

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD WELFARE LEVERS FOR



Helping Families With Actual Needs

What can organizations and systems responding to domestic violence do to **Help Families with Actual Needs?**

Research demonstrates that survivors of domestic violence encounter numerous barriers to accessing the help and resources they need. Domestic violence inflicts intersecting physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, socio-cultural, legal, and economic harms. A holistic understanding of the myriad impacts and multifaceted, interrelated needs of survivors and their children is essential. Systems responding to domestic violence, however, are often prescriptive, compliance-driven, and based on the assumptions of professionals, instead of listening and being responsive to survivors' actual expressed needs and interests.

When a survivor's efforts to seek help bring them into contact with the child welfare system, they typically receive a list of demands and requirements, largely focused on their presumed mental health problems and parenting deficiencies, coupled with the threat of losing their children if they do not comply. Often overlooked are the immediate needs of survivors trying to establish safety, security, and stability for their family. The result is that survivors are given additional burdens rather than actual help or services that increase their safety and the safety of their children. This tool highlights critical needs that systems frequently fail to address and identifies best practices for helping families impacted by domestic violence with their actual needs.



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.



Physical Needs



Physical safety: Leaving often increases the risk of harm. Survivors need a realistic, flexible, and individualized, safety plan.



Healthcare: Survivors and their children may have unmet health needs or lack insurance and may require help accessing healthcare.



Basic needs: Access to food, clothing, and other basic needs is an immediate and pressing concern for many survivors.



Accessibility: Survivors with disabilities may face added barriers that require special accommodations and planning.

Economic Needs



Financial assistance: Survivors often suffer economic abuse and lack resources to be self-sufficient. Economic supports are critical for building stability. Additional services can facilitate economic empowerment.



Housing: Securing safe and stable housing is a significant barrier for survivors and a critical first step in their recovery.



Child support and childcare: Ability to support their children is a major concern. Child support orders can increase violence without protections. Affordable childcare is also needed.

Social and Cultural Needs



Community support: Isolating their victim from family, friends, and community is one way that people who use violence maintain control. Survivors may need help reestablishing family, social, and community connections to form a support network.



Culturally responsive services and supports: Racial and ethnic minority survivors may distrust mainstream providers or find such services are not responsive to their particular experiences and needs. Culturally-specific organizations may offer a better fit. Additionally, they can support survivors in rebuilding their cultural connections and identity if damaging these ties was one of the ways their partner inflicted harm.



Language justice: Survivors who speak a language other than English or those who are hearing impaired need access to services in their preferred language whenever possible. Translation and interpretation services are critical if a provider who speaks the survivor's language is not available.



Spiritual supports: Experiencing violence can cause a crisis of faith for those who are religious or spiritual. Some may find it helpful to receive support from a spiritual counselor, healer, or other faith-based services, but keep in mind that some survivors have had negative experiences with religion.

Best Practice Tips

1

Intersectional, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered approaches that respond to the ways in which systemic inequities shape domestic violence and help-seeking experiences and prioritize survivor decision-making and self-determination are better positioned to meet the expressed needs and values of survivors and their children. Check out the following resources for more information and guidance on implementing trauma-informed survivor-centered practices:

- [Adult & Child Survivor-Centered Approach for Addressing DV](#)
- [Protective Factors for Adult & Child Survivors of Domestic Violence](#)
- [Intersectional Trauma-Informed Intimate Partner Violence Services](#)
- Trauma-Informed Domestic Violence Services, A 3-part Series:
 - Part 1: [Understanding the Framework and Approach](#)
 - Part 2: [Building Program Capacity](#)
 - Part 3: [Developing Collaborations and Increasing Access](#)



2

The needs and desires of survivors are often interconnected with the needs of their children, family members, pets, and others who rely on them. Helping a survivor take care of children, elderly parents, or job responsibilities may provide relief so they can spend time and energy focusing on their own important needs and self-care. Learn more about community-based strategies to support survivors through the [Creative Interventions Toolkit](#).

3

Remember, services and resources should be offered to survivors, based on their expressed needs, not mandated. Survivors may quickly become overwhelmed if too much is thrown at them at once. Work together with the survivor to identify and prioritize their most pressing needs and address those first. Allow survivors to take the lead in deciding what they need and when they need it. For example, a survivor might benefit from parenting classes or counseling services, but having a safe place to live and economic resources to support their children must come first.

For more information on the child welfare levers for change, please visit our website: www.centertoadvancepeace.org/levers-for-change



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