

ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONNECTION WITH ABUSIVE MEN

A NEW CHILD PROTECTION RESPONSE TO INCREASING FAMILY SAFETY

Celia, a Child Protective Services caseworker, is investigating a report of potential child neglect. A neighbor has reported that he saw Daniel, the four-year-old boy next door, cowering near the garden shed in his pajamas late one winter night. Celia interviews the boy's mother. She learns that there is domestic abuse in the home, and that Daniel's mother sent the boy outside to keep him safe during a violent fight. Celia is confronted with an all too common scenario for CPS workers. Her ultimate goal is to ensure the safety of the child. She knows she can safety plan with Daniel's mother and can offer resources to help her leave this dangerous environment. But is that all she can do? What can she do about the father, the man who is ultimately responsible for the abuse? What can Celia do to help him stop his violent behavior from happening again? How can he be held accountable for his actions? She knows she needs to talk with Daniel's father. Is he going to be hostile? Avoidant? Willing to talk? How can she approach him in the best way? What can she offer him?

INTRODUCTION

The overlap between domestic violence and child abuse is well documented: where one form of family violence exists, there is a likelihood the other does as well. In one review of 200 substantiated child abuse reports in Massachusetts, 48% of the cases could not be closed due to risk posed by domestic violence. Another survey of more than 6,000 American families found that 50% of men who frequently assaulted their wives also frequently abused their children. A third study, in Oregon, showed that domestic violence was present in 41% of families experiencing critical injuries or death due to child abuse and neglect.

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FAMILY VIOLENCE
PREVENTION FUND



Child protection workers have become more and more aware of the co-occurrence of these forms of family violence, and in recent years have begun to change their practice to reflect this reality by reaching out to the mother, offering her services, and working with her to find solutions to keep her children safe. However, our best efforts with victims of violence have fallen short. Too often, men remain invisible in discussions and interventions about how to handle these complex cases and subsequently, women have been held solely responsible for undoing the harm done to them and their children. Clearly, we cannot increase family safety without involving men in the process.

This document is an effort to remedy the excessive focus on mothers in cases involving domestic violence. It provides suggestions for connecting with and holding abusers accountable. This guidebook captures a decade of research and practice wisdom on strategies for intervening with and engaging men in the context of child protection. It is a resource for child protection workers, supervisors, managers and others working with families involved in the child protection system. It provides a comprehensive understanding of what domestic violence is and how it often manifests itself in cases involving child abuse and neglect.

The initial goal of this document was to provide workers with a framework for holding abusers responsible for the harm they cause their families, to teach them how to interview abusers, and to make suggestions for appropriate service planning. However, over time it became clear that the task was more extensive. It was necessary to address many areas of confusion and uncertainty in practice, such as the fact that:

- a) “battering” is a not a psychological diagnosis, but a behavioral profile that is usually evident in the case record;
- b) race, culture and class stereotypes can be an obstacle to good practice, but aspects of culture can be motivators of change for abusers;
- c) child protection workers need a dangerousness assessment framework that is suited to information sources that are readily accessible to the CPS system; and
- d) dangerousness assessment and safety planning should address risk for the mother and the CPS worker.

When child protection workers and others learn how to hold men who use violence accountable for their actions and how to direct them to appropriate resources – that is, how to provide both sanctions and support – they are much better equipped to find real, long-term solutions to complex problems – and they have a better opportunity to increase safety and improve the well-being of children, women, families and communities.

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For a copy of *Accountability and Connection with Abusive Men* contact the Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody at (800) 527-3223 or visit www.thegreenbook.info to view or download.