunity to look at their abusive behavior and encouraged to change it.

[41] Ibid, p.20.
[42] Ibid, p.20.
[43] Ibid, p.19.

Other important basic practices described in the Guiding Principles include providing access to meaningful referrals, performing comprehensive intake/orientation, offering support during transitions, discussing interactions, and preparing the visiting parent.

Respectful Limit-Setting

It is important to point out that positive engagement of abusive fathers does not mean that limits, boundaries, policies, and procedures are ignored. In fact, many years of practice with men who are abusive have clearly established that they need very clear limits and rules, and in general, visitation centers do a good job of developing and implementing such regulations. Many abusive men also respond better to limit-setting when they feel that the rule enforcer respects them, cares about them, and genuinely wants to assist them.

Fernando Mederos has written about the rules of respectful limit-setting when working with abusive men:

- Clearly point out specific behavior or specific rule that is being broken
- Define unintended impact
- Ask for it to change
- Describe what the different, appropriate behavior should be
- Reaffirm interest and connection

Avoid the following situations:

- Getting into arguments, debates, and power struggles
- Pressing too hard; hostile confrontation
- Interpreting all anger as intimidation and threatening behavior; getting overly reactive to an abusive man's anger

Initial Contacts with Abusive Fathers

The intake and/or orientation with the visiting father is an important opportunity to begin establishing a relationship of respect, clear boundaries, and, if appropriate, connection with the client. It is desirable to give fathers the chance to tell their stories. Visitation center staff can practice listening without agreeing with or validating fathers' point of view.

In reviewing the intake forms of some of the partner centers in this project, it became clear that they were missing the opportunity to use the intake as the first chance to use fathering as an engagement tool. Most of the questions connected with parenting (if any) seemed to have negative overtones.

The framework of engagement in this publication proposes that centers include in their intakes with fathers exploratory and open-ended questions that would invite them to think about their legacy to their children and the effects of their violence on them.

Examples of questions that can be used during intake:

- What kind of relationship do you currently have with your children?
- What kind of relationship do you want to have?
- What are you worried about?
- What do you think your children are worried about?
- How do you think violence at home affects your children?
- Complete the following sentences:
- I am a good father because…
- I could be a better father by…
- This is what I want my children to remember about me…
- This is what I don't want them to remember about me…

Engagement Around the Visits

Offering fathers support during transitions, preparing them for the visits, and discussing interactions afterward can be done in many different ways. One style that seems to be effective is to always begin with a positive statement, such as an affirmation of something they did right or the recognition that they want to do well by their children. Creating a relationship with the fathers that includes constructive statements, encouragement, and building on their strengths will make redirection and rule enforcement go much more smoothly.

For example, monitors could say: "I can see that you really care about your children. There are ways in which your parenting is really good, such as (give a concrete example). I also think there's room for improvement. For instance, (give a concrete example and alternative behavior)."

Creating a relationship with the fathers that includes constructive statements, encouragement, and building on their strengths will make redirection and rule enforcement go much more smoothly.

Another way to develop a relationship of trust with the fathers is to provide them with truly meaningful referrals that go beyond the immediate issue of dealing with the abuse, without going along with men's avoidance and denial. Clearly, the first and foremost referral that visitation centers can do for abusive fathers is batterers intervention and substance abuse services, but by not stopping there, staff can send the message to the fathers that they genuinely care about their well-being and that of their families.

Providing meaningful referrals requires that staff get to know the visiting fathers and their particular situations and needs. Some obvious referrals beyond BIPs and substance abuse might include mental health services, parenting classes, and fathering programs. But some clients might have more basic needs that could be interfering with their visits and fathering style, such as finding housing, food, clothing, or medical care.

In the YWCA of Northampton, Massachusetts, one of our learning communities, a monitor had noticed that a visiting father had had a toothache for several weeks, which was getting worse and interfering with his visits. The client had not taken care of the problem because he had limited resources. A simple phone call from the monitor located a low-cost dentist, and the referral noticeably improved the relationship with the father, who was thereafter more open to accept the monitor's redirection and advice. Because more trust was formed, harder issues could be discussed, and limits and redirection were more readily accepted by the father.

In addition to the basic practices discussed above, this document proposes to include the use of "universal messages" to engage men in renouncing their violence. These universal messages include any literature, materials, or visuals at the center that send a clear

nonviolence communication to visiting fathers. It is not unusual for visitation centers to have such materials targeting the adult victims of domestic violence, commonly literature developed by local battered women's organizations. But, partly because of scarcity, programs seldom display similar messages directed toward men.

To support the use of positive universal messages directed toward visiting fathers, the FVPF developed a series of posters and a short documentary that invite fathers to think about the impact of their behavior on their children and the legacy they want to leave for them.

Universal messages do not need to be passive and limited to posters or other literature. Staff members can regularly convey universal messages to all visiting fathers before, after, and during visits, as well as during the intake and/or orientation. Here are some examples of statements they can make:

- Fathers are important for children. You are really important to your children.
- Your behavior has a lifelong impact on your children. It's never too late to turn it around.
- You have the power to change things for them.
- How do you want your children to remember you?
- They will carry memories of you and your actions forever.
- You are an example for your children in everything you do.
- What kind of emotional legacy do you want to leave for them?
- It's never too late to change your behavior.
- When you hurt your partner, you also hurt your children.
- If you disrespect your children's mother or undermine her parenting, you are hurting your children's capacity to respect adults in general and women in particular.

Deepening Practice with Fathers Who Use Violence

Supervised visitation centers staff have noticed that a substantial number of visiting fathers who use visitation centers are interested in their children's well-being.[44] Furthermore, some fathers who have used violence seem to be able to develop empathy toward their children more readily than toward their partners or ex-partners. Even though there is no empirical evidence to support this claim, there is a wealth of practice wisdom from BIPs and visitation providers that points in this direction. Some BIPs have used fathering as a successful strategy to recruit participants into their groups without a court or CPS mandate. Some have even developed fathering programs or groups to attain this goal.[45]

Fathers who have used violence seem to be able to develop empathy toward their children more readily than toward their partners or ex-partners.

Other BIPs have reported integrating exercises on fathering in their core curriculum to motivate participants to change their behavior by helping them understand the impact they have had on their children.[46]

Supervised visitation centers have a unique opportunity to use positive fathering as a strategy to engage men and invite them to look at their behavior.

Supervised visitation centers have a unique opportunity to use positive fathering as a strategy to engage men and invite them to look at their behavior. This could be done in a formal, systematic way or through more informal interactions. Formal strategies to engage men can include expanded conversations during intake and subsequent check-in meetings, as well as an individual or group orientation for visiting parents. Informal interventions would include any interaction that the center staff might have with visiting fathers, providing the opportunity to further develop a relationship of "accountability and connection."

As stated earlier, the intake with the visiting father is the first opportunity that providers have to start developing a meaningful connection with their clients. The previous section

[44] Private communication with Barbara Loh, director of the YWCA Supervised Visitation Centers in Western Massachusetts.
[45] Examples include CORIAC in Mexico City, EVOLVE in Connecticut, and EMERGE in Boston.
[46] See supra note 2.

included suggestions on questions that can invite fathers to think about their role and impact on their families. An example of further engagement would be to have an open conversation with the client praising his desire to be a good father without colluding with his abuse, communicating that the visitation center staff is ready to help him become a better father and reminding him that maintaining constructive and consistent interactions with his children and showing respect to their mother, regardless of his feelings about her, are likely to have a positive effect in the long run.

A constructive conversation about fathering during the intake can also serve as a means to establish a set of values about parenting generated by the client and not the center staff. Later on, when monitors need to intervene during a visit or debrief about it with the visiting father, they can use this baseline of parenting values to hold the man accountable and to support him to change within his own belief system. This is a particularly important strategy when working cross-culturally, as described below.

The intake with the visiting father is the first opportunity that providers have to start developing a meaningful connection with their clients.

As an example, if during the intake (or later) a man states that he thinks he is a good father because he cares about his children or that he could become a better father by giving more intentional attention to the children, the monitor can use those statements as the basis to redirect the man or offer parenting suggestions. If the father breaks a center rule (like asking the children about his ex-partner), the monitor can redirect him by framing the issue as one that adversely affects the children. After the visit, the monitor can say: "Remember how you told me that you really care about the well-being of your children? Well, asking them about their mother is not only against the rules, but it puts the children in a difficult position, which is not good for them. I know you want to do better and I'm here to help you do that."

Some centers use the waiting time after the visit to check with visiting parents about how it went. This is a great opportunity for the monitor to make connections between the man's beliefs about fathering and his actual performance at the visit. As stated before, suggestions for improvement are often more effective when preceded by some kind of acknowledgment or praise for a father's positive behaviors or beliefs. For example, the monitor can say, "I

have noticed how you are trying to be the best father you can be during the visits and clearly your child is benefiting from that. May I make a suggestion?"

Working with fathers using their own parenting values as a basis for engagement is particularly important when working cross-culturally. Parenting practices can be heavily informed by cultural values, and members of diverse communities often feel very strongly about such values and practices. Since cultures are neither static nor monolithic, it is important to allow fathers to self-define their own positive parenting values rather than assuming them from the staff's knowledge, or even from the perspective of members of the same culture.

Working with fathers using their own parenting values as a basis for engagement is particularly important when working cross-culturally.

For example, if a father has identified *respect* as an important value in their family, the monitor can use this value to work with the father during and around visits. The monitor can ask open-ended questions, such as:

- How do you think your children learn about respect?
- Do you think they learn from you?
- Do you think your modeling respect toward their mother is important for them to learn?
- Do you think your being respectful with your children is important for them to learn?
- Do you think respect should be based on fear or love?

Another example of a formal enhanced intervention would be requiring parents who use the center to attend an orientation session, either individually or, preferably, as a group. The orientation could be two or three hours long, and in addition to all the logistical and regulatory information concerning the center, it could incorporate some education segments about the effects of violence on children. Some of the materials developed by FVPF could be used here, such as the Fathering After Violence "Empathy Exercise"[47] originally designed for use in BIPs and/or the film *Something My Father Would Do,* a short documentary produced by the FVPF.

[47] See supra note 2.

A major challenge of conducting group orientation sessions is that in most centers, some (if not many) of the visiting parents are mothers. In that case, it would be desirable to segregate the orientations by gender, and appropriate materials would need to be developed for the visiting mothers, some of whom might be in fact victims, rather than perpetrators, of domestic violence. Likewise, for the sake of fairness and equal treatment, orientation sessions would need to be implemented for custodial parents, again preferably divided by gender and with gender- and custodial status–specific content.

Implementing the duality of "accountability and connection" is easier said than done.

Implementing the duality of "accountability and connection" is easier said than done. The staff using this approach need to be very well trained and must constantly walk a fine line to avoid, on one hand, an open confrontation with the father that might backfire, and on the other, collusion with his abuse, which could compromise the safety of the children, the ex-partner, and the staff.

Exploring New Directions of Engagement

This section delves deeper into some of the premises and ideas presented in this guide by introducing case studies developed and implemented by three of our FAV partners. It describes strategies of engagement with visiting fathers that require a level of expertise, involvement, and commitment that most centers have not yet achieved. Furthermore, these case studies describe ongoing work, and it is important not to draw definitive conclusions or form generalizations based on this preliminary information. In particular, this section explores the use of educational groups for visiting fathers and the creation of a multicultural mentoring initiative using men from the community.

<u>The Minnesota Experience</u>

As part of the FAV initiative, Advocates for Family Peace (AFP) decided to begin offering educational groups to fathers who use their visitation center. The purpose of the groups was to help them improve their parenting skills, develop empathy for their children, and think about the legacy they wanted to leave for them as fathers.

From the beginning, AFP decided that if fathers were to participate in their new fathering groups, they needed to complete first their Intervention Group for Men.

AFP is located in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, a community small enough that the agency is able to offer a "one-stop" center for all domestic violence services, including a hotline; advocacy, emergency and transitional housing for battered women; batterers intervention; and supervised visitation and safe exchanges, among others. AFP also has a strong relationship with the three local judges and other court personnel, as well as with many other community organizations.

These circumstances allowed this agency to implement a comprehensive program for fathers who were ordered to use the visitation center. From the beginning, AFP decided that if fathers were to participate in their new fathering groups, they needed to complete first their Intervention Group for Men (a BIP). Judges who wanted to mandate men to the fathers' group understood and agreed that the offenders had to go through a process that included a comprehensive intake, twenty sessions of batterers intervention, one individual aftercare session, a second intake for the fathers' group, eight sessions on parenting, and an exit interview.

As a result of this progression, the facilitators observed that most men who participated in the fathers' group had overcome the initial denial of their abusive behavior and were able to discuss the deepest fears and desires in their lives. Some were able to talk about their painful childhoods for the first time. This created an emotional opening that the facilitators could use sometimes to deepen their relationships with the men and to help them make the connection between the abuse they suffered in their own childhoods and the violence they were inflicting on their own families.

Furthermore, the group leaders were able to corroborate the FAV thesis that abusive men can be more empathetic as fathers than as intimate partners or ex-partners. In one case, one of the group participants who had been violent both with his partner and with his son was able to feel great remorse and take some important reparative steps with his child, while remaining minimally empathetic toward his partner.

AFP had already integrated some of the Fathering After Violence exercises in their BIP curriculum, as part of their comprehensive approach. The fathers' group built upon these exercises, covering topics such as defining healthy fatherhood, domestic violence and fatherhood, and expanding on the reparative process.

To implement this project, AFP made the commitment to hire a man, who helped develop the curriculum for the fathers' group and co-facilitated it with an experienced female staff member. The new hire had had a long-standing relationship with AFP, was strongly committed to advocacy of women and children, and was a very well regarded member of the community, having done violence prevention work with youth. Although he was one of only two men in the agency, he was able to be integrated without any problems.

The California Experience

A multicultural mentoring program was piloted by our project partners in California, the San Mateo County Family Visitation Center and the Walnut Avenue Women's Center (WAWC) in Santa Cruz. Both organizations serve a significant percentage of Latino families, and the original idea behind the project was to train Latino men from the community to serve as informal mentors for the visiting fathers who use the center. The mentors would sit in the visiting parents' waiting room before and after the visit and maybe even observe some of the visits. The goal was to offer the visiting fathers role models from their own community, with whom they could develop relationships of trust and responsibility.

The implementation of this project was more complicated than originally anticipated. The initial idea was to invite men from the community as volunteers, but this proved impractical because it became clear that the mentors would need extensive training and supervision. Eventually, both agencies decided to hire men (one each) as part-time employees, who would also serve as monitors.

The goal was to offer the visiting fathers role models from their own community, with whom they could develop relationships of trust and responsibility.

The next challenge was to figure out how to find the right men from the local Latino communities, given that both sites were

agencies managed and governed largely by European-American women. Previous experience has shown that it is not very effective to seek qualified personnel from diverse cultures just by placing an ad in the paper (even in culture-specific papers) or circulating a notice among the usual networks of colleagues. Instead, agencies have to make an effort to directly recruit workers by developing connections with cultural community organizations or informal community networks.

In the case of this project, the sites hired Ricardo Carrillo, a consultant with extensive experience in issues of domestic violence and culture and strong connections with the Latino communities of Northern California. Through his longtime relationships with local groups and individuals, Carrillo was able to find men in both San Mateo and Santa Cruz who were interested in working as mentors and monitors at the centers. The sites also retained Carrillo as a trainer and advisor for the project.

Having found the men, the centers had to negotiate the obstacle of integrating Latino men from the community into professional agencies where most of the staff were European-American women. An obvious solution was to provide extensive training to the new hires on domestic violence. However, it was as important to develop legitimate buy-in for the project from staff members at every level of the organizations. To achieve this, the sites received technical assistance and training from consultants and the FVPF on cross-cultural work, working with Latino men who batter, utilizing the "accountability and connection" approach, and using fatherhood as a means to engage men.

Once both men had received the appropriate training, they started serving their dual function of monitors and mentors. The traditional tasks of the monitor, including making sure that the center rules are followed and observing the visits, were enhanced by the men's role of informal mentors.

As mentors, they were able to use the pre- and post-visit waiting times to develop supportive relationships with the visiting fathers without compromising the safety of the children and their mothers. This clearly required developing strong skills in the accountability and connection model. Although neither of the men had ever worked with

abusive men before, both of them were able to develop their own style of intervention that balanced supporting the fathers with challenging their negative behaviors.

Here is a good example of how positive engagement can enhance the center staff's safety: A visiting father arrived to a visit with a pocketknife, clearly breaking a major safety rule. He could be seen as a stereotypical scary man, large, gruff, and covered in tattoos. Instead of calling the police, the receptionist decided to ask the monitor/mentor to deal with the man directly. The monitor/mentor recognized the man from living in the community and was able to peacefully and skillfully ask him for the weapon and work with him in understanding why it was inappropriate to bring it to the center. Although this particular visit was cancelled, the father was much more amenable to receiving feedback from the monitor/mentor in subsequent visits after this incident.

The California sites eventually decided to run educational groups for visiting Latino fathers, with the mentors/monitors co-facilitating the groups. For this purpose, they worked again with Carrillo, who put together an eight-session curriculum for Latino fathers adapted from the *Padre Nobles* manual developed by Jerry Tello[48], complemented by the exercises from the FVPF's Fathering After Violence Initiative.

More involved interventions require a higher degree of preparation, especially in the context of cross-cultural work.

Unlike Advocates for Family Peace in Minnesota, the California sites did not have the infrastructure and court relationships to make the group mandatory for the fathers using the center, nor could they require that they attend a BIP prior to going to the fathers' group. Since attendance was voluntary, the centers had to rely on the relationships that the mentors had developed with certain fathers to exhort them to come to the group. The mentors engaged some of the visiting fathers by suggesting that the group would improve their fathering skills and, initially, they received a commitment from a number of the Latino men using the centers. The Santa Cruz mentor was able to recruit two fathers and the San Mateo mentor enlisted four.

[48] Jerry Tello is the director of the National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute.

In spite of low attendance in the groups, some important lessons were learned, including that some men are willing to attend fathering groups voluntarily and that these groups can provide an opportunity to invite them to think about the effects of their actions on their children. In fact, the groups became intensive mentoring situations for the participants and helped develop deeper relationships with the facilitators, which in turn were used during visits to enhance the accountability and responsibility of the fathers.

The implementation of these two projects underlines some of the key points that we have made previously in this document. More involved interventions require a higher degree of preparation, especially in the context of cross-cultural work. Advocates for Family Peace operates in a largely racially homogeneous area of Minnesota (except for an adjacent Native-American community) and did not encounter major problems in incorporating the new male staff member. In the California sites, cultural issues clearly created challenges, many of which were remedied with appropriate training and intervention.

SVP sites that might be considering more advanced projects to engage visiting fathers will need to pay attention to cultural issues (including race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation) and provide extensive proactive training to all staff, including administrators.

When hiring new staff to implement innovative projects, centers need to try to think in advance about what kinds of issues might arise, how to handle them, and how to support all the staff involved. As centers try to operationalize accountability with male staff, they need to realize that the agencies also need to be accountable to the communities they serve and be open to transparency and constructive criticism from members of those communities, including staff.

XII. CONCLUSION

Supervised visitation centers are in a unique position in the domestic violence field. They are the only service providers that consistently have access to the whole family. On the one hand, they play a key role in the coordinated community response by enhancing the safety of children and adult victims. On the other, they have the opportunity to work directly with the perpetrators, who might otherwise receive no services.

By using the "accountability and connection" approach, supervised visitation staff can both challenge the visiting fathers' abusive behavior and support their process of change, without compromising the safety of the children and adult victims. Furthermore, center staff can take advantage of the desire many men have to be good fathers and use it to encourage them to renounce their violence.

By using the "accountability and connection" approach, supervised visitation staff can both challenge the visiting fathers' abusive behavior and support their process of change, without compromising the safety of the children and adult victims.

This approach can improve the lives of women and children in various ways, but its implementation is complex and it requires ongoing organizational preparation, staff buy-in, and staff training in key areas, such as domestic violence dynamics, characteristics and tactics of men who batter, effects of violence on children, positive engagement of fathers, and culturally relevant services.

XIII. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
CURRICULA AND MATERIALS ON FATHERHOOD AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Crager, M. and Anderson, L. (1997). *Helping Children Who Witness Domestic Violence: A Guide for Parents*. Seattle (unpublished). For more information, contact the authors at megcrager@comcast.net or lily.anderson@metrokc.gov.

Crooks, C., Francis, K., Kelly, T., and Scott, K. (2006). *Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value Their Children*. Victoria, British Columbia, Canada: Trafford Publishing.

Donnelly, D., Mederos, F., Nyquist, D., Williams, O. J., and Wilson, S. G. (2000). *Connecticut's EVOLVE Program: A 26 & 52 week culturally competent, broad-based, skill-building, psycho-educational curriculum for male domestic violence offenders with female victims*. State of Connecticut Judicial Branch: Rocky Hill, Connecticut. For more information, contact Sarah Wilson at 860-721-9474 or Sarah.Wilson@jud.state.ct.us.

Fleck-Henderson, A. and Areán, J. C. (2004). *Breaking the Cycle: Fathering After Violence. Curriculum Guidelines and Tools for Batterer Intervention Programs*. San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund.

Mandel, D. (2003). *Being Connected: A Group for Fathers*. Middletown, Connecticut (unpublished). For more information, contact David Mandel at 860-347-8220 or www.endingviolence.com.

Mathews, D. J. (2003). *Restorative Parenting: A Curriculum for Parents in the Aftermath of Violence in the Home*. St. Paul, Minnesota (unpublished). For more information, contact David Mathews at the Domestic Abuse Project, 204 West Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55409. 612-874-7063 x 210 or dmathews@mndap.org.

All the Family Violence Prevention Fund materials cited in this document are available, free of charge, at: www.endabuse.org/store

APPENDIX B:
NATIONAL RESOURCES

SAFE HAVENS SVP TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS

Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF)
www.endabuse.org

Praxis International
www.praxisinternational.org

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
www.ncjfcj.org

Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community
www.dvinstitute.org

Duluth Family Visitation Center
www.duluth-model.org/dfvchistory

OTHER RESOURCES

Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vwr

Center for Family Policy and Practice
www.cffpp.org

National Latino Alliance to Eliminate Domestic Violence (ALIANZA)
www.dvalianza.org

Mending the Sacred Hoop Technical Assistance Project
www.msh-ta.org

National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute
www.nlffi.org

National Compadres Network
www.nationalcompadresnetwork.com

Men's Resources International
www.mensresourcesinternational.org

FATHERING AFTER VIOLENCE LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Advocates for Family Peace
www.stopdomesticabuse.org

City of Kent Supervised Visitation Center
www.ci.kent.wa.us/humanservices/safehavens.asp

San Mateo County Family Visitation Center
www.familyserviceagency.org/programs_services/childFamilyVisitationCenter

Walnut Avenue Women's Center
www.wawc.org

YWCA Visitation Centers in Western Massachusetts
www.ywworks.org/serve

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS MENTIONED IN THIS DOCUMENT

Caminar Latino (Atlanta)
www.caminarlatino.org

CECEVIM (Training Center to Eradicate Masculine Intra-Family Violence, San Francisco)
www.cecevim.org

Christians Addressing Family Abuse (Eugene, Oregon)
www.users.myexcel.com/yabgirl/index

Domestic Abuse Project (St. Paul, Minnesota)
www.mndap.org

EMERGE (Boston)
www.emergedv.com

Institute for Family Services (Somerset, New Jersey)
www.instituteforfamilyservices.com

Menergy (Philadelphia)
www.menergy.org

Men's Resource Center for Change (Amherst, Massachusetts)
www.mrcforchange.org