

This resource packet was prepared by Anne Menard for the
National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC)

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The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence serves as
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Building Effective Partnerships is the second in a series of 5 related Guides developed for relationship and marriage educators and program administrators to help them understand and respond to domestic violence issues that may arise within their programs. The full Resource Packet consists of the following Guides:

- ◆ Understanding Domestic Violence: Definitions, Scope, Impact and Response
- ◆ ***Building Effective Partnerships with Domestic Violence Programs***
- ◆ Protocol Development and Implementation: Identifying and Responding to Domestic Violence Issues
- ◆ Screening and Assessment for Domestic Violence: Attending to Safety and Culture
- ◆ After Disclosure: Responding to Domestic Violence

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Building Effective Partnerships

There are many positive reasons for healthy marriage and relationship (HMR) projects and domestic violence programs to work together cooperatively. The directive from federal and state funders for healthy marriage grantees to consult with domestic violence experts is often what initially prompts HMR practitioners to involve domestic violence advocates in program design and implementation. While forced collaborations are sometimes necessary, they are less effective, meaningful and long-lasting than those borne of a self-identified and shared commitment to address common interests, such as ensuring that programs being offered are safe and appropriate for all participants.

Successful collaborations involve creating connections between people and purpose, and sometimes require building bridges where none previously existed. In many communities, there will have been limited or no prior contact between marriage projects and domestic violence programs. In others, a strained relationship may already exist. Identifying common ground, creating a shared sense of purpose, and building mutual trust will be key to not only building collaborative relationships, but sustaining them over time.

Described below are some of the opportunities and challenges inherent in building respectful and meaningful collaborations with the domestic violence advocacy community, as well as suggestions for how to proceed.

Building Bridges Between the Healthy Marriage, Responsible Fatherhood, and Domestic Violence Fields

In May of 2006, the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Center for Law and Social Policy sponsored a meeting at the Wingspread Conference Center that brought together 30 participants to:

- Open a dialogue between leading representatives from healthy marriage, responsible fatherhood, and domestic violence fields;
- Discuss current tensions and misunderstandings;
- Explore areas of common ground; and,
- Identify possible avenues for cooperation, collaboration and joint action

Many of the recommendations included here are drawn from the report generate from this Wingspread Conference, found at: www.clasp.org.

Key first steps

- **Invite domestic violence experts from your community to the table**

If your project is statewide or multi-site, the state domestic violence coalition might be the logical first contact (for a list of state coalitions, go to www.vawnet.org and click on “Organizational Links” in the top toolbar). Your state coalition can also help identify the community-based domestic violence programs that should be included in early and ongoing collaborative efforts.

- **Spend time sharing information about your program**

Make time to answer questions about your HMR project, including the specific relationship and marriage education activities you plan to provide or are already offering in the community. Respond to questions and concerns honestly and with an open mind.

- **Learn more about the scope and impact of domestic violence**

Increase your understanding of domestic violence and the dynamics of power and control in intimate relationships. Learn about not only the impact of domestic violence in your community, but the intervention and preventions systems that are in place. (For an introduction to this information, see *Understanding Domestic Violence*, Guide #1 in this Resource Packet.)

- **Learn more about the domestic violence services provided in your community**

It will be important for you to understand exactly what domestic violence services and interventions are available in the communities you are serving. Ask about their experiences working with the communities, families and individuals that your program targets.

Acknowledging Concerns

“Many in the domestic violence community are concerned that the implementation of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood programs may threaten the lives and safety of women and their children by inadvertently ignoring the risk of domestic violence among program participants. They also fear that women in abusive relationships will be encouraged to marry, stay married, or remain with a cohabiting partner. They also fear that participation in healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood programs will not be truly voluntary if it is linked to other services and benefits.”

~ *Building Bridges: A Preliminary Guide (2006)*

As noted in *Understanding Domestic Violence*, Guide #1 in this Resource Packet, domestic violence programs are first and foremost crisis intervention agencies, responding daily to emergency situations that might be quite dangerous to the women, men and children involved, as well as to the advocates themselves. Even at the state domestic violence coalition level, a significant amount of advocacy efforts are urgent and time-sensitive, which must take precedence over other issues of a less urgent nature. The work of domestic violence advocacy organizations is difficult and exhausting, with demand for services far outstripping resources.

Do not make assumptions about the adequacy or stability of your domestic violence partner's funding or their capacity to take on new work and responsibilities, or their interest in doing so. While many domestic violence programs at the local and state level have secured strong community support and have diversified and stable funding, others operate on a shoe string and scramble each year to cover essential costs. Often the funding that they do have is for designated purposes. All of these realities affect the ability of domestic violence programs to respond to requests from community partners for training and consultation without compensation.

- **Spend time articulating shared values and developing a common language**

It will be important for the domestic violence advocates to hear that you care as deeply as they do about safety as the cornerstone of healthy relationships and marriage. The terms that each field uses – domestic violence, safety planning, healthy marriage, healthy relationships, marriage and relationship education – are often not well understood by those outside that particular field and *misunderstandings* can easily arise.

- **Develop a shared understanding of and commitment to cultural competence. As necessary, identify other community partners to bring to the conversation**

Some HMR programs are rooted within specific cultural communities, with staff from the community and programs that members of that community have shaped and endorsed. Others will be bringing relationship and marriage education to communities that are new to them, and working with families and couples whose cultural, racial, religious identities and experiences might be quite different than their own. This is also true of domestic violence programs. Frank conversations about what it means to provide culturally relevant,

respectful and appropriate services, and the ways in which attitudes towards relationships and marriage, as well as domestic violence, are culturally framed can be very important at this stage in the partnership building process.

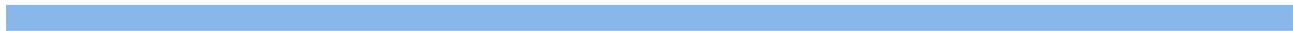
“Cultural competence” in the marriage education field refers to the ability to understand the specific cultural differences – the shared values, attitudes, beliefs, customs and traditions, history, and institutions – that may affect couple, marital, and family behavior in a specific population group or subgroup.¹

Discussions about the significance of culture, race, ethnicity, and gender to your work together may lead you to identify other community organizations or groups that could be invited to your discussions. These might include (other) culturally-specific organizations, responsible fatherhood programs, and/or child advocacy organizations. The goal here is to expand your understanding of diverse experiences and needs and the domestic violence supports and community resources available to those families served by your program.

Why are these first steps important?

In general, the marriage education and domestic violence fields do not know each other well, and each has its own unique history, language, funding streams, and approach to serving its constituents. There may also be very different understandings and perspectives on community and family needs. The missions of each field can sometimes appear at odds with the other – for example, marriage education programs focus on keeping couples together, and domestic violence advocates work with many victims who are trying to separate from a current or former partner.

For these reasons and more, spending time getting to know each other first, rather than jumping immediately into program planning or protocol development, is essential. As the *Building Bridges Preliminary Guide* underscores, “When planning to collaborate across fields, it is important first to spend some time creating a trusting relationship. Without intentional and strategic action this might not happen. Meetings that do not include strategies to encourage open and constructive dialogue may only exacerbate misunderstandings and bad feelings. What is intended to be a productive discussion may turn into an acrid debate.”



This sometimes means bringing in a meeting facilitator to help establish ground rules, ensure respectful listening and constructive discourse, and identify how and when the groups can move forward together. Taking time to learn about each other, voice concerns, seek and receive reassurance, identify shared values, and recognize shared constituents will all help inform and frame the nature and scope of the partnership.

If, even with a facilitator, communication and a sense of shared purpose cannot be established, you may simply not be ready to work together collaboratively. However, at a minimum, you will need to put in place a referral process to help you address any domestic violence issues that arise as you provide marriage education services in the community.

Identifying Common Ground

During the *Building Bridges* discussions, conference participants identified several shared goals and principles – common ground upon which collaborative work among domestic violence, healthy marriage and responsible programs could be built:

- Ending family and intimate partner violence and supporting and encouraging healthy relationships, healthy marriage, and responsible fatherhood.
- Promoting child well-being by ensuring that children grow up in a family environment that is free of violence and in which relationships are respectful, responsible and healthy.
- Ensuring safety for all family members.
- Building cross-field cooperation and collaborations that are meaningful and respectful.

Defining the nature of the collaborative

Once you and your local domestic violence have gotten to know each other better, you will be more prepared to identify what you will be doing together. There are many ways for HMR programs and domestic violence programs to work together productively, whether at the local or state level. During the *Building Bridges* conversations in 2006, both existing activities, already in place in some communities, and those that seem promising were identified:

- **Establish common ground**

Participate in common-ground dialogues or similar forums, in order to understand each other's perspectives, build trust, and plan joint actions.

- **Cross-train**

To facilitate mutual understanding and cooperation, arrange for HMR staff to receive ongoing training on domestic violence issues from your domestic violence partners, and for domestic violence program staff to have an opportunity to learn more about the relationship and marriage education services you are offering to the community.

- **Formalize your relationship**

If you reach the point in your discussions that you are planning joint activities with agreed upon objectives, you might want to formalize your relationship. This can take at least two forms. The first is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which allows you to express in writing how you have agreed to work together.

The elements of an MOU are straightforward and should be developed jointly with your partner –

- 1) a description of what you intend to do together
- 2) the timeline for the joint activities you plan to undertake together (these activities can be quite specific, such as planning a community event, or more general, such as continuing to meet monthly to discuss issues of common interest)
- 3) a description of the specific tasks that each collaborative partner is agreeing to take responsibility for, either as lead staff or as part of shared responsibilities
- 4) a description of how costs associated with activities or the ongoing collaboration will be handled.

Each of the organizations who are part of the MOU should identify a lead contact to ensure implementation of the MOU and resolution of any issues that arise.

You may also want to develop a more formal contract with a domestic violence partner for specific training or technical assistance services related to the design, implementation and evaluation of HMR services. This contract for consultation might flow from protocol development work (see below) or arise at other points in your collaboration.

- **Co-locate staff and activities**

For example, a domestic violence advocate might be invited to present on domestic violence resources during relationship and marriage education classes, and a healthy marriage program could offer a relationship education class in a women's shelter.

- **Cross-reference each other**

Reference your partnership and your community's domestic violence resources in organizational brochures, websites, and other materials as appropriate. Where appropriate, ask that your domestic violence partner refer to your partnership and the services you provide as well.

- **Emphasize shared goals**

In public education and promotional materials, articulate your shared interest in supporting healthy and safe relationships and marriage.

- **Where possible, combine prevention efforts**

Join forces to design and implement primary prevention activities. One example includes developing joint strategies to counteract pervasive cultural and media messages that glorify violence of all kinds, especially towards women, and target youth and young adults. (For more, see *Building Bridges: A Preliminary Guide*.)

Jointly developing domestic violence protocols

In addition to the types of activities described above, which will help to build and nurture the personal and professional relationships and shared purpose that are so critical to a successful collaboration, you can and should also look to your domestic violence partner for technical assistance and consultation related to program design and implementation issues. How will your program identify and respond to domestic violence issues? Domestic violence experts can be helpful in some or all of the following areas:

- Reviewing and enhancing current responses to domestic violence within your agency or system, including policies, procedures and written materials designed to identify and respond to the needs of domestic violence victims and address confidentiality issues
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- Reviewing marriage education activities to ensure that safety and confidentiality issues are addressed for domestic violence victims and those at risk
- Identifying appropriate responses when past or current domestic violence is disclosed during recruitment or intake, or by program participants
- Providing training of program staff on domestic violence issues

All of these can be incorporated into a collaborative protocol development process or handled as discrete activities. As partnership roles are clarified, you also need to talk about the types of financial or programmatic resources needed and available to support the involvement of domestic violence experts in your program design and implementation. (See also *Developing and Implementing Domestic Violence Protocols*, Guide #3 in this Resource Packet.)

Keeping the partnership alive and healthy

Like any ongoing relationship, collaborative partnerships between healthy marriage projects and domestic violence programs will require “care and feeding” to remain productive, healthy and strong. Leadership and staff turnover might affect not only the completion of joint activities but the sense of shared purpose. Interest may wane as the collaborative work becomes more routine. Disagreements over the best approach to take or how to solve a problem may lead to conflicts. Below are some tips for cultivating ongoing, beneficial partnerships with domestic violence programs.

- **Keep lines of communication open**
Identify liaisons with each domestic violence partner, and establish regular points of contact. This ensures that all communication is not just in response to problems.
- **Commit to addressing issues as they arise in an open, honest manner**
Before problems arise, decide how issues will be brought up for discussion. These issues could include the normal challenges of blending different communication styles and ways of working.

It will also be helpful to anticipate the issues that are specific to these collaborations, such as:

- How will you proceed if the domestic violence program doesn't feel that HMR program staff members are implementing the protocol that you mutually developed?
- How will you address the project if the HMR program staff did not feel that the domestic violence training they've received from the state coalition or local program fully prepared them to work with domestic violence issues?

Commit to bringing in a facilitator when a problem is particularly complex or intractable and the discussion is likely to be a difficult one.

- **Document your work together, both in terms of process and programming**

This will be particularly important as you are developing a shared language, when misunderstandings and miscommunication are more likely. This can be as simple as identifying at the beginning of every meeting or conference call who will take notes and make sure that they are distributed to participants.

- **Take time to assess your work together**

Ask yourself what's working? To what or to whom can you attribute that? What hasn't worked as well as you had hoped, and why? If you have documented your work together, as suggested above, this will help when you periodically reflect on both your accomplishments and the opportunities that you've not yet explored.

- **Take time to celebrate successes**

Completing a list of community resources, jointly writing a letter to the editor, or co-sponsoring a community forum should all be noted as successes and celebrated. Individual and organizational leadership should be honored and supported.

- **Update your Memorandums of Understanding and any contracts you have in place at least annually**

This provides both of you the opportunity to clarify or modify how you will work together in the upcoming year.

- **Continue to struggle with the hard issues**

During the *Building Bridges* conference, two particularly tough and complex issues were identified as needing ongoing attention from healthy marriage, responsible fatherhood and domestic violence programs: respecting diversity and responding in culturally competent ways; and developing program guidelines for addressing domestic violence concerns. These issues remain critically important at the national, state, and local levels and answers will only emerge from more experience and continued cross-field dialogue.

The process of building collaborative partnerships is challenging under ideal circumstances. It requires hard work and persistence. Identifying common ground, creating a shared sense of purpose, and building mutual trust will be key to not only building collaborative relationships, but sustaining them over time.

For more information

A copy of *Building Bridges Between Healthy Marriage, Responsible Fatherhood and Domestic Violence Programs: A Preliminary Guide*. (2006) by Ooms, et al. can be found at www.clasp.org.

Another helpful resource is the *Collaboration and Partnership Guidebook: Fatherhood Practitioners and Advocates Against Domestic Violence Working Together to Serve Women, Men, and Families* (2007) by Boggess, et al.. More information is available at www.cffpp.org

Endnote

¹ Ooms, T. *Adapting Healthy Marriage Programs for Disadvantaged and Culturally Diverse Populations: What are the Issues?* Couples and Marriage Brief #10 March 2007, Center for Law and Social Policy. Available at www.clasp.org.

General domestic violence resources

NOTE: For a listing of state domestic violence coalitions, and other public and private organizations involved in domestic violence intervention and prevention activities, go to www.vawnet.org, and click on “Organizational Links” on the top toolbar.

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

800-799-SAFE

800-787-3224 (TTY)

www.ndvh.org

The National Hotline provides support to victims in crisis and those trying to assist them, and is a particularly important resource for victims living in areas in which there are no local services or for victims exploring relocation. Assistance is available in English and Spanish with access to more than 140 languages through interpreter services.

NATIONAL TEEN DATING ABUSE HELPLINE

866-331-9474

866-331-8453 (TTY)

<http://loveisrespect.org>

The Helpline and loveisrespect.org offer real-time one-on-one support from trained Peer Advocates who offer support, information and advocacy to those involved in dating abuse relationships, as well as concerned parents, teachers, clergy, law enforcement and service providers.

Both the NDVH and the Teen Dating Abuse Helpline are operated by the Texas Council on Family Violence.

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

6400 Flank Drive, Suite 1300
Harrisburg, PA 17112
800-537-2238
TTY: 800-553-2508
www.vawnet.org

Family Violence

Prevention Fund

383 Rhode Island Street, Suite 304
San Francisco, CA 94103-5133
415-252-8900
TTY: 800-595-4889
www.endabuse.org

Culturally-specific domestic violence resources

Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence

450 Sutter Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94108
415-954-9988, ext. 315
apidvinstitute@apiahf.org

Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community

290 Peters Hall
1404 Gortner Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55108
877-643-8222 (877-NIDVAAC)
www.dvinstitute.org

National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (ALIANZA)

P.O. Box 672, Triborough Station
New York, NY 10035
800-342-9908
www.dvalianza.org

Sacred Circle

National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women
722 Saint Joseph St.
Rapid City, SD 57701
877-733-7623
www.sacred-circle.com

Women of Color Network

6400 Flank Drive, Suite 1300
Harrisburg, PA 17112
800-537-2238
TTY: 800-553-2508
<http://womenofcolornetwork.org>