

## Parenting Interventions for Men Who Batter

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With contributions from Fernando Mederos

*“Except in the most severe cases, fathers and children remain connected even following domestic violence and regardless of the possible separation of the mother and father. When we fail to acknowledge and respond to this reality, we inadvertently make mothers solely responsible for assessing, monitoring, and responding to concerns about men’s parenting. We also lose a potential opportunity to promote safe and healthy father-child relationships, which may in turn contribute to children’s healing from traumatic exposure to abuse.”*

Applied Research papers synthesize and interpret current research on violence against women, offering a review of the literature and implications for policy and practice.

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Over the past few generations, there have been rapid shifts in the involvement of fathers in parenting their children. Fathers today are spending more time with their children, taking more responsibility for child care tasks, and sharing in more parenting decisions (Sandberg & Hofferth, 2001). Generally speaking, increased involvement of fathers is positive for children, leading to enhanced cognitive, social, and emotional development, and greater protection against adolescent delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and other risk behaviors (Allen & Daly, 2007; Marshall, English, & Stewart, 2001; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008). However, the generally positive impact of father-child relationships cannot always be assumed (Degamo, 2010; Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi, & Taylor, 2003). Domestic violence, in particular, is a threat to child health and well-being. Three meta-analyses of research on child exposure to domestic violence have concluded that children who live with mothers who are abused and fathers who batter show elevated rates of psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems, including aggression and anxiety (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008; Kitzmann, Gavlord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre, & Jaffe, 2003). These conflicting perspectives on fathers’ involvement have, unfortunately, not been broadly taken up by child welfare, child mental health, and domestic violence services. Instead, these services continue to focus on mothers and children and ignore or exclude fathers (Brown, Callahan, Strega, Walmsley, & Dominelli, 2008; Featherstone, Hooper, Scourfield, & Taylor, 2010; Scourfield, 2003).

There are multiple compelling reasons to shift towards better recognition, assessment, and intervention with fathers who have been violent in their families (Scott & Crooks, 2004; Scourfield, 2003; Strega, Fleet, Brown, Dominelli, Callahan, & Walmsley, 2008; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). One is that children most often retain an emotional connection with their fathers and continue to have contact with them despite past violence and regardless of

whether or not their mothers and fathers separate. Such contact may play a powerful role in breaking the intergenerational transmission of violence if fathers are able to own and take responsibility for their past abuse (Scott & Crooks, 2004). Improving interventions for fathers who have battered also has the potential to benefit women. Current practice within child welfare services tends to hold mothers primarily responsible for children's well-being (Strega et al., 2008). Models of intervention that address fathers directly have the potential to reduce the burden of child protection on mothers (Scott & Crooks, 2007). Finally, greater involvement of fathers in child mental health and child protection services creates significant opportunities to engage men in early intervention or prevention programs for woman abuse.

This paper explores how fathers who have battered might be best included in interventions that improve outcomes for women and child survivors of domestic violence. Specifically, the paper explores the question: What form of parenting intervention should we consider for fathers who batter? To address this question, we begin by describing what we know about fathers who batter. We then highlight common features of pioneering parenting programs for men who batter. Finally, we discuss current debate about how we can best provide services to fathers in a way that will protect women and children. A companion paper, entitled "Practical Considerations for Parenting Interventions for Men who Batter" adds to this review by considering issues of recruitment, program organization, content of intervention, and collaborative inter-agency practice.

### **What are the Characteristics of Fathers who Batter?**

In considering interventions for fathers who batter, it is first necessary to identify the characteristics and needs of this population. Preliminary steps have been taken in this direction. Perhaps the most widely recognized characterization of a father who batters is the one presented by Lundy Bancroft and Jay Silverman in their groundbreaking book *The Batterer as Parent* (2002; now revised, Bancroft, Silverman,

Ritchie, 2012). Based on many years of clinical experience, these authors characterized fathers who batter as hostile, demanding, and entitled men who were generally controlling towards both their partners and their children. Batterer fathers were described as having rigid and unreasonable rules, little patience, high expectations, and as using strict and often abusive means to ensure child compliance. Bancroft and colleagues (2011) also highlighted the undermining impact that fathers who batter have on their children's mothers and on the mother-child relationship.

Research has provided a good deal of support for Bancroft and colleagues (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Bancroft, Silverman & Ritchie, 2012) characterization of fathers who batter. It is now clear that when men are abusive towards their children's mothers, children are at substantially increased risk of being abused and neglected (e.g., Edleson, 1999; Salisbury, Henning, & Holding, 2009; Smith Slep & O'Leary, 2005; Stith et al., 2009). Moreover, among children at-risk of being abused, the presence of domestic violence is associated with greater severity of child maltreatment (Coohey & Zhang, 2006; Dixon, Hamilton-Giachrisis, Browne, & Ostapuk, 2007; Hartley, 2004) and has been implicated as an important risk factor for fatal father-perpetrated child maltreatment (Cavanagh, Dobash, & Dobash, 2007; Yampolskaya, Greenbaum, & Berson, 2009).

Although it is critically important to recognize the risk that fathers who batter pose to their children, research and clinical experience also suggests that not all these men fit the profile of being generally hostile, demanding, and controlling (Fox & Benson, 2004; Perel & Peled, 2008; Scott & Crooks, 2007). In the authors' work with fathers who have been violent in their families, we have identified three potential additional profiles of men. The most common appears to be that of fathers who, although committed to fathering, are profoundly *emotionally disconnected* (Perel & Peled, 2008). These men may long for a closer bond with their children, but their lack of connection often translates to emotional and sometimes physical neglect of their children (Martin et al., 2009).

Another profile of fathers who batter is that of men from low-income backgrounds who have fathered children in two or more families, with each relationship eventually ending due to infidelity and domestic violence. Often these fathers face multiple challenges including chronic unemployment, discrimination, substance dependence or abuse, and intermittent incarceration. Men with this profile are often *physically disconnected* from their children. They seldom maintain regular contact or pay child support after their relationships end with their children's mothers, thereby abandoning fathering relationships with multiple children. Fathers who demonstrate this pattern have not been emphasized in past studies of fathers who batter, but they have been described in the literature on poverty, especially poverty of African American men (e.g., Blankenhorn, 1995; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Popenoe, 1996).

A final, and in the authors' experience, smaller group of fathers who batter are those who have developed *reasonably healthy and connected* relationships with their children, despite past or sometimes ongoing abuse, harassment, or denigration of their children's mothers. This is a complicated group of fathers often in the midst of change. Their children are often older and are trying to work out for themselves issues of blame in their parents' relationship. Also appropriately included in this category are separated fathers who have a history of battering children's mothers, but who have respected no-contact orders and have developed independent relationships with their children.

Although this description of possible profiles (i.e., hostile and controlling, disconnected, multiply challenged, and connected) of fathers who batter may be helpful, it must be considered very tentative. There is a great deal of research still to be done on fathers who have battered. There has yet to be a large and comprehensive study of parenting among men who have battered, and it is unclear if the variables identified here (i.e., co-occurring abuse or neglect, level of connection between fathers and children) reliably differentiate either between or among

battering and non-battering fathers. At this point, it is possible only to conclude that fathers who batter are a heterogeneous group and that further research is needed on their shared and unshared characteristics and intervention needs.

### **Pioneering Parenting Programs for Men who Batter: Common Features**

Although it is still early days for parenting interventions for men who batter, there is some consensus among researchers and practitioners in the field on the content and style of intervention needed for the diverse range of fathers who batter. Two groups have written programming recommendations for fathers who batter and developed associated interventions. These two groups are Juan Carlos Arean, through Futures Without Violence ([http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/section/our\\_work/child\\_wellbeing/\\_breaking\\_cycle](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/section/our_work/child_wellbeing/_breaking_cycle)) and Katreena Scott and her colleagues with the Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value their Children program (see Scott & Crooks, 2004; 2006; 2007; Crooks, Scott, Francis, Kelly, & Reid, 2006; Scott, Francis, Crooks, Paddon, & Wolfe, 2006). Others have written about the needs of this group of fathers (e.g., Mandel, 2002) or have developed program curricula (e.g., Scaia, Connelly, & Downing, 2010). A summary of published programs in this area along with some key references are included as additional resources at the end of this paper. In the following section, we highlight four aspects of intervention that are shared across these pioneering programs.

### ***Use of a Motivational Approach to Engage and Retain Fathers in Intervention***

Fathers who batter almost always ascribe great importance to being good fathers who are able to protect their children and who contribute to educating and molding their children's characters (Perel & Peled, 2008). Batterers' commitment to being a good father is further intensified by their reflection on their own experiences of being fathered. The contrast between men's experiences with their own fathers and their current commitment to be

a good father to their children is extremely fertile ground for developing men's motivation to change (Crooks et al. 2006; Fox, Sayers, & Bruce, 2001). All current programs include exercises that promote men's reflection on intergenerational patterns of violence in their families and that use these exercises in a manner consistent with the principles of motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

### ***Continued Emphasis on the Need to End Violence Against their Children's Mothers***

A second commonality of all existing parenting programs for men who batter is the programs' emphasis on the need for men to end perpetration of abuse (e.g., physical, verbal, emotional, financial) against their children's mothers. Men are taught that they cannot abuse or disrespect their children's mother without also hurting the children. In other words, the programs emphasize that they "cannot be a lousy husband, but a good father" (Scott & Crooks, 2004, p. 103). This message is based on empirical literature documenting the negative impact of exposure to domestic violence on children (Evans et al., 2008; Kitzmann et al., 2003; Wolfe et al., 2003), the importance of respectful co-parenting to child development (Katz & Low, 2004), and the risk to children when men's perpetration of domestic violence is not addressed (Cavanagh et al., 2007). Guidelines for program content include the need to: a) teach men about the impact of their abuse on their partners' parenting and on mothers' connections with their children; b) help men avoid and cease disrespectful and abusive conflict with children's mothers; and c) prompt men to take responsibility for ending their contributions to drawn-out conflicts over parenting (Scott, Francis, Crooks, & Kelly, 2006). Most pioneering programs also actively collaborate with services for battered women to try to ensure that they are responsive to the perspectives, goals, and potential safety needs of victimized women and children (e.g., Scott et al., 2006).

### ***Program Content Addressing Accountability for Past Abuse***

Fathers often underestimate the traumatic impact of their violence and downplay their responsibility for past abuse and neglect (Perel & Peled, 2008; Scott & Crooks, 2004). Accordingly, all existing curricula for fathers who batter include exercises designed to help fathers understand, and be accountable for, the impact of their past abuse on their children and on the mother-child relationship. These exercises help men understand that acting out or distancing behaviors by children often stem from fathers' violence and negative modeling.

### ***Intervention to Reduce Fathers' Use of Harsh Discipline***

A fourth area that is consistently addressed by programs for fathers who batter is men's use of harsh discipline. In the Caring Dads program, for example, a major aim is to help fathers develop a fundamentally more "child-centered" view of fathering – one where children's wishes and needs are given greater consideration and higher priority. To do this, the program focuses on activities, such as learning about children's developmental capabilities and limitations, increasing men's tolerance for child misbehavior, enhancing the amount of nurturing time and attention fathers give their children, prompting men to disengage from power battles with their children, and developing men's skills for engaging in positive and healthy fathering. Behaviorally-based teaching on alternative child management strategies, such as using time outs, setting consequences, and developing behavioral reinforcement schedules for children, are used much less often, or, in some programs, deliberately avoided. Future research is needed to determine if an approach based on child-centeredness is effective with fathers who batter, or if more attention should be given to teaching alternative strategies for gaining child compliance.

### Areas of Greater Debate

Pioneering interventions for fathers who batter have in common the use of a motivational approach, a focus on accountability, and the need to continue to address domestic violence. All existing programs also include materials designed to teach men to avoid harsh discipline. Although there are areas of commonality across programs for fathers who batter, other aspects of parenting interventions for men who batter are more controversial. In this section, we highlight ongoing debate about ways to avoid unintended consequences, appropriate timing of services, inclusion of child maltreatment, and the integration of the voices of women and children. We also provide our opinions on these controversial issues, but we acknowledge that not all pioneers in the field would agree with our recommendations.

#### *How Can We Best Guard Against Potential Unintended Consequences of Parenting Programs for Men who Batter?*

Perhaps the most important area of debate concerns how parenting interventions for men who batter can best contribute to the broader efforts to end violence against women and children. Pioneers in the field acknowledge that not all men will benefit from intervention (Lishak & Scott, 2012), and that, in some cases, fathers will represent a continuing risk to their partners and children (DeGarmo, 2010; Jaffee et al., 2003). Additionally, these programs may unintentionally increase risk to women and children (Scott & Crooks, 2007). One example is that fathers may try to use their attendance at a parenting program to gain advantage in court proceedings, despite having made no discernible progress. Another is the possibility that the mere existence of such programs will lend credibility to the view that fathers' right to access their children supersedes any consideration of their history of violence against children's mothers.

Most existing programs for fathers who batter caution against potential unintended negative effects of intervention and see fathering programs for men

who batter as part of a coordinated community response to family violence. However, programs vary greatly in the extent to which such cautions are represented in program design. Herein, we advance the position that when men have been violent in their families and have potentially traumatized their children, the focus of parenting program decisions needs to remain firmly grounded on the safety and well-being needs of children, which in turn, are integrally connected to the safety needs of their mothers (Scott & Crooks, 2004; 2007). Accordingly, intervention should be guided by the principle that fathering intervention for men who batter should benefit children. Children's well-being, recovery from past abuse, and protection from ongoing abuse should not be subordinated to concern about fathers' progress or lack of progress (Scott & Crooks, 2007). Adopting this principle requires that (a) children's and women's needs be considered in assessing men's eligibility to join or to be discharged from the program, and the need for follow-up, and that (b) fathering programs work in close collaboration with other essential services, such as child welfare, battered women's shelters and advocates, and mental health services. Collaboration with these services should be maintained throughout men's involvement with fathering programs. The following operational guidelines should be utilized to monitor and reduce risk to potential victims of men's abuse:

1. Programs should directly acknowledge that it may not be advisable (for reasons of safety and/or high levels of trauma in children or children's mothers) for some fathers to have contact with their children. Programs should be clear about this issue with fathers, referral agents, members of men's families, and with the community of service providers.
2. When there are converging concerns about men, programs should be prepared to help fathers understand and cooperate with limits placed on their contact with their children.
3. Programs should communicate confidentially with battered women to assess and address their safety, to offer intervention or referral, and to seek information that may help in the assessment

of men attending the program. Programs should avoid direct or indirect advocating for men's increased contact or access to their children when it is against the wishes of their children's mothers.

4. Children should not be compelled to have contact with fathers, and men's involvement in programs should not be predicated on an understanding that their participation will increase their chances of contact with their children.
5. Programs should acknowledge that fathers who have battered are a heterogeneous population and that the appropriate intervention will vary depending on men's profiles of risk and strengths. For fathers with more strengths and lower risks, work can encompass support (and supervision if possible) of visits with children; at the other end of the spectrum, intervention for men with fewer strengths and greater risks may need to focus exclusively on increasing fathers' recognition of the risks they pose to their children and partners or former partners and on working collaboratively with men and with other service providers to ensure structures are in place to minimize these risks.

#### ***What is the Best Timing of Parenting Interventions for Men who Batter, Especially in Contrast to Programs Specifically Addressing Domestic Violence?***

There is an ongoing debate on the best time to offer parenting programs to men who batter, and, more generally, on the relationship between batterer intervention programs and parenting programs for men who batter. This debate has come to a head on referral to the Caring Dads program. Some recommend parenting programs for men who batter be limited to those fathers who have already successfully addressed, or are in the midst of addressing, their perpetration of domestic violence through completion of a batterer intervention program ([http://www.respect.uk.net/data/files/respect\\_position\\_statement\\_on\\_the\\_caring\\_dads\\_programme.pdf](http://www.respect.uk.net/data/files/respect_position_statement_on_the_caring_dads_programme.pdf)). Consistent with

this recommendation, two of the existing curricula listed here in the additional resources were designed specifically for men involved in batterer intervention (Breaking the Cycle: Fathering after violence and Addressing Fatherhood with Men who Batter: A curriculum for working with abusive men as fathers in batterer intervention program). Others (including Katreena Scott, one of the authors of this paper) have argued that limiting parenting intervention to men who have completed batterer intervention excessively, unnecessarily, and sometimes dangerously limits the range of fathers who can be served ([www.caringdads.org](http://www.caringdads.org)).

Restricting service to men who have completed batterer intervention is sometimes necessary. In particular, in cases where men's violence against their intimate partners has been severe enough to warrant criminal involvement and prompt a mandate to attend a program addressing woman abuse, it is critically important to respect this mandate. Any attempt to sidestep such a mandate (e.g., by replacing batterer intervention with parenting intervention) significantly undermines the potential of the system to promote men's accountability for abuse. Clinically, it is also sometimes necessary to begin intervention by addressing men's abuse against their children's mothers. Examples would include those where there is ongoing, potentially dangerous woman abuse or when men's past abuse has been severe. In addition, restricting parenting intervention to men who have completed batterer intervention has the advantage of potentially advancing advocacy against woman abuse. As has been concluded by Domestic Violence Death Review Committees across developed nations (e.g. National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative [www.ndvfri.org](http://www.ndvfri.org)), there is still much to be done to develop the capacity of all of our intervention systems (e.g., child protection, nursing, child mental health, employee assistance services) to recognize and respond to woman abuse. Insisting that problems in parenting (which may be more recognizable) be addressed only after woman abuse may indirectly advance this important training goal.

Despite these possible advantages, we argue that a model of service that requires men to complete a batterer intervention program prior to parenting program is overly prescriptive. There are a great many families identified by child protective services, family courts, child and family mental health, marital and family therapy, and fathering programs in which men have perpetrated abuse against their intimate partners. Women abuse is only sometimes the identifying problem; other common presenting problems include child abuse, neglect, parental substance use or mental health problems, child behavior issues and problems with separation. Moreover, the range of domestic violence perpetration identified varies enormously, from repeated severe abuse to relatively isolated incidents of emotional or verbal coercion.

Given the heterogeneity of problems presented by families, we argue that any blanket restriction on the basis of men's prior completion of batterer intervention (or on any other single feature of men's situations) oversimplifies the complexity of situations presented by men and leads to misguided prescriptions for intervention. In the specific case of men who have battered, to insist that all fathers be funneled through batterer intervention program prior to addressing parenting issues is neither realistic nor appropriate. In cases where the primary immediate risk is to children (e.g., consider a father who is separated from the partner he abused, is having very limited, non-abusive contact with his former partner, and is using physical abuse to gain compliance from his children during visits), this restriction may, in fact, be dangerously short-sighted.

As an alternate model, we recommend that decisions about service for fathers who present with both perpetration of woman abuse and abuse or neglect of their children (and potentially other co-occurring problems) be made on the basis of a good assessment. Excellent recommendations for such assessment are summarized by Ver Steegh & Dalton (2008). Among these are recommendations to thoroughly assess severity and nature of men's violence, to consider the implications of domestic

violence in the context of women's and children's safety and well-being, and to address family needs in priority order, beginning with the safety need of children, then the safety and well-being of the victim parent, then victim autonomy, then perpetrator accountability, and finally the priority of ensuring access of both parents to children. We would add to Ver Steegh & Dalton's (2008) list the need to assess the context in which we can most effectively engage men in intervention (e.g., how long are waiting lists, how receptive is he to engaging in different services) and a consideration of the measures currently in place to protect women and children against victimization. In some cases, assessment will suggest that men should complete batterer intervention prior to a program addressing fathering. In others, an appropriately targeted parenting program for men who batter will be the most appropriate starting point for change.

### ***Should Parenting Programs for Men who Batter be Separated from those for Fathers who have Abused or Neglected their Children?***

Another significant differentiating feature of currently available fathering programs for men who batter is the extent to which they address issues of child abuse and neglect. There is considerable overlap between men's perpetration of domestic violence and both their physical abuse and neglect of children. Edleson's (1999) review of the literature concluded that there is a 30 to 60% overlap of domestic violence and child physical abuse perpetration, a range that has been confirmed in subsequent reviews (e.g., Jouriles, McDonald, Slep, Heyman, & Garrido, 2008) and on the basis of nationally representative samples (e.g., Hamby, Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2010). All existing programs recognize the potential for overlap of woman abuse and child maltreatment, but these programs vary in the extent to which they address child maltreatment. Some programs focus primarily on child exposure to domestic violence and spend little time on possible overlapping concerns about men's physical or emotional abuse or neglect of their children. Given the overlap in these two presenting

issues, we recommend that parenting programs for men who batter include assessment and intervention for child abuse and neglect throughout intervention. Screening and referral for child sexual abuse is also warranted.

***What are the Perspectives of Women on Parenting Programs for Men who Batter and How Can We Ensure that the Voices of Women and Children Victims of Men's Abuse be Considered in these Programs?***

Given the connection between the safety and well-being of mothers and that of children, it is critical to understand and incorporate women's perspectives on parenting interventions for men who batter. Pioneering programs have been vigilant to this concern, and most have involved women's advocates as part of program development. For example, both the Caring Dads and the Addressing Fatherhood with Men who Batter programs were developed with a community advisory committee that included representatives from shelters, women's advocacy services, child welfare, family court, and child and family mental health services.

Although involving women's advocates is important, a growing body of research on mothering in the context of domestic violence suggests that "hearing" women's voices on the value and potential harm of parenting interventions for men who batter is likely to be much more complex. Battered women face numerous unique challenges in mothering (e.g., Létourneau, Fedick, & Willms, 2007; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001). For example, Lapierre (2010) documented that battered mothers hold an increased sense of responsibility in regards to their children. They are affected frequently by fairly significant loss of control over mothering due to the impact of domestic violence victimization on their physical and mental health, by the co-occurring dysregulation of children's behaviors and sometimes, by the multiple and conflicting social services involved in their lives. Importantly, Lapierre's (2010) also documented the centrality of mothering in men's violence. Women explained that men routinely

used mothering as a target in their violence (e.g., by frequently criticizing women for being bad mothers or by using or threatening to use violence against the children as a way to impact women's parenting).

When abuse based on mothering is coupled with cultural mandates supporting father-child contact, children's requests for visits with their fathers, and with the practical challenges of single-parenting, women feel considerable pressure to support father-child relationships and face substantial internal (if not external) conflict over implementing safety-based restrictions on fathers' access. Combining these pressures with an inappropriate referral to a fathering program may contribute to this pressure on a woman and further reduce her ability to advocate for safety for herself and her children. Given this context, we recommend that the voices of women, and of the advocates working with them, be part of referral, assessment, monitoring, and feedback for fathers involved in parenting programs for men who batter. We also recommend that more research be done to understand and incorporate women's perspectives on parenting programs for men who batter and on their impact on women's parenting decisions over time.

### **Conclusions**

There are many compelling reasons to include fathers in our efforts to end violence against women and children. Except in the most severe cases, fathers and children remain connected even following domestic violence and regardless of the possible separation of the mother and father. When we fail to acknowledge and respond to this reality, we inadvertently make mothers solely responsible for assessing, monitoring, and responding to concerns about men's parenting. We also lose a potential opportunity to promote safe and healthy father-child relationships, which may in turn contribute to children's healing from traumatic exposure to abuse. Fathers are often strongly motivated to be good parents to their children and they are readily engaged in interventions that address their relationships with their children. Well-designed and collaboratively linked parenting programs for men who batter have

significant potential to assist in supporting healthier and safer father-child relationships when warranted, and when safety concerns are high, to work towards reducing risk while building men's understanding of restrictions on their access to their children.

At the same time, we are cautious about risks and potential harms to battered women and their children. In our experience, fathering groups for men who batter may drift towards focusing on the father-child relationship to the exclusion of a focus on men's ongoing hostility or abuse towards children's mothers. There is also a risk of a father's progress overshadowing potential harmful impact or ongoing risks for children. Finally, there are significant possible harms of running these programs without strong connections to other service providers for the family, and where women's and children's voices and perspectives are not considered in referral and intervention planning. Fortunately, pioneers in this field have given careful thought to these issues and have developed programs that have significant potential to support positive change for men, women, and children.

This paper summarized developments in the field of parenting programs for men who batter. Commonalities of pioneering programs include the use of a motivational approach, focus on teaching men about the impact of domestic violence on children and the mother-child relationship, education about children's development in order to encourage realistic expectations, promotion of men's accountability for past abuse, and attempts to reduce men's use of harsh discipline. Areas of greater debate in the field concern provisions necessary to ensure that intervention does not have unintended consequences, appropriate timing of intervention, inclusion of material to address child abuse and neglect, and the ways in which women's and children's perspectives are best considered. It is our hope that, in summarizing and presenting this information, we will maximize the potential for the development of parenting interventions for men who batter in a way that contributes to efforts to end violence against women and children and ensure safe

and healthy relationships between fathers and their children.

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**Additional Resources**  
**Parenting programs for fathers who have been abusive in their families**

Initiative	Brief Description	References & Contact Information
<p><b>Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value their Children</b></p> <p>Katreena Scott, Claire Crooks, Tim Kelly and Karen Francis</p>	<p>Caring Dads is an intervention program devoted to ensuring the safety and well-being of children through working with fathers who have been abusive, neglectful or violent in their families. The program includes three components: 1) a 17-week empirically-based manualized group intervention for fathers; 2) contact with children's mothers to promote safety and freedom from coercion; and 3) coordinated case management to ensure that children benefit (and are not unintentionally harmed) as a result of father's participation in intervention. Therapeutic strategies used include motivation enhancement, parent education (including skills training and behavioral practice) to improve men's recognition and prioritization of child needs, understanding of developmental stages, respect and support for children's relationships with their mothers, listening and using praise, empathy for children's experiences of maltreatment and to identify and cognitive behavioral therapy counter the distortions underlying men's past, and potentially ongoing, abuse of their children and/or children's mothers.</p>	<p>Program manual available through <a href="http://www.caringdads.org">www.caringdads.org</a></p> <p>Considerable documentation in support of the program, including that for:</p> <p><u>Program rationale and philosophy:</u>  Scott, K. L. &amp; Crooks, C. V. (2004). Effecting change in maltreating fathers. <i>Clinical Psychology: Science &amp; Practice</i>, 11, 95-111.  Scott, K. L. &amp; Crooks, C. V. (2006). <u>Intervention for abusive fathers</u>: Promising practices in court and community responses. <i>Juvenile and Family Court Journal</i>, 57(3), 29-44.</p> <p><u>Accountability</u>  Scott, K. L., Francis, K. J., Crooks, C. V., Paddon, M., &amp; Wolfe, D. A. (2006). Accountability guidelines for intervention with abusive fathers (pp. 102-117). In O. Williams, &amp; J. Edleson, (Eds.) <i>Parenting by men who batter: New Directions for Assessment and Intervention</i>. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.</p> <p><u>Core therapeutic techniques</u>  Crooks, C.V., Scott, K. L., Francis, K., Kelly, T., &amp; Reid, M. (2006). Eliciting change in maltreating fathers: Goals, processes, and desired outcomes. <i>Cognitive and Behavioral Practice</i>, 13, 71-81.</p> <p><u>Preliminary outcomes</u>  Scott, K. L. &amp; Crooks, C. V. (2007). Preliminary evaluation of an intervention program for maltreating fathers. <i>Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention</i>, 7, 224-238.</p>
<p><b>Breaking the Cycle: Fathering after violence</b></p> <p>Family Violence Prevention Fund, Juan Carlos Arean</p>	<p>The Fathering After Violence program is a series of three exercises run over 4 sessions designed for integration with batterer intervention programs. Exercises address men's empathy for their children's experiences of violence, modeling for children and repairing father-child relationships.</p>	<p>Rationale for intervention, leader training and program materials are available from the Family Violence Prevention Fund at:  <a href="http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/section/our_work/child_wellbeing/_breaking_cycle">http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/section/our_work/child_wellbeing/_breaking_cycle</a></p>

<p><b>Helping Children who Witness Domestic Violence: A guide for parents</b></p> <p>Meg Crager and Lily Anderson</p>	<p>This 12-session downloadable program was developed for use in parent education programs, shelters, batterer services and other related counseling services to help parents better support their children following violence. Sessions cover issues such as the effects of domestic violence on children, accountability for past violence, building stronger parent-child relationships, parental anger management, limit setting and respectful co-parenting. Alternate sessions are designed for use with victim-parents and batterer-parents.</p>	<p>Curriculum is posted on the MINCAVA website at: <a href="http://www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/materials/instructor.html#id427613">http://www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/materials/instructor.html#id427613</a></p>
<p><b>Addressing Fatherhood with Men who Batter: A curriculum for working with abusive men as fathers in batterer intervention program</b></p> <p>Melissa Scaia, Laura Connelly and John Downing</p>	<p>This program offers 5 to 8 exercises under each of four themes: 1) Examining men’s own childhood experiences with their father; 2) Impact of batterer by men on children; 3) Becoming a more nurturing, child-centered father; and 4) Examining how man can be respectful, nonabusive and more supportive of their children’s mother and of the mother-child relationship. The curriculum is designed for use as part of, or following, batterer intervention.</p>	<p>Curriculum and an associated DVD is available from the Advocates for Family Peace at <a href="http://www.stopdomesticabuse.org/">http://www.stopdomesticabuse.org/</a></p>
<p><b>Restorative Parenting Activities: A Group Facilitation Curriculum</b></p>	<p>Emerging from the restorative justice framework, the Restorative Parenting curriculum offers a series of exercises designed to help men built empathy for their children and take responsibility for their abuse and its impact. This program can be offered as a stand-alone program or as a component of batterer intervention or parenting classes.</p>	<p>Curriculum is available at <a href="http://www.globalvp.umn.edu/documents/fathering/Restorative%20Parenting_Curri.pdf">http://www.globalvp.umn.edu/documents/fathering/Restorative%20Parenting_Curri.pdf</a></p>

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## In Brief: Parenting Interventions for Men Who Batter

Katreena Scott with contributions from Fernando Mederos

As part of the ongoing effort to prevent violence against women, recent years have seen an increased interest in services for fathers who batter their children's mothers. Research has provided compelling reasons to intervene with violent fathers, including the expanded role of today's fathers in children's lives (Sandberg & Hofferth, 2001); the positive psychosocial outcomes associated with involved fathers behaviors (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008; Allen & Daly, 2007; Marshall, English, & Stewart, 2001); and the risks for psychological health associated with child exposure to domestic violence (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008; Kitzmann, Gavlord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre, & Jaffe, 2003). Moreover, except in extreme cases, most children maintain contact with their fathers despite past or current violence (Scott & Crooks, 2004). Parenting interventions for men who batter attempt to address these realities while reducing the burden of child protection on mothers (Scott & Crooks, 2007). Ideally, such interventions improve outcomes for women and child survivors of domestic violence.

Interventions for batterer fathers are based on preliminary research into this population. The most widely recognized characterization of fathers who batter mothers describes them as hostile, demanding, and controlling (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; now revised, Bancroft, Silverman, Ritchie, 2012); children of batterer fathers are also at greater risk of being abused (Stith et al., 2009; Salisbury, Henning, & Holding, 2009; Smith Slep & O'Leary, 2005; Edleson, 1999). Not all batterer fathers fit this profile, however; some are emotionally or physically disconnected from their children (e.g. Martin et al., 2009; Perel & Peled, 2008; Scott & Crooks, 2007; Fox & Benson, 2004); while others are able to maintain healthy and connected relationships. Until further research can be conducted, it is important to recognize that batterer fathers are a heterogeneous group with a range of characteristics and needs.

Parenting interventions for men who batter share four aspects in common:

- Use of a motivational approach to engage and retain fathers in intervention. All programs use the principles of motivational interviewing to encourage men's reflection on intergenerational patterns of violence and draw on their commitment to being good fathers (Perel & Peled, 2008; Crooks et al. 2006; Fox, Sayers, & Bruce, 2001; Miller & Rollnick, 2002).
- Continued emphasis on the need to end violence against their children's mothers. Men are taught that they cannot abuse their children's mother without also hurting their children (Evans et al., 2008; Scott & Crooks, 2004; Katz & Low, 2004; Kitzmann et al., 2003; Wolfe et al., 2003). Most programs collaborate with services for battered women to ensure they are responsive to the needs and goals of victimized women and children (Scott, Francis, Crooks, & Kelly, 2006).
- Program content addressing accountability for past abuse. All existing curricula include exercises to help fathers understand the traumatic impact of their violence on their children (Perel & Peled, 2008; Scott & Crooks, 2004).

Along with these common features, the field also includes areas of controversy.

- How can we best guard against potential unintended consequences of parenting programs for men who batter? Not all fathers benefit from intervention or understand why access to their children has been restricted, and thus represent continuing risk to their partners and children (Lishak & Scott, 2012; DeGarmo, 2010; Jaffee et al., 2003). An intervention may unintentionally increase risk to women and

children if participating fathers are given access to their children despite lack of real progress (Scott & Crooks, 2007).

- What is the best timing of parenting interventions for men who batter, especially in contrast to programs that specifically address domestic violence? Some recommend that parenting programs be restricted to fathers who have completed a batterer intervention program (see *Caring Dads* program, [http://www.respect.uk.net/data/files/respect\\_position\\_statement\\_on\\_the\\_caring\\_dads\\_programme.pdf](http://www.respect.uk.net/data/files/respect_position_statement_on_the_caring_dads_programme.pdf)). Others argue that such a limitation can be unnecessary and even dangerous in cases where the primary physical risk is to children; individual assessment, rather than blanket restrictions, are encouraged (Ver Steegh & Dalton, 2008).
- Should parenting programs for men who batter be separated from those for fathers who have abused or neglected their children? All programs acknowledge the research showing a considerable overlap between men who batter women and men who abuse and neglect their children (e.g. Hamby, Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2010; Jouriles, McDonald, Slep, Heyman, & Garrido, 2008; Edleson, 1999); however, they vary in the extent to which they address child maltreatment in their curricula.
- What are the perspectives of women on parenting programs for men who batter, and how can we ensure the voices of women and children victims of men's abuse be considered in these programs? While many programs are vigilant about engaging with women's advocates, the inclusion of women victims' perspectives is more complex due to the unique challenges faced by battered mothers (e.g. Lapierre, 2010; Létourneau, Fedick, & Willms, 2007; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001). For example, battered women are often compelled to continue parenting with their batterer; parenting interventions for batterer fathers may increase pressure on mothers at the expense of mother and child safety.

There are many compelling reasons to include fathers in the efforts to end violence against women and children. When batterer fathers are not considered in interventions, mothers become solely responsible for assessing, monitoring, and responding to concerns about fathers' parenting. Further research and strong connections to other service providers will help minimize the potential risks of parenting interventions for batterer fathers. Well-designed and collaboratively linked parenting programs for men who batter have the potential to support healthier and safer relationships between parents and children.

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