

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD WELFARE LEVERS FOR



*Generate Relevant Research*

## The Evidence You Can Count On

to support survivors and children affected by domestic violence

When advocating for systems change, we often hear that “we need more evidence” to support the case for doing things differently. While there are significant gaps and limitations to the current evidence base regarding how to address domestic violence, an intersecting issue is that practitioners often lack up-to-date knowledge of the research that does exist, resulting in services and responses to domestic violence that are not informed by evidence. Gaps in knowledge and awareness can fuel resistance towards changing the way services are provided. As we continue to advance research at the intersection of domestic violence and child welfare, here is some of the current evidence that can be used to support improvements in systems and services to better meet the needs of survivors and their children.



**NATIONAL CENTER TO ADVANCE PEACE**  
for Children, Youth, and Families

The National Center to Advance Peace for Children, Youth, and Families (NCAP), is a coalition led by Caminar Latino-Latinos United for Peace and Equity and includes Ujima: National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, the Alaska Native Women’s Resource Center, the National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center, and Futures Without Violence.



- Removing children, especially from a non-offending parent, often causes more trauma to both the child and the survivor ([Sankaran 2019](#); [Beller 2015](#); [Bruskas 2008](#)). Research has demonstrated that children placed in foster care have poorer outcomes than children exposed to similar maltreatment who remain with their family ([Doyle 2007](#); [Lawrence et al. 2006](#)).
- Survivor-parents and children support one another in their long-term recovery from domestic violence ([Bethell et al. 2019](#); [Herschell et al. 2017](#); [Thiara & Humphreys 2017](#); [Katz 2015](#)). Interventions that nurture the parent-child relationship can increase parenting quality and assist children in recovering from their trauma.

**Removing children is not the best way to ensure their safety when there is domestic violence. Here's what the research says...**

- Collaborative interventions between domestic violence and child welfare agencies that hold people who use violence accountable, develop survivors' strengths and protective factors, and promote child well-being can reduce domestic violence related child removals ([Safe & Together Institute 2018](#)).



**Domestic violence survivors can parent just as effectively as parents who are not impacted by domestic violence. Here's what the research says...**

- When parenting is impaired by domestic violence, it is often circumstantial and specific to constraints placed on the survivor by the parent who uses violence (e.g., actions that prevent the survivor-parent from meeting the child's basic needs). Consequently, many survivors report improvements in their parenting and relationships with their children after the domestic violence ends (Sousa et al. 2022; Pels et al. 2015).
- Domestic violence does not necessarily impair the parenting of survivors. Women with violent partners are equally nurturing towards their children and engage in similar parenting behaviors as women in non-violent relationships (Lieberman et al. 2005; Casanueva et al. 2008). Some studies have even found that survivors may positively compensate to overcome the effects of domestic violence on their children (Anderson & Danis 2006; Buchbinder 2004).
- Many survivors find their parenting role to be a source of strength. Striving to be a good parent despite the violence they have experienced can provide a sense of value and self-worth (Wendt et al. 2015; Semaan 2013; Lapierre 2010). Services that empower survivors and focus on their strengths, rather than assuming parenting deficiencies, are most beneficial.



## Many interventions intended to help can actually harm or blame survivors. Here's what the research says...

- Many survivors experience victim-blaming, including child welfare system responses that charge survivors with neglect, failure to protect, or exposing children to domestic violence ([Sweet 2019](#); [Meyer 2015](#)). Before assigning blame, consider the following evidence on how survivors prioritize their children's needs and safety...
- Survivors may stay in a violent relationship to protect their children. Such decisions are often grounded in the reality that leaving could escalate the violence and place their children at increased risk of harm. Many fear that their partner will harm or gain custody of the children if they try to leave, or that their children will be taken away by CPS ([Pokharel et al. 2020](#); [Meier 2020](#); [Lyons et al. 2021](#)).
- Survivors typically engage in extensive safety planning and strategizing to protect their children. Multiple studies have demonstrated that survivors develop and utilize a variety of strategies to protect their children from harm or mitigate harm when they lack other alternatives ([Sousa et al. 2022](#); [Nixon et al. 2017](#); [Pels et al. 2015](#); [Lapierre 2010](#); [Kelly 2009](#)).
- Poverty can trap survivors in abusive relationships, especially when there are children involved. Many survivors lack the financial resources to leave and worry about how they will support their children and find affordable housing ([Stylianou 2018](#); [Kuo 2019](#); [Postmous et al. 2012](#)).



## Not all interventions for people who use violence are equal. Here's what the research says...

- A one-size-fits-all approach to working with people who use violence is not the most effective method. Rather, research suggests that interventions may be more effective when they are tailored to different typologies of offenders, severity of violence, and level of risk posed by the person who uses violence ([Ferraro 2017](#)).
- For some people who use violence, their desire to be good parents can motivate them to change their behavior ([QIC-DVCW 2021](#)). Practices such as motivational interviewing can provide an effective means for engaging individuals who use violence to reflect on the harm they have caused and identify their own motivation to change ([Pinto e Silva et al. 2022](#); [Santirso et al. 2020](#)).

- Responses to domestic violence that are primarily punitive (e.g., criminal justice system) are often ineffective and may be counterproductive, especially when working with communities of color, who are frequently harmed by such systems. Integrating relational, community-based, and systemic strategies that hold people who use violence accountable while promoting healing are more likely to produce positive change ([QIC-DVCW 2021](#); [Lippy et al. 2020](#); [Creative Interventions 2012](#)).
- Research indicates that providing culturally specific domestic violence offender interventions are more effective in addressing the use of violence and facilitating behavior change among individuals from racial/ethnic minority communities ([Satyen et al. 2022](#); [Ferraro 2017](#); [Bent-Goodley et al. 2011](#)).



## **We can advance more responsive, equitable approaches that protect the fundamental rights of survivors. Here's what the research says...**

- Stigmatization from mainstream organizations and law enforcement marginalize LGBTQ2S<sup>1</sup> survivors, preclude them from accessing the services they need, and subject them to increased scrutiny over their parenting abilities ([Calton et al. 2016](#); [Joslin & Sakimura 2022](#)).
- Numerous studies have demonstrated the value and effectiveness of providing culturally specific services, including greater trust, rapport, language accessibility, and responsiveness to the needs and desires of survivors ([Serrata et al. 2020](#); [Klingspohn 2018](#); [Gillum 2008](#)).
- Institutional racism and lack of culturally responsive services deter racial and ethnic minority survivors from seeking help. When they do seek help, they often receive punitive responses (e.g., intervention by child welfare, losing custody of their children) rather than services that address their actual needs ([Hulley et al. 2022](#); [Storer et al. 2021](#); [Beller 2015](#)). Evidence of racial disproportionality in the child welfare system, particularly of Black and Indigenous children, is well established and linked to the historical oppression of communities of color ([NCJJ Dashboard](#); [Dettlaff et al. 2020](#); [Lash 2017](#); [Roberts 2012](#); [Roberts 2002](#)).
- Intersectional and survivor-centered approaches that respond to the impact of systemic inequities and prioritize survivor agency and self-determination are better situated to meet the needs of survivors and their children ([Kulkarni 2019](#); [Klingspohn 2018](#)).

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<sup>1</sup> Caminar Latino-LUPE is committed to being inclusive and seeks to fully reflect and promote the diversity of our communities throughout all our work. When terms such as LGBTQ2S+ are used throughout this paper, the intent is to represent all persons who may identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, 2-Spirit, Questioning, Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Intersex, Asexual, Gender Fluid, Sexually fluid, or who identify in other ways outside of heteronormative or cisgender identities, while also acknowledging the shortcomings of these terms.

For more information on the child welfare levers for change, please visit our website:

[www.centertoadvancepeace.org/levers-for-change](http://www.centertoadvancepeace.org/levers-for-change)



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