

# Why Women's Domestic Violence Intervention Programming *Must* Include Contextual Assessments and Programming

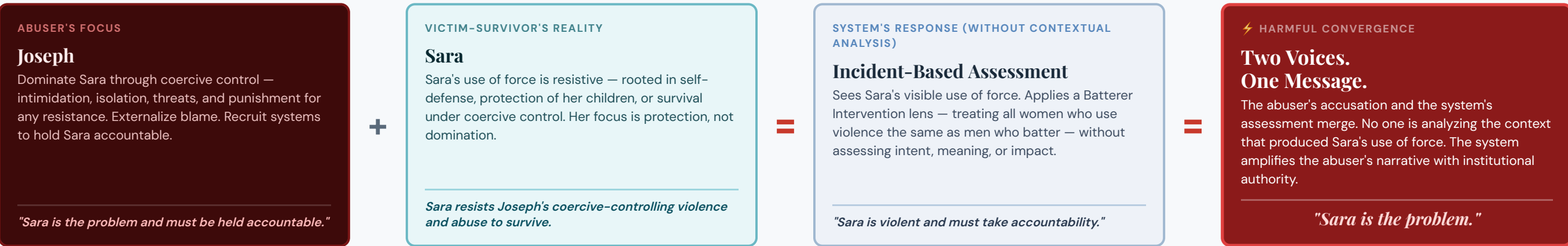
*When systems respond without contextual analysis, the abuser's narrative and the system's response become one — with serious consequences for the victim-survivor, her children, and the community.*

## Domestic Violence Turning Points

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*Contextual research overwhelmingly shows that women's use of violence against an intimate partner differs from men in intent, meaning, and impact. A system response that ignores this produces harm — not accountability.*

### THE HARMFUL CONVERGENCE — HOW TWO VOICES DELIVER ONE DAMAGING MESSAGE



#### COLUMN 1 | JOSEPH'S TACTICS

##### Abuser's Focus

The abuser's position and continual focus is that **"Sara is the problem"** and must be held accountable. This framing serves the abuser's interests: it externalizes blame, conceals his own coercive control, and recruits system partners to join him in holding her accountable.

- Minimizing, denying, and blaming Sara for his coercive-controlling violence and abuse
- Reframing her resistance, self-defense, or fighting back as "mutual" or framing her as the abusive one or "predominant" aggressor
- Weaponizing systems — police, courts, child welfare — against her
- Presenting himself as the victim and the reasonable, self-regulated one in the relationship

#### COLUMN 2 | SYSTEM WITHOUT CONTEXT

##### System's Focus

When systems respond using a typical **"Batterer Intervention"** lens, the operative frame becomes: Sara is the problem and must take accountability. The system can include probation, courts, and court-ordered women's non-violence programs that treat all women who use violence the same as men who batter.

- Compliance with court-ordered programming
- Reduction of measurable recidivism
- Risk management for the institution
- "Equal treatment" framed as gender-neutrality — without accounting for the gendered context of women's use of force

#### COLUMN 3 | WHAT THE CONVERGENCE PRODUCES

##### Harmful Convergence

Two voices — the abuser and the system — deliver the same core message to Sara: **"Sara is the problem."** When both arrive at the same conclusion using the same framing, the woman in the middle has no one analyzing the context that produced her use of force in the first place.

- The intervention becomes evidence Sara can internalize: *"Everyone says I am the problem. Maybe he was right."*
- Her safety needs go unaddressed; she returns to a potentially more dangerous environment
- Documentation created by the system can be used against her in future custody, criminal, or immigration matters
- The source of her use of violence remains untouched — the convergence sabotages its own stated goal of reducing recidivism

## Five Consequences of the Convergence *For Sara, her children, and the community — when programming does not account for context*

### 1 Reinforcement & Validation That the Abuser Is Right

When the state delivers the abuser's message back to Sara with institutional authority, his narrative is confirmed. The intervention itself becomes evidence she is made to internalize: *"Everyone says I am the problem. Maybe he was right."*

### 2 Less Safety for Sara

Programming that does not analyze the coercive control she has been subjected to leaves her safety needs unaddressed. She may return to a more dangerous environment, less able to name what is happening to her, with documentation that can be used against her in custody, criminal, or immigration matters.

### 3 The Approach Fails the System's Own Goal

Women's use of force is overwhelmingly contextual — rooted in self-defense, resistance to coercion, protection of children, or cumulative effects of violence. An approach that does not address the source of her use of violence cannot reduce its recurrence. The convergence sabotages its own stated outcome.

### 4 Diminished Personal Growth, Well-Being & Autonomy

Healing requires accurate naming. When Sara is offered a framework that misnames her experience, her capacity for self-understanding, agency, and growth is constricted. Programs become something to survive rather than something that supports her growth and change process.

### 5 Increased Risk of DV and Self-Harm

Internalizing the "you are the problem" message is associated with elevated risk of depression, suicidality, and substance use. It can also increase — not decrease — the likelihood of future violent incidents, because the underlying conditions remain untouched. She is less likely to reach out for help in the future.

**Key principle (Osthoff, 2002; Pence & Dasgupta, 2006; Johnson, 2008; Scaia, 2017; Young Larance, 2025):** Women's use of force in intimate relationships differs from men's in intent, meaning, and impact. Contextual analysis — not actuarial risk scoring — is the appropriate tool for determining the type of violence present and the appropriate intervention response. A risk assessment for danger or lethality is not designed for that determination.