

# Healing and Supporting Fathers

Principles, Practices, and Resources for  
Fatherhood Programs to Help Address and  
Prevent Domestic Violence



# Healing and Supporting Fathers: Principles, Practices, and Resources for Fatherhood Programs to Help Address and Prevent Domestic Violence

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# Foreword

This report provides principles, practices, and helpful resources for fatherhood programs to help address and prevent domestic violence (DV) in their participants' relationships. The report's five primary sections include an overview with background information, three resources that can be used individually or as a series, and a detailed list of additional resources.

This report was created through the Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence when Engaging Dads (PAIVED) study. Findings from the PAIVED study were informed by Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programs funded through the Office of Family Assistance within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF). However, the recommendations and resources are applicable to and useful for all fatherhood programs across the country, regardless of federal funding. More information on the PAIVED study is included in the textbox on the following page.

The sections of this report include:

**Principles and Practices for Fatherhood Programs to Address and Prevent Domestic Violence ..... 2**

This overview provides background information on domestic violence, guiding principles for the field, a summary of promising practices already being used by fatherhood programs, and directions for programs to consider in the future.

**Ten Ways to Engage Fathers in Addressing and Preventing Domestic Violence ..... 10**

This resource provides suggested ways that fatherhood program staff can enhance program practices to engage fathers in addressing and preventing domestic violence.

**Teachable Moments ..... 12**

This resource provides four example scenarios that demonstrate and provide guidance on how fatherhood programs can address and prevent domestic violence.

**Six Ways Fatherhood Programs Can Successfully Partner with DV Agencies and BIPs ..... 15**

This resource provides recommendations on ways for fatherhood programs to connect and strengthen relationships with community partner organizations that address domestic violence and battering intervention.

**Additional Resources List ..... 16**

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# Principles and Practices for Fatherhood Programs to Address and Prevent Domestic Violence

## Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) is a widespread problem in the United States. Experiencing and/or witnessing violence in relationships can negatively affect the health of parents and their children.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Therefore, any program that works with families should play a part in preventing and addressing domestic violence. Fatherhood programs provide an opportunity to engage fathers in these efforts. This document includes:

- Background information to help fatherhood programs better understand DV
- Foundational principles fatherhood programs can adopt to address and prevent DV
- Descriptions of promising practices already being used by some fatherhood programs
- Recommended future directions for fatherhood programs, based on current challenges in the field

This document also provides three practical resources that can help fatherhood practitioners work more effectively with fathers who use or have used DV and/or are survivors of such violence. Also included is a list of additional resources that provide more information on these topics.

## The PAIVED Study and Methodology

This report was informed by the findings from the PAIVED study. The goal of the PAIVED study was to better understand the strategies that RF programs use to help prevent and address DV among participating fathers. The study included a literature review; a review of RF program documents (grantee applications and progress reports); a review of fatherhood, DV, and other relevant curricula; consultations with stakeholders and experts; and qualitative data collection and analysis.

Data collection included interviews with 16 staff at eight RF programs and 11 staff from nine partner organizations (typically domestic violence programs). The study team also observed seven program sessions at five of the programs; these sessions included RF programming with DV content. For more information on the PAIVED project, see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/preventing-and-addressing-intimate-violence-by-engaging-dads-paived>. For a comprehensive report on the methods and findings, see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/preventing-and-addressing-intimate-violence-when-engaging-dads-final-report>. More information on the Responsible Fatherhood program can be found here: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/healthy-marriage/responsible-fatherhood>.

## What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence (IPV), is defined as physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and/or psychological aggression by a current or former intimate partner.<sup>4</sup> DV can also include other forms of coercive control; these can include restricting freedom, emotional abuse, financial abuse, extreme jealousy and controlling behaviors, use of children against the other parent, intimidation and threats, and use of isolation.<sup>5</sup> Coercive control can also be perpetrated electronically through computers, mobile devices and social media sites.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, DV is defined more broadly and may

include child abuse and aggression between various family members; however, for the purpose of this document, DV is understood as abuse within intimate or romantic relationships.

## How common is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is very common in the United States and around the world. Some estimates suggest that about 1 in 4 women and nearly 1 in 10 men nationwide have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and reported some form of IPV-related impact.<sup>7</sup> Generally, the most extreme forms of DV (including serious injury and death) are perpetrated against women.<sup>8</sup>

Even though the majority of men and fathers have not used or experienced DV, it is likely that some participants in fatherhood programs have. Furthermore, many men have grown up in households where they were exposed to DV, and more than 15 million children live in homes where there is DV.<sup>9</sup> Men's rate of exposure to family physical or psychological violence before age 18 is almost 25 percent.<sup>10</sup> When other kinds of violence, such as bullying,<sup>11</sup> stranger sexual or physical assault,<sup>12</sup> and community violence<sup>13</sup> are also considered, the prevalence of men's lifetime exposure to violence is likely much higher. Many fatherhood programs work with fathers who are young, economically insecure, and have experienced multiple lifetime traumas and other life challenges.<sup>14</sup> Some of these characteristics put fathers at greater risk for DV perpetration and/or victimization.<sup>15</sup>

## What are the consequences of domestic violence?

The consequences of surviving DV as an adult or being exposed to DV as a child are varied and can be severe. These effects may manifest as physical, psychological, behavioral, and/or societal problems such as social isolation.<sup>16</sup> However, surviving or being exposed to domestic violence does not affect all survivors in the same way. Children and adults are naturally resilient; that is, they have the potential to persevere and overcome their problems.<sup>17</sup> Children in particular can move forward from stressful events in their lives. One way children heal is by having adults in their lives who care about them and provide guidance and support. This and other protective factors can reduce the consequences of DV.<sup>18</sup> A wide range of prevention strategies are available to reduce the risk factors that lead to domestic violence, and to increase the protective factors that reduce the likelihood of first-time perpetration.<sup>19</sup>

## Why should fatherhood programs address and prevent domestic violence?

Two central goals of many fatherhood programs, including those funded by the federal government, are to strengthen positive father-child engagement and improve healthy relationships (including couple and co-parenting relationships) and marriage. Fatherhood programs aim to help fathers overcome obstacles and barriers that prevent them from being effective and nurturing parents and partners. Domestic violence is one such obstacle, and it can work against the goals of the programs, since any kind of abuse is contrary to positive, healthy, and nurturing bonds in the family.

Research has shown that most fathers want to be good parents (even those who use violence). This ideal of fatherhood may be a powerful basis for strategies that can engage and motivate change in some fathers who use violence and coercion,<sup>20</sup> and it puts fatherhood programs in a good position to address DV among participants. Furthermore, the PAIVED study found that RF practitioners feel fathers respond positively to DV education when it is focused on the consequences of DV for children. For more information on ways to engage fathers in addressing DV, see the resource *Ten Ways to Engage Fathers in Addressing and Preventing Domestic Violence* on page 10.

It is important to note that fatherhood programs are not substitutes for programs that serve people who use violence (commonly known as battering intervention programs or BIPs) or agencies that work with survivors of DV. However, fatherhood programs can help participants become more aware of the



dynamics of DV, encourage them to seek help, and refer them to programs for people who use violence or for survivors of violence.

Fatherhood programs can also focus on prevention of future DV perpetration and victimization by providing universal education that explores the underlying factors that may contribute to violence and teaches healthy relationship skills. Fatherhood programs can help fathers avoid the use of violence in the future by emphasizing the consequences of abusive behavior, especially for children exposed to DV. Most parents are able to empathize with the experience of children affected by violence. As a RF practitioner interviewed in the study said: "How are we a fatherhood program if we don't talk about the effects that [DV] has on children?"

Millions of people have grown up in abusive households and many have been traumatized by such experiences.<sup>21</sup> Although mostly focused on mothers, research suggests that the negative consequences of childhood maltreatment are often observed in subsequent generations. For example, studies show that individuals who have survived childhood maltreatment are themselves at increased risk of using harsh parenting or maltreatment with their own children, creating or continuing a cycle of maltreatment.<sup>22,23</sup> In addition to affecting fathers' ability to parent their children in positive ways, the trauma that results from men's exposure to violence (in the family, or in the community more broadly) may also have consequences for fathers' economic stability and other outcomes of interest to fatherhood programs. Therefore, it is essential that fatherhood programs adopt a trauma-informed approach not only when addressing DV, but in all their activities. For more information on trauma-informed approaches, see the Additional Resources List on page 16.

## Principles for fatherhood programs to address and prevent domestic violence

Program principles provide guidance for how programs prioritize and achieve common goals. Principles are particularly useful when a program is working in collaboration with others; they help to ensure that practitioners within and outside an organization have a shared language and joint objectives. The eight principles detailed here are informed by the findings of the PAIVED study, established guidance from the fatherhood and DV fields on how to engage fathers, and input from stakeholders and experts in these fields. They illustrate how principles can be useful for achieving collective understanding of an issue, and how they can serve as a starting point for a discussion about fatherhood and domestic violence. The principles are as follows:

### Everybody deserves a life free of violence

Irrespective of sex, gender identity, race or ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, class, disability, and any other identity, every person has the right to live a life free of violence, abuse, harassment, and oppression. This premise is rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which posits that everyone has the right to live without discrimination or oppression.<sup>24</sup>

### Children benefit from safe and positive relationships with their fathers

There is ample evidence that children do better when their fathers are positively involved in their lives.<sup>25</sup> Research also suggests that when individuals use violence in the home with their partner, children can experience negative outcomes.<sup>26,27,28</sup>

### Most men want to be good fathers and have the capacity to be safe and responsible parents

The great majority of fathers (and mothers) aspire to be good parents; this is true even for people who use violence.<sup>29,30</sup> We heard from PAIVED study participants that when there is DV, they believe this aspiration can be used to motivate fathers to change negative behaviors.

### Everyone can benefit from universal education about DV

Most fathers are not currently experiencing domestic violence, but it is likely that some are survivors of DV, were exposed to DV as children, and/or are users of DV.<sup>31,32,33,34</sup> Furthermore, all fatherhood program participants can benefit from education on the topic.<sup>35</sup> Practitioners in the PAIVED study felt that when fatherhood programs create a trusting relationship with fathers, these practitioners are then in a unique position to both prevent and respond to domestic violence. By speaking openly about this difficult subject, fatherhood programs can create pathways for healing, educate fathers about the dynamics and consequences of DV (especially for children), and potentially help prevent abuse before it happens. Fatherhood program staff also felt they could motivate fathers to seek help to end perpetration or victimization of DV without adding to their shame, and connect fathers with meaningful referrals.

### Addressing domestic violence requires expertise and critical thinking

DV needs to be understood in context; this includes understanding the motivation of the person using violence and the impact of violence on survivors. We heard from PAIVED study participants that practitioners should receive education on the impact of trauma, the underlying factors that may contribute to violence, risk and protective factors for perpetration and victimization of DV, and complex dynamics of DV; and they should apply critical thinking to each individual situation. Practitioners must understand that the most damaging type of abuse is rooted in coercive control, which can continue even after a couple has separated.<sup>36,37</sup> Even when practitioners have a good understanding of DV, they should consult with and make referrals to their partner DV and BIP programs.

### All fatherhood program practices should be trauma-informed

Given the high numbers of people in the U.S. who grew up in abusive households<sup>38</sup> and people who have experienced community violence, poverty, labor and sexual exploitation, and multiple forms of oppression,<sup>39,40,41</sup> research suggests that fatherhood programs should adopt a trauma-informed system of care. This system could include a trauma-informed approach (conditions to encourage healing and avoid re-traumatization, such as organizational commitment and staff training) and can also incorporate trauma-specific services (participants' screening and referrals to clinical services). A trauma-informed approach also includes supporting the needs of staff who might be grappling with their own history of trauma, and with the experience of being exposed to secondary or vicarious trauma, as they work with fathers and hear about the traumatic experiences fathers have faced.<sup>42</sup>

### Fatherhood programs should be culturally responsive to the population of fathers with whom they work

There is evidence to suggest that fatherhood programs are more effective when they use teaching methods and materials that are culturally relevant to the participants.<sup>43</sup> This is also true in the case of BIPs.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, using facilitators and other staff who have the same cultural background as the fathers helps create trust and rapport.<sup>45</sup> Regardless of their cultural background, all staff should receive education that addresses the intersection of culture and domestic violence and promotes cultural responsiveness, including an analysis of oppression, institutional racism, and racial profiling.

### Partnerships with other agencies benefit both families and practitioners

Fatherhood programs, DV survivor agencies, and BIPs have traditionally served different members of the family;<sup>46</sup> therefore, PAIVED study participants felt that collaboration focused on better outcomes for all family members can be extremely valuable. Through partnerships with other agencies based on common goals, mutual trust, and respect, fatherhood programs can improve the way that practitioners and fathers understand the complexities of DV and can help fathers access appropriate services.

## Promising practices

The fatherhood programs that participated in the PAIVED study were implementing innovative practices for preventing and addressing domestic violence that can serve as a model for other programs to replicate, modify, or enhance their services. These promising practices are related to the principles described above.

These promising practices were informed by the PAIVED study. Practices were identified as promising if they had measurable results and reported successful outcomes. However, there was not enough evaluation research available to prove efficacy of these practices. These practices were also the most actionable strategies we heard about and were those that appeared most relevant for a broad set of fatherhood programs.

### Safe spaces for fathers to talk about DV

Many of the programs in the study reported that most fathers do not disclose DV victimization or perpetration during the intake or initial assessment due to, among other factors, the shame and stigma associated with both experiences. However, some programs were able to create safe, non-shaming spaces where fathers became comfortable sharing their stories of perpetration or victimization as they developed trust with program staff and participants. Disclosures were more commonly made when staff were able to offer one-on-one meetings with each participant (such as in case management meetings).

### Partnerships with DV agencies and BIPs, when available and possible

ACF-funded Responsible Fatherhood grantees are required to consult with DV experts to develop program activities that address DV. All the fatherhood programs interviewed for the PAIVED study had various degrees of collaboration with agencies that work with survivors of DV. Two of the programs in the study also had significant partnerships with battering intervention programs. Although some DV agencies work with both users and survivors of DV, in most cases, these services are provided by different organizations. This suggests that it may be beneficial for fatherhood programs to have relationships with multiple organizations that can provide access to both types of services. For more information on the differences between DV agencies, BIPs, and other organizations that address men's use of violence (i.e., anger management programs), see the Additional Resources List.

### Focus on the consequences of DV on children

Many program staff in the study reported that an effective strategy to engage fathers in reflecting on DV is to discuss the consequences of such violence for children before talking about the impact on adult survivors. Many curricula have incorporated activities related to this type of universal education. Research on BIPs has shown that children are the strongest motivating factor for fathers to address violence in their homes.<sup>47,48</sup>

### On-site Emotional Empowerment Training class

One of the programs interviewed for the PAIVED study engaged with a community partner to teach an on-site, ongoing class for the fathers. The class was named Emotional Empowerment Training to make it more palatable for the fathers to participate, though it clearly covered topics that many BIPs usually teach. The RF program compensated the partner program staff for their work, and fathers did not have to pay to participate in the class, which helped address the problem that services for users of violence (such as BIPs) are usually unaffordable for many fatherhood program participants. Fatherhood programs can use this approach to reach fathers who would benefit from BIP content but have not used DV. The Emotional Empowerment Training class was open to all fathers, regardless of whether they are using DV, and sought to help them cope with challenges both in their romantic relationships and other aspects of their lives.

### Domestic violence coordinator

One program interviewed for the PAIVED study had a full-time staff member who served as a DV coordinator. This person provided ongoing consultation services to other fatherhood program staff about assessing and addressing problems or issues concerning DV, providing appropriate referrals for fathers who use violence or who are survivors of DV, and sharing information on topics related to DV. The DV coordinator also taught an ongoing class for the fathers that covers various topics connected to domestic violence, including its consequences for children.

## Future directions

One objective of the PAIVED study was to understand fatherhood programs' needs and access gaps and to identify future directions for programs in their work to address and prevent domestic violence. The study suggested that fathers would benefit if fatherhood programs created or enhanced the following practices:

### Integrated services to effectively address multiple issues fathers face, including DV

Fathers and families do not experience life challenges in compartments, but rather as a whole. Issues like poverty, oppression, substance abuse, mental illness, and family and community violence often overlap in complex ways. Fatherhood programs could aim to address the range of challenges in a holistic, healing-centered way, and in partnership with other community agencies, with the aim of creating a network of support for fathers, including those who are survivors or users of DV.

### Free and accessible services for fathers who use DV

Many BIPs rely exclusively on participant fees to provide services. Some have sliding scales, but even the lowest fees might be prohibitive for some low-income fathers. Some fathers have the extra burden of being court mandated to programs they cannot afford. Fatherhood programs can share resources and seek funding to partner with BIPs to provide free, on-site services for fathers who have used DV.

### Increased awareness of services for fathers who are survivors of DV

Even though it is not widely known, programs for survivors of DV provide services for men, including emergency shelter, counseling, and legal representation. Fatherhood programs can partner with their local DV agencies to ensure that fathers receive comprehensive information about services available to them. Additionally, RF programs can develop a “warm” referral system—which directly connects fathers to someone from a partner agency rather than only giving them the contact information of the agency or person—and expand their services to be responsive to the needs of fathers who are survivors of DV.

### Accessible and welcoming services for fathers who are survivors of DV

All federally funded DV agencies serve survivors of all genders. However, there might still be obstacles for fathers who have survived violence to easily access them. Examples of barriers include the father or fatherhood program staff not knowing that services are available to them; or the DV agency not creating a welcoming environment for men, lacking experience working with men, or lacking cultural competency. Fatherhood programs can work with their local DV agencies to make sure that all services are culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and accessible to their participants, when needed.

### Use of trauma-informed approaches when providing DV education or intervention services

As stated in one of the principles proposed above, it is important that all fatherhood program practices be trauma-informed. This is especially relevant when addressing domestic violence. Most people who use DV and many survivors of such violence grew up in abusive households<sup>49,50</sup> and may have unhealed trauma



from those experiences. Before talking about DV and particularly before showing graphic images or playing audio or video recordings, fatherhood program staff should evaluate the educational value of the materials against their potential to trigger traumatic reactions in participants. At a minimum, fatherhood program staff should always warn participants of the graphic nature of materials before showing them, allow participants to opt out from an activity that might be triggering, and offer emotional support in case someone is triggered during a DV educational activity.

### Regular updating of protocols on how to assess and respond to DV perpetration and victimization

ACF-funded fatherhood programs are encouraged to have protocols in place to address domestic violence. The PAIVED study found that there are significant variations in the content of programs' protocols. Researchers and leading practitioners suggest that protocols should include, at minimum, guidance on how to:

- Conduct screening and assessment of DV (including recognizing red flags and signs of coercive control)
- Respond to disclosures of victimization and perpetration of DV
- Make appropriate, safe, and confidential referrals
- Follow up after a referral is made
- Train program staff on DV<sup>51,52</sup>

These protocols should be regularly updated in coordination with partner agencies.<sup>i</sup>

### Ongoing assessment of DV victimization and perpetration

Many of the staff interviewed for the PAIVED study stated that even when fatherhood programs use DV screening and assessment tools during intake, most fathers are not ready or willing to share DV perpetration and victimization at that point. Instead, fatherhood program staff can conduct formal and informal assessments at various intervals, especially when there is an opportunity to have one-on-one meetings, such as during case management.

### Assessments that include an understanding of coercive control

As described above, domestic violence includes more than physical and sexual violence. Therefore, in addition to assessing DV at various intervals, fatherhood programs can also prioritize assessing for coercive behaviors to provide more context about who holds power in the relationship.<sup>ii</sup> These behaviors include restricting freedom, emotional and psychological abuse, financial abuse, extreme jealousy and controlling behaviors, use of children against the other parent, intimidation and threats, and use of isolation and stalking (this applies both to perpetration and victimization).<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> For more information on DV protocols, see <https://www.fatherhood.gov/toolkit/work/addressing-domestic-violence/protocols-guide-service-delivery>

<sup>ii</sup> Research from the custody mediation field has found that IPV assessments are better able to identify victims when coercion-related questions are included in the assessment in addition to violence-related questions. For more information see: Beck, C. J., & Raghavan, C. (2010). Intimate partner abuse screening in custody mediation: The importance of assessing coercive control. *Family Court Review*, 48(3), 555-565.

<sup>iii</sup> For examples of coercive control assessment, see <https://www.guilford.com/add/forms/fontes3.pdf>; [http://www.proceduresonline.com/darlington/cs/user\\_controlled\\_lcms\\_area/uploaded\\_files/Assessment%20of%20coercive%20control.docx](http://www.proceduresonline.com/darlington/cs/user_controlled_lcms_area/uploaded_files/Assessment%20of%20coercive%20control.docx); and [http://www.cdar.uky.edu/CoerciveControl/docs/Partner%20Abuse%20Looking%20Beyond%20Physical%20Assault%20to%20Coercive%20Control\\_health%20professionals.pdf](http://www.cdar.uky.edu/CoerciveControl/docs/Partner%20Abuse%20Looking%20Beyond%20Physical%20Assault%20to%20Coercive%20Control_health%20professionals.pdf)

## About the Resources

The following three resources have been developed to help fatherhood programs contribute to prevention and intervention of DV:

- Ten Ways to Engage Fathers in Addressing and Preventing Domestic Violence
- Teachable Moments
- Six Ways Fatherhood Programs Can Successfully Partner with Domestic Violence Programs and Battering Intervention Programs

These resources are informed by the PAIVED project and other sources, including a broader literature review on engaging fathers in DV prevention, as well as resources drawn from other types of interventions for men, fathers, and families.

Each resource can be used separately, but they are designed to complement each other as well as the sections above on principles, promising practices, and future directions for fatherhood programs to help address and prevent DV. The resources are directed to fatherhood program staff and can be used as a summary reminder of good practices and/or as educational resources during trainings and staff meetings. These resources should not be used as standalone training tools. They must be accompanied by a more thorough and in-depth training from DV experts and community partners.



# Ten Ways to Engage Fathers in Addressing and Preventing Domestic Violence

This section presents practices that fatherhood programs use to address and prevent domestic violence (DV) with their participants. For concrete examples of how to use some of these practices, see the Teachable Moments resource on page 12.

## 1 Create safe, non-shaming spaces for fathers

There is a lot of stigma and shame associated with both using and surviving domestic violence. In order for fathers to feel comfortable sharing their experiences with DV, they should feel supported, believed, and understood. However, practitioners should always be careful not to justify any abusive behaviors.

## 2 Develop ongoing opportunities for fathers to disclose DV perpetration and victimization, including one-on-one meetings

Once fatherhood program staff have developed trust with fathers, fathers might be more inclined to share their experiences with DV perpetration and victimization. It is important for staff to create opportunities to regularly meet privately with fathers and ask about domestic violence and unhealthy relationships in different ways. Fathers are more likely to disclose their experiences in one-on-one meetings.

## 3 Use non-stigmatizing language to describe people who have experienced or used violence in relationships during education and other services

It is important for practitioners to be explicit about what constitutes domestic violence (including physical, sexual, psychological, and financial abuse and coercion), its consequences for various family members, and the fact that violence is never justified in relationships. However, practitioners also need to be mindful that the labels used to describe people involved in DV may add to their shame and discourage disclosure. Practitioners should use “people-first” language to refer to those involved in DV. For example, it is better to say “person who uses violence in relationships” than to use terms like batterer, offender, or perpetrator; and it is better to refer to a “person who has experienced or survived DV” than to a victim (some people also prefer the term “survivor of violence”). Practitioners should also pay attention to the language that fathers use and mirror that language.

## 4 Provide universal information about the consequences of violence for children

Teaching fathers about the consequences of exposure to DV for children is a powerful strategy to motivate some fathers who use violence to start the process of changing their behavior, and may help prevent DV from happening in families. Understanding the consequences of DV for children is also important for the healing journey of people who have experienced DV as adults or children. Information about the consequences of DV for children should be balanced with facts about healing, resilience, and protective factors in children and adults.

## 5 Use relatable, relevant examples

As with any other kind of education for fathers, practitioners should use relevant and relatable examples when talking about DV. The examples should be gender-inclusive, and include couples who are still together and couples who are separated (as DV can happen in both instances). Practitioners should also be careful not to always characterize the person who uses violence as male and the survivor as female

(although this is the most common situation), and they should use a variety of examples from diverse racial and ethnic groups and sexual orientations.

## **6 Create connections between practitioners and fathers by participating in educational activities and sharing relevant personal experiences<sup>53</sup>**

One effective way to develop trust between fatherhood practitioners and participants is for staff to participate in all educational activities—including the group’s check-in and check-out—and exercises. Practitioners should decide for themselves how much of their personal histories they are willing to share but recognize that offering some information about how they struggle in their own relationships can create a sense of connection and help reduce the imbalance of power between facilitators and group members. It is also powerful for practitioners to share success stories about how they have dealt with relationship problems as this allows them to model positive behavior and bring hope to group members.

## **7 Connect fathers with battering intervention programs (BIPs) and DV services when appropriate**

When fathers have disclosed domestic violence perpetration or victimization, it is important that practitioners not only refer, but also connect fathers to agencies that address these issues. When making a referral, it is always preferable for the practitioner to call the other provider while a father is present and pass the phone to him, rather than only giving a father the provider’s telephone number to call. Establishing relationships with staff from DV agencies and BIPs is essential for offering appropriate referrals. For more information on collaborations with DV agencies and BIPs, see the Partnerships resource.

## **8 Create safe and welcoming spaces and services for fathers**

In both small and big ways, fatherhood programs can make their spaces and activities more accessible for fathers. Examples include having baby changing tables in the men’s restroom, providing food and diapers for young children, and displaying positive images of fathers and children in printed materials.<sup>iv</sup> Additionally, providing literature and displaying posters that address victimization and perpetration of DV (with a focus on men) helps reinforce the message that the fatherhood program is committed to addressing and helping to prevent DV.<sup>v</sup> Offering childcare (as well as food) for fathers during educational sessions, including those that address DV, might improve their attendance and participation.

## **9 Use motivational interviewing strategies**

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a clinical approach to help people change negative behaviors using various motivational strategies. MI is often used in work with individuals who have addiction and physical health issues. In some cases, these strategies and the principles of motivational interviewing have proven successful in engaging with individuals who use violence.<sup>54</sup> The strategies include reflective listening, open-ended questions, and affirmation, among others. For more information on motivational interviewing, see the Resources section.

## **10 Use teachable moments**

Teachable moments are opportunities outside the regular curriculum—or even outside the classroom—when practitioners can provide education and intervene in situations concerning DV.

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<sup>iv</sup> For a checklist and assessment to make your space more father-friendly, see <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/sites/default/files/youngfathers-introtoolkit.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> For examples of DV materials for men, see <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/role-model-poster/> and <http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/blog/it%E2%80%99s-not-%E2%80%9Cjust-women%E2%80%99s-issue%E2%80%9D-men-are-survivors-too>





# Teachable Moments<sup>vi</sup>

In addition to the formal education about domestic violence (DV) that fatherhood practitioners provide to fathers through classes and workshops, other opportunities often arise—both inside and outside the classroom—for practitioners to address issues related to the topic. These situations are what we call “teachable moments.” While curriculum-based education tends to be proactive, teachable moments are both reactive (they are used in response to a statement or observed behavior by the fathers) and proactive (they make use of opportunities in everyday interactions).

The following teachable moments are examples of such situations and are meant to provide general guidance—by identifying the problem and some possible options for responding to it—that can be applied in other situations.<sup>vii</sup> It is important to note that practitioners have a number of options for responding to situations and should choose an option based on their relationship with the father, their level of comfort with the subject, and recommendations from their partner DV organizations. Practitioners must also consider their own safety and the safety of others in the situation.

We recommend using these teachable moments as a supplementary training resource. They are not sufficient on their own to replace a training from a partner DV organization. It is important for fatherhood programs to instead develop strong partnerships with DV agencies and then together with their partners establish a clear protocol for referrals.

## Teachable moment #1: Trash talk

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A practitioner overhears a father talking to other program participants about the mother of his children. He refers to her using expletives and blames her for many of his problems.

### What’s the problem?

Men who hold sexist and hostile attitudes toward women are more likely to be directly abusive to them.<sup>55</sup> Using disrespectful and abusive language on the premises of a fatherhood program—even if this happens outside the classroom—fosters a toxic culture for everyone in the program.

### What to do?

Here are some options:

- In the moment, say something to the father (in front of the other men). For example: “*Man, remember we don’t use that kind of talk here.*”
- In the moment, take the father aside and privately say something. For example: “*I would appreciate if you don’t use that kind of language when referring to the mother of your children or any woman for that matter. What would your children think if they heard you?*”

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<sup>vi</sup> The teachable moments concept was inspired by the work of Dr. Jackson Katz and Mentors in Violence Prevention. For more information about the programs, see <https://www.mvpstrat.com/>. The need for teachable moments like the ones described here was identified through the PAIVED study.

<sup>vii</sup> The options for responding to situations were developed by experts in the field of domestic violence at Futures Without Violence. These options are grounded in the field of bystander intervention which promotes that anybody can step in to safely and effectively intervene. For more information on bystander approaches, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/prevention.html>.

- Bring up the issue during a one-on-one meeting with the father, emphasizing the consequences of verbal abuse on children and adults and the importance of using respectful language, even when the person is not present.
- Indirectly address the issue by talking about the same topics during a class, and also discuss beliefs about women that can contribute to verbal abuse (such as unhealthy masculinity and rigid gender roles).
- Share information about resources in the community that can work with fathers who use violence.

## Teachable moment #2: No big deal

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A father arrives to the program with visible bruises or a black eye. The practitioner knows that this person has been verbally abused by his partner in the past. When the father is directly asked what happened, he looks down and says that he walked into a door.

### What's the problem?

People who experience violence often do not want to disclose what happened to them for various reasons, including fear of not being believed, feelings of diminished self-worth or shame, and not wanting their partner to get in trouble. Practitioners need to meet survivors of violence where they are and not push for disclosures or try to fix the problem when the person is not ready. Survivors should always be in charge of their own processes.

### What to do?

Here are some options:

- In the moment, take the father aside, express empathy, and privately say something. For example: *"That looks painful. Has someone looked at it?"* or *"I am worried about you. Remember that you can always talk to me about anything and I'm here to support you."*
- Bring up the issue during a one-on-one meeting with the father, providing an opportunity for a disclosure, but not pushing for one. For example: *"You have told me that your partner and you sometimes have bad fights. What do they look like? Remember that everybody has the right to live a life free of violence and that I am here to support you in your own choices, whatever they might be. I care about you."*
- Indirectly address the issue during a class, emphasizing the fact that men can also be the recipients of abuse. In order to be gender-inclusive when discussing DV, be sure to provide prevalence data that includes both women and men, and talk about barriers that survivors face, including barriers faced by male-identified survivors.
- Share the number of the National Domestic Violence Hotline, as well as resources in the community that can support fathers who have experienced violence.

## Teachable moment #3: None of your business

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On his/her drive to work, a practitioner sees a program participant yelling at a woman (not the mother of his children) on the street. The woman seems scared. The father pushes her and walks away. She does not seem to be injured, but walks away, crying.

### What's the problem?

Even though the abuse witnessed by the practitioner does not seem to be extreme, the fact that this violent behavior is happening in a public place might mean that more severe violence is happening in private (possibly with this woman and, likely, with the father's partners). The father is at risk of being arrested and charged with assault and battery.

## What to do?

Here are some options:

- At the next opportunity to speak with the father, take him aside and privately say something. For example: *"I saw you the other day yelling and pushing a woman on the street. I am concerned about you and her. I don't know who she is, but it looks like she is afraid of you. Remember that I am here to talk and to help you with your problems."*
- If the father responds defensively or says something like, "Mind your own business," this is an opportunity to add: *"This is my business. I'm here to help you be the best father you can possibly be, and treating a woman—or anyone—like you did can have serious consequences. Remember, you want to always be a good role model for your children and in your community. Also, you could get arrested if someone called the police. If you end up in jail, you won't be able to be there for your children."*
- It is important to add something like: *"I care about you—and your children, your partner, and that woman. I'm here to help you and can connect you with a program that can help you change your behavior. Please do it for your children."*
- Share information about resources in the community that can work with fathers who use violence.

## Teachable moment #4: Fight for custody

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A father shares during a class that he is going to sue the mother of his children, his ex, to request sole custody because she is an "unfit mother." He says that she often leaves the children alone while she is out. He also says that she recently got a protection order against him to prevent him from "getting more involved in the situation." The children are 10 and 12 years old.

## What's the problem?

While it might be true that the mother took out a protection order to keep the father away, it is also possible that this father may want to retaliate against the mother of his children because the court issued a protection order against him. People who use violence often use systems (including the courts and child protection) to try to continue manipulating their ex-partners. It is important to apply critical thinking to this type of situation to go beyond obvious explanations and consider all factors and alternate explanations.

## What to do?

Here are some options:

- In the moment, say something to the father (in front of the other men). For example: *"Tell me more about the situation. Has she told you why she did this? Did you try to come up with mutually agreed-upon solutions before you were served with the protection order? Are you ready to be a full-time dad, and are you sure you would never leave the kids alone if you weren't able to find child care?"*
- Later on, take the father aside and privately say something. For example: *"I'm concerned that your problems with your ex are affecting your children. It seems like things are getting worse between the two of you and they are caught in the middle. Do you really think that trying to terminate your ex's parental rights is in the children's best interest? I would encourage you to work together to find a more amicable solution."*
- If you suspect that the father has been abusive, during a one-on-one meeting, explore the topic further. For example: *"How can I help you find a solution to your problem with your ex, so that your kids don't have to suffer? I can recommend a program (BIP) that can support you in making changes in your life that might improve your situation. Remember that trying to control others often doesn't go very well. You only have control over yourself and your own actions. And sometimes, a change in your own actions can have positive consequences for others."*
- Share information about resources in the community that can work with fathers who use violence.



# Six Ways Fatherhood Programs Can Successfully Partner with DV Agencies and BIPs

Fatherhood programs that develop strong, functional partnerships with domestic violence (DV) agencies and battering intervention programs (BIPs) can better serve the fathers in their programs and their families. This section offers practices that are conducive to good collaboration among programs.

## 1 Common vision and principles

When fatherhood programs and DV agencies have overlapping visions and principles centered on better outcomes for all family members, they can more easily create true, functional partnerships. At minimum, fatherhood programs need to be explicit about the crucial need to address and prevent DV in their programs, and DV agencies need to acknowledge the importance of engaging men and fathers when working to end DV.

## 2 Mutual respect

It is essential that fatherhood programs and DV agencies get to know each other's work and show respect for each other's expertise. When partners establish mutual respect, they are better able to deal with difficult issues and resolve disagreements that may arise.

## 3 Cross training

Most fatherhood programs and DV agencies have staff who do trainings in the community. It is very important for both fatherhood programs and DV agencies/BIPs to develop tailored trainings for their partners, so that the partners can better understand each other's fields, areas of expertise, and available services. Targeted cross trainings can greatly benefit fatherhood programs and DV agencies or BIPs, even if they do not have a formal collaboration.

## 4 Ongoing, open communication

Successful partnerships often involve regular, frank communication between agencies. This can include standing meetings or ad-hoc exchanges. Consider focusing communication on general topics and not specific cases, as the latter requires a signed release of information from the program participants.

## 5 Cross referrals

Outcomes for fathers and their families can improve when there is sufficient trust between agencies to create an effective process for referrals. Referrals work best when working relationships exist among practitioners from various agencies who have important knowledge of the services available for the fathers. The use of "warm" referrals is recommended whenever possible; that is, practitioners should connect fathers directly to someone from a partner agency rather than only giving fathers the contact information of the agency or the person.

## 6 Collaboration on developing programming, protocols, and consultation on cases

A deeper level of partnership among agencies can involve seeking shared funding to collaborate on developing and delivering education materials, creating and revising protocols, and conferring about specific cases (including developing a release of information process). This collaboration applies both to DV agencies that serve survivors and battering intervention programs.



# Additional Resources List

## Advocacy, referrals, and information on domestic violence

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) – The Hotline offers round-the-clock, confidential information for survivors of domestic violence **and** for people who use violence, their family, friends, and service providers. The free services include referrals to local DV agencies and battering intervention programs, as well as advocacy for survivors of DV.

[VAWnet](#) – This website, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV), is a resource library with thousands of materials on domestic violence and other related issues. VAWnet houses NRC DV's special collections, publications, applied research papers, training tools, and many other resource materials.

[Advocacy Beyond Leaving](#) – This guide for domestic violence advocates raises the key issues, questions, and dilemmas regarding advocacy with battered women who stay in their relationships. It discusses the limitations of safety strategies for leaving, and frames the issues central to the expansion of advocacy beyond leaving.

## PAIVED study report and related resources

[Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence when Engaging Dads \(PAIVED\) Challenges, Successes, and Promising Practices from Responsible Fatherhood Programs](#) – This report provides an overall summary of the PAIVED project, including detailed information on research purpose and questions, study objectives, methodology, findings, and recommendations.

[Domestic Violence Intervention and Prevention in Fatherhood Programs](#) – This brief provides an overview of the key distinctions between providing services from a prevention versus an intervention standpoint, describes lessons learned from PAIVED about what programs are doing, and provides additional resources.

[Domestic Violence Referral Guide for Fatherhood Programs](#) – This brief provides an overview and comparison of battering intervention programs, domestic violence agencies, and anger management programs to help programs understand the distinctions and appropriate referrals.

## Educational materials for working with fathers who use violence

[Fathering After Violence: Guidelines and Tools for Batterer Intervention Programs](#): This resource provides information and exercises on positive father involvement for programs that work with fathers who have used violence.

[Fathering After Violence: Working with Abusive Father in Supervised Visitation](#): This detailed resource provides guidance on how to work deliberately with fathers who have used violence to engage them in supervised visitation with their children.

[Relational and Systemic Accountability Framework](#): This product provides guidance to child welfare workers and their partners, including fatherhood programs, on how to work with people who have used violence. It includes strategies to help providers balance using limits and consequences with encouragement and support to promote change.

[Something My Father Would Do](#): In this video, three men share their experiences of witnessing DV as children and their journeys to nonviolent, loving relationships.

[Strong Fathers](#) – This strengths-based intervention program is for fathers who have used violence. Strong Fathers aims to break the cycle of violence, help fathers learn how their behavior is influenced by their childhood, and promote positive behavior.

[Caring Dads](#) – This intervention program is for fathers who have used violence. Caring Dads aims to help men be better fathers and have healthier co-parenting relationships. The 17-week program has providers in the United States, Europe, and Australia.

[Addressing Fatherhood with Men Who Batter](#) – This curriculum provides resources for fathers who have used violence, including screenings, exercises, and information related to the impact of family violence on children and how to be nonviolent and supportive fathers and co-parents.

## Trauma-informed work with fathers

[Trauma-Informed Approaches and Awareness for Programs Working with Fathers](#) - This brief highlights the importance of using a trauma-informed approach and offers tips and considerations for programs that serve fathers.

[Creating a Trauma-Informed System of Care for Formerly Incarcerated Dads](#) – This report describes how trauma-informed approaches may be incorporated into Responsible Fatherhood programs for formerly incarcerated fathers.

[Trauma-Informed Care for Children Exposed to Violence: Tips for Engaging Men and Fathers](#) – This tip sheet includes information on how to engage and motivate fathers to be nonviolent, supportive role models. This resource also lists warning signs that children who are being exposed to violence (by age group) may exhibit.

[Trauma-Informed Approaches for Programs Serving Fathers in Re-Entry: A Review of the Literature and Environmental Scan](#) – This report explores the trauma that fathers re-entering their communities from incarceration have experienced as children and during incarceration. It also provides guidance on developing trauma-informed approaches, with specific steps that fatherhood programs can take.

[Trauma-Informed Approaches to Working with Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence and Other Trauma](#) – This report summarizes findings from interviews with organizations working with survivors of violence on ways that programs conceptualize trauma-informed work and how this enhances their services.

[Healthy Moms, Happy Babies: A Train the Trainers Curriculum on Trauma Informed Domestic Violence Programming and Practice](#) – This curriculum includes strategies for dealing with staff's history of trauma and exposure to vicarious trauma.

## Collaboration between fatherhood programs and DV agencies

[A Guide for Building Partnerships between Fatherhood and Anti-Domestic Violence Organizations by Fathers, Incorporated](#) – This guide offers Responsible Fatherhood grantees guidance on partnering with community-based, anti-domestic violence agencies. It also offers guidance on maintaining existing relationships, which may be helpful for established partnerships.

[Building Bridges Between Healthy Marriage, Responsible Fatherhood, and Domestic Violence Programs](#) – This report aims to help Healthy Marriage, Responsible Fatherhood, and DV organizations and experts learn from one another and understand the benefits of working together. Additionally, it provides tips for developing partnerships.

[Addressing Domestic Violence](#) – This toolkit provides guidance on how to address DV when working with fathers. Particularly relevant pages include Partnerships with Domestic Violence Prevention Organizations,

Possible Guiding Principles for Partnering Agencies, Protocols to Guide Service Delivery, and Staff Training.

[Fatherhood Programs and Domestic Violence](#) – This report, based on meetings involving DV, fatherhood, and BIP programs, provides information on challenges to cross-field collaboration, including those related to oppression, and other issues to consider when partnering.

[Addressing Domestic Violence: The Role of Fatherhood Programs](#) – This webinar includes information on how Responsible Fatherhood programs can respond to domestic violence and create and maintain environments that are safe for families.

[The Role of Fatherhood Programs in Addressing Domestic Violence](#) – This webinar provides information on creating partnerships between Responsible Fatherhood and DV organizations and addresses challenges to these partnerships and how fatherhood programs can better deal with DV.

## **General information about motivational interviewing**

[SAMHSA Webpage on Motivational Interviewing](#) – This webpage provides general information on motivational interviewing, which is used to promote behavioral changes. Additional resources and webinars are also included.

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