# Intersections: Where Domestic Violence, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Meet

Many families impacted by domestic violence perpetrators' behaviors have multiple, complex, intersecting issues. Prominent among them are substance abuse and mental health. Domestic violence-informed practice requires us to examine how these issues interact. In particular, we need to be able to connect how the perpetrator's behavior causes and exacerbates the problems are of other family members. It is also important to be able to identify how the perpetrator interferes with treatment and services for adult and child survivors.

## Siloed Thinking and Practice

#### SUBSTANCE **ABUSE**

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**MENTAL** HEALTH

When we keep a family's intersecting issues siloed, we decrease opportunities for:

- **Effective perpetrator accountability**
- and intervention; Appropriate and accessible treatment
- and safety of the adult and children survivors;
- Systems who work efficiently, effectively and collaboratively.

#### The results of siloed practice can include:

- **Unnecessary removals**;
- Children remaining in placements longer
- **Cases open longer**
- **Case plans less effective**
- **Cases that return to child welfare Increased harm to children and families**

#### **Examples of Siloed Practiced:**

- If a family comes to the attention of child welfare bécause of a mother's substance abuse, it is considered a "substance abuse case" even if she is also a domestic violence survivor.
- If a family comes to the attention of the courts because of a father's domestic abuse arrest, even if he has a substance abuse issue, it is considered a "domestic violence case".

#### **Benefits of an Intersections Approach:**

- we increase perpetrator accountability
- o e.g. when we are able to identify and articulate how the perpetrator's violence has produced anxiety for the survivor, exacerbating her existing anxiety, we are better able to provide effective interventions for the perpetrator and support for the survivor
- improve our ability to assess the family
- o E.g. explaining how the domestic violence perpetrator has interfered with his partner's recovery is more powerful than just listing the family's issues
- improve our ability to partner with adult survivors
  - o e.g. we are able to affirm to the survivor that her partner's abusive behaviors are not her responsibility and are the source of concern for the children's safety, and we can still address her substance abuse

### Safe & Together Model Principles & Components

Keeping child safe and together with non-offending parent Safety Healing from trauma Stability and nurturance

Efficient

The Safe & TogetherTM Model Practice Principles are practice indicators for domestic violence-informed practice.

Each of these principles have implications for addressing families with intersections: • Domestic violence perpetrators who have substance abuse and/or mental health issues are likely to have increased negative impact on the children's safety, trauma, stability and nurturance.

Partnering with non--offending parent as default position

Partnering with adult survivors who have substance abuse and/mental health is more complex, but still necessary. • Interventions with the perpetrator must address how his mental health and/or substance abuse issues intersects with his violence and control.

Intervening with perpetrator to reduce risk and harm to child Accountability Courts Engagement

Effective Child--centered

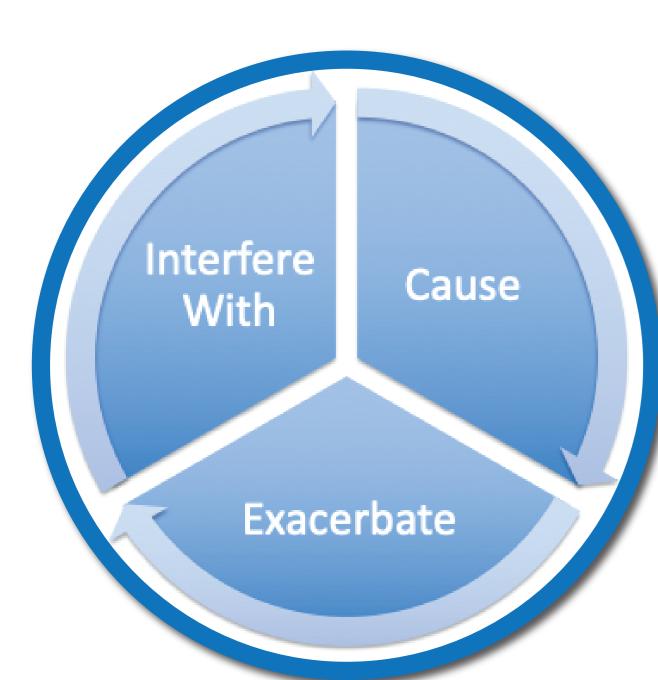
The Safe & Together Critical Components assist us in making sure our assessments, engagement, documentation and case planning are comprehensive and domestic violence-informed. If we are missing one component, we are missing critical information that has implications for the family's outcomes.

Using a perpetrator pattern-based approach requires first assessing the perpetrator's pattern of violence and coercive controlling behaviors as the source of risk and harm to children. Only then can we accurately assess the survivor's full spectrum of efforts to promote child safety and well being.

The 5th Critical Component addresses the assessment of intersecting issues. This component involves using a perpetrator pattern-based approach to asking questions about how the perpetrator's abuse intersects with mental health and AOD issues in the family. This change in the way we ask questions about intersecting issues will impact the way we assess and provide services to families.

#### Perpetrator's pattern of coercive control **ROLE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE, MENTAL Actions taken HEALTH, CULTURE** by the perpetrator AND OTHER to harm the child **SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS** Full spectrum of the **Adverse impact of** non-offending the perpetrator's parent's efforts to behavior on the promote the safety and well being of the

### Intersections Assessment Framework



This framework is builds on our overall perpetrator pattern-based approach by giving us language to more accurately describe the specific way the perpetrator's behaviors interact with their own, the survivor's and the children's intersecting issues. The perpetrator's pattern of behavior can cause and exacerbate or interfere with the treatment of existing mental health and substance abuse issues. Examples:

- Interfere with: The perpetrator interferes with the survivor's attempts at
  - E.g. He sabotages her mental health treatment by refusing to give her the car or provide child care, claiming she is "making it up" so she can escape her "responsibility" to care for the kids.
  - E.g. He confiscates her anxiety medication when he's upset with her
  - E.g. They both are required to attend the same substance abuse program--his threatening comments after each session causes her to not feel safe and she drops out.
- Cause: Her substance abuse is a direct response to his violence and abuse.
  - E.g. His violence and abuse, exacerbated by his substance abuse, impacts her mental health which leads her to self-medicate.
- o E.g. He pressures her to use drugs with him, threatening he'll make sure she loses the children if she doesn't.
- Exacerbate: The perpetrator leverages the survivor's mental illness, increasing her vulnerability.
  - E.g. He targets her existing anxiety by creating a tense, overwhelming environment at home and then tell others she's "crazy" or "losing it" to discredit her
  - E.g. After his violence, her depression intensifies making it harder to resist the urge to use again.

### Intersections Framework Delivery Methods

Changing systems' approach to intersections is challenging and complex. Here are some examples of tools for implementation:

- 1. The Safe & Together Institute e-learning module on Intersections is being used by child welfare, substance abuse and other programs to change organizational culture.
- 2. The STACY project in Australia is a multi-year, multi-state research project led by Professor Cathy Humphreys which examines improving cross system collaboration using the Safe & Together Model Intersections Framework.

3. The Safe & Together Model CORE training includes teaches skills related to intersections as part training practitioners skills to implement the Model.

# The Intersections Framework Supports Stronger Interventions with Families

When we use an intersections framework, we are better able to understand the complexity that previously made effective interventions challenging. This framework provides critical information that will support our ability to:

- accurately assess, describe and document the complexity of the perpetrator's impact on child and family functioning assess the survivor's strengths in the context of the intersections and the survivor's added barriers to recover and support
- partner with the survivor to support the children's safety and well being
- make domestic violence-informed case decisions and plan effective interventions

#### **CONTACT US**

Safe & Together Institute PO Box 745 Canton, Connecticut 06019 Phone: 1 (860) 319-0966

safeandtogetherinstitute.com @SafeandTogether SafeandTogether Safe and Together SafeandTogether

in afeandTogetherModel

# Vinformed

**CONNECT WITH US** 

