



‘Secondary Victims: Best Practices On Serving Teen Boys’

Many shelters across Tennessee are still struggling with providing shelter to teenage boys. 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 father to son, the more significant finding is that in the majority of cases these behaviors are not passed down. Male 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 for the abuse and trauma boys 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 not only forces survivors to make the difficult choice to seek safety at the expense of their child, but enforces to the boy that he is not trusted or worthy or safety himself. It is the responsibility of advocates to serve the needs of all primary and secondary victims of domestic violence.

Contact the Coalition for additional resources and staff training/ education on this topic.

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 or requiring the abusive individual to leave shelter.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

TRAINING & EDUCATION

PUBLIC POLICY

IMMIGRANT LEGAL CLINIC

SPEAKER'S BUREAU

EXAMPLE POLICY

[Name of agency] shall work to ensure access and services for all survivors of domestic violence and their minor children, including teenage boys. Comprehensive plans to meet the needs of survivors and their teenage sons should consider the following:

1. Developing policies and procedures for identifying and assessing the needs of program participants and their teenage sons.
2. Providing teenage boys with a range of age-appropriate service options and activities.
3. Providing program participants and their teenage sons with age-appropriate domestic violence written materials.
4. Periodic training of staff for working with teenage boys and related issues.
5. Monitoring of the policy and program implementation.



ADVOCATES & AGENCIES SHOULD:

1. Inform the program participant about services provided to victims of domestic violence and their teenage sons including shelter and other advocacy services.
2. Complete the intake with the program participant without the presence of their teenage son. If needed, the advocate should make a plan with the survivor to support her parenting needs.
3. Explain to the survivor and her teenage son the purpose of maintaining confidentiality. Additionally, the advocate should make a verbal confidentiality agreement with the teenage boy.
4. Discuss the shelter's non-violence policy with the program participant and their teenage son. Explain the importance and purpose of this policy.
5. Work jointly with the program participant and their teenage son 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 teenage boy to assess what support and services they each need.
7. Inform the teenage boy 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 teenage boy and offer age-appropriate written materials. Discuss the strategies the program participant's teenage son used 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 male mentoring for teen boys.
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 when appropriate.

REFERENCES:

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

