

UNDERSTANDING  
**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE™**

**FATHERTOPICS™  
BOOSTER SESSION**

**National  
Fatherhood  
Initiative®**

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# Understanding Domestic Violence™

## INTRODUCTION

*Domestic violence* refers to the use of physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, or economic abuse or coercion by an individual against a current or former partner.<sup>1</sup> Also known as intimate partner violence, it can occur between spouses, former spouses, or girlfriends and boyfriends.<sup>2</sup> Though men are more often the perpetrators, domestic violence may be committed by men or by women, and both men and women can be victims.<sup>3</sup>

Domestic violence may take one of several forms.

- **Physical violence** occurs when one partner uses physical force against the other partner, such as hitting, punching, kicking, or burning.
- **Sexual violence** occurs when one partner forces the other partner to participate in unwanted sexual behavior.<sup>4</sup>
- **Verbal violence** includes threats of harm toward the other partner.
- **Psychological or emotional violence** is defined as “trauma to the victim caused by acts, threats of acts, or coercive tactics,” and may include degrading a partner, restricting what a partner is allowed to do, withholding information from a partner, or isolating a partner.<sup>5</sup> The severity of domestic violence can range greatly within and across households. Researchers have identified three types of domestic violence. Each of these types can be perpetrated by partners of either gender and may be one-sided or mutual.
- **Situational couple violence**, also known as **common couple violence**, occurs when a disagreement or conflict escalates into violence, such as shoving or slapping.<sup>6</sup>
- **Patriarchal terrorism or intimate terrorism** is a “systematic, intentional” form of violence in which one partner—usually a male—terrorizes the other through physical violence, threats, and other tactics in order to control the victim.<sup>7</sup>
- **Violent resistance** is a victim’s physical response to his or her partner’s intimate terrorism.<sup>8</sup>

1 Centers for Disease Control. (2006a). *Intimate partner violence: Overview*. Retrieved March 1, 2007, from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/ipvoverview.htm>; Ooms, T., Boggess, J., Menard, A., Myrick, M., Roberts, P., Tweedie, J., et al. (2006). *Building bridges between healthy marriage, responsible fatherhood, and domestic violence programs: A preliminary guide*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy and the National Conference of State Legislatures.

2 Ooms et al. (2006); Centers for Disease Control (2006a).

3 Ooms et al. (2006); Centers for Disease Control (2006a).

4 Ooms et al. (2006); Centers for Disease Control (2006a).

5 Ooms et al. (2006); Centers for Disease Control (2006a).

6 Johnson, M. P. (1995). Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57(2), 283-294; Ooms et al. (2006).

7 Johnson (1995), 284.

8 Johnson, M. P. (2006). Conflict and control: Gender symmetry and asymmetry in domestic violence. *Violence Against Women*, 12(11), 1003-1018.



Healthy, nurturing, and loving fathers play a significant role in preventing domestic violence. When a boy is raised with a father who appreciates the importance of relating to the mother in an equal and fair manner, he learns that being a man is not about being above, having power or asserting control over women. Being raised with an absent or abusive father is a powerful predictor of male violence.

Likewise, fathers influence how their daughters expect to be treated. A girl who is raised in a home with a healthy, nurturing, and loving father is more likely to become a confident woman who won't tolerate verbal and physical abusiveness from men. She'll know she deserves better.

Because your fatherhood program connects you with a diverse population of men, you are well-positioned to prevent or identify domestic violence situations. National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) has designed this booster session to help your organization be proactive in the reduction of domestic violence. Moreover, the increasing emphasis from funders on collaboration between domestic violence groups and organizations that serve fathers and their families can help position your organization for additional funding.

The objectives of this booster session are to: 1) create a bridge between fathering programs and domestic violence prevention advocates including those who operate Batterer Intervention Programs (BIP); 2) support domestic violence programs' goals by creating awareness that will encourage men to seek help earlier and, ultimately, decrease the impact of intimate partner abuse; 3) help fathers understand what domestic violence is and how it impacts others; and 4) provide fathers with strategies to seek support for themselves or with others (e.g. children and children's mom). Do not use this booster session in place of a BIP because the focus of the smaller sessions that comprise it is to **raise awareness of domestic violence**. Intervention after domestic violence occurs requires a more comprehensive, therapeutic approach.

Many fathers who participate in this booster session will increase their awareness of what domestic violence is and, as a result, reduce the likelihood of domestic violence in their families. This booster session has information on domestic violence, such as its cyclical nature and recognizing its red flags. There is also a possibility that it will trigger these fathers or someone they know to seek assistance from a BIP.

Each smaller session includes didactic, group, and interactive learning that help fathers explore issues related to domestic violence. Fathers will learn:

- Definitions of domestic violence
- Prevalence of domestic violence in society
- The family impact of domestic violence
- The effects of domestic violence on children
- The cyclical nature of domestic violence
- How to recognize the early warning signs of domestic violence
- How to foster non-violence in the home

Everyone deserves a safe, stable, emotionally-healthy, and nurturing home environment. Throughout the booster session, your main focus should be to lead fathers to create that kind of environment for their family.

You can use this booster session as a stand-alone booster session even if you don't currently have a fathering program. If you run a fathering group, you can either integrate the booster session into your program or simply use them before the start or at the end of your program. If you use NFI's 24/7 Dad® A.M. program, we recommend integrating this booster session between Session 10 (Working with Mom and Co-Parenting) and Session 11 (Dads and Work) to allow the fathers to deal with important aspects of self-awareness that occurs

in earlier sessions such as Session 1 (Family History) and Session 2 (What it Means to Be a Man). Moreover, Session 6 gives fathers an opportunity to create the “Ideal Father” and assess what kind of father and partner they are. The sessions on domestic violence awareness builds nicely on these topics. If you use NFI’s InsideOut Dad® program, you can use a similar strategy by integrating this Booster Session 11 (Working with Mom and Co-Parenting and Session 12 (Change and Impact).

The next generation depends on us for guidance and instruction. As you practice the principles in this booster session and see its objectives come to fruition, you will contribute to the reduction of violence in our homes and the societal consequences of it.

**SAMPLE  
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**NOTE TO FACILITATOR:**

Procedure 3 is important because it will stimulate their thinking about domestic violence and, more importantly, their feelings associated with this issue.

**NOTE TO FACILITATOR:**

Keep the flip chart pages so you can refer back to them during Session 3.

**SESSION 1:**

# What is Domestic Violence?

**ACTIVITY 1.1 Domestic Violence and the Fear Factor****TIME:** 45 minutes**MATERIALS:** Fear Factor Inventory found in Appendix A, flip chart, and magic markers**GOAL:**

To raise awareness and understanding of domestic violence.

**PROCEDURES:**

1. Welcome each father to the session and explain that the 3 sessions in this overall booster session will increase their awareness of the dynamics of domestic violence and its impact on the family.
2. Mention that even though we know domestic violence can be perpetrated by both men and women, this booster session focuses on the violence and its impact as it is perpetrated by men towards women.
3. Ask the group to share their thoughts about the words **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE** that you will write on the flip chart. Before you write the words tell the group that you want them to think about and reflect on both of the words you will write and that you want them to share with the group whatever thoughts, ideas, or feelings come to mind and cross their heart.
4. Write the words, **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE** on the flip chart and take 5 minutes to write down all of the fathers' responses on the chart.
5. Divide the fathers into two groups and give them 20 minutes to identify the following definition (a.) and thoughts on the following concept (b.).
  - a. A definition of domestic violence.
  - b. How domestic violence affects the family.
6. Bring the fathers back together and have each group share their definition of domestic violence and their thoughts and feelings about how it impacts the family.
7. Take 10 minutes to ask the fathers the following questions.
  - a. How does domestic violence impact the relationships within a family?
  - b. How does it impact the relationship between mom and dad?
  - c. How does it impact the relationships between/among the children in a family?
  - d. How does it impact the relationship between mom and the children?
  - e. How does domestic violence impact the relationship between dads and their sons?
  - f. How does domestic violence impact the relationship between dads and their daughters?

8. Share with the group the following definitions of domestic violence.
  - a. “Domestic violence is characterized as a pattern of coercive behaviors that may include repeated battering and injury, psychological abuse, sexual assault, progressive social isolation, deprivation and intimidation. These behaviors are perpetrated by someone who is or was involved in an intimate relationship with the victim.” —*Diagnostic and Treatment Guidelines on Domestic Violence, AMA 1992*
  - b. “Any attempt to impose your will on another is an act of violence.” —*Ghandi*
9. Mention that the first definition is a formal explanation of domestic violence and that the term “coercive” means to bring something about by force or threat. Ask the fathers for examples of coercive behavior. State again the examples of coercive behaviors listed in the first definition for emphasis.
10. Read the second definition again and ask the fathers to reflect and interpret its meaning.
11. Handout the Fear Factor Inventory. Explain that although many people think domestic violence is about anger, it really isn’t. Batterers tend to take their anger out on their intimate partner, but it’s really not about anger. It’s about trying to instill fear and wanting to have power and control in the relationship. Tell them that this inventory is a great tool to help them become more aware of the importance of remaining violence-free in their relationship with their wife, child’s mom, or with the woman with whom they currently have a relationship even if they don’t have children with that woman. Take about 10 minutes to go through the remaining procedures.
12. Have them rate the amount of fear that exists in their relationship from the perspective of their wife, child’s mom, or with the woman with whom they currently have a relationship even if they don’t have children with that woman. (Keep in mind that people tend to underestimate the amount of violent, coercive, and controlling behavior that exists in their relationships.)
13. Mention that no matter where they rated the level of fear she has for him that this awareness is just the beginning of a greater understanding of who they are as a husband or partner and as a dad. Tell them that we will talk in future sessions about the kind of person they want to be in relation to their wife, child’s mom, or partner and their children.
14. Now have them rate how much they fear their wife, child’s mom, or partner.
15. Finally, have them rate the level of fear their child(ren) has of them.
16. Mention that we are here so that we can not only learn more about our awareness of domestic violence, but also how others who we care about deeply perceive our behavior and attitudes. Completing the inventory provides a great opportunity to begin the process of challenging ourselves by taking a more detailed look at some of the changes that we might need to make in our attitudes and behaviors so we can move towards a more caring, loving, non-violent relationship with those whom we love. It also helps us to spot when others we care about are involved in domestic violence.


**NOTE TO FACILITATOR:**

The second definition gives the fathers a greater sensitivity to what it means to be violent.


**NOTE TO FACILITATOR:**

If a father has children with multiple women and is not in a relationship, have him rate his most recent relationship with the mom of at least one of his children.



## ACTIVITY 1.2 Domestic Violence and the Effects on Children

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**MATERIALS:** Enough containers of modeling clay for each man, flip chart, and magic markers

### GOAL:

To increase the understanding of the effects domestic violence has on children.

### PROCEDURES:

1. Explain that we will now move from talking about the effects of domestic violence on the entire family to concentrate on the effects on children who live in an abusive environment.

Take 10 minutes to write the following words on the flip chart one at a time and ask the corresponding question for each word before moving on to write the next word on the flip chart and ask the corresponding question for that word.

- a. **GUILT** – Why do children who live with violence and abuse feel guilty?
- b. **CONFUSION** – Why are these children often confused about what's happening to and around them?
- c. **LONELINESS** – What causes a child to feel lonely as a result of living with violence and abuse?
- d. **DISTRUST** – Why do children have distrust when living with violence and abuse?

2. Mention that the fathers will do an exercise that will help them become more sensitive to the children who are in families where there are incidents of violence and abuse. Mention that a few moments ago we had an opportunity to discuss what's in these children's heart and capture their pain and suffering. You will now mold some clay into a visual representation of the pain and despair children experience in an abusive environment.

3. Provide a small container of clay to each father and give the group 10 minutes to mold it.

4. After they finish molding the clay, ask them the following question.

- a. What was going on in your heart as you went through this exercise?

5. Ask for volunteers to share their clay-creation story.

6. Share this list of beliefs that often develop in children living in the midst of violence.

- a. Violence is an acceptable and legitimate way for a person to handle conflict.
- b. Promises are easily made, easily broken.
- c. A child's needs are unimportant.
- d. You never know when someone will turn on you.



### NOTE TO FACILITATOR:

Although you can use Play-Doh® as an alternative, we recommend modeling clay because it is more difficult to mold and will help the fathers apply additional insight to the concepts of pain and despair that children experience.



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