



**ADVOCATES**

*for family peace*

# **Addressing Fatherhood with Men Who Batter**

A Curriculum for Working with Abusive Men as Fathers  
in a Batterers Intervention Program

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Second Edition

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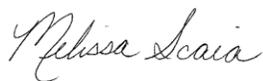
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Melissa Scaia  
Executive Director, AFFP

## Forward

The day before my father died, I went to his apartment with my sisters. My oldest sister had cleaned everything out. All of his possessions were piled into a corner of the living room with a sign, “For Goodwill.” In the dining room were some nice things: a chest, a beautiful large photo of three enormous elephants, a set of old dishes and silverware, a box of encyclopedias I remembered from my childhood. We all took something and there was no haggling, no bad feelings. In fact, the absence of feelings was palpable. As I drove home with a small chest of drawers and the elephants in my trunk, I imagined us doing the same when my mother dies. Every salt shaker, lamp, vase, and dish will have meaning. It will be a very different, more painful experience. As my father lay dying, his children gathered around him, but in so many ways he was disconnected from us and we from him. It was a disconnect that began before we were born. It began when he was nineteen, on an island in the Pacific Ocean during a world war. It began when, as he said, he was, “spreading the seeds of American blood in an inferior population,” a racist metaphor I later came to see for rape. He felt guilt and I sensed it more and more as he aged and his war stories took on a sense of confessionals. When he was drinking he would show his commendation from Admiral Nimitz and say, “this is what you get for killing women and children.” Something happened there that returned the nineteen-year-old, funny, honest kid my mother married a changed man. He became a man who could never again talk to a woman as a peer; a man who rarely said a word about women that was not on some level sexualizing, trivializing or objectifying. My father was simply incapable of loving a woman. Like so many of the men in the groups described in this curriculum, his hostility toward women was not of his making and didn’t come to him naturally. On the other hand, my father was never willing or able or perhaps, unlike the men in these groups, even given the opportunity to remake himself. He was never able to transform all that it took to produce what he had become.

When we as therapists or teachers or mentors walk into a group for men who have physically, sexually, and emotionally abused the mothers of their children, we enter a deeply gendered space. So many practitioners would have us reduce this space to a place to review and discuss and transmit rules of good parenting. But what does that have to do with what everyone in that room has been doing? Many practitioners would use that time and space to talk about children’s developmental needs at different ages. But what does that have to do with what everyone in that room has become? Still others would differentiate between harsh punishment and appropriate discipline. But what does that have to do with what everyone in that room is likely to do again? Such are the agendas rooted in a view of the men sitting in the room as fathers gone adrift. You hold in your hand the work of a group who seeks to change this paradigm. It is an approach to entering that room with everyone’s eyes wide open. It is designed to talk with men like my father about what they are doing, how they are causing harm, and how they can change. It does not seek to shame or guilt, as that has never moved a man away from violence. Neither is it designed to shift the focus from what is going on to a Brady-Bunch discussion about parenting.

Advocates for Family Peace has created a tool for all of us who work with men who batter that carries forward one of this social movement’s strongest traditions. They talked to people whose everyday lives are at the center of the work to end violence against women and children and to open paths to change for men like my father. They talked with those who grew up with a battering father, those who tried to be a partner and mother while living with a violent man, and those who fathered and battered and sought to change. This curriculum gives those of us who are somehow pulled to

this work with men who batter, a process to connect with men on a deeper level than we had perhaps been able to do in the past. It gives us a tool to help ourselves and the men we work with come to a deeper understanding of what is going on in their lives and make visible the possibilities of change and the destructive nature of their past actions. It gives practical, straightforward methods to practice becoming the change we seek.

If we accept the premise that battering—by that I mean the ongoing use of coercion, intimidation, violence and control—is at its core dehumanizing to both the object of those acts of aggression and hostility and the perpetrator, then this curriculum can best be seen as an act of compassion and love for all concerned. It tells a woman that we are fundamentally in her corner and not against the father of her children, but standing firm against his violence and aggression. It offers children a place that takes their father aside and says, “Stop, these are children; everything you say and do plants the seeds of how they will walk through this life, how they will understand themselves as men or women, how they will see themselves as powerful or powerless, and how they will experience relationships with others as life-giving or as life-destroying.” To the men this curriculum offers what no one offered my father: the ability to leave this world connected to his children.

Ellen Pence  
Executive Director, Praxis International

# Contents

Introduction .....	10
Scope and purpose.....	10
Life stories .....	12
Chapter One: Curriculum Design .....	15
Goal .....	15
Objectives .....	15
Guiding principles .....	16
Theoretical framework .....	17
Distinctions between <i>Addressing Fatherhood</i> and a parenting curriculum .....	18
Methodology.....	20
Cultural context .....	21
Chapter Two: Presenting the Curriculum .....	23
Framework .....	23
Men without children .....	23
Guidance from battered women .....	24
Coordinated community response .....	24
Organization.....	25
Presenting the curriculum .....	26
The Fatherhood Log .....	28
Assessment .....	30
Contact with women.....	31
Chapter Three: Tools for Dialogue – Theme 1 .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1: Men’s childhood experiences with their fathers.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1: Core messages .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

The story of Laurie and Lucas (Age 11) .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1: Context.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1: Goals .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1 – Exercise 1: A father should . . . ..	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1 – Exercise 2: Strengths and weaknesses as a father.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1 – Exercise 3: Beliefs about fathering.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1 – Exercise 4A: Tell me about Grandpa .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1 – Exercise 4B: Tell me about Grandma .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1 – Exercise 5: Marcus’s Story.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1 – Exercise 6: My father’s influence on me.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1 – Exercise 7: What is it like to be your father’s son? .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 1 - Exercise 8: Was I abused as a child? .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter Four: Tools for Dialogue – Theme 2.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 2: Understanding the impact of battering on children and their mothers... <b>defined.</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 2: Core messages .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
The story of Megan and her children: Sara (Age 8) and Cody (Age 11). <b>defined.</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
The story of Jeff and his children .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 2: Context.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 2: Goals .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 2 – Exercise 1: The impact of violence against women on children .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 2 – Exercise 2: Using art to understand battering .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 2 - Exercise 3: Using children’s poems and stories to understand battering <b>defined.</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 2 – Exercise 4: Building empathy for children .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 2 - Exercise 5: “Let’s play house” .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

Chapter Five: Tools for Dialogue – Theme 3 .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3: Becoming a more nurturing, child-center father.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3: Core messages .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
The story of Ron and Michelle .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3: Context.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3: Goals .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3 - Exercise 1: Becoming a father.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3 – Exercise 2: A model of manhood and fatherhood .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3 – Exercise 3: Ending the intergenerational cycle of battering ....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3 – Exercise 4: Becoming more nurturing, child-centered fathers	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3 – Exercise 5: Yelling . . . What’s the intent? What do children hear? .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3 – Exercise 6: The Argument .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3 – Exercise 7: Discipline, abuse, or punishment?.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 3 – Exercise 8: The Don’t Blame Game .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter Six: Tools for Dialogue – Theme 4.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 4: Respect, nonviolence, and support for mothers and the mother-child relationship.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 4: Core messages .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
The story of Joe, Maria, Angie (Age 7), and Danny (Age 16) .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 4: Context.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 4: Goals .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 4 – Exercise 1: Becoming a more supportive and respectful parenting partner	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 4 – Exercise 2: Harm to the mother-child relationship.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 4 – Exercise 3: Woman abuse is child abuse.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Theme 4 – Exercise 4: Supporting the mother-child relationship .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

Theme 4 – Exercise 5: Building empathy for the woman as the mother .. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Theme 4 – Exercise 6: “What are you really trying to say, Dad?” ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Theme 4 – Optional exercise: Using popular media and educational videos..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Recommended Reading ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

References ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Resources ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

# Introduction

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## Scope and purpose

Many men who batter<sup>1</sup> have some level of contact with their children. Many men enrolled in batterer intervention programs (BIPs) are concerned about their relationships with their children. Many battered women seek resources for the men who batter them and want to help them become safe and more nurturing fathers, as well as more supportive parenting partners. For the safety of battered women and the benefit of children who are having contact with their fathers, it is critical for interveners in domestic violence to work with abusive men in their role as fathers. This curriculum is a guide for interveners. It is designed for working in a group process with men who batter. While it recognizes that many men will have ongoing contact or relationships with their children, it does not seek to imply that all men who batter should have such contact.

In 2002, Advocates for Family Peace (AFFP) began managing the supervised visitation center in Itasca County, Minnesota. In working with men who batter in this different context, the agency began to see the possibilities of addressing the men's role as fathers. Since 1995, AFFP had been operating BIP groups using the Duluth Model's "Creating a Process of Change for Men Who Batter." It was not until the agency began a supervised visitation center, however, and also participated in the national Fathering After Violence Project that it started approaching domestic violence through the lens of fatherhood. Since then, AFFP has developed new programming that seeks to help abusive fathers find nonviolent, loving lives with their children and safe, respectful relationships with their children's mothers.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last thirty years, BIPs have developed around the country to help men stop battering the women in their lives. BIPs vary widely, with most taking a psycho-educational or cognitive-behavioral approach that focuses on beliefs and assumptions men hold about women and relationships with women. BIPs primarily help participants examine their beliefs that support violent behavior, stop the violence, and take on alternative beliefs which lead to non-abusive behaviors. BIP curricula have not traditionally or systematically addressed (1) men's relationships with their children, (2) men's use of children to abuse women, and (3) the impact that violence against women has on children. More recently, a few programs have recognized how children are used in men's abuse of women and the danger of domestic violence for children. Consequently, these programs have begun to talk more about children as well as men in their roles as fathers (Areán & Fleck-Henderson, 2004). The use of and harm to children has increasingly been recognized as one of many tactics used

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<sup>1</sup> The term "batter" or "battering" will be used throughout this curriculum as a way to describe the behaviors used by most men who commit domestic violence. Battering is defined as a pattern of coercive control, intimidation, and oppression that women often experience in abusive intimate relationships.

<sup>2</sup> AFFP's supervised visitation work began under the Office on Violence Against Women's (OVW) Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Program. In 2003, AFFP was selected as one of three implementation sites (in addition to Kent, WA, and the San Francisco Bay Area) in the Fathering After Violence Project established by the Family Violence Prevention Fund. AFFP's work with men who batter and attention to fatherhood has been supported by the Blandin Foundation, Grand Rapids, MN; and by Minnesota's Bush and Northland Foundations.

by men who batter. This curriculum places children and the women as mothers in the center of its work, in the ways that battered women recommended when we talked with them.

There is increasing research reporting that many men express a greater sense of empathy toward their children's experiences of the violence than toward their partners' experiences (Areán & Fleck-Henderson, 2004). Therefore, increasing men's awareness of the following factors is part of an evolving approach to ending violence against women and children:

- How men's childhood experiences with their own fathers influenced them
- How they use children to punish women partners
- How their treatment of their children's mother affects the children
- How they co- and parallel-parent with their children's mother
- How their violence impacts their children
- How they are an important influence in the lives of their children

This curriculum and its impact on the lives of men, women, and children will be most successful if a man who batters has a commitment as a father<sup>3</sup> to change and implement new beliefs into actions in his everyday life and relationships. A man's empathy for his children can motivate him to make such changes.

Surprisingly little research has been conducted on parenting by men who batter. According to Edleson and Williams (2006), fathers who have been violent toward their children's mothers are less likely to be involved with their children, more likely to use negative practices (e.g., spanking, yelling), and more angry with their children than nonviolent parents. Indicators that a man who batters is still a danger to the women and children in his life and is not making changes include:

- Ongoing physical or sexual violence
- Violation of restraining orders
- Violation of visitation orders
- Violation of terms of probation
- Using the children as a means to control and instill fear in their mother
- Having little regard for the mother's and/or children's wishes

Men are socially constructed to believe they have a right to control the lives of their partner and children. Men who batter, whether or not they are fathers, utilize physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse to coerce their family members into complying with their notions of how to think, feel, and act. This stems from a variety of beliefs, such as "I'm always right," "you and the kids are mine," and "the man is the decision maker," and "the wife and kids do what I say." This kind of privileged or entitled thinking is a learned behavior that many men get from the families they grew up in and that is reinforced by the wider culture over time. "Getting my way" is an extremely important expectation of men who batter and it often sits behind physical or emotional abuse intended to coerce compliance from a partner or children. **This curriculum provides a way of making the**

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<sup>3</sup> This curriculum is focused on men who batter in their role as fathers. Men play many roles in their lives. For example many men are also a husband, intimate partner, brother, uncle, and/or cousin. Therefore, this curriculum uses the words "men" and "father" interchangeably.

origin and impact of a father's violence visible to him so that he can begin the difficult task of learning how to live peacefully with a woman and her children.

## Life stories

In developing the curriculum, we talked with men who batter about their experiences with their own fathers. Michael's story is representative of what we heard. (An excerpt from Michael's story is used in Theme 1 – Exercise 7.)

### My Life with My Abusive Father

Michael (Age 29)

“My dad wasn't around much. He'd come home and play with us and be so rough. It was awful. He always smelled like booze and cigarettes. If you said something he didn't like, he would instantly get mad and turn weird. I wasn't scared of him for myself, I just hated him. He was very mean to me. He would say things to me, like I was “lazy, fat, worthless, stupid, and a momma's boy.” I think he was jealous of us kids because our mom spent time with us.

I really didn't like how he treated my mom. He started to be really mean to me once I started telling him I didn't like how he treated her. He used to make my mom have sex with him. I can remember hearing her crying and telling him to stop, and he wouldn't.

I remember one time when she slapped him because he was so drunk and he chased her through the living room and knocked her down. I got in his face and called him a “fucking bastard.” He didn't let me live that down for a long time.

I also remember a time in the middle of the night when I heard a loud thump and ran to their bedroom. My mom was lying on the bedroom floor in her underwear. He had just punched her. I brought her to my room and locked the door. He stood outside the door pounding on it, then finally gave up. I think he hated me because I always tried to protect her. I was the only person who ever stood up to him.

He was very verbally and emotionally abusive to my mom, too. He'd tell her she was worthless or call her a whore and I never saw him give her any encouragement or affection. My mom said the night I was born she was in the hospital in labor and he had to finish his bowling tournament before he got there. When he showed up he was drunk. That gives you a little idea of how much he wanted kids.

When my mom's dad died, my aunt took me down to the hospital. My mom was home without a car so she called my dad at the bar and told him that her dad had just had a heart attack and she needed to get to the hospital right away. My dad showed up drunk two hours later and by the time they got to the hospital her dad was dead. My mom said she made a comment about how peaceful her dad looked and my dad responded with some smartass comment like, “Well, yah, he's dead.” He was so insensitive, that's what made me hate him back then.

The times when he wasn't around were so fun and peaceful. As soon as we heard his truck pull up we'd scatter because he was so mean.

I didn't have a very high self-esteem. I did drugs and drank a lot as a teenager. I slept with more women than I should have. I had a ton of psychological issues. I cried all the time and felt so depressed. I struggled with bad eating habits, too. I got myself into a really bad relationship where I treated my girlfriend just like my dad treated my mom. I didn't talk to my dad for years. This was a huge thing for me to overcome. I saw many therapists and if they ever tried to force me to look too closely at what my dad had done and to try to get me to forgive him, I'd fire them. I became abusive myself. I was abusive to my sisters and to my girlfriends.

It wasn't until my dad apologized to me and started to take some responsibility for what he'd done that I began to work to heal myself. I used to confront him about things when I was younger and he'd deny it all. He actually believed he wasn't abusive! That was really hard for me to take. His denial was almost as bad as the abuse, if not worse.

My dad should have to admit all the things he has done and take responsibility for his actions. He should have to talk about why it is he thinks he can treat people like he does, as if he is in control or something. He has no regard for the affect it has on others. He should have to talk about whether he really wanted to be a dad. If he did, why did he treat his kids and wife like that? We all hated him and he acted like nothing was wrong with how he was acting. He should talk about what went wrong in his life that lead him to think he could treat women, children, and everyone, for that matter, the way he did. He was pretty much abusive to everyone. He needed to address what happened with him as a kid. He should talk about how he feels about all of it. If any one of us would try to talk to him about it he'd skip town."

In developing the curriculum, we also interviewed battered women and asked them what a fathering group for abusive men should pay attention to. Kaelynn's story is representative of their advice. (An excerpt from Kaelynn's story is used in Theme 3 – Exercise 5.)

### **Living in Fear of a Husband and Father**

Kaelynn (Age 49, mother of five children)

"As a father to our children, he's always harping, barking, and imposing his will on all of us. He does a lot of name calling, especially to the boys if they do something he thinks is feminine. He'll call them a "fag," "pussy," or "wus." His style of punishment is very rigid. His way of interacting with them always seems to be teasing, hounding, or bullying. He believes that if his children fear him they'll respect him. He also has unreasonable expectations for our kids. For example, when they were two years old he wanted them to be quiet all of the time. I want him to bring calmness to the situations with our children, not ordering or barking.

If my husband were in this type of fathering group, I'd want him to talk about the children's behavior that he didn't like, then answer this question: "How did you contribute to this

behavior?” I’d ask this because most of our children’s behavior comes from their fear of him or by watching how he treats me and other people. For example, our ten-year-old daughter, Lisa, has a glass of water next to her at bed every night. When John (her dad) says it’s time to go to bed, the kids do because they’re scared of him. One night Lisa forgot to get her glass of water. I went to the bathroom and heard a noise behind the shower curtain. I looked and found Lisa in there. I asked her what she was doing and Lisa said that she was making her way down to the kitchen to get a glass of water without dad seeing her when she heard a noise. She got scared and hid in the shower. She was too scared of her dad yelling at her if she told him she forgot the water, so she was sneaking down there to get it.

He either doesn’t realize how his tone of voice, size, and presence intimidates and scares the children, or he does realize it and does it to get his way with them. Get fathers to understand how much fear the children live in because of their presence. They need to understand how to go to the child’s level, how to connect with them and touch them in a safe way. As a mother, I’d often try to divert him from being harsh on the kids by shifting his attention to me. He has abused me and the children physically, verbally, and mentally for as long as I can remember.

My children’s father usually doesn’t think that the children’s perspective is accurate or relevant. He never listens to them. His “master of the castle” attitude doesn’t allow for it. He treats the children as if they were his property to do what with as he sees fit. I think it would be interesting to have the men do an inventory about what they really know about their children.”

*Addressing Fatherhood* includes stories such as Kaelynn’s and Michael’s throughout its themes as a reminder of the experiences and realities of battering, the harm it produces, and the opportunities the curriculum presents to change the beliefs and actions that sustain it.

# Chapter One: Curriculum Design

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## Goal

*Addressing Fatherhood* seeks to contribute to the social movement to end violence against women and children by motivating abusive men to become better fathers (or father figures) and more supportive parenting partners.<sup>4</sup>

## Objectives

*Addressing Fatherhood* presents a process for change. Its objectives are to create the conditions through which men who batter will:

- Uncover their beliefs that support their use of violence against women and children.
- Examine their childhood experiences with their fathers in order to better understand themselves as fathers and to create greater empathy with their own children.
- Increase their awareness of and examine the impact of their abusive behaviors on their children and partners/ex-partners.
- Build a more engaging and nurturing relationship with their children.<sup>5</sup>
- Examine how they can be respectful, non-abusive, and more supportive to their children's mother and toward the mother-child relationship.
- Examine themselves more closely in their roles as a father and as a parenting partner.
- Gain a new sense of responsibility as a father and as a parenting partner.
- Develop an understanding that abusing their children's mother harms their children.
- End their violence against women and children.

***SAFETY CAUTION:*** These objectives are not written to encourage all men who batter to have continued relationships with their children. Some men present serious risks and potential lethality to the women and children in their lives. This curriculum is not intended to encourage contact or repair the harm by fathers who are too dangerous to undertake the change work it sets forth.

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<sup>4</sup> From this point onward, the curriculum will be referenced as *Addressing Fatherhood*. The term "parenting partner" in the context of this curriculum refers to men who have been abusive as a current or ex-partner to the mother of their children. The use of this term assumes that men must follow any court orders related to no contact or restricted contact with their ex-partners and children.

<sup>5</sup> This objective is written with a clear understanding that some men should not have continued relationships with their children if they have not undergone a long-term process to become nonviolent.

## Guiding principles

- Safety of women and children takes priority over all other intervention goals.

Ensuring safety may mean that some men should not have contact with their children, regardless of completing a group for men who batter. Contact that occurs between fathers and their children or parenting partners should only occur when it is safe and appropriate. Violence against women is harmful to children in multiple ways, including their safety, development, and relationships with their violent fathers and non-offending mothers.<sup>6</sup>

- Men who batter do so because they demand compliance from women and children.
- Chemical dependency, mental illness, and stress are not causal factors in battering, either singly or in combination, although they may contribute to violence in some situations.
- Violence by women and children toward a father who is battering is almost always resistive in nature rather than coercive.
- The experiences and realities of battered women and their children will always guide group content.
- The behaviors of men who batter are rooted in beliefs that justify their use of violence to control women and children.
- The group process as an intervention is based on engaging in dialogue with men who batter to critically examine their beliefs and to encourage change.
- In order for men who batter to be considered safe fathers, they need to believe and demonstrate that battering is unacceptable, take responsibility for past abusive behaviors, and recognize that they are solely responsible for the abusive tactics they have used against their families.
- Men's use of violence towards their current or ex-partners should be considered when determining access to their children.
- All intervention practices must reflect an understanding of the interdependence of the mother's and children's safety: namely, woman abuse is child abuse.
- Intervention practices for men who batter that address their roles as fathers should be accessible to men of diverse cultures and individual circumstances.

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<sup>6</sup> This guiding principle reflects the work of the Family Violence Prevention Fund; see the *Fathering After Violence Toolkit* (p. 7), at [www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org).

## Theoretical framework

This curriculum is based on the reality that men who batter are likely to parent differently than other fathers. Many battered mothers report that their abusers purposefully involve the children in violent events (Edelson, 2006). Men who batter systematically undermine and interfere with battered mothers' parenting in multiple ways (Bancroft, 2002). Men use violence to control the behavior of the other members in the family. On average, children exposed to adult domestic violence exhibit more difficulties than those who are not. The difficulties can vary in range and extremity and in behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social functioning (Edelson, 2006).

Battered women and their children often report that they want to have a continued relationship with their children's fathers, if his violence stops. Many children may continue to love their father despite the violence.

Being a committed, nonviolent, and nurturing father is a life's journey. This can prove to be challenging in a culture that closely ties fatherhood to dominance and strength. Many men enrolled in BIPs have had few models of nurturing fathers in their lives.

Many fathers who have been abusive to their children's mothers and/or to their children often believe that their family should provide them with unquestioning compliance. If there is a conflict he will either "let" her have her way or get his way. Either way, in his mind, he decides.

Men who batter often report that they have never hurt their children, the children have never been present, or, if their children happened to be present for a particular incident and were harmed in some way, it is portrayed as a one-time event. However, research continuously indicates the high overlap between domestic violence and child maltreatment. A review of studies investigating this overlap suggests that between 30% and 60% of children whose mothers had experienced abuse were themselves likely to be abused (Edelson, 1999).

If men who batter seek to undo the harm they have caused their children, they must examine their use of abusive and manipulative tactics against their children's mother. This can happen more readily when men examine how the violence against the mother impacts the children. The primary challenge for facilitators is to encourage men to examine their abusive behaviors, actively participate in uncovering the beliefs that drive those behaviors, and then find the desire to change. This desire will be realized when men increase their awareness of what they have done to their families and begin to see the injustice of their behavior.

Fathers who use abusive and manipulative tactics against their children, as well as their children's mother, often legitimize their actions as "this is the way to raise children to be respectful." They see their abusive behavior as just and right. *Addressing Fatherhood* sees the best path for change as beginning when men become empathetic to their own histories of abuse by their fathers and use that empathy as a lens through which they can understand their children's experience of abuse. Many of these insights may be painful to examine and very emotionally charged. Facilitators must be prepared to refer men to further help in the event that a man's memories of abuse trigger emotions that cannot be or should not be addressed in the format and structure of the BIP group.

## Distinctions between *Addressing Fatherhood* and a parenting curriculum

*Addressing Fatherhood* is written for facilitators of BIPs or similar groups who seek to include sessions and exercises on fatherhood in their work with men who batter. It was created to supplement work already being conducted in a BIP group that addresses men's beliefs that support violence against women. Therefore the curriculum is not a "parenting" curriculum for men who batter, nor is it designed for all fathers.

A traditional parenting curriculum seeks to build skills to parent children as circumstances and situations arise, including techniques related to child development, communication, discipline, and relationships. The focus of teaching parenting skills is on behavior and each skill/behavior has a set of beliefs that support it. For example, if the goal is to demonstrate an activity that improves parent-child cooperation, the corresponding beliefs might include "negotiation is important," "my child and I both need to have input on the outcome," "*our* way is more important than my way," and "teaching cooperation an important aspect of a child's development."

The difficulty in teaching a cooperative activity to a man who batter's his children's mother is that he does not hold any of these beliefs. For example, men who batter will often define cooperation as compliance, with a set of beliefs expressed as "do what I say" and "I'm always right" or "this is MY kid and he'll learn how to do things my way." When men who batter go to a parenting skills class focused on behavior, the resulting father-child interaction does not look like what was taught or intended by the class. That is because the beliefs that support the parenting skill, such as communication or negotiation, do not match the beliefs held by the batterer. Parenting skills organizations have an opportunity to adapt their interventions to include a focus on changing beliefs when working with men who batter. *Addressing Fatherhood* may be informative in that regard, but again, it is not a parenting curriculum.

*Addressing Fatherhood* focuses on men's entitlement<sup>7</sup> in relationship to their children and their children's mother as a parenting partner. This curriculum seeks to expose the beliefs that support entitlement and replace them with a way of thinking that is nonviolent and inclusive of the children and the children's mother. **It is not intended to stand alone, but to be incorporated into an already existing program for men who batter that works in collaboration with the courts and local domestic violence agency as part of a coordinated community response.** It reflects and was modeled after the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) curriculum, *Creating a Process for Men Who Batter*.

The following story illustrates why men who batter need to address their sense of entitlement in relation to women and children, instead of learning techniques of how to "manage" and "discipline" their children.

Randy came to father's group telling the following story: "My 14-year-old daughter, Missy, won't listen to me. She talks back, won't clean up her room when I tell her to, and told me she doesn't have to talk or listen to her 'loser dad.' When I asked my wife to talk to her, she

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<sup>7</sup> As used in this curriculum, "entitlement" is defined as a man's exaggerated and/or intrusive sense of what he believes he deserves in relation the women and children in his life.

told me to figure it out for myself. When I got home last night, I walked in the kitchen and told her that if she did her job as a mother then maybe the house wouldn't be such a damn mess, the kids wouldn't be crying and in trouble and not listening to their parents all of the time. I told her to go to hell and left, saying that no one respects me in my own house."

A traditional parenting skills curriculum would talk to Randy about child development and how some of Missy's behaviors are typical of other teenage girls her age. A traditional parenting group might also talk to him about how to communicate his concerns to wife and children in a non-threatening manner. The problem, however, is that Randy does not possess many nonviolent beliefs when it comes to his family. He believes that he is entitled to getting his way and to his family's obedience. He will use coercion, intimidation, and violence to obtain that obedience and put his needs first. These beliefs will underpin any parenting technique or skill he is taught. The skill or technique will not only be ineffective, it will most likely be used and justified with coercion or physical violence. Randy will blame the skill for not working, without any recognition of how his own beliefs and abusive actions keep it from working.

*Addressing Fatherhood* would pay attention to what happened between Randy and his daughter and would ask why she won't listen to him. It would also address Randy's authoritarian view of Missy and his abusive behavior toward her mother. It would work with Randy to identify the beliefs that give him permission to treat both Missy and her mother in such abusive ways. It would focus on Randy and tie his beliefs and actions to the impact on the rest of the family. It would help Randy identify what he needs to do in order to improve his relationship with Missy and her mother. This curriculum seeks to raise men's consciousness and open a path to change by asking Randy such questions as:

- What is the belief that gives you permission to blame Missy's mother for your children's behavior?
- What did you learn from your father?
- How did you undermine your wife and what is the impact on your daughter and her mother?
- What beliefs entitle you to walk into the room and talk to your wife and children in that way?
- What would you have to change in your thinking about yourself as a father and about your child and your wife? What would be the subsequent benefits if you made those changes?

## Methodology

AFFP sought to develop a curriculum that was grounded in the experiences of battered women and their children, supported in its theory by current research, and creative in its group process exercises. AFFP used the following methods to create and design *Addressing Fatherhood*.

### Literature review

The authors sought out research and other publications that addressed battering and parenting. They found an abundance of literature related to men who batter, the effects of domestic violence on children, and parenting, but little that addressed men who batter as fathers. Jeff Edleson, Oliver Williams, Jay Silverman, and Lundy Bancroft have paid the most attention to the subject. (See References chapter for examples of their work.)

### Focus groups with battered women

AFFP conducted two focus groups, with over twenty battered women participating. Women received transportation to the focus group, dinner, childcare, and a stipend for their participation. The discussions focused on the impact of battering on their children and on the mother-child relationship. Participants provided guidance on the topics to include in a group that would be working with men who batter as fathers.

### Individual interviews with battered women

The authors conducted in-depth interviews with six battered women on the impact of battering on their children and the mother-child relationship. Interviewees received transportation, childcare, food, and a stipend.

### Individual interviews with adults who grew up in a violent home

AFFP conducted in-depth interviews with four adults who as children grew up in homes with domestic violence. The interviews focused on the impact of the violence on their lives and their relationships with their mothers and with their fathers.

### Individual interviews with practitioners

The authors also interviewed five local practitioners who work with men who batter in various capacities, including: representatives from the courts, batterer intervention program, and a social services agency. The interviewers sought their perspectives and insights about working with men who batter.

### Practitioner focus groups

The two practitioner focus groups included fifteen participants who, in their roles as interveners, have contact with or work with men who batter. Curriculum developers spoke with representatives of the following agencies: battered women's advocacy, child abuse advocacy, sexual assault

advocacy, prosecution, probation, courts, health and human services, children's mental health services, law enforcement, adult mental health services, and chemical dependency services.

### **Interviews with subject-matter experts**

AFFP conducted in-person and telephone interviews with experts in the field of domestic violence and batterer intervention, including:

- Ellen Pence, PhD, Praxis International
- Jeff Edleson, PhD, University of Minnesota
- Oliver Williams, PhD, University of Minnesota
- Dave Ellis, Greater Twin Cities United Way and prisoner re-entry initiatives through the Minnesota Department of Corrections
- Denise Gamache, MSW, Battered Women's Justice Project
- Juan Carlos Areán, Family Violence Prevention Fund
- Lonna Davis, Family Violence Prevention Fund
- Kristine Lizdas, JD, Battered Women's Justice Project
- Resma Menakem, MSW, Tubman Family Alliance
- Sylvia Olney, MA, LMFT
- Dave Matthews, PhD, Domestic Abuse Project

### **AFFP experience and trial-and-error**

The exercises and videos developed for *Addressing Fatherhood* have been implemented in one form or another in AFFP's batterer intervention program since 2004. The authors of the curriculum are co-facilitators of that program. They developed and tested exercises and ideas in their local Itasca County, Minnesota, program. They conducted interviews with men enrolled in the BIP, pre- and post-group, to elicit feedback on the group process content, as well as further insight into the experiences of men who batter and issues related to fatherhood.

### **Evaluation consultant**

Sylvia Olney observed three group sessions and numerous exercises for their effectiveness and provided a critique of the written curriculum.

## **Cultural context**

Each culture has values, traditions, and practices that support and promote relationships based on respect. Every culture also has its own values, traditions, and practices that facilitate ongoing abuse and violence in relationships. Domestic violence occurs in heterosexual, gay, and lesbian relationships; among all ethnic and racial groups; and at all socioeconomic levels. Race and ethnicity are not associated with higher reported levels of domestic violence, but certain racial and ethnic groups do experience disproportionately higher levels of adverse life circumstances and poverty (Areán, 2008).

This curriculum has been designed, tested, and evaluated in the cultural context of Itasca County, Minnesota. This community is located in northern, rural Minnesota and has a population of approximately 43,000. Its economy is primarily based on timber production, iron ore mining, and tourism. The men in Itasca County who are court-ordered to AFFP's batterer intervention program can best be described demographically as primarily working class or poor, Caucasian (94%) or Native American (4%), and regular users of guns for hunting and sport (75%), with a high rate of alcohol consumption (80%).

Most of the men court-ordered to the BIP have regularly used forms of sexual coercion against their partners. Very few of these men have ever lived in homes where their own fathers modeled positive roles of how to care for children or be a supportive parenting partner. Around 90% of men court-ordered to the AFFP batterer intervention program are sent immediately after engaging in some use of violence or coercive threats against a current or former intimate partner. While acts of physical violence diminish during their participation in the group, few readily or quickly give up using intimidation and threats against their current or ex-partners.

To end violence against women within any cultural group, the intervention must be based on values generated by that community, rather than the dominant culture. If men believe that the group process being utilized is being imposed from outside their cultural framework, it may be interpreted as continued oppression. If BIPs recognize and respect varying cultures and the structural barriers to nonviolence within those cultures, programs will more likely gain the trust of men. By addressing fathering in a BIP, facilitators have an opportunity to explore issues of culture and oppression (Williams, 2007).

As facilitators work with and assess men in their groups, it is important that they are aware of the cultural variables that are interwoven in the men's experiences. Facilitators who are able to identify and understand those diverse cultural contexts and dynamics are better able to effectively engage men in the change process.

It is AFFP's hope that this curriculum will act as a tool for dialogue that has been adapted to the cultural context in which it is used. Failure to understand the social and cultural contexts of men who batter can lead to increased risks to battered women and their children and reduce the usefulness of the group process. When BIPs in local communities incorporate multiculturalism and diversity into their programming, they support outcomes that do a better job of supporting safety, accountability, and change.

# Chapter Two: Presenting the Curriculum

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## Framework

Historically, BIPs have not addressed the impact and effect of men's violence against women on children and on the mother-child relationship. It has only been recently that programs across the United States have begun to work with men who batter as fathers.

After many years of facilitating groups for men who batter and talking with women who have been battered about their experiences, common themes around fathering and battering have emerged. AFFP's experience is that most men who batter are not alike, but fall along a continuum of fathering related to their use, frequency, and severity of violence. The common theme is that the primary intention of the battering behavior is to control others. Keeping this continuum in mind provides facilitators with a framework for understanding men who batter as fathers (see Figure 1).

Increasing fathers' awareness about the impact their actions are having on their children provides men with the opportunity to stop the intergenerational pattern of domestic violence. Most men did not invent the abusive tactics they use, but learned them from their families and the social community they live in.

This curriculum was written as a tool for facilitators of BIPs to work with men in ways that more deeply examine how battering behaviors have affected men as fathers and their relationships with their children and their children's mother. It also provides group members with information and practical tools to begin the journey to becoming nonviolent, nurturing fathers.

**This curriculum is not designed for, nor intended to encourage or endorse, contact between violent fathers and their children.** Courts, referral agencies, battered women, and communities must decide whether it is safe for the children and the mother to have ongoing contact with the father and determine the nature of any contact.

## Men without children

This curriculum does not (1) assume that the men in group have biological children, (2) require a man to have direct contact with his children, or (3) encourage contact between fathers and their children. Men in BIPs who do not have children or those who do not have contact because of a court order or by choice should still be considered for participation in this curriculum. *Addressing Fatherhood* can help all men increase their capacity for empathy. It is the experience of AFFP staff that even when men in BIPs do not currently have biological children or stepchildren, many will become fathers in the future and most have, or will have, an intimate partner with children, nieces or nephews, or other children in their lives. Most grew up in a home with a battering father. The curriculum is therefore applicable to all men who batter.

## Guidance from battered women

Our research indicates that many battered women, though not all, support BIPs working with men who batter in their role as fathers. Many women want their children's father to have contact with the children as long as it is safe. In the focus groups and interviews conducted for this curriculum, many women stated that they wanted the father to understand that abusing them as the child's mother also harmed their children. They also wanted a program for men that would increase men's respect for them as women and mothers, eliminate violence from their language and actions, and encourage men to listen to the concerns of both the women and their children.

Drawing on guidance from battered women, *Addressing Fatherhood* does not require actual contact between a father and his children. By design, it does not ask a man to contact his children in order to "practice" what he has learned in group. Programs that encourage men who batter to pursue such an exercise demonstrate a lack of appreciation for the power imbalance, fear, and risk that it may have for the children. For some men, however, the curriculum's very existence may imply the possibility of future contact, regardless of their current circumstances, and programs should be prepared to accurately address such expectations.

Programs using the curriculum are encouraged to conduct focus groups of battered women in their own communities to talk about working with men who batter as fathers. Programs are also encouraged to maintain contact with the battered women who are associated with the men in the group.

## Coordinated community response

*Addressing Fatherhood* is most effective when utilized within a coordinated community response (CCR) that accounts for the safety of victims and places sanctions on men who batter in order to reduce their inclination to abuse.<sup>8</sup> For example, a man who is court-ordered to a BIP that uses the curriculum is more likely to be influenced by the material if he lives in a community that holds him accountable for any violence he commits while enrolled in the BIP. Most courts believe that children need both parents in their lives as long as the contact is safe and will send men to a BIP because of their violence against women and to address their role as a father (Maturi, 2007).

As part of a CCR, facilitators must understand how their reports of a man's participation in a BIP, and in the fatherhood curriculum in particular, can be used and misused in the lives of women and children. Many men who batter are involved in a court proceeding for custody and will seek to utilize completion of this curriculum as evidence of change, improved capacity for parenting, and a sign of their commitment to their children. BIP group members and referral agencies will actively solicit feedback from facilitators about "progress." Always take care to provide clear feedback to the courts and others. This includes a prominent notice that completing the program in no way demonstrates or provides evidence of whether or not a man is incorporating its themes in his life and making changes accordingly.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, see the Duluth Model of public intervention, described at: [www.theduluthmodel.org](http://www.theduluthmodel.org).

## Organization

The following **four themes** are the core topics in the curriculum:

1. Examining men's childhood experiences with their fathers
2. Understanding the impact of battering on children and their mothers
3. Becoming a more nurturing, child-centered father
4. Examining how men can be respectful, non-abusive, and more supportive of their children's mother and of the mother-child relationship

A variety of exercises accompany each theme. Use whichever exercises best meet the needs and cultural contexts of a group. The curriculum is intended to be flexible, with facilitators moving from theme to theme once men are engaged in the exploration of the theme and ready to move on. It may be crucial for one group to remain on a theme longer than another in order to better meet the intended goal and fully address the four themes.

The **core messages** included with each theme help focus attention and provide alternatives to the beliefs that support men's abusive actions. Display the core messages in the group room to visually reinforce them for each session and to prompt dialogue with the men.

The **"stories"** related to the themes help ground the curriculum and its activities in the real lives of battered women and their children. Use the stories to prepare for the group session, as well as a facilitation aid in the group via oral "storytelling," reading, or handouts.

The **context** provides facilitators with the theoretical framework, research, and context of each theme.

The **exercises** are the tools for dialogue in the group process. They include various group process techniques, including role-plays and experiential practices.

The **Fatherhood Log** (Figure 2) is a teaching tool that can be used during any theme. Each section of the Fatherhood Log corresponds to one of the four curriculum themes.

A **check-out question** is important at the end of each group session. A standard checkout question could be something like: "What stood out for you about tonight's session?" or "What did tonight's session get you thinking about?" In addition, include a substantive **closing question** at the end of each group, based on the discussion and dialogue that occurred. Such a question can help point out contradictions the men carry in their thinking that have been exposed during the group process. For example: "What would you have to believe to be the father you want to be to your own children" or "What would you have to believe to be a more respectful parenting partner?"

## Presenting the curriculum

BIPs can deliver this curriculum in a number of ways. The alternatives include:

- Incorporate as much of the curriculum content as desired into an existing program.
- Replace existing content related to children and being a supportive parenting partner.
- Add all of the curriculum content to an existing BIP.
- Use the entire curriculum in a fatherhood group that follows completion of a BIP.

Decide in which order to deliver the content, depending upon the specific nature of the group. For example, for some men, beginning with a man's own childhood (Theme 1) may present risks if introduced before they are ready to discuss this topic. If this curriculum is utilized in a stand-alone fathers group, Theme 3 (becoming a nonviolent, child-centered father) is probably the best point to begin. Starting with Theme 3 in a stand-alone setting is more likely to decrease men's defensiveness toward the group process and the content.

Whatever the delivery method and starting point, stay attentive to the terms and concepts used throughout the curriculum that may need definition or explanation in order for the group to clearly understand them. For example, words such as "fathering," "father figure," "parenting partner," "co-parenting," and "parallel parenting" may not be self-explanatory to most participants. Take care to avoid assuming that everyone will automatically understand them.

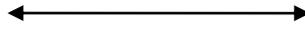
**Be strategic**, both in deciding where to begin with the curriculum and in choosing men to participate in different exercises, as noted throughout the instructions. Some of the exercises can be particularly challenging to men's willingness to examine their beliefs and actions. Begin with someone who you know is becoming more reflective about his actions and the harm he has caused to his children and to their mother.

Guard against assumptions about the men's levels of comprehension and literacy. Know who is in the group and adjust the facilitation accordingly. For example, read handouts and other materials out loud rather than giving them to the group and assuming that they will be read and understood.

Throughout the curriculum you will see facilitator *NOTES* that emphasize aspects of an exercise's purpose, content, or approach to take into account when using the exercise. The curriculum also includes *SAFETY CAUTIONS* that address specific issues related to several of the exercises. Such safety cautions go beyond the overarching cautions and assessment related to any work with men who batter.

**Figure 1. Fathering Continuum**

**Domination**



**Nurturing and Nonviolent**

- The father emotionally, psychologically, physically, and sexually abuses his partner and/or the children. He forces them to obey by using violence and inflicting pain. Children often become fearful and hostile.
  - The father believes that someone has to be in control of the family. Children learn at an early age to obey orders without question. They learn to carry a harsh voice in their heads that relays negative messages about themselves, their mother, and their father.
  - The father is afraid that everything will fall apart if he does not supervise everything that everyone is doing and if the other family members don't follow his orders. Children learn to become rigid and fearful; they stiffen up when in their father's presence.
  - The family and home environment is painful and unpleasant. The mother and children cannot speak freely and they learn to "obey" the father. Children learn that any sort of challenge to his authority is "talking-back" and will result in punishment.
  - The mother and children become imprisoned in a life they don't want. The father uses and believes in harsh punishment as a form of "discipline."
- The father engages in nurturing, nonviolent behaviors with his children and the mother of his children.
  - The father does not attempt to establish and maintain a rigid control over his partner and children. Children feel free to play, pursue their natural curiosity and express a wide variety of emotions.
  - Children feel inspired by their father. They feel a sense of structure and leeway to experiment and learn. Children are able to relax and enjoy themselves in their father's presence.
  - The family and home environment is uplifting and emphasizes cooperative problem-solving. Children learn to express their ideas.
  - The mother and children are able to express their opinions, thoughts, dreams, hopes, challenges, and fears without punishment. Each person has and can speak freely with their own voice.
  - Mothers are supported as parenting partners, even when the mother and father disagree.
  - Discipline is seen as a way to guide children with limits and structure.

## The Fatherhood Log

Logging actions, abuse, and behaviors (i.e., writing or recording actions and events according to a prescribed format and questions) is a common tool in groups with men who batter.<sup>9</sup> Working from the model of the DAIP Control Log, AFFP developed a complementary tool, the Fatherhood Log (Figure 2), that is organized around the four themes in *Addressing Fatherhood*. The Fatherhood Log can be used throughout as a way to help a man see how his thinking directs his abusive behaviors.

The Fatherhood Log is a core teaching tool of this curriculum. It is designed to facilitate a group analysis of key elements of an abusive act as it relates to fatherhood and the beliefs that support coercive and violent behaviors. The log challenges men to think differently and to examine their beliefs about fatherhood and parenting. The log guides men to examine:

1. How a man's experience with his own father has impacted his own abusive behaviors
2. How a man's abusive behaviors impact his children and his partner as their mother
3. How men can be more nurturing and child-centered fathers
4. How men can become more supportive and respectful parenting partners

Use the Fatherhood Log throughout the curriculum with each of the four themes and related videos. Figure 2 illustrates the content of the log and the Appendix includes a version that can be copied for group use. The Fatherhood Log is not designed to be completed in one session. Use the section of the Fatherhood Log corresponding to a particular theme and exercise. For example, to analyze the role play in Theme 4 – Exercise 2 (harm to the mother-child relationship), use the questions in Theme 4 of the Fatherhood Log (respecting and supporting the woman as a parenting partner). The Fatherhood Log is intended to produce a deeper exploration over the course of the curriculum in order to uncover the origins and characteristics of a man's violence toward his children and their mother.

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<sup>9</sup> Using logs in groups with men who batter started in the 1970s, with the work of Anne Ganley. The Duluth, Minnesota, Domestic Abuse Intervention Project adapted Ganley's anger log to create the "Control Log" as part of its education group, "Creating a Process of Change for Men who Batter." The Control Log is a tool that represents a way of understanding the full scope of an abusive act or behavior.

## Figure 2. Fatherhood Log

### Theme 1: Childhood experiences with your own father

- ⇒ What were your father's abusive behaviors, and what did those behaviors teach you?
- ⇒ How did being a father get defined for you as a child?
- ⇒ What have your children learned about being a father from you?



### Theme 2: Impact on your children and your children's mother

- ⇒ What IMPACT have you had on your children?
- ⇒ What IMPACT have you had on the relationship between your children and their mother?
- ⇒ What expectations do you have of your children's mother?



### Theme 3: Becoming a more nurturing, child-centered father

- ⇒ What would you have to DO differently to be more nurturing and child-centered?
- ⇒ What would you have to BELIEVE to be a more nurturing and child-centered father?



### Theme 4: Respecting and supporting the woman as a parenting partner

- ⇒ What would you have to DO to be a more supportive and respectful parenting partner?
- ⇒ What would you have to BELIEVE to be a more supportive and respectful parenting partner?



## Assessment

To address fatherhood when working with men who batter, BIPs must conduct a multifaceted and ongoing assessment in order to better understand a man's life. An initial assessment should determine the appropriateness of the referral and the level of risk. When conducting an assessment of a BIP participant who is a father, establish whether and how the following factors related to the risk of ongoing abuse are present:

- Has he directly abused his or his partner's children?<sup>10</sup>
- Did the man experience psychological, physical, or sexual abuse from his own father?
  - If yes, what was the nature and impact of that abuse?
- Did the man see his mother abused by his father (or father figure)?<sup>11</sup>
  - If yes, what was the nature and impact of that abuse?
  - How did the abuse affect his relationship with his mother? With his father?
- Did the man have any role models of nonviolent, nurturing men in his life?
  - If yes, who were they and what did they contribute to his life?
- Has the man been disrespectful and unsupportive to his partner as a mother? If so, how?
- Does he try to create a "wedge" in the mother-child relationship (i.e., interfere in or damage the relationship between the mother and her children)? If so, how?
- What has been the impact of his behavior on his children? On the mother of his children?

Assessing a man's risk of using lethal violence is complex. BIPs should establish the following information related to lethality:

- Is the man likely to change his behavior? What actions is he taking or not taking to change his behavior?
- Has he continued to be physically violent post-separation from his partner, post-conviction, and/or post-restraining-order?
- Does he have an extensive history of assaults against his current or former partners? Against others?
- Does the man's partner believe he is likely to kill her? Does the local advocacy program believe he is likely to kill her?
- Does he have a history of severe chemical use?
- Has he ever threatened or actually kidnapped the woman or the children or held them hostage in any way?
- Has he ever threatened or actually hurt the children?

**SAFETY CAUTION:** Conducting a lethality assessment requires more than a series of yes or no questions and requires that BIPs gather information from sources other than the individual participant. In order to be as accurate as possible, gather information from the man, his partner, the advocacy program, law enforcement, and the criminal and civil courts. An assessment cannot be a

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<sup>10</sup> BIP facilitators or others conducting the assessment must be clearly aware of any responsibilities as mandated reporters of child abuse and any related notifications to the man completing the assessment.

<sup>11</sup> Throughout the curriculum, references to "father" include "father figure." Be aware of each man's individual circumstances in how the terms are used.

static, fixed conclusion, but needs to be re-examined over time as circumstances and the potential for lethal violence change. Has the final divorce hearing been scheduled? Has the man suddenly become unemployed? Have stalking behaviors and threats increased? All can signal an increased risk of lethal violence (Campbell, et al., 2003).

## **Contact with women**

Meaningful contact with the women who are associated with the men enrolled in the group is essential to using this curriculum as intended. Inform women about the curriculum's themes and scope of work and the facilitators' role with the men as fathers. Women need to understand what to expect and not expect from the program and group process. Research shows that many women who have been abused want their current or former partners to be involved in their children's lives and to become better fathers if it is safe to do so (Areán, 2008). It is therefore important to avoid encouraging a false hope that their partners will change just by attending the group and completing this curriculum.

It is also essential for facilitators to have regular contact with women's advocates in order to avoid collusion with men who batter. The degree to which facilitators understand what it is truly like to live with a batterer will be the degree to which they can effectively intervene when he presents his understanding of "the problem" as something other than his own beliefs and actions. Women whose partners are participating in the group should also receive information about resources and referrals in the community. BIPs are positioned to help interrupt the messages that a batterer sends – e.g., "no one's going to believe you," "you're crazy" – and replace them with messages of help and accountability.

