

Supporting Families & Children

Tennessee Domestic Violence Shelter Best Practices Manual / Section I



According to the data gathered in National Network to End Domestic Violence’s annual Domestic Violence Shelter Census, from 2010-2015, roughly 51% of all shelter residents are children. In spite of this fact, many shelter staff feel ill-equipped to work with family units and support the unique parenting efforts of their adult clients. Instead, family members are often given entirely separate services, and advocates often take an inappropriate role in disciplining children or coerce adults into parenting in ways they are not comfortable with. It is vital for advocates to have clear and healthy boundaries when interacting with parents and children, and to be comfortable in their role of supporting the survivor’s parenting, building resilience, and encouraging bonding within the parent-child relationship.

Response & Interaction with Parents

Advocates have a responsibility to be aware of the ways in which living with and surviving abuse can impact the survivor’s parenting. “Domestic violence is inherently destructive to maternal authority because abusers intentionally undermine, devalue, and interfere with their victim’s parenting as a tactic of abuse. Further, their behavior can provide a model for children of contemptuous and aggressive behavior toward their mother.” (Keene & Ortiz, 2015)

Advocates can begin by asking themselves:

How can we support parents and children to strengthen their bonds with each other?

How can we help families repair relationship difficulties that have emerged as both parent and child have been affected by their experiences of domestic violence?
(Blumenfeld, 2015)

The role of the advocate is not to create a lasting relationship with either parent or child, but to act as a support and encourage rebuilding and nurturing of the parent-child bond. Advocates should never take it upon themselves to impose discipline in any form on the child, or to mandate a certain parenting behavior (such as a specific form of discipline or interaction) from the adult. Rather, the goal is to create an

environment where there are ample opportunities for bonding, and a shelter community which encourages and lends itself to non-violent discipline.

Within the first 36-48 hours after a parent enters shelter:

- Tell the parent you want to support their parenting
- Ask “Is there anything in particular you want me to know about any of your children that will help us make this a good place for them?”, “Do they have a birthday coming up, special learning needs or behavior challenges?”, “Are there games or activities that the child really enjoys?”
- Tell the parent you know it can be hard to parent in shelter and you want to help

Challenges to discuss:

- Lots of distractions for kids who need to do homework
 - Minimal private space with mom and siblings (how you can help)
 - Kids have had a variety of experiences and we can't always predict how they may act out their distresses and traumas; need to be vigilant about safety and appropriate play and compassionate with children who are struggling with displacement, disruption and trauma
 - Varying parenting styles within the shelter
 - Feeling that everyone is observing your parenting
- Ask what the parent is most concerned about with regard to parenting in shelter? (What can you do to alleviate this concern or provide support?)



Advocacy

- Give parents and children an informal tour of the shelter within the first 24 hours. Give special attention to children's and community spaces such as play/media rooms, study areas, quiet areas, etc. Give children a chance to explore and explain shelter community living (such as non-violence, cooking/access to food, quiet times, etc.) in age-appropriate terms.
- Advocates routinely make space for parents to talk about how abuse impacted their children and their parenting
- Program staff defers decision making regarding children's daily activities to the child's parent
- Parents, not program staff, present children with toys, games or other fun things that the program buys or receives as donations for children.
- Regular, fun events are scheduled for staff, children and mothers to gather in positive and fun ways, such as pizza party, game night, picnics at the park, etc.

(Checklist adapted from WSCADV Supporting Parenting in Shelter Checklist for DV Advocacy Programs)



- Ask about their parenting philosophy: What informs their parenting? Who is their role model? Who do they go to for information and ideas about parenting? How have these strategies worked? What sort of parent do they hope to be?
- Introduce or refresh parents on the non-violence policy in shelter and let them know you are available to discuss this at any time.
- Staff should include non-judgmental and supportive language when discussing parenting and discipline.
 - “I know parenting can be hard, especially with so much change happening, and being in a new place.”
 - “I am here to support you and your children. I can set aside time whenever you need to let you vent or talk about parenting, education, or child development concerns.”
 - “We care about you and your children and making sure you all feel safe and supported.”
 - “We respect your parenting decisions, including decisions about discipline. We’re here to offer support and help you explore your options.”
- Ask about punishment styles, and what kind of punishments they typically use for their children. *See ‘Discipline’, page 72, for information you can share. Information on how to talk about spanking is on page 74.*
- Ask: “How will we know if you are having a hard time?”
- When parents come to you with concerns, instead of posing questions that the parent might answer with a yes or no, you might ask:



- “Can you tell me more about that?”
- “What was that like for you?”
- “How is [your child] doing?”
- “How does [your child] respond to you when that happens?”
- “What have you tried so far?”

(Checklist adapted from WSCADV Supporting Parenting in Shelter Checklist for DV Advocacy Programs and Keene & Ortiz, 2015)

Encouraging Messages Advocates Can Use With Parents:

- There are no perfect parents: we all have strengths and weaknesses
- Parents can change the lives of their children for the better
- Single parents are good parents too
- Mothers can be good role models for boys
- Learning to be a parent is a life-long process
- Stopping exposure to violence was the best thing you could do for your children
- There are people to help if you need it
- You can model and teach non-violent problem solving, attitudes, and behavior
- Living with violence as a child is not a "life sentence" for a bad future
- Children can be resilient and can thrive

(Baker & Cunningham, 2004)



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

ACEs, or Adverse Childhood Experiences, are a fast-growing field of study recognized by the CDC and other science and mental health professionals as an important building block in understanding physical and emotional health over a lifetime. These studies have consistently shown that those adults who have experienced multiple ACEs, including childhood sexual abuse, childhood exposure to domestic violence, and exposure to drug abuse, have the potential to experience negative mental and physical health outcomes through their lives. These outcomes include increased risk for depression, anxiety, PTSD, heart disease, diabetes, and other illnesses.

Having advocates and other program staff take the ACE questionnaire and discuss ACEs and prevention is a great empathy building activity.

See <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/> for the quiz and more information.

ACEs are very common. Almost two-thirds of the original study participants reported at least one ACE, and more than one in five reported three or more ACEs (CDC, 1997).

The good news is that these negative health outcomes and even ACEs themselves are preventable. The CDC has identified five key strategies for prevention, including “supporting parents and positive parenting”. One of the best ways to keep children safe is to support and ensure the safety of their non-offending parent.

Resources & Referrals

Advocates should be prepared for parents to ask for assistance with things like:

Before using ACEs as a tool with staff or residents, the staff members implementing the tool must be trained appropriately. Contact your local health department or Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee for training resources.



- Safety planning for self and children.
- Information about community resources for children (e.g. after school & mentoring programs).
- Counseling or support groups for children.
- Information on child development and how violence affects that development.
- Respite from care-taking or a break from day-to-day struggles (e.g. help with childcare).
- Help with parenting a child whose behavior is worrisome or challenging.
- Help with strengthening or creating a healthy parent-child bond.
- Legal advocacy and referral for child support or custody matters.

Make a plan in advance. Create lists of resources and referral sources in your service area. Shelters are encouraged to reach out to local child advocacy, mentoring, peer education, counseling, and other child

and youth services to become familiar with the services they provide and discuss opportunities for collaboration.

Take a moment to bring to mind several of the parents and families you are currently working with. Ask yourself:

- Do I routinely observe parenting strengths?
- What do I identify as positive, or think is working well, in the parent-child relationships I see?
- Am I able to share my observations directly with parents? How often?
- When I do share my observations about strengths with parents, what effect does this have on them?

(Blumenfeld, 2015)

Advocates should establish themselves not only as a source of support for physical safety, but for emotional safety as well. This includes validating and supporting the survivor in their parenting efforts.



Education and Schooling

A stable school experience can help ease some of the effects of domestic violence on children. Schools offer many important benefits, including safety, predictability, a sense of normalcy, peer support, and basic medical and mental health services. However, schools and service providers must work together to ensure safety and confidentiality for children and their parents who are fleeing domestic violence.

The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that ensures children and youth who have lost their housing can attend school. It covers children and youth who are living in domestic violence shelters, emergency shelters, staying temporarily with friends or relatives, or in other temporary or inadequate housing. The McKinney-Vento Act says that children who have lost their housing can:

- Attend school, no matter where they live or how long they have lived there.
- Continue in the school they went to before losing their housing or in the school in which they were enrolled last (called “school of origin”), even if they move out of the school district, if that is feasible.
- Go to the local school in the area where they are living. The school must immediately let students enroll, attend classes, and participate fully, even if students do not have documents such as proof of residency, immunization records, other medical records, or school records.
- Receive transportation to their school of origin, provided or arranged by the school district.
- Access all the school services they need, including preschool.

Advocates and organizations can use the worksheet on the following page to help facilitate conversations with their clients about parenting needs. Advocates should provide, give referrals to, or help clients find resources in their community to match their needs.



Advocates should be prepared to help parents enroll their children in school and assist them in accessing the resources listed above. For a model policy on children’s education while in shelter see page 209.

Use this chart to list the things you need for your children. You can get some of these things here. For other things, your advocate can help you find community resources!



Things that I need for myself or my children. ✓	Where Can I find this?
Someone to look after my children while I work.	
Help to pay for child care.	
Help with changing schools.	
Learning how to be the best parent I can be.	
A lawyer for custody or child support issues.	
Help for my child, who is having a hard time.	
Someone to look after my children to give me a break.	
Help for before or after custody visits.	
Counseling for my children.	
Other:	
Other:	
Other:	

(Baker & Cunningham, 2004)



Discipline

Positive Discipline is a model used by many school systems and parenting experts that focuses on behavior. It is based on the idea that there are no bad children, just good and bad behaviors. Good behaviors can be reinforced and bad behaviors punished without hurting the child emotionally or physically.

Positive Discipline is a model focused on respect, compassion, and responsibility, much like survivor-focused advocacy. It promotes positive decision making, teaching expectations to children early, and encouraging positive behaviors. By contrast, punitive or negative discipline may include corporal (physical) punishment and other behaviors that can erode and damage parent-child bonds.

Positive Discipline may not seem any different than other parenting styles, but the keys to this behavior are using a calm tone, respecting children's boundaries, no negative language, and being firm and consistent in enforcing rules.

One of the most important pieces of Positive Discipline is to establish reasonable and clear rules and limits. Often abusers will 'punish' their victims for arbitrary and ever-changing rule infractions. They use this as a means of controlling their victims and making them believe that the abuse is their fault. Positive Discipline is the complete opposite of this manipulative behavior. Children should know all of the rules and boundaries (in shelter and those that their parent establishes) and understand what the consequences for breaking them will be. These rules should be consistently enforced and consequences should be predictable. This helps to establish and secure, safe, and routine-oriented space where the child can thrive. The goal of this model is not to 'punish' but to help children learn to take control of and responsibility for their behaviors.

Don't forget recognition!

Recognizing positive behaviors in children ("Good job," "You worked hard for that," "I really appreciate how you helped Sally.") and rewarding especially important good behavior ("I got you your favorite smoothie because I know how

If possible, let the children help set the rules.

Ask- "What do you think rules should be for the house?" Or "What rules would help us be kind to each other?"



Page 38 of *Helping Children Thrive* includes a great activity for helping parents create family rules with their children. See link in 'Resources' at the end of this chapter.

Note that the Positive Discipline model is not a mandate for residents in shelter, but gives an excellent and easy-to-understand framework to discuss discipline with parents. It also helps to foster a healthy and respectful environment in shelter.



hard you worked studying for your exam”) is a great way to motivate kids to keep up or engage in good behavior. It’s also an opportunity to strengthen the bond between parent and child.

On Spanking

Spanking is a widely debated topic, and for many it’s a very personal and even culturally-ingrained practice. In the South, spanking continues to be an extremely common tool for punishment. Most experts advise against corporal punishment, but many parents (most of them spanked themselves as children) still see it as a useful practice.

As advocates, it is a particularly difficult topic. While it is important to allow parents to choose their own parenting and punishment styles, spanking is something that is contrary to both our commitment to, and rules against, violence in shelter. Even when used simply as ‘punishment’ and not an abusive behavior, spanking can still trigger many negative memories and emotions in adult and child residents.

Advocates are advised to have a conversation about punishment styles with all parents in shelter (see checklist page 67-68 for ideas). When talking about spanking, advocates can discuss the following problems related to spanking and offer non-violent alternatives.

- **Spanking doesn’t teach kids good behaviors.** A child who gets spanked for arguing with his brother won’t learn how to get along better in the future. Effective discipline should teach new skills.
- **Spanking models aggression and can trigger memories of violence.** Children learn the most from modeling adult behaviors. So, if you spank your child for hitting his brother, you’ll send a confusing message. Children who are spanked often feel shame and a loss of control.
- **Spanking shifts a child’s focus from their behavior to their parent’s behavior.** They may spend their time focusing on how they are angry at their parent rather than on what they could do better next time.

Types of rule enforcement used:

- **Positive reinforcement:** Complimenting, recognizing or rewarding good behaviors
- **Negative reinforcement:** Not giving attention to bad behaviors. Ignoring requests made with rude language (e.g. reminding of manners, “please call me mom, not ‘Karen’”- refusing to answer to ‘Karen’)
- **Positive punishment:** Correlating the punishment to the desired behavior e.g. requiring a child to clean up a mess they made, requiring extra study-time after not turning in homework
- **Negative punishment:** Removing a privilege, time out.



Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt has created *Play Nicely: The Healthy Discipline Program.*, a free curriculum on healthy discipline, including tools and resources. It can be found at <http://www.childrenshospital.vanderbilt.org/interior.php?mid=1998>



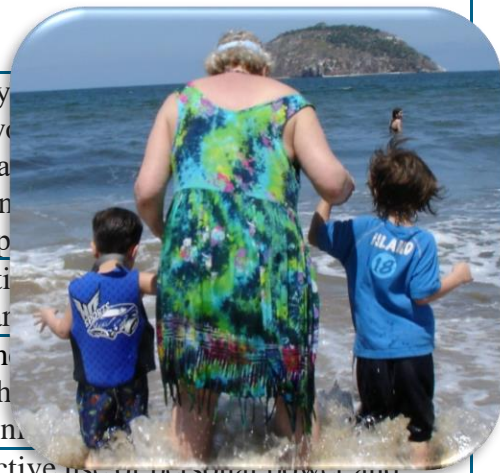
- **Spanking loses effectiveness over time.** Sometimes kids decide the misbehavior is “worth it.”
- **Spanking isn't an option as children grow older.** Age appropriate positive disciplines can be used throughout a child’s development, even into late teen years. *(Amy Morin, LCSW, 2016)*

Here are some ideas for talking about spanking and other sensitive topics:



There are 5 criteria for effective positive discipline

Criteria	Examples
Help children feel a sense of connection or belonging.	This is our home, so we have to keep it clean
Mutually respectful and encouraging.	“I need your help. Can you help me? It’s important to you to do your part. How can we work on it?” “What do you think about this?” “Would you be willing to help me with this?” brainstorm together on problem
Effective long-term.	Age appropriate and fitting consequences cleaning when messes are made
Teaches important social and life skills.	Respect, concern for others, cooperation as well as the ability to solve problems at school or larger community
Invites children to discover how capable they are.	Encourages the constructive use of personal power and autonomy. “If you need my help with your assignment, please let me know in advance” “I can see you’re upset.” “What do you think about this?”



(Nelsen, Jane (2006). Positive Discipline)

Be honest about your own worry or discomfort in talking about the subject and address the concern clearly. You can begin by asking if the parent shares your concern.

Example script- “I’ve been a little worried about how to bring this topic up with you, but I know how much you want the best for your child [using the child’s name].”

“Discipline, and spanking, is a hard topic, especially in shelter. Is this something you’ve thought about?”

Elicit interest first, don’t just tell or demand.

Example Script- “I have some information on spanking, and some reasons that it might not always be the best choice. Would you like to look at this tip sheet with me? Some of it may fit your family and some may not.”

When a parent brings up a concern with you, be tentative about sharing observations or making suggestions. The parent may just want someone to listen or to vent to. Think about times when you have called a friend or mentor to talk out an issue, but have not wanted them to try and solve it for you. How did it feel when they started telling you what to do?

First, explore with the parent what they typically do in the situation, then ask about what has worked in the past and what hasn't. Once you've done that, then you can offer suggestions.

Example script- "I am not sure if this would be helpful or not. Something that other parent's have told me works for their children is..." or "Something I have information about is..."

Normalize, then explore alternatives. When you have a concern about how a parent may be responding to their child, it can be helpful to first normalize the behavior and response first. You can think about how the parent may be feeling herself in that moment, and you start from a place that makes it okay to have those feelings. By normalizing the parent's response, you offer the parent a space to explore without fear of judgment.

Sometimes advocates can become frustrated when working with a parent. Many of the conversations advocates must have with parents in shelter are difficult and time-consuming. It is easy to feel discouraged, ineffective, or even angry.

The Self-Reflection Tool on Page 31 of *Guide for Engaging & Supporting Parents Affected by Domestic Violence (Blumenfeld, 2015)* can help advocates and supervisors have conversations about these difficult cases. Find a link to this guide in 'Resources' at the end of this chapter.

Example Script- "A lot of mothers have told me that when they see their child [crying, swearing, hitting, etc.] that they [shut down, feel helpless, get angry, or they think they would be better off with the abusive parent, etc.] I wonder if you have ever felt this way? What helps you at those times?" "I wonder if you might be interested in trying something different and seeing if this helps."

Tactfully introduce another perspective.

Sometimes the best we can do is to acknowledge the parent's positive intentions for their child, reflect back and honor their beliefs, and ask permission to revisit the topic in the future.

Example Script- "I hear what you're saying about him being a bad kid just like his father, but do you think that he may be acting this way because he's feeling scared or worried about you getting back together with his Dad and you getting hurt again?"

(Adapted from Blumenfeld, 2015)

Relationship Strengthening vs Weakening Behaviors

Understanding the detrimental and damaging parenting behaviors often used by abusers can help advocates relate to the adult and child clients they are working with. It can also help advocates create a framework for discussing behaviors that parents witnessed in their homes and explore alternative behaviors parents can use to strengthen their family bonds.



Tactics abusers use when parenting:

Authoritarianism

Authoritarian behavior is often characterized by unrealistic expectations for victims, little empathy, and harsh punishment for even very small infractions. Discipline is not thought out or age-appropriate, and is often a product of anger or frustration. Examples include expecting perfection and adult behavior from children regardless of age, or thinking a baby cries to ‘get attention/get on their nerves’ or ‘be a brat’.

Low Involvement & Neglect

This involves leaving the daily care and interaction with children to the non-offending. The abuser gives little to no affection, and may avoid interacting with the children in any manner. The abuser may also use rare praise or attention as a ‘reward’ for children to side with them against the non-offending parent. Financial abuse is often present in relationships characterized by neglect, e.g. spending family money on the abuser’s own interests rather than on food for children.

Undermining of Non-offending Parent

An abuser may overrule the decisions of the non-offending parent, or belittle, ridicule, or abuse the non-offending parent in front of the children. Deliberately undermining the authority of the non-offending parent, or encouraging the children to model the abuser’s behavior toward the non-offending parent are all parts of this strategy. The abuser may tell the children that the survivor is to blame for the violence in the home, or that the survivor does not love the children. E.g. “I only hurt your mother because she did something wrong.” Your client may say: “My kids treat me just like my abuser did.”

Ability to ‘perform’ under observation.

Just as many abusers are considered by their extended family or peers to be upstanding citizens, the same is true in parenting situations; many abusers put on a public face of a loving and attentive, even involved, parent. Children may feel safer in public places for this reason.

(Bancroft & Silverman, 2002, The Batterer as Parent)

Role Confusion.

When abuse is occurring within the home, children often assume or find themselves forced into roles that are not appropriate, such as rescuer, referee, or caretaker (especially in the case of children with younger siblings). It can take some time after they are in a safe place for children to adjust to a normal routine and their proper roles. This can cause tension

within family relationships, when children try to assume parenting roles over their siblings, or see themselves as above being parented by the survivor, often because of assuming a protective role. This may also cause bitterness within the child, who may resent being forced into a role they did not choose and were not emotionally prepared for. This resentment may more often than not be directed toward the survivor, both because they are seen as a 'safe' person to express frustration toward and because the abuser may have cultivated the idea that the abuse was caused by the survivor.



For more information about power and control tactics used against children, see the 'Abuse of Children Wheel' developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, MN. For more specific examples of these tactics in practice, see *Helping Children Thrive*, page 24 and checklist on page 28 as a conversation tool for advocates with parents (Baker & Cunningham, 2004). For links see 'Resources' at the end of this chapter.




“Children who adopt pseudo-adult roles such as the “caretaker” may have difficulty adjusting when expected to assume the role of child once again. The “abuser’s assistant” may take up the role of abuser. The “scapegoat” child’s isolation within the family may be intensified by feelings of responsibility for the marital break-up. The “perfect child” may be impatient with and blaming towards siblings who misbehaved or otherwise “triggered” abuse by the abuser.”
(Baker & Cunningham, 2004)

The following skills can strengthen the parent-child relationship and help children to begin resuming their proper roles within the family.

1. **Model the behavior you wish to see.** This includes compassion, honesty, healthy expressions of emotion (including anger), as well as non-violent, and non-sexist viewpoints.
2. **Have clear expectations.** Rules should be appropriate, understandable, and known to all family members. When you identify negative behaviors (e.g. hitting, name-calling) you should also identify what behaviors should replace it (e.g. soft touches, respectful words).
3. **Praise good behavior.** Misbehavior often gets more attention than positive behavior. Praising good actions encourages them to continue. “You did a great job on your project!” “Thank you for sharing with your sister.”
4. **Focus on the behavior, not the person.** Remember ‘positive discipline’ and that behaviors are bad, not people. E.g. instead of “you’re very rude” try “I don’t like the words you’re using, they

make me feel hurt.”

5. **Never compare the behavior of the child with the abuser when disciplining them.** Saying things like, “you’re just like your father” gives children a sense of worthlessness.
6. **Keep emotions out of discipline, and avoid yelling.** All parents get tired, frustrated, emotional, and overworked. Sometimes small things (e.g. not picking up a toy) can cause a large emotional reaction. Take a step back, count to ten, and think through your words. Don’t yell; let your words get the point across. People tend to start to tune out and ignore yelling if it is all they hear, so save it for emergencies.
7. **Expect what is reasonable and realistic based on the child’s age and cognitive abilities.** For example, toddlers can understand the concept of ‘hurt’ and why to avoid hot stoves, but will not cognitively understand the emotional impact of repeating bad names used by the abuser.
8. **Keep adult matters among adults.** It is not fair to expect a child to take on the burden of being a confidant for a parent. This further confuses family roles and can be stressful and upsetting for children to hear.
9. **Make time to spend playing, talking, or doing other bonding activities.** If you have more than one child, set aside time, even just a few minutes, to spend one-on-one time with each child. This shows that children are an important part of a parent’s life.
10. **Practice empathetic parenting.** Parents should consider the ways in which they wish a parent or authority figure had responded to them in times of emotional distress.



See the worksheet titled ‘10 Things I Can Do’ on page 36 of Helping Children Thrive (link in ‘Resources’ at the end of this chapter) for great activities for parents in shelter to think about how they can apply Positive Discipline and nurturing parenting skills.

Skill Building

The two key skills for survivors to use in rebuilding and nurturing the bonds with their children are listening and reassuring. Advocates can talk with survivors about how they can reassure children that they will protect them, that they won’t leave them, and that nothing that happened in the past was their fault. Often, especially when young, children instinctively blame themselves for anger, violence, and disruption in the home. Likewise, when parents separate (even if it is a situation where the survivor flees with the children to a safe space), young children often worry that they will lose their non-offending parent as well.

Advocates can help parents to find ways to reassure children that they are safe and loved, and that they are not to blame for the violence they have experienced. Often it is helpful to facilitate age appropriate conversations between the parent and child about the violence. The keys to these conversations are:

- Respect the child’s feelings about their experiences, and do not try to tell the child how they should feel. This can be especially hard when many children still have positive, loving, or hopeful feelings toward the abuser.
- Acknowledge that the child’s feelings are okay and valid.
- Do not force the child to talk if and when they don’t want to, but let them know that they can choose to have the conversation when they feel ready.
- Help the child put words to feelings if they are struggling. Some children find it easier to draw or write about their experiences.
- Prepare the survivor that they may hear things that surprise or hurt them, including incidents not known before, or frustrations that the child may have toward the survivor. Sometimes when children are safe they let out built up emotions, including anger.
- Don’t confide in child or tell them bad things from the past that the child is not already aware of.

“Listen to them talk, and show you are ready to hear whatever they need to say.” (Baker & Cunningham, 2004)



Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee offers **Nurturing Parenting**, a concentrated, 8-12 week evidence-based program for parents with children twelve and under. The program focuses on fostering nurturing, protective adult behaviors and safe environments for children in order to promote healthy coping skills and resiliency in children. The program is free and trainers are available to shelters across Tennessee. For more- <http://www.pcat.org/support-for-parents/>.



Nurturing Activities



Nurturing activities include any activities, small or large, where parents have an opportunity to interact and bond with their children in positive ways. This can include anything from short dance parties, playground visits, movie nights, arts and crafts, cooking, and even homework time. Shelter staff should try to provide or encourage small opportunities for bonding daily, and larger opportunities (like movie nights) weekly.

Movies nights. Advocates may host a movie night with parents and children within the shelter, using a movie that is family appropriate and showcases some aspect of healthy family interaction. After the film advocates can ask the group questions, encourage parents to ask- and answer!-questions, and facilitate discussion about the relationships depicted in the film.

Questions might include:

What was your favorite character and why?

What did you think about [parent and child] in the film?

What was your favorite/least favorite part of the film and why?

Movie Night Film Ideas:

Title	Key Points	Warnings	Sample discussion question
<i>Lilo and Stitch</i>	Found family, accepting different family structures	Discussion of parental deaths	What do you think about ‘ohana’? What do you think it means to be family?
<i>Big Hero 6</i>	Found family, non-traditional family structures, dealing with grief and loss	Discussion of parental and sibling deaths	Who do you talk to when you’re feeling sad like Hiro was in the movie?
<i>Brave</i>	Mother-daughter relationships and bonding		Who do you think the bravest person in the movie was? Why?
<i>Matilda</i>	Found family, acceptance, inner strength	Discussion and depiction of abuse and neglect	Do you think Matilda and Miss Honey were happy after the end of the movie? Why?
<i>Coraline</i>	Parent-child bonds, lends itself to discussion about manipulation	Could be scary for some children	What do you think you could do if you were in Coraline’s position? Is there someone you could talk to or get help from?

***How to Train
Your Dragon***

Father-child relationships,
healthy masculinity

Hiccup wasn't like the
other boys and men in his
village; do you think that
helped him in the movie?

Draw a Safe Place

Purpose: This activity is designed to create a personally meaningful, visual representation of a safe place that the child can “go to” in their mind when they feel stressed. This activity promotes self-soothing—both in making the drawing and in using the image in the future.

Materials: paper, crayons, markers, or paints

Recommended age range: 4 years and older

Instructions: Invite the child to draw a real or imaginary place that feels safe. Note that some children may not be able to think of a real place that is safe, because of their traumatic experiences. Sometimes older children, teens, or adults may feel self-conscious about their drawing abilities. Reassure the participant(s) that “this is not a drawing contest” and that the purpose is not to display artistic ability, gently encourage them to re-enter the experience.

This activity can be done individually or in a small group. Some children may need prompts from the activity leader to help create this place (e.g., elaborating on details that the child is able to articulate, such as “Grandma’s blanket is soft,” “breeze in the air,” “smell of cookies baking,” to give specific sights, sounds, smells, textures). After the drawing is complete, invite the child to talk about the picture. Explain to the child that they can “go to” this space in their mind when they are feeling stressed. This can lead to a discussion about times that are stressful when going to this place in their minds might be comforting.

Bedtime Beads from Natalie Caufield

Purpose: This activity incorporates relaxation skills for self-regulation. The beads incorporate both deep breathing skills and positive self-affirmations, images, and memories. In creating the necklace, the parent and child can talk about what images the child is selecting and why they are meaningful. If done with the parent, this activity can promote increased communication and closeness.

As with the “Draw a Safe Place” activity, some children may need help in thinking about what images, words, or memories to include on the beads. Once the beads are completed, they can be carried with the child to school and to visitation with the non-custodial parent, as well as used as a bedtime ritual at home. For many children, the transition to bedtime is particularly difficult, and if this becomes part of the family routine, it can help ease this transition to sleep.

Materials: string, small beads, larger beads, paints, markers, stickers

Recommended age range: 3 years – 16 years old

Instructions: The participant will construct a necklace from large and small beads and using a sturdy string that can be knotted. The small bead, representing the ‘breath beads’ can be all the same color (or plain wooden beads). These are alternated with the larger beads that are decorated with positive images (e.g., people, places, objects, animals, such as family pet, beach), inspirational words (e.g., love, hope, gratitude), or an image that represents a positive memory (e.g., family trip, kicking a winning goal in soccer, etc.). For younger children, stickers may be used, and they may also need some assistance from a parent or the activity leaders in making the image(s) that they select.



Response & Interaction with Children

When interacting with children of survivors in shelter, advocates have a responsibility to not only set

appropriate boundaries, but to model caring and respectful behavior. Advocates should not engage in physical contact with children (touching, hugging, kissing) unless it is initiated by the child, and even then the contact should be brief and professional. It is easy to cross boundaries and create strong attachments to children in shelter, who are often vulnerable and seeking validation and affection. Advocates should take every effort to redirect children to their parent to receive this affection, and help facilitate interaction and bonding between the parent and child.

Any prizes and gifts that may be available for children (e.g. donations of toys or birthday items) should be presented to the child by their parent. Whenever possible, activities for children within the shelter should include their parents as helpers, leaders, or ‘teammates.’ This provides opportunities for the parent and child to bond.

When advocates or volunteers are interacting with or leading activities for children in the absence of parents (such as during adult support groups or other times when parents may be meeting with counselors or advocates), the advocate should see their role as one of a teacher or educator.

Draw a Safe Place, Bedtime Beads, and other activities can be found in *Guide for Engaging & Supporting Parents Affected by Domestic Violence* from the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health (Blumenfeld, 2015). For a link, see the ‘Resource’ Section at the end of this chapter.

Remember- an advocate is only in the child's life briefly, while the parent's relationship with the child is for a lifetime.



We know that consistently loving, nurturing relationships with parents or caregivers who are involved in a child's life over time is the single greatest resource for healthy child development and recovery from exposure to family violence and other trauma. (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2005)

Safety Planning With Children

Unlike safety planning with adults, much of safety planning with children revolves around their emotional reactions to violence in the home. It is important to reinforce that: children are not the cause of violence or anger in the home (or any related consequences, such as the move to shelter); it is not children's responsibility to keep a parent safe (and they should never intervene in violence); and violence is never okay or justified.

Planning for violence in the home. *Survivors return to their abusers an average of seven times before finally leaving for good.* This happens for a myriad of reasons including housing, financial security, child custody, culture and faith, and other very valid reasons. Additionally, the risk of death for survivors increases when they leave their abusers, and many abusers stalk their victims after the relationship has been dissolved. For these reasons it is important to teach children safety skills for violent situations in the home. Advocates should engage parents in teaching and reinforcing these skills:



- Teach children when and how to call 911, and not to hang up when they call.
- Instruct children to leave the home if possible when things begin to escalate. Plan safe places where children can go if this happens (such as a neighbor's house or close convenience store).
- Come up with a code word that the survivor can say when the child needs to leave the home in case of an emergency — make sure that the child knows not to tell others what the secret word means.
- In the house: Identify a room or place children can go to when they're afraid and something they can think about when they're scared.
- Instruct children to stay out of the kitchen, bathroom and other areas where there are items that could be used as weapons.
- Teach children that although they want to protect their parents, they should never intervene.

- Help children make a list of people that they are comfortable talking and expressing themselves to, such as a teacher, family member, friend or friend’s parent, church or club leader.

Planning for safe custody exchanges and/or unsupervised visits. Many children feel nervous, upset, or scared when these visits are approaching, and parents may notice a change in their behavior. Abusers may use tactics such as negative talk about the non-offending parent, passing messages through the child, or other emotionally manipulative tactics during visitation which can cause changes in a child’s behavior upon returning home. It is a good idea to encourage or facilitate conversations between the non-offending parent and child before visitation addressing the child’s worries and giving the child space to address fears they may have.

- If it is age appropriate, brainstorm with children to come up with ways that they can stay safe using the same model as you would for the survivor’s home or shelter. Have them identify where they can get to a phone, when and how they can leave the house, and who they can go to.
- If it’s safe to do, send a cell phone with the children to be used in emergency situations — this can be used to call 911, a neighbor or you if they need aid.
- Avoid exchanging custody at the survivor’s home or the abuser’s home.
- Meet in a safe, public place such as a restaurant, a bank/other area with lots of cameras, or even near a police station.
- Bring a friend or relative with you to the exchanges, or have them make the exchange.
- If possible, plan to have the perpetrator pick the children up from school at the end of the day after the survivor drops them off in the morning, eliminating the chances of seeing each other.
- Emotional safety plan as well. Figure out something to do *before* the exchange to calm any nerves the survivor or child is feeling, and something *after* for the parent and child to focus on positive bonding, such as going to a park or doing a fun activity.

Non-offending parents should never vent their anger or frustration about the perpetrator to their children. This forces children to play the role of mediator and places them in an inappropriate adult role. It is also important to note that many children have mixed emotions about the abuser, including love and the desire for a healthy relationship. Survivors venting to their children can alienate the child and may cause the child to feel overwhelmed and forced to choose between their parents.

Emotional safety planning with children. Advocates and survivors should reinforce that children are never to blame for violence in the home. You can use the following statements and ideas:

- “You are not to blame for the fighting. It is not your fault.”
- Adults have many ways to solve problems but violence should never be one of them.
- “You cannot make a person behave violently or be abusive; how a person behaves is their choice, and you are not to blame for their behavior.”
- Children are not to blame even if they hear their name in the argument.

- Children and youth often feel conflicted about the abusive parent. For example, they want to help their mother so they call the police. They then have an overwhelming sense of guilt for getting their father in trouble. If the child is feeling guilty for calling the police, or getting the abusive parent in trouble, reaffirm with them that they did the right thing.
- Reinforce that children have a right to:
 - Know that someone will take care of them.
 - Know what is expected of them.
 - Have an idea about what will probably happen next.
 - Not worry that they or someone else will get hurt.
 - Not feel scared.



Serving Male Children & Youth

Many shelters across Tennessee are still struggling with providing shelter to teenage boys, even though **banning teenage boys from shelter is prohibited**. The continued practice of banning teenage boys from shelter presents a difficult barrier for many survivors, and a failure of these advocacy organizations to serve all those who are experiencing and recovering from the trauma of domestic violence. Male children over the age of twelve present a unique set of service needs, but they do not present a unique threat to the safety and security of shelter residents and staff.

While the research on domestic violence tells us that battering behaviors can be “passed down” from the batterer to children (including girls), the more significant finding is that in the majority of cases these behaviors are not passed down. These teenagers can and do choose nonviolence. They are capable of healthy, respectful relationships. Domestic violence programs can provide a source of support and encouragement for those choices, as well as healing from the abuse and trauma that teens have witnessed and experienced. Shelter staff have a responsibility to model clear expectations and consequences that serve to protect all residents.

Excluding teen boys from shelter is not only prohibited by law but forces survivors to make the difficult choice to seek safety at the expense of their child, but reinforces to the boy that he is not trusted or worthy of safety himself. It is the responsibility of advocates to serve the needs of all primary and secondary victims of domestic violence.

Safety Concerns

Shelter workers should be trained to screen for potentially abusive individuals of any age or gender prior to admitting families to shelter or at the time of intake. When developing a safety plan that includes an adolescent male, critical information such as a history of violent behaviors, a history of having been sexually abused, or a history of ignoring consequences will assist the advocate in supporting all residents.

Training, screening and guidelines can work together to minimize the risk of allowing any abusive individuals into the shelter. Provide clear expectations for individual behaviors and support survivors and their children. Consequences for abusive and/or violent behaviors by shelter residents may include taking legal action and/or requiring the abusive individual to

When working with teen secondary victims advocates & agencies should:

1. Inform the program participant about services provided to victims of domestic violence and their teenage children including shelter and other advocacy services.
2. Complete the intake with the program participant without the presence of their teenage child. This is to maintain the survivor's confidentiality and allow them to feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics without the presence of their child. If needed, the advocate should make a plan with the survivor to support their parenting needs.
3. Explain to the survivor and the teen the purpose of maintaining confidentiality. Additionally, the advocate should make a confidentiality agreement with the teen, just as with the survivor.
4. Discuss the shelter's non-violence policy with the program participant and their teen. Explain the importance and purpose of this policy.
5. Work jointly with the program participant and their teen to create a safety plan. The safety plan should include the activities the teen boy participates in outside of school or independent from the non-offending parent.
6. Meet separately with the program participant and the teen to assess what support and services they each need.
7. Inform the teen of support groups, activities and other services and community resources available to him, describe their purpose, and encourage his participation.
8. Discuss dynamics of domestic violence with the teen and offer age-appropriate written materials. Discuss the strategies the program participant's teen has or can use to cope with domestic violence.
9. When possible offer peer support activities such as mixed-gender peer support groups for teens offering discussion about domestic violence tactics, coping strategies, anger, and grief as well as individual support.

10. Consider partnering with local ‘Big Brother-Big Sister’ or other youth mentoring agencies to provide positive mentoring for teens.

11. Make sure the diversity of your organization’s staff matches the diversity of the community you are serving, this includes hiring male staff members.

Shelter Environment

Whenever possible, shelters should have indoor and outdoor spaces dedicated to children’s play as well as quiet time (e.g. homework and reading).

Think about the décor of these areas- keep it light and child friendly, and make sure storage of children’s toys can be reached by the children they are intended for. Even in adult and communal spaces, think of small hands; do not put fragile or breakable items or electronics within easy reach.

Display children’s artwork on the fridge with magnets and consider investing in easy-change or simple plexi-glass frames to display children’s art on rotation in children’s spaces.

On cleaning and sanitizing toys and surfaces.

Cleaning involves scrubbing, washing and rinsing to remove visible soil and debris, typically using soap or pre-made cleanser and water.

Sanitizing is covering the cleaned area with a sanitizing solution such as bleach and water. The best practice recommendation is to leave the sanitizing solution on the surface for a minimum of 2 minutes before wiping it dry. It can also be left to air dry.

Disinfecting is covering an already cleaned area with a disinfecting agent that is non-toxic for children, such as a stronger bleach and water solution. This kills all of the germs on a surface.

See page 213, for policy on service



Sanitizing and disinfecting should be done often to minimize spread of illness in a shelter.
Basic measures for a disinfecting solution are- ¾ teaspoon bleach to 1 cup cool water OR 1 tablespoon bleach to 1 quart cool water OR ¼ cup bleach to 1 gallon cool water.

Policies & Procedures

On Childcare. Many shelters have a rule (or policy) in place saying that parents must be with their children 24 hours a day when they are in the shelter. This rule is not only impractical, it interferes with both the parent's and child's activities and responsibilities. For instance, a parent who is preparing dinner while their child is playing or doing homework in another room is in violation of this rule, even though they are participating in a normal routine that parents across the country engage in daily. This rule also means that residents can't openly arrange for someone else to watch their children while they shower, meet with an advocate, make important and sensitive phone calls, or during other times when it would be inappropriate for children to be present.

On Department of Children's Services (DCS). Shelters should not establish a mandatory practice of reporting all parents who enter shelter with minor children to DCS. This practice can further damage parental bonds, compound survivors' trauma and anxiety, and set up a culture of mistrust between survivors and the advocates (agency). While advocates should take seriously their duty as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect, reporting a non-offending parent who is seeking safety in shelter and has shown no abusive or neglectful behaviors is an unnecessary and punitive step. Advocates should keep in mind that **imperfect parenting on the part of a survivor is not the same thing as abuse.**

A best practice for ensuring permanency and stability for children is to keep them in the care of the non-offending parent whenever possible. Programs should have a policy which details the requirements for reporting suspected child abuse. The agency should provide things like safety assessments, safety planning, and supportive services to all parents in shelter. (*Arizona Coalition to End*

“The more that advocates considered what was truly realistic and supportive for residents, the more they realized that many (if not all) of their rules regarding children and parenting were not in the mothers' or children's best interest. Eliminating these rules allowed advocates to expect and respect residents' need to be able to have time away from their children, for personal care, chores or matters that are not conducive to having children present. The same was true regarding the interest of the residents' children, who benefit from time away from their mothers, such as by attending their own support groups and engaging in fun activities without their mothers present.”

(How the Earth Didn't Fly Into the Sun: Missouri's Project to Reduce Rules in Domestic Violence Shelters, MCADSV, 2011)

“On Oct. 26, 2004, the New York Court of Appeals unanimously held that a mother's inability to protect a child from witnessing abuse does not constitute neglect, and therefore cannot be the sole basis for removal. Furthermore, the Court held that any decision to remove a child must be weighed against the psychological harm to the child that could be created by the removal itself, and that only in the rarest of instances should this decision be made without judicial approval.” (*Nicholson v. William, 1999*)



Sexual and Domestic Violence, Making the Connection Between Domestic Violence and Child Abuse, 2014)

On Abandonment of Children. When shelter staff know or suspect that a parent has abandoned their child in shelter they should follow the same policies and procedures as they would for reporting urgent cases of abuse or neglect, notifying both DCS and law enforcement. Once reports have been made and the children are safe, it is important for agency leadership to offer support for both staff and other residents. When cases of abandonment occur, it is often very distressing and difficult for witnesses to understand and process. If advocates notice signs of neglect or abandonment, this is an opportunity for

You will find a list of model policies for children and families, including a child abuse reporting policy, childcare policy, and more on page 209.

advocates to talk with the parent about supportive resources and potentially to suggest alternative custody arrangements. Advocates should broach these conversations non-judgmentally and reassure survivors that it is normal and healthy to seek help and support for caring for their children while they are healing from abuse and trauma.

Resources:

Sample Empowering Responses-

<https://www.positivediscipline.com/sites/default/files/sampleempoweringresponses.pdf>

Positive Discipline Tip Sheet- <https://www.positivediscipline.com/sites/default/files/positive-discipline-guidelines.pdf>

Praise vs. Empowerment

https://www.positivediscipline.com/sites/default/files/praise_and_encouragement.pdf

PBS Parents- Seven Tips for Practicing Positive Discipline

http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/positive_discipline_tips.html

Abuse of Children Wheel' developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, MN

<http://www.theduluthmodel.org/pdf/Abuse%20of%20Children.pdf>

Guide for Engaging & Supporting Parents Affected by Domestic Violence from the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health, Blumenfeld 2015.

http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NCDVTMH_GuideEngagingSupportingParents.pdf

How the Earth Didn't Fly Into the Sun: Missouri's Project to Reduce Rules in Domestic Violence Shelters, MCADSV, 2001. [https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-](https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-07/NRCDV_ShelterRules_0.pdf)

[07/NRCDV_ShelterRules_0.pdf](https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-07/NRCDV_ShelterRules_0.pdf)

Helping Children Thrive : Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors As Mothers, Baker & Cunningham, 2004 <http://www.lfcc.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Helping-Children-Thrive-Supporting-Woman-Abuse-Survivors-as-Mothers -A-Resource-to-Support-Parenting.pdf>

The National Center for Victims of Crime Handbook on Reaching and Serving Teen Victims-
<http://www.ovc.gov/pdf/ncj211701.pdf>

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence Model Protocol on Working with Battered Women and Their Teenage Boys in Shelter - <http://bit.ly/1TkednR>

Nicholson v. Williams (Defending parental rights of mothers who are domestic violence victims)
<http://www.nyclu.org/case/nicholson-v-williams-defending-parental-rights-of-mothers-who-are-domestic-violence-victims>)

Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, Making the Connection Between Domestic Violence and Child Abuse, 2014, <http://www.azcadv.org/azcadv2014wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Making-the-Connection-Between-Domestic-Violence-and-Child-Abuse-2014.pdf>

Child Protection in Families Experiencing Domestic Violence, Bragg, 2003,
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/domesticviolence.pdf>

Tips for Supporting Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence, National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health, http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Tipsheet_Children-Exposed_NCDVTMH_May2012.pdf