

WSCADV

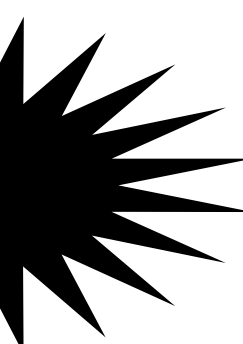


**IF YOU MUST  
MAKE A  
MANDATORY  
REPORT,  
*DO IT LIKE AN  
ADVOCATE***

# PARENTING AND DV

## Keep in mind:

Parenting in the context of DV is very difficult. Experiencing DV and coercive control can be stressful, depressing, impoverishing, overwhelming and corrosive to one's self esteem.



DV abusers often undermine the survivor's parenting, enlist children in the abuse, attack the survivor's adequacy as a parent, interfere with nurturing and care, refuse to parent collaboratively, and sow divisions between the survivor and the children. Experiencing DV and coercive control makes parenting much harder. In spite of this, many DV survivors are loving, protective, compassionate and thoughtful about their children.

DV survivors parent similarly to non-abused parents. In contrast, DV abusers are much more likely to be emotionally, physically or sexually abusive to their children. They may be authoritarian, inconsistent, or manipulative parents. Abusers may see their children as property or as extensions of themselves. They often prioritize their own needs over those of children.

**Coercive control includes many behaviors that harm both adult survivors and children.**

**The DV abuser is responsible for the harm their choices cause.**



# BEFORE YOU REPORT



## Pause and consider:

### **DOES THIS RISE TO THE LEVEL OF A MANDATED REPORT?**

DV survivors report contact with Child Protective Services (CPS) often makes things worse, not better. Understand the law and definitions in it. Check in with colleagues. Consider if consequences of reporting may be more harmful than what you plan to report.

### **HAVE I REFLECTED ON MY CULTURAL BIASES?**

Have you made a clear distinction between behavior that makes you uncomfortable versus behavior that is harmful to the child?

Have you educated yourself about parenting in different communities?

### **AM I REPORTING BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW HOW TO PROVIDE SUPPORT?**

Do all you can to meet the needs the survivor is prioritizing. Know your community resources: play groups, preschool co-ops, affordable child care, community based parenting classes, and supports for housing.

### **WHERE SHOULD I REPORT?**

You can report to the CPS or law enforcement. CPS focuses on maltreatment by parents or guardians, NOT on peer to peer violence or abuse by non family members. Consider where to report in light of potential outcomes.

# BEFORE YOU REPORT



**Affirm your commitment to confidentiality and support**

## **EXPLAIN CONFIDENTIALITY WARMLY, SLOWLY, ACCURATELY AND CLEARLY**

Your first obligation is confidentiality; reporting harm to children is an exception to that obligation. (As is reporting imminent threats of homicide or suicide.)

## **SHARE WHEN YOU WOULD HAVE TO BREAK CONFIDENTIALITY**

For example: if a child is sexually abused, injured from physical discipline, hurt intervening in a fight, or so traumatized they can't function.

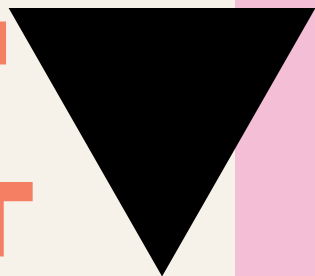
## **ENSURE BEST PRACTICES AROUND RECORD KEEPING: MINIMAL RECORDS**

CPS has the right to demand your records during a child abuse investigation. The less detail in those records, the less risk of harm to the survivor.

## **GET FAMILIAR WITH DCYF POLICIES REGARDING DV**

DCYF/CPS [Social Worker's Practice Guide to DV](#) describes their policy and best practices. Actual CPS practice may not reflect the policy: be prepared to advocate for CPS social workers to do better.

# DURING A REPORT



## Collaborate with the survivor

### **EXPLAIN WHY YOU NEED TO MAKE A REPORT**

Be compassionate, avoid judgement. Validate that the survivor has a right to feel scared or angry about this. Ensure the survivor you will stand by them whatever happens.

### **MAKE THE CALL WITH THE SURVIVOR OR SUPPORT THEM TO CALL**

Discuss with the survivor what you will be saying in the report before making the call. Encourage the survivor to listen in, make the call with you or call themselves.

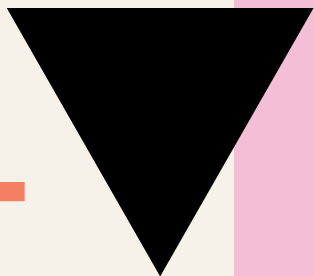
### **EXPLAIN WHAT IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN DURING AND AFTER THE CALL**

Share what you know about CPS priorities and response. Explain the CPS process and what will happen next.

### **ANTICIPATE ABUSER RESPONSE AND SAFETY PLAN**

If CPS decides on an investigation, they will seek to contact the biological parent of the children, anyone living with the children, and/or the alleged perpetrator of the child abuse or neglect. Safety plan: what will happen if a CPS social worker gets in touch with a current or former abuser?

# DURING A REPORT



## Minimize harm in DCYF documentation

### **BE CLEAR ABOUT THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

CPS policy is to ask if any adults in the household have been violent towards other adults. Be clear about who the survivor is and who is doing the harm. Be clear about who did what to who. For example, “he hit her” versus “there has been a lot of hitting”.

### **CONSIDER ALERTING DCYF TO ABUSER RESPONSE**

If the survivor thinks the abuser is likely to retaliate, consider alerting CPS to this danger. Request a warning call before the abuser is contacted.

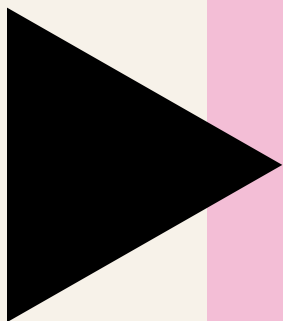
### **AVOID VICTIM BLAMING**

Avoid criticizing the survivor to CPS social workers.

### **HAVE THE OPERATOR READ WHAT THEY WROTE TO YOU OUT LOUD AND MAKE CORRECTIONS**

Vague language about who is responsible for abuse, inaccuracies and victim blaming all live on forever in CPS files. Ask the operator to read back what they recorded. Try to get them to document who chose to be abusive and controlling and who is the target of that abuse and control.

# AFTER A REPORT



## Ensure ongoing support for the survivor

### HELP THE SURVIVOR PREPARE FOR FURTHER CONTACT

CPS social workers may call the survivor or come to their home. They may contact the children at school. Help the survivor think through how they will respond.

Although it may be justified, getting angry at CPS social workers doesn't work well. Anticipate frustration and discuss calming methods.

### MAKE SURE THE SURVIVOR KNOWS THEIR RIGHTS

WSCADV's [Know Your Rights When CPS Comes Knocking](#) outlines parents' rights.

### SUPPORT THE SURVIVOR TO AFFIRM THEIR STRENGTHS AND PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

Survivors usually have taken steps to support their children, keep them safe from abuse, and build their resilience. Help the survivor see their strengths and articulate their protective strategies. The survivor may want to share these with CPS social workers.

### OFFER ONGOING SUPPORT

Offer to follow up with the survivor. Stay connected. If they no longer trust you offer to connect them with another advocate or agency.



**Remember, making a report to CPS may have serious, life changing consequences for the survivor and their children. Focus on effective parenting support whenever possible.**

For more information about DV advocacy, DCYF policy and mandatory reporting, visit: [wscadv.org](http://wscadv.org)

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March 2025