



Promising Futures: Best Practices for Children, Youth, and Parents Experiencing Domestic Violence

Program Readiness Checklist

Infrastructure:

No matter where your children's program is in its development, you can benefit from revisiting philosophical conversations and advancing policies and practices regarding children's programming.

Providing children's programming can bring up issues of personal beliefs and values for staff. It can also feel like a stretch of core principles and resources to consider and adequately respond to the needs of children, teens and families. Because of this, it is important for all programs to have ongoing conversations about their work with children. Time can be set aside in staff and board meetings, retreats, and supervision to talk about your work with children, teens and mothers.

Conversations may include:

- Exploring issues of ageism and adultism
- Staff feelings regarding working with children and teens
- Challenges that arise when embracing thoughtful children's programming
- Staff values regarding parenting styles, cultural diversity, personal bias, and child abuse.

Children's program and shelter policies may reflect best practices by shifting toward greater empowerment and support for mothers and children as well as a focus on strengthening their relationships. **Use these questions to help guide your conversations:**

Philosophy

- What is our program's philosophy?
- Does our mission statement include a specific commitment to children and their needs?
- Does our program have a clear philosophical statement or policy about nonviolent treatment of children and teens?
- Does our program have a well articulated statement about provision of services to children and teens which includes survivor centered/empowerment model language?
- Is the safety of non-offending parents and children primary in our decisions?
- Do you allocate sufficient resources to providing direct services to children and teens?



Core Values

Children and Teens:

- How do all staff members feel about working with children? Teens?
- Does our program consider children and teens direct recipients of our services?
- How do we see the needs of children as both separate and connected to their mothers'?
- How does our program feel about all staff building capacity in child advocacy, child development, and supporting parents?
- How well does our program apply our survivor centered/empowerment model in our work with children and teens?
- How does our program feel about information sharing, confidentiality and parental consent for children and teens?
- How do we respond to mothers requesting shelter for their teen boys? What are our feelings about teen boys in shelter?
- Do our guidelines provide enough autonomy and independence for older children?
- How do staff members feel about children missing their fathers and visitation with batterers?
- Does our program go beyond providing respite for mothers and focus on providing direct advocacy and support for children and teens?
- Have we explored conversations about ageism and adultism?

Parenting:

- What do we feel our role is regarding supporting parents in shelter?
- How do individual staff members feel about nonviolent discipline?
- Do we have a consistent message, common goal or overarching guideline about treatment of children and youth?
- Are all staff members comfortable providing parenting support to mothers?
- Does our program support mothers' parenting power or take it away?
- Do we support mothers' desire for their children to have safe and positive contact with fathers?
- What comes up for staff members regarding cultural values and practices related to discipline and parenting?

Child Abuse and Reporting:

- Do all staff understand their mandates regarding child abuse reporting?
- What programmatic challenges do we face given the overlap of child abuse and domestic violence?
- Do our child abuse reporting policies adequately pay attention to both child safety and parent empowerment?
- How does staff feel about situations where child abuse occurs in shelter?

Immigration



- What are our program's policies about working with undocumented survivors and their children?
- Are our services culturally relevant to immigrant and refugee families?

Physical Environment

At a minimum, programs are beginning to think beyond the status quo toward creating environments that:

- Empower families to make their own decisions and reclaim their autonomy and dignity
- Create a sense of security with clearly defined boundaries between the shelter and surrounding community
- Support families to reconnect with others and break the isolation of abuse
- Create spaces that make parenting less stressful and that support opportunities to play, strengthen family relationships and easily supervise children
- Create spaces specifically for teens
- Minimize the need for rules and the possibility of conflict

Information on physical environment was adapted with permission from the [Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence's Building Dignity project](#).

Personnel Policies

Staff Recruiting and Hiring Practices:

- When we recruit for all positions, do we seek experience in working with children, teens and families?
- Do all position interviews include questions about experience and philosophy regarding working with children and supporting parents?
- Do we ask questions that elicit feelings and values about working with children and teens and parenting approaching?
- When hiring, do we consider cultural diversity, knowledge of trauma informed approaches, understanding of the needs of under-served populations, and demonstrated skill in working with diverse families?
- Do we check child abuse registries and criminal records before hiring staff or engaging volunteers?

Staff Development and Support:

- Are all staff trained in child development, child advocacy, nonviolent discipline and supporting parents?
- Are all staff trained in providing trauma informed services with some focus on how trauma impacts children and brain development?
- Does our program provide adequate supervision for all advocates which includes opportunities for reflection on the challenges of working with a diversity of children and families?



- How can we better build program-wide capacity for all staff regarding cultural values and practices related to discipline and parenting within families?

Program Practice

Foundational:

- Does our program strive to balance advocacy with children and mothers both as individuals and together as families?
- Do we have clear lines of communication, coordination, and collaboration between children and adult focused advocates?
- Do parents and children have places to play together, have time alone, and cook and eat together? Do we have teen friendly spaces?
- Do all staff members have training and skills to help heal and strengthen parent, child, sibling relationships?
- Do we consider cultural values and practices related to parenting, discipline, and mental health within families?
- Are all staff trained in nonviolent discipline strategies and skills to support parents?
- Have we had training to ensure that our programming is trauma informed?
- Are our programs and materials accessible to all people with disabilities, who are deaf or hard of hearing, and people for whom English is not their first language?

With Children and Teens:

- Does our program support children's healing by:
 - Supporting strong bonds between children, mothers, and siblings?
 - Providing a sense of safety for children?
 - Supporting environments that are structured and predictable?
 - Connecting children and families with their communities and support systems?
 - Creating safe spaces for children and teens to express their feelings, be heard and understood?
 - Allowing for children to not feel responsible for the care of adults?
 - Providing access to counseling and support groups?
 - Supporting decisions regarding contact with noncustodial parent if safe and doesn't interfere with healing?
- Do we create programs for teens which consider their individual needs and concerns
- Do we allow for teen autonomy, protected space, and privileges?
- Do we have clear practices about sharing children and teen's information, and parental consent for services that allow children and teens the most confidentiality possible?

With Mothers:

- Does our program empower mothers to care for their children without unnecessary rules and unnatural structures?
- Are staff available to support parents and children in informal ways (e.g., casual conversations, providing recreation)?



- Does our program support parents in reclaiming and redefining their parenting and family culture while offering resources and support?
- Are staff prepared to support mothers who want their children to visit their fathers, provide information on impacts, options and safety?
- Are all staff able to provide information about the impact that batterers have on children and ways to support children's healing?
- Are all staff able to talk with mothers about the impact that batterers have had on their parenting, the stressors related to parenting in shelter and beyond, and brainstorm parenting supports?

Child Abuse and Reporting:

- How do we define what constitutes child abuse and/or neglect?
- Are our child abuse reporting policies and protocols articulated to both adult and child service users in appropriate ways at the onset of services?
- What is protected and what is not?
- What happens when the children's interests and mothers' interests differ?
- How will our program determine if a child is in danger? If a child is in immediate danger, how will the agency respond?
- What will our program do beyond compliance with mandated reporting requirements?
- How will we support battered mother's protection and parenting of their children?
- What resources could our program offer to assist battered women in their role as mothers?
- How will cultural considerations change our advocacy?
- Does our program work closely with mothers when reporting child abuse whenever possible?
- Does our agency provide advocates with consultation with supervisors or managers prior to making the report?

Cultural Considerations:

- Does our staff represent the diversity of the populations we serve?
- Are all staff allowed time for personal work and training on developing cultural competency including self examination, understanding power differentials, accepting different values, and understanding the diversity of the communities accessing our program?
- Do we ask families how we could better meet their unique needs and consistently incorporate their feedback into our practice?
- Do all staff understand the history that guides a particular community's perception of services (e.g. domestic violence shelters, police, child welfare)? Have we taken steps to create plans that will meet the needs of individuals from that community?
- Have we truly made efforts to collaborate with under-served communities and their representing organizations, learn from them, and create sustainable plans for working together and providing a wider range of culturally sensitive services for families affected by domestic violence?
- Do we have outreach strategies to reach under-served communities?
- Do we have a plan for accessing relevant language, deaf and hard of hearing interpreters?
- Do we avoid asking children to interpret our communications with their mothers?



- Do we consistently examine our shelter spaces, decorations, food, recreational and printed materials, and personal care items for cultural relevancy?

Community Connections:

- Do we have established connections and referral protocols with community programs and mental health providers that will support children and teens and promote resilience and healing?
- Are we working with schools and early education programs to coordinate services whenever possible?
- Are we effectively collaborating with community organizations to better meet the needs of the diversity of families with whom we work?
- Do we have an established relationship with child protection which allows communication about supporting the safety of children as well as adult victims of domestic violence and ensures that children are not removed from non-abusive parents?
- Do we intentionally build and sustain relationships and partnerships with staffs of other agencies and systems that affect family safety?
- Do we work with community partners to establish a shared vision for practice based on safety for all family members?
- Do we understand various perspectives and work processes and acknowledge the experience and skills of staffs in other agencies.
- Have we developed joint protocols and policies with key community partners to guide practice?

Partnering with Supervised Visitation Centers

- How are our program's services linked to other family service agencies, and in particular services for men and fathers?
- What support and services does your program have for mothers who are post-separation?
- In what ways does your program support women and children using your local supervised visitation program?
- Does your provide training and support to your local supervised visitation program on the dynamics of domestic violence?

Partnering with Programs for Fathers and Abusive Men

- How do fatherhood programs, batterers intervention and supervised visitation centers safely keep the lived experiences of women and children at the center of their work?
- What type of training and on-going supervision does staff receive about domestic violence and children's exposure to domestic violence?
- What is each programs philosophy about domestic violence and battering?
- What is each programs approach to engaging with the partners and children of the men they are serving?
- How do programs work towards holding men who use violence responsible for their behavior while supporting opportunities for change and healing?



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