

# **A Teacher's Handbook: Understanding Woman Abuse and its Effects on Children**

## **Strategies for Responding to Students**

Linda L. Baker  
Peter G. Jaffe

# A Teacher's Handbook: Understanding Woman Abuse and its Effects on Children

## INDEX

<b>The Importance of this Topic</b>		The views expressed herein are those of the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ontario Women's Directorate or the Government of Ontario.
<b>Why you need to know</b> .....	<b>3</b>	
<b>How this handbook can help</b> .....	<b>3</b>	
<b>What is it?</b> .....	<b>4</b>	
<b>Power &amp; Control Wheel</b> .....	<b>5</b>	
<b>Impacts on Children &amp; Adolescents</b> .....	<b>6,7</b>	
<b>Signs a Student is Having Difficulties</b> .....	<b>8</b>	
<b>Potential Impacts at Different Ages</b> .....	<b>9</b>	
<b>What Teachers May See</b> .....	<b>10</b>	
<b>Responding When Students Display</b>		
<b>Troubling Behaviors</b> .....	<b>11,12</b>	
<b>Teaching Strategies</b> .....	<b>13,14</b>	
<b>School and Community Partnerships</b> .....	<b>15</b>	
<b>When a Parent is a Victim of</b>		
<b>Woman Abuse</b> .....	<b>16</b>	
<b>Ways to Support a Student Who Makes</b>		
<b>a Disclosure</b> .....	<b>17,18</b>	
<b>Reporting to the Children's Aid Society</b> .....	<b>19</b>	
<b>Reporting Guidelines</b> .....	<b>20</b>	
<b>Safety Planning</b> .....	<b>21</b>	
<b>Community Responses</b> .....	<b>22</b>	
<b>School-Based Violence Prevention</b> .....	<b>23,24</b>	
<b>Where to Go for Help</b> .....	<b>25</b>	
<b>Resources</b> .....	<b>26</b>	
<b>References</b> .....	<b>27,28</b>	
		<p><b>Authors &amp; Associations:</b></p> <p><i>Centre for Children &amp; Families in the Justice System</i>  <b>Linda L. Baker, Ph.D.</b></p> <p><i>Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children</i>  <b>Peter G. Jaffe, Ph.D.</b></p> <p><i>Adapted from:</i>  <i>Baker, L., Jaffe, P., Carter, S. &amp; Ashbourne, L. (2002). Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: A Teacher's Handbook to Increase Understanding and Improve Community Responses. London, ON: Centre for Children &amp; Families in the Justice System</i></p> <p><b>How to Order:</b></p> <p>This handbook can be obtained from the Centre for Children &amp; Families in the Justice System online at: <a href="http://www.lfcc.on.ca">www.lfcc.on.ca</a></p> <p><b>Or write to:</b></p> <p>Centre for Children &amp; Families  in the Justice System  254 Pall Mall Street, 2Floor  London, ON N6A 5P6</p> <p><b>Or call:</b></p> <p>(519-679-7250 x 206)</p> <p><b>Or email:</b></p> <p><a href="mailto:pubs@lfcc.on.ca">pubs@lfcc.on.ca</a></p> <p>The content of this handbook cannot be reproduced for publication without the written permission of the Centre for Children &amp; Families in the Justice System.</p> <p><b>Copyright ©2006 Centre for Children &amp; Families in the Justice System</b></p> <p><b>ISBN # .....</b></p>

## The Importance of this Topic

### Why you need to know

Each year, children and adolescents are exposed to violence in their homes, schools, neighborhoods, and through the media.<sup>1, 2, 3, 4</sup> A significant proportion of these young people are exposed to woman abuse - abusive behavior used by an intimate partner to control and dominate a woman. Students touched by this form of violence often experience short and long term impacts that may affect their adjustment at school.

- Children and adolescents living with woman abuse are at risk for increased emotional and behavioral problems,<sup>4, 5</sup> including increased violent behavior.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup> They are also at increased risk of experiencing emotional or physical abuse.<sup>5, 6, 9</sup> These difficulties may compromise their availability for learning and their capacity to get along with others at school.
- Early identification of difficulties can lead to earlier and more effective support and intervention for young people and their families. Teachers are in an ideal position to identify when a student is having difficulty.
- School-based interventions and prevention initiatives can reduce risk and increase protective factors for students. Teachers may be the caring adults who make a difference in the lives of students experiencing difficulties at home.

### How this handbook can help

This handbook contains information that will help you:

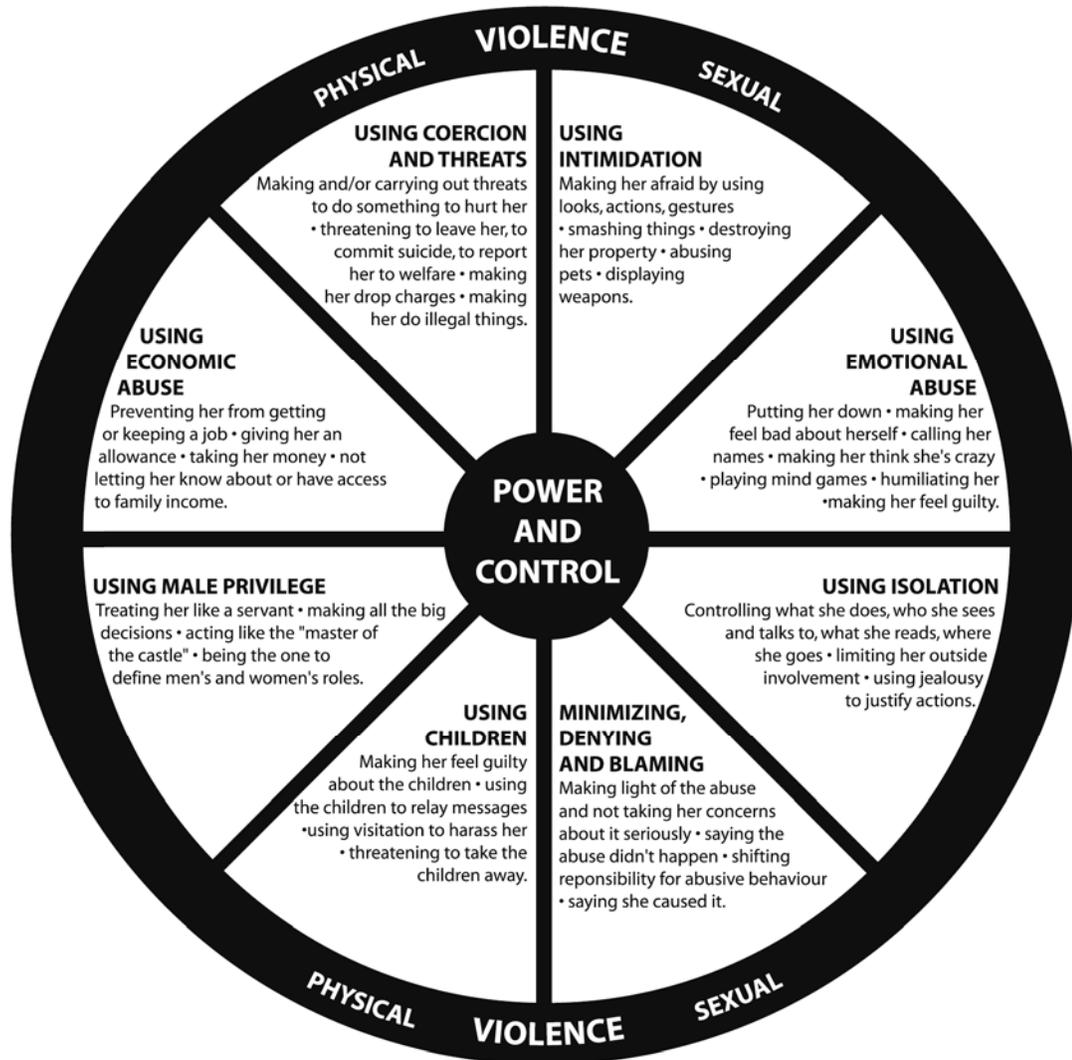
- learn about woman abuse and its impact on children and adolescents;
- recognize the signs that students may display when they are having difficulties. These signs may occur for a variety of reasons, including woman abuse;
- learn ways to support students and deal with challenging behaviors in school;
- offer support and information about resources to mothers who may be victims of woman abuse.

## What is it?

### Understanding woman abuse helps us support affected students. Woman Abuse...

- ⇒ occurs in all age, racial, socioeconomic, educational, occupational and religious groups;
- ⇒ occurs within an intimate relationship;
- ⇒ typically involves repetitive behavior including different types of abuse – physical assault, psychological, emotional and economic abuse, and use of children (see Power and Control Wheel, page 5);
- ⇒ can involve severe forms of violence that result in serious injuries ;<sup>10</sup>
- ⇒ is used to intimidate, humiliate or frighten victims as a systematic way of maintaining power and control over them;
- ⇒ is abusive behavior that in most cases is learned (e.g., abusive behavior modeled in family of origin; abusive behavior rewarded – gets desired results for perpetrator);
- ⇒ ***is caused by the perpetrator*** and not by the victim or the relationship;
- ⇒ is a criminal offense where actual or threatened physical or sexual force is used;
- ⇒ may present increased risk to the victim and children at the time of separation from the abuser;<sup>11</sup>
- ⇒ results in victim behavior that is focused on ensuring survival (e.g., minimizing or denying the violence, taking responsibility for the violence, protecting the perpetrator, using alcohol or drugs, self-defense, seeking help, remaining in the abusive relationship).

# Power and Control Wheel



Developed by the *Domestic Abuse Intervention Project*, 202 E. Superior St., Duluth, MN 55802

For more information contact: [info@praxisinternational.org](mailto:info@praxisinternational.org) or fax: (218)722-1053

## Impacts on Children and Adolescents

### **Watching, hearing or later learning of a mother being abused by her partner, threatens young people's sense of stability and security.**

- Children and adolescents may experience increased emotional and behavioral difficulties.<sup>5, 12</sup>
- Some young people who experience difficulties display traumatic stress reactions (e.g., flashbacks, nightmares, intensified startle reactions, constant worry about possible danger).<sup>13</sup>
- Children and adolescents living with domestic violence are at increased risk of experiencing physical injury or childhood abuse (e.g., physical, emotional).<sup>6, 9</sup>
- The perpetrator may use children and adolescents as a control tactic against adult victims.<sup>14</sup> Examples include:
  - ⇒ claiming the children's bad behavior is the reason for the assaults on their mother;
  - ⇒ threatening violence against children and their pets in front of the victim;
  - ⇒ holding them hostage or abducting them in an effort to punish their mother or to gain compliance;
  - ⇒ talking negatively to them about their mother.
- Children and adolescents may experience strong ambivalence toward their violent parent: affection coexists with feelings of resentment and disappointment.
- Young people may imitate and learn the attitudes and behaviors modeled when woman abuse occurs.<sup>7, 8</sup>
- Exposure to violence may desensitize children and adolescents to aggressive behavior. When this occurs, aggression becomes part of the "norm" and is less

likely to signal concern to them.

## **Impacts on Children and Adolescents (continued)**

**Aboriginal students and students whose families are new to Canada are likely to experience the same feelings as other young people living with woman abuse, but they can face additional challenges just as their mothers may experience added barriers to seeking assistance. Issues they may worry about or face include:**

- Cultural linguistic barriers;
- The visibility of their mother's situation within their community;
- Distrust of social and legal systems (e.g., Children's Aid Society, Police);
- Increased concerns about confidentiality;
- Increased isolation;
- Discrimination.

**Children and mothers living in rural or remote areas may also experience additional challenges. Issues they may worry about or face include:**

- Increased isolation;
- Difficulty accessing services due to lack of public transportation and long distances to travel;
- The visibility of their situation within their community;
- Increased concerns about confidentiality (e.g., teacher may confide with abusive parent).

**When Aboriginal students and new Canadians live in rural or remote areas the barriers are likely to be compounded.**

## Signs a Student is Having Difficulties

**Students may display some of the following signs when they are living with woman abuse. They may show these problems for other reasons as well (e.g., death of a parent, traumatic event).<sup>15</sup>**

- physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches)
- tiredness
- constant worry about possible danger and/or safety of loved ones
- sadness and/or withdrawal from others and activities
- low self-esteem and lack of confidence, especially for trying new things (including academic tasks)
- difficulty paying attention in class, concentrating on work and learning new information
- outbursts of anger directed toward teachers, peers or self
- bullying and/or aggression directed toward peers in and/or out of the classroom
- stereotyped beliefs about males as aggressors and females as victims

**In addition to the behaviours listed above, older students may display:**

- suicidal thought and action
- high risk behaviour including criminal activities, alcohol and substance abuse
- school truancy or leaving home

- dating violence

## Potential Impacts at Different Ages<sup>25</sup>

Key Aspects of Development	Potential Impact of Woman Abuse
<p><b>Preschoolers</b></p> <p>Learn how to express aggression and anger, as well as other emotions in appropriate ways. ⇒</p> <p>Think in egocentric ways. ⇒</p> <p>Form ideas about gender roles based on social messages. ⇒</p> <p>Increased physical independence (dressing self, etc.) ⇒</p> <p><b>School-aged Children (6 to 11 Years)</b></p> <p>Increased emotional awareness Of self and others. ⇒</p> <p>Increased complexity in thinking about right and wrong; emphasis on fairness and intent. ⇒</p> <p>Academic and social success at school has primary impact on self-concept. ⇒</p> <p>Increased same sex identification. ⇒</p> <p><b>Adolescents</b></p> <p>Increased sense of self and autonomy from family. ⇒</p> <p>Physical changes brought on by puberty. ⇒</p> <p>Increased peer group influence and desire for acceptance. ⇒</p> <p>Dating raises issues of sexuality, intimacy, relationship skills. ⇒</p>	<p>Learn unhealthy ways of expressing anger and aggression; possibly confused by conflicting messages (e.g., what I see vs. what I'm told).</p> <p>May attribute violence to something they have done.</p> <p>Learn gender roles associated with violence and victimization.</p> <p>Instability may inhibit independence; may see regressive behaviours.</p> <p>More awareness of own reactions to violence at home and of impact on others (e.g., concerns about mother's safety, father being charged).</p> <p>Possibly more susceptible to adopting rationalizations heard to justify violence (e.g., alcohol causes violence; victim deserved abuse).</p> <p>Ability to learn may be decreased due to impact of violence (e.g., distracted); may miss positive statements or selectively attend to negatives or evoke negative feedback.</p> <p>May learn gender roles associated with intimate partner abuse (e.g., males as perpetrators – females as victims).</p> <p>Family skills for respectful communication and negotiation may be poorly developed due to violence; transition to adolescence may be more difficult for youth and family.</p> <p>May try to physically stop violence; may use increased size to impose will with physical intimidation or aggression.</p> <p>Possibly more embarrassed by violence at home; may try to escape violence by increasing time away from home; may use maladaptive coping to avoid violence (e.g., drugs).</p> <p>May have difficulty establishing healthy relationships; possibly at greater risk to become involved in dating violence (e.g., boys as abusers, gender role stereotypes).</p>

Increased influence by media.⇒

Possibly more influenced by negative media messages about violent behaviour, gender role stereotypes.

## What Teachers May See

The following are actual case examples that illustrate how living with violence can impact the lives of students:

### **Truancy:**

Kevin, age 10, was referred because of truancy. The referral letter queried whether Kevin is developing a school phobia. The school is particularly puzzled by the episodic nature of his truancy and the fact that he comes to school in the morning but runs away during morning recess. During the second interview, Kevin discloses that his father is extremely violent and “beats Mom real bad”. Kevin explains that he has to be home some days to make sure his mother is okay. He describes staying outside his house and watching through the window, ready to intervene if his mother needs him.

### **Preoccupation and Secrecy:**

Scott, age 8, is obviously distressed at supper. Eventually he discloses that his table partner Alex was really upset at school during math. Alex said that his mother left in the middle of the night after his parents had a big fight. Alex woke up in the night to arguing. He said that he saw his father pull his mother by the hair down the stairs. Scott tells his parents that Alex said that he would kill him if he told anyone else. Neither of the boys completed their math.

The next week, Scott tells his parents that Alex was really mad at his mother. Again, during a math assignment, Alex told Scott that his mother was with another guy and she was going to try and take all of Dad’s money. Alex also said that his father would never hurt his mother if she was not trying to hurt their family.

### **Dating Violence:**

Jane, age 15, grew up witnessing repeated violence against her mother. She recalls many times when she and her mother fled to a shelter for safety. She reports that she hates her father and stepfather for how they treated her mother. She is determined not to find herself in a violent relationship. During a court-ordered assessment for truancy, Jane describes being slapped, kicked and knocked to the ground at school by her boyfriend. She explains that it was her fault because she had been speaking to another boy that her boyfriend does not like. Later, she discloses that she no longer sees her female friends because she has to be home in case her boyfriend wants to see her.

### **Anger and Aggression:**

John, age 13, and his mother are talking with the social service worker from the school. His mother is very concerned about John’s verbal disrespect for his female teachers when they reprimand him. He is also physically aggressive toward her when she tells him that he cannot go out with his friends. His mother is surprised by John’s actions. She reports that John witnessed his father being violent toward her until he was eight. She describes being very close to her son and proudly tells of a time when he attacked his father with a wooden spoon in an effort to stop him from choking her. She knows John hated his father’s violent behaviour and is hurt and puzzled by John’s aggression towards her and his teachers.

Some students may cope by intently focusing on academics, sports or social activities. They describe blocking out the troubling events at home with life at school. These young people may appear as if they have not been affected by the domestic violence. It may be more accurate, however, to view them as children and adolescents whose coping strategies foster

success at school.

## Responding When Students Display Troubling Behaviours

These guidelines are helpful for teachers dealing with troubling behaviors regardless of whether woman abuse is a factor.<sup>26</sup>

- i) Remember there may be a variety of reasons for the student's behavior.**
  - problems may be explained by a number of factors in the student's life. Exposure to woman abuse is only one possibility.
- ii) Reassure students and increase their sense of security in school by:**
  - establishing simple rules and routines so they know what to expect;
  - giving straightforward explanations (where possible) for things that worry them (e.g., sirens, presence of police in school);
  - allowing students to naturally express themselves through talk, play and written assignments.
- iii) Clarify your concern as it relates to the school and your responsibility to educate. Try not to interpret the behavior, but rather describe it. It may be helpful to consider the following questions:**
  - What is the problem?
  - When did it start?
  - How often does it occur?
  - Who is affected and in what ways (e.g., failing grades, victimized peers)?
  - What has been tried and how did it work?
- iii) Consult with the principal or the social service worker at your school.**
  - Consultation provides opportunities to obtain support, information about resources and strategies for the classroom and school (e.g., hallways, yard).

## Responding (continued)

### v) Talk to the student's parent.

- Express your concerns as they relate to the education of this student or others in a supportive and non-threatening manner.
- Ask the parent what she/he is noticing at home and whether she/he has any ideas about what might be contributing to the student's difficulty in school.
- Discuss possible ways to support the student (What can the parent do? What can you do?).

### vi) Remember that it is often not easy to talk about family problems.

- Woman abuse and other family problems are often treated with great secrecy. Sometimes the secrecy is a way of maintaining safety. By asking, you will have let the family know that you are concerned and willing to help. They may choose to talk to you in the future if they are experiencing violence or other problems that affect their child.

### vii) Provide information on available resources.

- Offer information about resources in the community that might assist the student and his/her family (e.g., women's shelter, domestic violence agency, child trauma/treatment program, cultural-linguistic interpretation services). (See page 25)

**We suggest parents be encouraged to seek assistance for their child from a physician or family counseling agency when the child's behavior:**

- is physically harmful to the student or others (e.g., physically fighting with others, laying down on the street);
- is intense enough to interfere with the student's day-to-day adjustment in school;
- does not respond to behavior management strategies;
- persists over time (3 to 6 weeks).

## Teaching Strategies

**Students exposed to violence at home may benefit from specific teaching approaches and strategies. Fortunately, these approaches benefit most students and are likely already being used to some degree in your classroom.** <sup>26</sup>

**i) Create a safe and low-stress environment that promotes respect toward others.**

- ⇒ Establish an explicit norm against violence.
- ⇒ Consistently enforce non-acceptance of violence.
- ⇒ Teach and reward non-violent conflict-resolution and cooperation.
- ⇒ Model nurturing respectful behavior and gender equality.
- ⇒ Foster cooperation and reduce competition and situations where students may be humiliated (e.g., peers picking teams).

**ii) Provide positive experiences and activities to promote security, self-esteem and learning.**

- ⇒ Verbally praise students for their efforts.
- ⇒ Provide opportunities for fun.
- ⇒ Assist students to recognize their strengths and to experience success.

**iii) Let students know what to expect.**

- ⇒ Plan and prepare the students for visitors.
- ⇒ Minimize last minute scheduling changes.
- ⇒ Give advance notice of upcoming events.
- ⇒ Give advance notice of upcoming lessons or activities that may touch on difficult experiences.

**iv) Increase positive connections to school.**

- ⇒ Look for a match between the student's interests and/or strengths and the course (e.g., special project), school (e.g., assisting custodian), or extracurricular activity (e.g., club, sports).
- ⇒ Strongly encourage participation.
- ⇒ Enlist peer (e.g., cross-age mentor, tutor) and adult (e.g., staff, volunteers) support to provide encouragement and support to foster connection.

## Teaching Strategies (continued)

### v) Use a variety of teaching strategies.

- ⇒ Provide time during the school day for homework completion when the student may be more able to attend and complete it.
- ⇒ Use co-operative learning strategies that allow for more immediate feedback, occasions to share and small group opportunities.
- ⇒ Consider ways of physically setting up your classroom to take a variety of learning styles into account.
- ⇒ Check often for understanding to see if what you are saying or modeling is being heard and understood.
- ⇒ Repeat information in a calm manner.
- ⇒ Allow students to use learning aids such as tape recorders, calculators, reference charts, and word processors – as necessary.

### vi) Be aware that some activities or situations may remind students of troubling events associated with the violence in their homes.

- ⇒ Examples of events or themes that may be difficult for children living with violence include:
  - raised voices
  - alcohol/drug prevention
  - making something new to give to a parent
  - violence prevention education
  - peer fights

“School served as my shelter from many storms... Teachers opened doors to worlds for me that the rest of my life had slammed shut.”<sup>16</sup>

# School and Community Partnerships

## Links between schools and other community agencies helping families experiencing woman abuse.

- Building relationships with shelters, legal advocacy programs, counseling services, police services and violence against women prevention agencies will be beneficial.
- These links help address gaps that can exist in the broader system and enable school personnel to provide accurate referral information to mothers about resources.
- Working relationships and protocols between schools and shelters will make consultation regarding the needs of the students easier. Personnel working at shelters are an excellent source of support, information and advice.
- In many communities there are local coordinating committees or councils that focus on violence against women. These committees may offer opportunities for networking, and may have sub-committees focused on the needs of children and adolescents.

## When students are living with their mother at a shelter:

### Make necessary allowances around school assignments.

- ⇒ It may be difficult to complete assignments because of circumstances at the shelter (e.g., lack of quiet space) and the student's emotional state.

### Cooperate with the safety plan that may have been developed in conjunction with their mother.

- ⇒ Children and adolescents may have helped develop a plan that may include where they must go when transported to school (e.g., office or yard) and what to do if the abusive parent comes to the school. It is important for every staff member at the school to be aware of this plan. This may involve protocols established with the shelter and police for crisis situations (e.g., hostile parent without visitation rights demands to see the student).

### Be aware of any school policies and procedures in case a crisis situation occurs.

- ⇒ Policies that include procedures for dealing with these difficult and distressing situations are helpful (e.g., Who will call the police? Who will stay with the student? Where will the student be taken until the police arrive?). The goal is to maximize the safety and minimize the emotional distress of all students, parent(s), staff members and school visitors.

## When a Parent is a Victim of Woman Abuse

When you are planning to talk to a mother who maybe a victim of woman abuse: <sup>26</sup>

- i) Find a safe time and place to talk to the mother.**
  - ⇒ Try calling the mother. When she answers the phone, ask if this is a good time to talk about her son's/daughter's progress in school. Offer her the opportunity to come to the school to talk. If you leave a message, do not refer to problems at home as this could endanger the adult victim and/or the student.
- ii) Share your concerns about the student.**
  - ⇒ Talk to her about your concerns from the view of her child's education and adjustment at school.
- iii) Be supportive and provide information about community resources.**
  - ⇒ It may be very difficult for a mother to hear that her son or daughter has let someone outside of the family know about the abuse. The parent may be worried about difficult situations that may result from the disclosure, including increased safety concerns. She may respond to you with anger or denial. It is important to remain supportive and provide information (see pages 25 & 26). You may choose to highlight that her child was not trying to be disloyal or to create trouble. Most adult victims want to, and have tried to, protect their children.
- iv) Encourage the mother to contact the local woman abuse program for support and help with planning for her safety.**
  - ⇒ Provide the women with contact phone numbers or information on additional safety measures. Offer her the opportunity to call and provide a phone and privacy. If possible, follow up to see if she has made the connection.
- v) Reassure her that you will not speak with the alleged abuser about your concerns.**
  - ⇒ Talking to the alleged abuser about your concerns may endanger the youth or the victimized parent. Your reassurance that you will not discuss issues related to violence with the abusive partner may relieve some of the concern the parent may be experiencing as a result of the disclosure.
- vii) Determine whether you have an obligation to report to the CAS.**  
(See pages 19 & 20.)
  - ⇒ If the adult victim is suspected of maltreating the child (e.g., physical abuse), contact CAS without discussing your concerns with the adult victim. Otherwise, share your concern, and when necessary, your obligation to report.

## Ways to Support a Student Who Makes a Disclosure

Teachers may receive disclosures about violence in the home from students, but may have limited information on how to support these young people. The following guidelines are offered to enhance your ability and confidence to respond in ways that help students when disclosures occur.<sup>26</sup> (Guidelines to assist with later decision making and formal responses are on pages 19 and 20.)

- i) Let the student know the limits of confidentiality.**
  - ⇒ Inform students when you cannot keep information confidential (e.g., if someone is being abused; if someone plans to harm self or others). What you say will be influenced by the legislation in your jurisdiction and school policies.
- ii) Allow the student to tell his/her story.**
  - ⇒ It usually helps young people to talk with a trusted adult about the violence or troubling events in their lives.
- iii) Do not pressure the student to talk.**
  - ⇒ It is important to remember that your role is not to gather evidence or to investigate the situation. Your role is to listen and to acknowledge the feelings the student is sharing.
- iv) Reassure the student.**
  - ⇒ If students disclose a troubling incident at home directly to you, reassure them by validating their feelings (e.g., “Sounds like that was scary for you. Are you okay?”). Depending on the situation, it may also be helpful to let them know that you are glad they told you, that the violence is not their fault, and that no one should be hurt.
  - ⇒ Older students may ask you to not say anything to anyone about what they have told you. It is important for you to let them know if you need to tell people who can help them and others to be safe.
- v) Inform the student of what you are going to do.**
  - ⇒ Students are likely to feel relieved but vulnerable following a disclosure. The troubling situation they are dealing with may also have left them feeling powerless. Letting students know what steps you are taking and when you will talk to them can decrease their anxiety.

## Ways to Support (continued)

**vi) Support the student in making choices whenever possible.**

⇒ Students do not have control of the troubling situation. You can increase their sense of control by offering them choices. For example, some students will want time away from the class after making a disclosure and may prefer to sit in the library. Others may wish to re-join their class. Whenever possible, support students' sense of what they need at this time.

**vii) Do not criticize or speak negatively about the abusive parent.**

⇒ Young people often have confused or mixed feelings about the batterer. They may hate the abuse but like the "fun" times they also share with the abusive parent. Children and adolescents can feel very angry at and loyal to a parent at the same time. If you criticize the offending parent, feelings of loyalty and protectiveness toward the parent may cause the youth to feel that he/she cannot talk about the abuse.

**viii) Do not make commitments to the student that you cannot honor.**

⇒ Sometimes teachers are so moved by a student's situation and want so much to protect and reassure the youth, they make statements that they cannot follow through on. Examples include comments such as: "I will keep you safe"; "I won't let him hurt your mother anymore"; "I won't tell anyone what you told me". While clearly well intended, such commitments can diminish a student's trust in others when he/she discovers the statements are untrue. This may cause a young person to believe that no one can help and it is not worth telling anyone about the upsetting things happening at home.

**The student may choose this time to disclose because changes in circumstances have tipped the balance so that the youth's typical coping strategies are strained. Responding supportively to students making disclosures may increase their sense of security and their willingness to share concerns or seek help in the future.**

# Reporting to the Children's Aid Society\*

Children's Aid Societies are mandated to protect children at risk at harm.

**We all have a legal obligation to report promptly to a Children's Aid Society (CAS) if we suspect a child is or may be in need of protection from abuse or neglect.**

- ⇒ The Child & Family Services Act (CFSA) defines the term "child in need of protection" and it includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.
- ⇒ Skilled social workers at the CAS evaluate each situation individually to determine if a child is in need of protection.

## Woman Abuse

- ⇒ You may suspect that a child's mother is being abused by her partner. In Ontario, this is not one of the reasons you have to call the CAS, unless you suspect that the child is at risk of harm. This includes risk to physical safety and risk of emotional harm.
- ⇒ According to the CFSA, a child is in need of protection if they are suffering emotional harm (i.e., unaddressed and serious levels of anxiety, depression, withdrawal, self-destructive, aggressive behaviour or delayed development)

## Who Makes the Referral?

- ⇒ The person who has the reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must make the report directly.
- ⇒ Do not delegate this responsibility.

## What if I am not Sure?

- ⇒ You do not need to be sure that a child is or may be in need of protection to make a report.
- ⇒ "Reasonable grounds" are what an average person, given his or her training, background and experience, exercising normal and honest judgment, would suspect.
- ⇒ **You can call the CAS and provide the details of your concerns, without giving names. They will say if you have to make a formal report.**

**For more information, see *How and When to Report Abuse or Neglect* from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. ([www.oacas.org](http://www.oacas.org))**

\* Reprinted with permission from Baker, L.L. & Cunningham, A. (2005). *Learning to Listen, Learning to Help: Understanding Woman Abuse and its Effects on Children*. London, ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System

# Reporting Guidelines

**When making a report to the CAS, consider the following:** <sup>26</sup>

**i) Before making the report:**

- ⇒ Let the youth/disclosing parent know of your reporting requirement, provide support and address any concerns – [especially those related to safety (e.g., “I know someone who can help you and your Mom. I’ll tell her.”)].
- ⇒ Consult the designated agency authority (usually a principal).
- ⇒ Ensure you have up-to-date information about the student that the CAS worker will require (e.g., name, DOB, address, parents’ names).

**ii) Making the report:**

- ⇒ Report disclosure information and any relevant background information (e.g., previous concerns by the school).
- ⇒ Ask and record what CAS will do and when.
- ⇒ Record the date, time and name of the CAS worker who received the report.
- ⇒ Report the information in a way that encourages CAS to consider the safety of the mother in its investigation and report.

**iii) After making the report:**

- ⇒ Reassure the student and let him/her know what to expect (e.g., “Mary Green is going to come to visit you after lunch. She helps kids and their parents stay safe.”).
- ⇒ Inform others according to school policy requirements (e.g., school staff involved with the child, the parent).
- ⇒ Document the disclosure and your response according to school policy.
- ⇒ If appropriate and in collaboration with CAS, make a referral to the social service worker/counselor associated with your school for ongoing support/follow-up (may not be an available resource for many schools).

(Note: These guidelines relate to students that fall within the age range (i.e., under 16 years) covered by the legislation relevant to child protection in Ontario – The Child & Family Services Act (CFSA).

**There may be times when your school policies and procedures seem to endanger the safety of the child, the adult victim, you or others. If this occurs, advise your principal immediately and seek consultation and direction from woman abuse agencies and the CAS in your area.**

# Safety Planning

## Transportation Arrangements

- ⇒ It is essential that you know **who can** pick up the student and **who can not**.
- ⇒ Have a plan in the event a parent who is not allowed attempts to pick up a student (e.g., who will stay with the student, who will call the police, who will explain to the parent that the police have been contacted).
- ⇒ Copies of court papers need to be on file to stop a non-custodial parent from picking up the student. You may need to explain this to the mother and encourage her to seek legal counsel in cases where there are no court documents identifying which parent is the legal guardian and/or issues of access.
- ⇒ Depending on the risk, some children being transported from shelters may need to go into the school building until class begins.

## Handling parent-attended events where woman abuse is an issue:

- ⇒ Focus on the student and the student's participation in the event.
- ⇒ Obtain copies of legal documents that state changes in guardianship, custody and access arrangements (e.g., custody and visitation agreement, restraining order).
- ⇒ Do not inadvertently blame either parent for whatever situation unfolds when talking with the student.
- ⇒ Be aware of your attitudes and feelings toward each parent and the current situation. This will help to safeguard against your attitudes and feelings leading to unhelpful or nonprofessional practice.
- ⇒ Be prepared to be flexible to support solutions that maximize comfort and safety for students, their families, and staff (e.g., separate parent conferences with the father and the mother).
- ⇒ You (or your principal) need to be prepared to make decisions about limiting access to school functions by a parent whose behavior jeopardizes the safety and well-being of students and their teachers.

## Community Responses

### Community responses to woman abuse should:

- ⇒ provide safety;
- ⇒ foster the emotional well-being of all victims;
- ⇒ hold perpetrators accountable through legal sanctions and batterer's programs;
- ⇒ provide a continuum of coordinated services that are accessible regardless of a client's language and culture (e.g., cultural linguistic interpreters);
- ⇒ promote prevention efforts (school programs, public awareness campaigns) as a long-term strategy for social change.

# School-Based Violence Prevention

While violence prevention benefits all students, it may be especially important for those exposed to violence. For example, a safe school environment may be a haven away from stressors at home.<sup>17</sup> Anti-bullying or healthy dating relationship programs may teach conflict resolution skills that provide alternatives to what is modeled at home.<sup>18</sup> Teachers play an important role in advocating for, implementing and sustaining school-based violence prevention.<sup>19</sup>

## What can teachers do?

- **Learn about violence in relationships, how it impacts students, and school-based prevention. For example:**
  - ⇒ Seek out professional development on topics such as children exposed to domestic violence, bullying, dating violence and school-based prevention.
- **Continually work to develop school practices that are inclusive and promote students' sense of belonging and availability for learning. For example:**
  - ⇒ Model inclusiveness.
  - ⇒ Provide sports activities for all students, not only for the few who make the school teams.
  - ⇒ Address "cool-kid cliques" or "gangs" that abuse and silence others (e.g., separate classes or lunch hours, cross peer mentors/tutors).
  - ⇒ Develop strategies to engage and foster connections (e.g., academic, social, athletic) for all students to the school.
- **Make helping create a safe school in and out of your classroom a priority. For example:**
  - ⇒ Consistently enforce and "bring to life" a school code of conduct that defines and promotes respectful behavior and provides an explicit norm against violence.
  - ⇒ Establish peer mediation programs in which students learn to use conflict resolution skills in the halls and in the school yard.
  - ⇒ Model respectful strategies for classroom management.
- **Help plan and/or support special violence awareness events for students. These events name and define violence, as well as increase awareness about different types of violence and its impact on victims. For example:**
  - ⇒ Plan assemblies featuring guest speakers whose lives have been touched by violence.
  - ⇒ Organize a violence prevention fair.
  - ⇒ Schedule theatre productions focused on violence prevention and debriefing sessions with older student facilitators.

## Prevention (continued)

- **Learn to effectively teach anti-violence curriculum, and/or effectively integrate anti-violence lessons into existing subject matter, without taking away from core academic learning. For example:**
  - ⇒ Plan a math lesson on gathering, graphing and interpreting data that uses results of student surveys on bullying.
  - ⇒ Use the topic of dating violence for an English writing assignment to practice the five paragraph essay.
- **Develop strategies for coping with the stress associated with learning about students' exposure to violence and with being exposed to incidents of student violence. For example:**
  - ⇒ Find opportunities to professionally and confidentially debrief.
  - ⇒ Develop supportive work environments that promote a balance between work and home.
  - ⇒ Identify and celebrate successes.

## Examples of Resources

### A School-Based Anti-Violence Program (ASAP)<sup>20</sup>:

- ⇒ Available through the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System in London, Ontario, Canada, this violence prevention program encourages teachers, parents, students and community agencies to work together to create safe schools with zero tolerance for violence. There are program offerings for both elementary and secondary school children with appropriate curriculum and activities, as well as suggested resources. The program stresses the importance of educating teachers prior to embarking on prevention within the schools.

### The Second Step<sup>21</sup>:

- ⇒ Developed in Seattle, Washington, this program teaches children problem-solving and coping skills. The goal of the program is to increase empathy, self-control, anger awareness and management, and non-violent conflict resolution and problem-solving.

### My Family and Me: Violence Free<sup>22</sup>:

- ⇒ This elementary school curriculum, developed by the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, labels different kinds of family violence and its effects, teaches children how to develop safety plans, increases awareness of the benefits of respect, equality and sharing power, encourages assertiveness and problem-solving skills, and helps children learn how to affirm their own self-worth.

### The Fourth "R"<sup>23,24</sup>:

- ⇒ The *Fourth R* is a comprehensive school-based prevention program for adolescent risk behaviours. The foundation is a 21-lesson skilled-based curriculum that promotes healthy relationships and targets violence (bullying, peer and dating violence, high risk sexual behaviour and substance use among adolescents. The contention of the *Fourth R* is that relationship skills can be taught in the same way as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Furthermore, given the plethora of negative relationship models available to teens, it is crucial that adolescents be exposed to healthy alternatives, and equipped with the skills to engage in healthy relationships themselves. The *Fourth R* is comprised of three units: Personal Safety and Injury Prevention (peer and dating violence/bullying prevention), Healthy Growth and Sexuality, and Substance Use/Abuse. Each unit contains similar themes of value clarification, provision of information, decision-making and an extensive skill development component. Furthermore, connections among the three units are emphasized throughout.

## Where to Go for Help

**Important numbers and information to share with older students or parents as needed**

**Fill in the Contact Numbers for your Community:**

Women's Shelter

---

Woman Abuse Agency

---

Family Counseling Agency

---

Child Protection Services

---

Victim/Witness Program

---

Hospital

---

Police

---

Cultural-Linguistic Interpretation Services

---

Legal Aid

---

Batterer's Program

---

Child/Adolescent Trauma/Treatment Program

---

**For immediate assistance in an emergency, call the Police.\***

- For immediate assistance in an emergency or crisis situation
- Tell operator the problem and give your full name and address where the emergency is taking place
- Do not hang up the phone until the operator tells you to

*\* In many areas of Ontario, call 911 for emergency assistance.*

# Resources

Visit the following websites for additional information on woman abuse, including impacts, getting assistance, resources, prevention and training. The websites for these organizations contain links to other valuable resources.

**Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System**

[www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)

**Education Wife Assault**

[www.womanabuseprevention.com](http://www.womanabuseprevention.com)

**Metrac (Metro Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children)**

[www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org)

**Ontario Women's Directorate**

[www.ontariowomensdirectorates.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorates.gov.on.ca)

**Ontario Women's Justice Network**

[www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org)

**Centres for Research on Violence Against Woman & Children in Canada**

**Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children (Ontario)**

[www.crvawc.ca](http://www.crvawc.ca)

**CRI-VIFF, Ecole de Service Social Universite de Montreal (Quebec)**

[www.ulaval.ca/vrr/bd/regroupement/fiche/136.html](http://www.ulaval.ca/vrr/bd/regroupement/fiche/136.html)

**Feminist Research, Education, Development and Action Centre (FREDA) (British Columbia)**

[www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/](http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/)

**Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research (New Brunswick)**

[www.unbf.ca/arts/CFVR/](http://www.unbf.ca/arts/CFVR/)

**RESOLVE (Research & Education for Solutions to Violence & Abuse) (Alberta)**

[www.umanitoba.ca/resolve/](http://www.umanitoba.ca/resolve/)

**British Columbia Institute Against Family Violence**

[www.bcifv.org](http://www.bcifv.org)

**National Aboriginal Circle against Family Violence**

[www.nacaafv.ca](http://www.nacaafv.ca)

**Aboriginal Healing & Wellness Program (AHWS)**

[www.gov.on.ca/CSS](http://www.gov.on.ca/CSS)

**White Ribbon Campaign**

[www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca)

**Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse**

[www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au)

**National Criminal Justice Reference Service**

[www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org)

**MINCAVA (Minnesota Center Against Violence & Abuse)**

[www.mincava.umn.edu](http://www.mincava.umn.edu)

# References

- 1 *Child Maltreatment 1997: Reports from the States to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, 1997.
- 2 Fantuzzo, J., Boruch, R., Beriama, A., Atkins, M., & Marcus, S. (1997). Domestic violence and children: Prevalence and risk in five major U.S. cities. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 36, 116-122.
- 3 Huston, A.C., Donnerstine, F., Fairchild, H., Feshbach, N.D., Katz, P.A., Murray, J.P., Rubinstein, E.A., Wilcox, B.L., & Zuckerman, D. (1992). *Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- 4 *Safe from the Start: Taking Action on Children Exposed to Violence*. Summary. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, November 2000.
- 5 Rossman, B.B.R., Hughes, H.M., & Rosenberg, M.S. (2000). *Children and Interparental Violence: The Impact of Exposure*. Philadelphia, PA: Brunner/Mazel.
- 6 *Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Recommendations to Improve the Criminal Justice Response to Child Victims and Witnesses*. Monograph. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, June 1999, NCJ 176983.
- 7 Singer, M.I., Miller, D.B., Guo, S., Slovak, K., & Frierson, T. (1998). *The mental health consequences of children's exposure to violence*. Cleveland, OH: Cayahoga County Community Mental Health Research Institute, Mandel School of Applied Social Services, Case Western Reserve University.
- 8 Thornberry, T. (1994). *Violent families and youth violence*. Program of Research on Causes and Correlates of Delinquency. Fact Sheet #21. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- 9 National Research Council. (1993). *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- 10 Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (November, 2000). *Full Report of Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, NCJ 183781.
- 11 Bachman, R., & Saltzman, L.E. (1995). *National Crime Victimization Survey, Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey*. Washington, DC: United States Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 154348.
- 12 Edleson, J.L. (1999). Children's witnessing of adult domestic violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 14(8), 839-870.
- 13 Graham-Bermann, S.A., & Levendosky, A.A. (1998). Traumatic stress symptoms in children of battered women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 14, 111-128.
- 14 Schechter, S., & Ganley, A.L. (1995). *Domestic Violence: A National Curriculum for Family Preservation Practitioners*. San Francisco, CA: Family Violence Prevention Fund.
- 15 Dawud-Noursi, S., Lamb, M.E., & Sternberg, K.J. (1998). The relations among domestic violence, peer relationships, and academic performance. In M. Lewis and C. Feiring (Eds.), *Family, Risk and Competence*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- 16 Johnston, A.G., (1993). *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. U.S.A.: Signet.
- 17 Osofsky, J.D. (Ed.) (1997). *Children in a Violent Society*. New York: Guilford Press.
- 18 Sudermann, M., & Jaffe, P. (1993, August). *Dating violence among a sample of 1,567 highschool students*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario.
- 19 Jaffe, P., Sudermann, M., & Schiek, E. (1999). *A School-based Anti-violence Program: Canada*. In A.R. Morrison and M. Loreto Biehl (Eds.), *Too Close to Home: Domestic Violence in the Americas*. Washington, D.C.: Inter-America Development Bank.
- 20 Suderman M., Jaffe, P., Hastings (Shieck), E., (1996). *A.S.A.P.: A School-based Anti-violence Program*. London, ON: London Family Court Clinic.
- 21 Committee for Children (1990). *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum*. Seattle, WA.

- 22 Stavrou-Peterson, K., & Gamache, D. (1988). *My family and me: Violence free*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women.
- 23 Jaffe, P., Wolfe, D.A., Crooks, C., Hughes, R., & Baker, L. (2004). The Fourth R: Developing healthy relationships through school-based interventions. In P. Jaffe, L. Baker, & A. Cunningham (Eds.), *Protecting children from domestic violence: Strategies for community intervention* (pp. 200-218). New York: Guilford.
- 24 Wolfe, D.A., Jaffe, P., & Crooks, C. (2006). *Adolescent Risk Behaviours: Why Teens Experiment and Strategies to Keep them Safe*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- 25 Baker, L.L. & Cunningham, A. (2004). *Helping Children Thrive: Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers. A Resource to Support Parenting*. London, ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.
- 26 Baker, L.L., Jaffe, P.G., Ashbourne, L.M. & Carter, J. (2002). *Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: A Teacher's Handbook to Increase Understanding and Improve Community Responses*. London, ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.

#### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

**Baker, L.L. & Cunningham, A.J. (2004) *Helping Children Thrive: Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers. A Resource to Support Parenting*. London, ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.**

**Jaffe, P.G., Baker, L.L. & Cunningham, A.J. (Eds). (2004). *Protecting Children from Domestic Violence: Strategies for Community Intervention*. (2004). New York, NY: Guilford Press**