

Supporting Mothers in DV Programs To Reclaim and Visualize Parenting

Mothers who are parenting in the context of domestic violence have most often had their parenting undermined by the abuser. It is sometimes helpful to talk about what that experience has been like, how to reclaim their power as a parent and visualize family structures and celebrations.

- Talk about what it is/was like to parent with an abusive partner. Talk about the ways that power was taken away from her as a parent, how her parenting was undermined, what types of things she wanted to do that she could not.
- Support her to visualize how she wants her family structure and relationships to look. Talk about behaviors and language that she would like to see developed. Talk about household guidelines and structures she would like to develop for her family.
- Talk about holidays, meals, and times of celebration, how she'd like these times to feel and look.
- Reassure her that there are realistic ways to move toward these visions - taking one step and issue at a time.
- Talk about this time of restructuring as an exciting new start and as a way to support non-violent forms of communication and discipline in her family.

Talk about guidelines, schedules and consistency

- Talk about how predictability will help her children heal from the violence that they have experienced.
- Help moms think about household guidelines. Suggest that she sit down with her children to design some simple household guidelines that they can write up and post.
- Help moms design manageable schedules for kids that can provide a consistent structure for everyday.
- Talk about some language that moms can use over and over to help children sense consistency and clarity about household guidelines and schedules.

Talk about ways to ritualize and reclaim historically disrupted times.

Bedtime and mealtime are often especially hard times for families that have been exposed to batterers. Working with moms and children to 'reclaim' these times of day will help strengthen their bonds as well as provide structure to these times.

- Suggest that the family members talk about their individual needs at particularly difficult times in their days together.
- Have them decide together on a time to focus on making better.
- Suggest that the family be creative and draw a picture of how they want these times to be and to look.
- Ask the family to write a family poem or blessing to help make these times more celebratory. **For instance:** a bedtime poem or a family blessing to say at each meal and at each bedtime.
- Ask the family to come up with positively framed words to describe how they will design these special times. Have them make a poster to hang in their bedrooms or in their dining area:

'We will read a book or two all in one bed together right before we turn the lights out'

'We will say our poem and hold hands each night after we turn out the lights'

'We will try to have dinner together at the table with candles and say our family blessing before we eat'

Activities to Strengthen Mother/Child/Sibling Relationships

Make a 'Family Banner'

- Using a large sheet of paper, create a 'family banner' together.
- Think about what it is that makes your family unique and special and include, photos, drawings, etc. that represent these things.
- Design a family 'emblem', 'coat of arms', or 'logo' that moms and kids agree on together.

Make 'Feelings' games and artwork together...and use them!

- Make a 'feelings barometer' with an arrow that points to feeling faces and words.
- Make posters with pictures and words that identifying feelings (you can cut them from magazines or draw them)
- Make paper plate & Popsicle stick puppets with feelings faces on them.
- Use these games and artwork to help identify feelings for each other and for yourself.

Make a family chart about whose jobs are whose

- Draw a picture of mom and then draw pictures or words to describe her jobs (both as a parent and chores). **For instance:** *decide when bedtime is, help children make good choices, clean the kitty litter, cook dinner, keep her children safe, talk to her kids about their feelings, try to use kind words, etc.*)
- Draw a picture of each child and then draw pictures or words to describe their jobs (both as children and chores). **For instance:** *make own bed, play, clean up toys after they play, pick out school clothes, try to use kind words, etc.*)
- Look together at the similarities and differences in each person's jobs.

Make big stuffed family member dolls

- Using big rollout newsprint paper (available from the newspaper company), roll out enough paper to trace each family member twice!
- Fold the paper in half from the top (so that it is doubled).
- Have the first family member lay down on the paper and have the other members trace that person.
- Cut out the paper in the shape of the person (both pieces).
- Everyone color the person's face, hands, feet, clothes, etc. (both sheets of paper one for the front and one for the back of the person).
- While you are coloring in the tracing, take time to talk about the things you like about the different parts of the person (*I like your smile, I like the way you hug with your arms*). Someone could record these words onto another sheet of paper.
- When you are done coloring, staple the two pieces of tracing together little by little (with the colored sides out), stuffing the 'doll' with balled up newsprint as you go.
- When you are done, you'll have a life sized stuffed doll.
- Repeat with the other members of your family until you have your whole family done!

Make family members out of clay and set them up doing their favorite things together.

Cook together.

**Make time each day to play together.
Even if it is just for 30 minutes.**

Be goofy together.

Sing together.