



The Safe and Together Model

A field tested approach to helping child welfare and its partners to make good decisions for children impacted by domestic violence perpetrators

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Domestic violence perpetrators hurt children.

Whether it is through their choice to expose children to their violence against another parent, through direct physical maltreatment, or by using a child as a weapon against the other parent, domestic violence perpetrators create safety and risk concerns for children. The co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence is estimated between 30% and 60%.ⁱ While some children appear to be resilient and show no symptoms, many children who are exposed to a parent's battering behavior display externalizing and internalizing behaviors including aggression, anxiety, depression, PTSD, educational and social problems and long term adjustment issues.ⁱⁱ Domestic violence perpetrators' patterns of coercive control are frequently present in cases that end in a critical incident or child fatality.ⁱⁱⁱ

Given this data, it is clear that government and private child welfare agencies need to effectively address domestic violence in order to achieve their core mission of safety, permanency and well being of children. Based on his more than twenty years in the domestic violence field and thirteen years working closely with child welfare agencies around the country, David Mandel, MA, LPC developed the **Safe and Together** approach to domestic violence cases where children are involved. David and his staff have provided training and technical assistance based on this model for multiple child welfare and domestic violence agencies around the country. For the past three years, the **Safe and Together** model has been utilized by the Connecticut Department and Children and Families' statewide Domestic Violence Consultation Initiative. David Mandel & Associates has also worked extensively with various federally funded "Greenbook" demonstration sites, New York City's Administration for Children Services, Florida's Department of Children and Families and the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence. In 2010, David Mandel & Associates LLC will continue to provide training and technical assistance to the Florida Department of Children and Families; train all Louisiana child welfare supervisors in the **Safe and Together** model; collaborate with the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy to provide **Safe and Together** training and technical assistance to Ohio's alternative response pilot; train child welfare and domestic violence workers in Lane County Oregon and Kansas City Missouri; and collaborate with the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence to implement the **Safe and Together** model in Collier County Florida.

There is growing data on the effectiveness of the **Safe and Together** model. The following is self report follow-up data collected from a group of child welfare supervisors and managers who completed the **Safe and Together** "Supervising Domestic Violence Cases" training:

- 66% of the respondents identified specific positive changes in their supervisory practice including (1) improved and increased utilization of domestic violence consultants; (2)

greater understanding of the dynamics of coercive control and its impact on the family; (3) increased understanding of survivors' strengths and safety planning; and (4) more specific questions and directives to workers.

- 62% indicated positive change in their workers' practice as a result of their training in the **Safe and Together** model including 1) workers were more empathetic and supportive to domestic violence survivors; 2) improved assessment and information gathering and 3) improved utilization of the domestic violence consultants.
- 50% of the respondents indicated positive changes in outcomes for families as a result of the training including 1) increased ability to maintain children safely in the home resulting in fewer out of home placements 2) referrals better tailored to the needs of the family 3) more support for domestic violence survivors and 4) greater accountability for the domestic violence perpetrator.

Assumptions, Principles and Critical Components

This field tested model is framed by the following assumptions:

- Child welfare systems cannot achieve their core mission of safety, permanency and well-being of children without being competent and skillful in their response to domestic violence.
- The interests of domestic violence survivors and child welfare are in significant alignment: reducing or eliminating the safety and risk concerns posed by batterers.
- The child welfare systems need to develop their capacities and competencies to intervene more effectively with domestic violence perpetrators.

To improve practice and create better outcomes for children and families exposed to domestic violence perpetrator's behavior, the following principles can help guide practice:

- From the perspective of safety, healing from trauma, and stability, it is in the best of interest of a child to remain **Safe and Together** with the non-offending domestic violence survivor.
- A partnership with the non-offending domestic violence survivor is the most effective and efficient way to promote the safety, permanency and well being of a child in a family with domestic violence.
- A partnership with a non-offending domestic violence survivor needs to be based on a comprehensive assessment of her active efforts to promote the safety and well being of the children.
- Child welfare agencies can improve outcomes for children and families by increasing their capacity to intervene with domestic violence perpetrators.

Implementation of these principles in case practice is supported by a focus on identifying the following critical elements of a case:

- The domestic violence perpetrator’s pattern of coercive control.
- Specific behaviors the perpetrator has engaged in to harm the children.
- Full spectrum of the survivor’s efforts to promote the safety and well being of the children.
- Adverse impact of the perpetrator’s behavior on the children.
- Other factors including substance abuse, mental health, cultural and other socio-economic factors that may impact the domestic violence.

The Safe and Together Training and Technical Assistance Package

The framework of the ***Safe and Together*** model provides a methodology for improving child welfare competencies and cross system collaboration between child welfare and its community partners. Using skill based trainings, David Mandel and his staff help child welfare agencies improve their capacity to conduct safety and risk assessments, interview family members, accurately document domestic violence dynamics, develop safety plans and legal filings. The ***Safe and Together*** principles and critical components can help facilitate collaboration, coordination and communication between child welfare and its community partners including domestic violence programs.

A ***Safe and Together*** technical assistance and training package can include:

- Multi-day training for investigations and on-going case workers on the ***Safe and Together*** model. Training topics include focusing on the domestic violence perpetrator’s behavior patterns to better assess adverse impact; assessing the domestic survivor’s protective capacity; interviewing domestic violence perpetrators, survivors and children; developing a domestic violence case plan with measureable goals.
- “Supervising Domestic Violence Cases” training for supervisors and managers.
- Training on domestic violence consultation or peer review skills.
- Training for child welfare legal staff.
- Training on the ***Safe and Together*** model for community child welfare service providers including in home services such as family preservation and parent aides, prevention workers and child guidance clinics.

- Training for child welfare’s collaborative partners including domestic violence victim advocate agencies, law enforcement, fatherhood programs and batterer intervention programs.
- Community wide trainings to introduce the **Safe and Together** model.
- Facilitation of community meetings on the intersection of domestic violence and child maltreatment.
- Technical assistance on policy and practice improvements.
- Case specific case consultation.
- **Safe and Together** web resources.
- Follow up surveys to assess implementation and impact.

The **Safe and Together** training and technical assistance is primarily provided through site visits supported with teleconferences. The trainings are focused on the specific needs of the target population and are skills based.

For more information:

Visit the **Safe and Together** blog at www.endingviolence.com/blog.

Or contact David Mandel, MA, LPC at:

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- i Edleson, J.L. (1999b). The overlap between child maltreatment and woman battering. *Violence Against Women*, 5(2), 134-154.
 - ii Summers, A. (2006). Children's exposure to domestic violence: A guide to research and resources. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Available at <http://www.ncjfcj.org>.
 - iii Edelson, J. & Schechter, S. in “In the Best Interest of Women and Children: A Call for Collaboration Between Child Welfare and Domestic Violence Constituencies” (<http://www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/wingsp/wingsp.html#id2628797>) cite reports from Oregon and Massachusetts. In 1993, in Oregon “domestic violence was present in 41% of the families experiencing critical injuries or deaths due to child abuse and neglect.” In “67 child fatalities in Massachusetts in 1992, 29 (43%) were in families where the mother identified herself as a victim of domestic violence.” In 2006, the Michigan Attorney General's Office reported “ that since 1998, Wayne County Juvenile Court Child Protective Proceedings recorded 58 child fatalities. Of those, 34 (58%) had issues of domestic violence involving one or more of the adult parental members of the household.” (http://michigan.gov/som/0,1607,7-192-29941_34757-139175--,00.html)