

## **TIPS FOR WORKERS WORKING WITH DADS: HELPFUL THINGS TO SAY TO MEN WHO HAVE BEEN VIOLENT WITH THEIR PARTNERS**

Below you will find some suggestions for talking to fathers who have a history of domestic violence after you have talked to the mother. Talking to men in this situation may increase or decrease risks. The suggestions are based on the following assumptions:

- ◆ You should speak to the father alone. If the mother is present, it can escalate things or lead to retaliation. She may feel safe when you are present, but he may take it out on her later.
- ◆ Check your feelings. You may be tempted to push the father to admit what he's done or want to confront him if he denies his abusive conduct. Experience shows that this is not a good place to start.
- ◆ Build a relationship with him. If he can feel a sense of respect and interest, it will pay off by supporting his capacity to hear what you have to say.
- ◆ At least at the beginning, focus on getting him to reflect on the impact of his behavior on children, and on connecting with strengths that may help him in the change process.
- ◆ Figure out your approach first. Are you moving toward having him engage in services that address domestic violence *and* some form of safe visitation with his children? Or do you think that his risk level and/or the children's level of trauma are too high to move toward visitation? You may want to speak to your supervisor or seek consultation about this issue.

**These are some things you can say.** These statements may promote self-reflection, and to help him consider the gap between the impact of his behavior on the children and his hopes for them. He may not react at the time you say these things. Keep in mind that these remarks work best if you have a good relationship:

- Many men don't realize it, but knowing that your dad has hurt your mom can scar children. You can change that.
- When you hurt your partner, you hurt your children. It doesn't matter what triggered you. You may have felt justified at the moment.
- (After he's been violent.) What you do now will be very important to them... If you don't change, they will feel you turned your back on them. It's not just about your partner.
- They will carry this forever: They always know. You can change things for the better.
- It's not about being a bad person. It's about changing behaviors that are harmful.
- You are very important to your children. Research indicates boys will get their sense of manhood and fatherhood from you and that girls will develop a sense of what to expect from men. Both of them will get a sense of healthy relationships and of how to resolve conflict from your example. You matter a great deal. If you can change your behavior, it will make a big difference to them.
- You are an example for them in all that you do. I know you love your children (say this only if true). Please go to this program (local batterer intervention program).
- If you do not show respect for their mother, you hurt them and weaken your family. (Talk about how to show respect even when you disagree.) If you disrespect her or undermine her discipline, you destroy the kids' capacity to respect adults.
- Earning respect is core. You don't get respect just because you're a man. If you can give a good example by holding your temper, being patient and listening, it helps.

Developed by F. Mederos for the Fatherhood Initiative at the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, September 2008