



## **Fathering After Violence**

Fathering After Violence (FAV) is a national initiative developed by the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) and its partners<sup>i</sup> to enhance the safety and well-being of women and children by motivating men to renounce their violence and become better fathers (or father figures) and more supportive parenting partners.

FAV is not a program per se or a quick solution to a complex problem. Rather, it is a conceptual framework to help end violence against women by using fatherhood as a leading approach. Using this framework as a starting point, the FVPF, our partners and other practitioners have developed culturally appropriate practical tools, prevention and intervention strategies, and policy and practice recommendations. FAV has proposed engaging abusive fathers by helping them develop empathy for their children and using this empathy as a motivator to change their behavior. It is exploring an assessment framework to help practitioners discern which fathers might be appropriate for repairing the relationships with their children. FAV has also introduced a reparative framework<sup>ii</sup> for those fathers who are in the position to start healing their relationships with their children in a safe and constructive way.

Our intention has been to support and complement other innovative work happening around the country and the world in the fatherhood, child abuse and domestic violence fields by contributing a domestic violence prevention strategy that can be integrated by multiple disciplines in various settings; by proposing a culturally appropriate model to impress systems change; and by playing a role in the larger movement to eradicate violence from our society.

This work is rooted in the FVPF's commitment to make the safety of all family members always its first priority and to support women and children who have been affected by domestic violence. At the same time, we recognize that fathers who have used violence often have access to their children and that, in some cases, this contact could be transformed into a positive and healing experience for the children. Giving fathers more opportunities for change and healing is an essential component to end violence against women and children.

Furthermore, it seems that many men are able to develop empathy towards their children more easily than towards their partners. Understanding the effects that domestic violence has had on their children can be a strong motivator for some men to change their behavior. Lastly, recent research<sup>iii</sup> has shown that some mothers who have suffered abuse want their children to have safer and healthier contact with their fathers and that positive involvement by a father figure can be very beneficial to children's development.

Starting in 2002, the FVPF partnered with three Boston-based batterers intervention programs, a coordinated community response organization and a child witness to violence program. Together we produced Curriculum Guidelines and Bi-lingual Tools<sup>iv</sup>

for Batterers Intervention Programs; Public Policy Recommendations for working with men and boys; and a Monograph for child mental health practitioners on considerations in working with fathers.

In the second stage, which is presently under way, we have teamed up with four agencies that provide supervised visitation services across the United States and are part of the Federal Safe Heavens Grant Program. This partnership of “learning communities” has produced Guiding Principles<sup>v</sup> for the initiative and will develop tools with universal messages that promote non-violent fatherhood (including a short film and printed materials); models of enhanced collaboration with batterers intervention and fatherhood programs; community partner dialogues about fathering after violence; pilot projects that include orientation sessions for fathers, fatherhood non-violence educational groups and a mentoring initiative; and an assessment framework to help practitioners discern which fathers are most appropriate to be included in these projects.

For more information on the Fathering After Violence initiative, please contact Juan Carlos Areán at 617-262-5900 or [juancarlos@endabuse.org](mailto:juancarlos@endabuse.org)

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<sup>i</sup> **First stage partners:** Dorchester Community Roundtable, Emerge, Common Purpose and Roxbury Comprehensive Community Health Services and the Child Witness to Violence at Boston Medical Center. Generous funding provided by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

**Second stage partners:** Advocates for Family Peace (Grand Rapids, MN), Family Service Agency of San Mateo County (CA), Walnut Avenue Women's Center (Santa Cruz, CA) YWCA (Springfield, MA) and City of Kent (WA). Generous funding provided by the Office of Violence Against Women, US Department of Justice.

<sup>ii</sup> See appendix A.

<sup>iii</sup> 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 Violence*. San Francisco, CA: Family Violence Prevention Fund. <http://endabuse.org/programs/children/files/conversations.pdf>

See also Bent-Goodley, T. and Williams O. J. (2005) Fathers and domestic violence. In Edleson J. and Williams O.J. (Eds.) *Parenting by Men who Batter Women: New Directions for Assessment and Intervention*. (In preparation).

<sup>iv</sup> Fleck-Henderson, A. & Areán, J.C. (2004). *Breaking the Cycle: Fathering After Violence. Curriculum Guidelines and Tools for Batterer Intervention Programs*. San Francisco, CA: Family Violence Prevention Fund. <http://endabuse.org/programs/display.php3?DocID=342>

<sup>v</sup> See Appendix B.

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## APPENDIX A

### THE REPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

Based on the qualitative research conducted at the beginning of the Fathering After Violence initiative, we developed a theoretical framework to conceptualize the process of healing between children and their fathers who have renounced violence. This model is a work-in-progress based primarily on in-depth interviews with six men who had stopped their violence and had started to heal their relationships with their children. After analyzing the information from the interviews, we discovered a series of similar actions taken by each of the men in question. These findings helped us conceptualize the steps needed to be taken in BIPs to begin supporting the healing process between men and the children in their lives. We named this the “Reparative Framework” and described the following actions in the project’s implementation guide:

1. **Changing abusive behavior.** It is imperative that fathers stop all kinds of abuse immediately. This is one of the fundamental goals of batterer intervention and, of course, a prerequisite to starting any reparation.
2. **Modeling constructive behavior.** Children learn by example. Fathers need to know that as they stop modeling destructive behaviors, they have to make a concerted effort to model positive ones. A key teaching concept in this project is that a father cannot be a good model for their children if he is abusive, disrespectful or hateful to their mother.
3. **Stopping denial, blaming and justification.** Most batterer intervention works towards having men take full responsibility for their abusive behavior. In the context of this framework, programs need to teach fathers about the negative effects that denial, blaming and justification can have on children.
4. **Accepting all consequences for one’s behavior.** Violence prevention activists often think of consequences primarily from the criminal justice system perspective. Fathers involved in a reparation process need to understand that facing the consequences of their behavior may also include accepting rejection and the loss of trust, love and even contact with their children.
5. **Acknowledging damage.** It is important that fathers realize the amount of damage they have inflicted and let their children know that they understand specifically how they have hurt them.
6. **Supporting and respecting the mother’s parenting.** Men who are abusive often continue to undermine the authority of the other parent. Fathers need to restore the sense of respect for the mother’s authority and decision making and fully support her parenting, especially if the father finds himself in a secondary parenting role.
7. **Listening and validating.** Fathers need to prepare and be willing to receive anger, hurt, sadness, fear and rejection from their children. It is essential that they understand that this is part of the healing process and not a way for the children to manipulate the situation.
8. **Not forcing the process nor trying to “turn the page”.** Except for the actions that involve personal change work, every action in this framework has to take place on the children’s own terms and timing. Fathers have to learn how to be patient, not try to push healing or contact with their children, and should be open to talking about the past as many times as their children need to do it.

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## APPENDIX B

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FATHERING AFTER VIOLENCE

- 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 nor 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; others continue to choose violence
- Working with fathers is an essential piece of ending violence against women and children
- Fathers who have used violence need close observation to mitigate unintended harm
- Our own practice must reflect the notions of non-violence and respect that we promote in our work
- Service coordination among providers of domestic violence services is essential
- The reparative process between abusive fathers and their children often is long and complex and is not appropriate for all men