



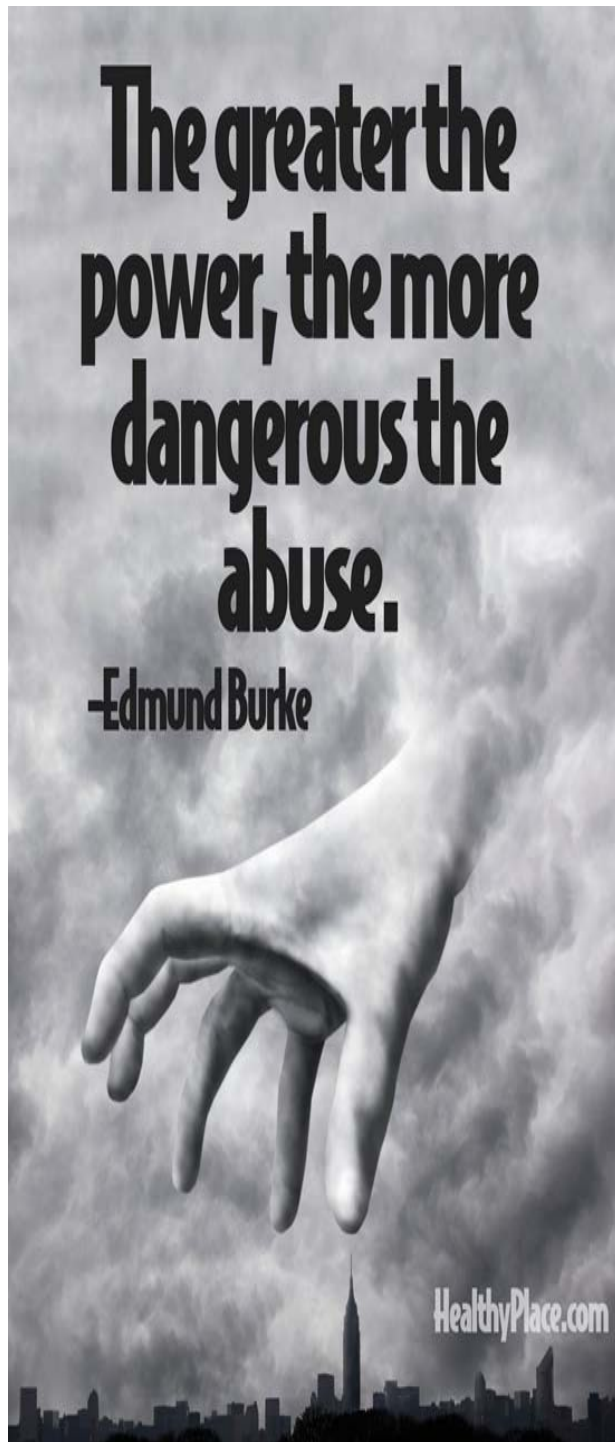
Safe After Separation: Abuse on Contact

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Child and Family Counselling Centre

Outline

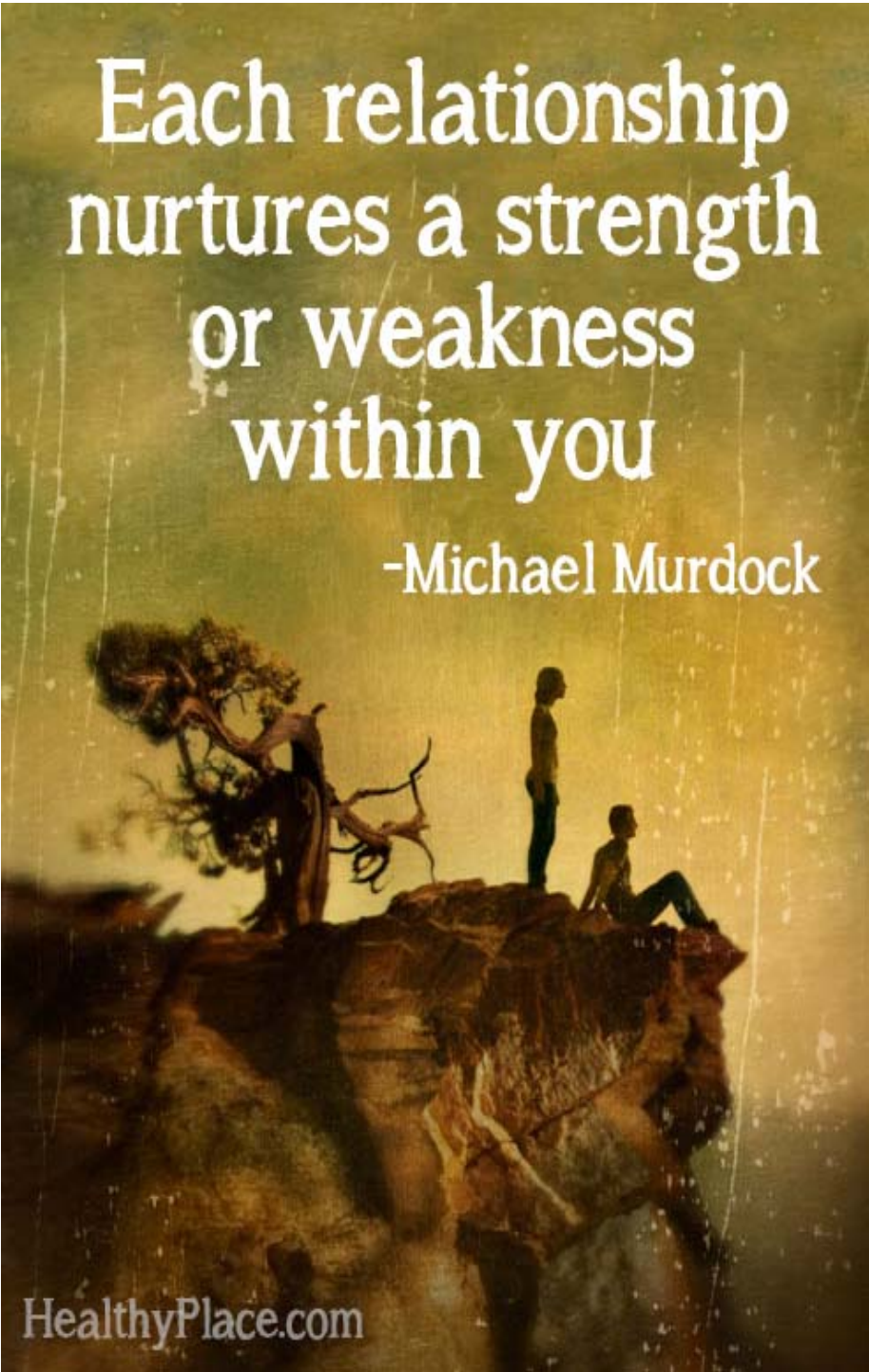
- Key understandings of child witness to DV
- Domestic Violence and parenting
- Identifying when a child has been a victim of DV
- Children in Abuse on Contact
- Counselling Children who are being abused on contact

<https://vimeo.com/73172036>



Key Understandings

- Domestic Violence is a gendered issue:
 - Victims are overwhelming women and children.
- Perpetrating DV is child abuse
(Edleson, Shin & Amendariz, 2007)
- Domestic Violence negatively impacts child development
(Perry, 2000)
 - DV is traumatising
 - DV negatively impacts attachments
- Domestic Violence does not stop after separation (Holt, 2013)
 - Abuse on Contact is a continuation DV

The background of the slide is a painting. It depicts two children standing on the edge of a dark, rocky cliff. One child is standing and looking out, while the other is sitting on the ground. To the left of the children is a gnarled, leafless tree. The sky is a pale, hazy yellow. The overall mood is contemplative and somewhat somber.

Each relationship
nurtures a strength
or weakness
within you

-Michael Murdock

HealthyPlace.com

Key Understandings

- Children are *not* resilient they are malleable both for good and for bad (Dan Siegal, 2014).
- Cumulative harm has a profound impact on children and diminishes their sense of safety and wellbeing (Bromfield & Miller, 2007).
- The biggest risk in child development is multiple adverse events- coupled with less than adequate or harmful care giving (Perry, 2009).
- In DV the father who is meant to love and care for you- is also the source of fear and abuse.
- Domestic Violence undermines the relationship of between the child and mother (Humphreys & Stanley, 2006).

Children witness of Domestic Violence Statistics

A child witnessing Domestic Violence does not mean children are passive observers of Domestic Violence

- 37% of children are accidentally hurt during violence
- 26% of children are intentionally hurt during violence
- 49% of mothers were hurt protecting their children
- 47% of perpetrators used the children as pawn to hurt mothers
- 39% of perpetrators hurt mothers as punishment for children's acts
- 23% of perpetrators blamed mothers for the perpetrator's own excessive punishment of children

(Fox & Benson, 2004)

If DV is present in the home - children have witnessed it!

What does child witness of Domestic Violence mean?

Children experience violence in a variety of ways, including viewing it, hearing it being used as a tool of the perpetrator, and experiencing its aftermath (Edleson, 1999)

What is child witness and exposure to DV ?

- 1. Hearing an episode of violence
 - 2. Direct involvement as a witness of physical or sexual assaults
 - 3. Direct involvement or witness /hearing verbal and emotional abuse toward themselves or family member
 - 4. Being used as part of the violence, such as a shield against an abusive parent or individual
 - 5. Intervening in an attempt to prevent violence
 - 6. Experiencing repercussions and aftermath of a violent episode
 - 7. Being forced to watch or participate in abuse
 - 8. Being used as a pawn to convince an adult victim to return home or to a relationship
 - 9. Accidental harm during an attack on an adult victim
 - 10. Being coerced to remain silent about family violence and to maintain the family secret
- (geritz & Edleson, 2004; Groves, 1999; Margolin & Gordis, 2000)
- 11. Being used as a hostage during violent incidents
 - 12. Observing destructive and aggressive behaviour (eg punching walls, throwing things, harming pets)
 - 13. Having to call for help during violent incidents

Domestic Violence and Parenting

- 50% of men who frequently assault their partners directly abuse their children (Straus & Gelles, 1996).
- DV is more likely to occur in couples with children
 - often commencing in pregnancy (Taft, 2002).
- Children are at risk from DV from the very beginning of life
 - Child development is most effected the younger the child is when they experience violence.

We can not
separate DV
from
parenting

Bad Partner but Good Dad?

Myth Busting

Myths that influence perceptions 'The Good father myth'

DV and parenting are directly linked

- It has been argued that men who perpetrate family violence cannot be fully responsible parents, as exposing children to domestic violence is in itself abusive (Brancroft & Silverman, 2002).



Child abuse casts a
shadow the length
of a lifetime.

-Herbert Ward

Identifying children who have witnessed DV

They can suffer a range of
difficulties...

- . Academic
- . Concentration
- . Conduct
- . Social
- . Emotional
- . Behavioural

(Sheeran & Hampton, 1999)

**Domestic Violence may be
behind any of these difficulties**

Identifying children who have witnessed DV

Are trauma symptoms present?

Are difficulties relational?
(DV is interpersonal/ relational trauma)



????

Do difficulties lack explanation?

Are difficulties multi-dimensional?

Children who have long-term exposure to domestic violence have striking similarities to children who survive wars and other conflicts (Malchiodi, 2008)

Symptoms of child witness to Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence creates an atmosphere of fear
the brains of Children who witness DV develop in this constant state of fear

Symptoms ...

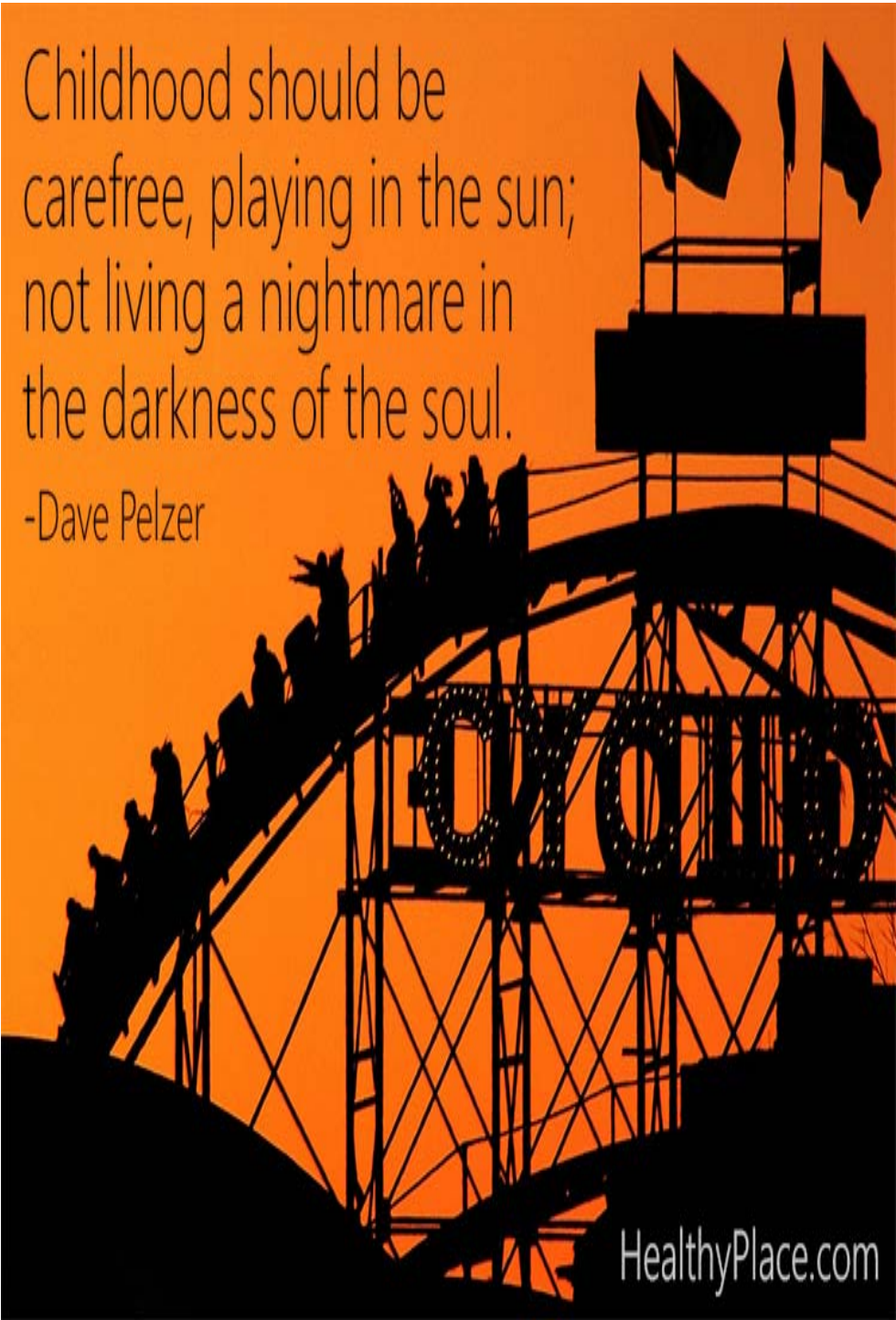
- . Trauma symptoms possibly PTSD
- . Elevated cortisol level (stress hormone)
- . Elevated heart rate
- . Hyper-vigilance and Hypo-vigilance
- . Traumatized attachments (people are harmful not helpful)
- . Low levels of tolerance and mood control
- . Limited awareness of body (e.g. temperature, pain)
- . Not meeting developmental milestones

Identifying children who have witnessed Domestic Violence

What if...

We aimed to rule out DV rather than rule in DV...

- Consider Domestic Violence whenever a child presents with difficulties.
- Considered Domestic Violence in all cases of separation.

The image features a silhouette of a roller coaster against a solid orange background. The roller coaster's track and cars are visible, with several cars positioned at the peak of a drop. The word "JOY" is written in large, stylized letters on the side of the coaster's structure. In the top right corner, there are three small black flags on poles. The text "Childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun; not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul." is written in a white, serif font in the upper left quadrant. Below it, the name "-Dave Pelzer" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, the website "HealthyPlace.com" is written in a white, sans-serif font.

Childhood should be
carefree, playing in the sun;
not living a nightmare in
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-Dave Pelzer

HealthyPlace.com

DV does not end after separation

It becomes Abuse on Contact

- Court ordered contact with a DV perpetrator creates opportunity for the abuse of mother and children to continue
- Fathers continue to use Domestic Violence after separation
 - women and children continue to be abused
- Re-partnering does not stop DV:
Perpetrators may continue to abuse a number of their ex-partners and also their current partner
- DVO's offer little long term protection and offer no immediate protection
 - DVO's don't protect children (DVO's seldom list children)

Perceptions that excuse Domestic Violence

Myth busting: Myths that influence perceptions

- Children are resilient
- Mental health (daddy is sick)
- Drugs and alcohol
- Good father
- Stress

“Alcohol does not a change a person’s fundamental value system. People’s personalities when intoxicated, even though somewhat altered, still bear some relationship to who they are when sober. When you are drunk you may behave in ways that are silly or embarrassing; you might be overly familiar or tactlessly honest, or perhaps careless or forgetful. But do you knock over little old ladies for a laugh? Probably not. Do you sexually assault the clerk at the convenience store? Unlikely. People’s conduct while intoxicated continues to be governed by their core foundation of beliefs and attitudes, even though there is some loosening of the structure. Alcohol encourages people to let loose what they have simmering below the surface.

ABUSERS MAKE CONSCIOUS CHOICES EVEN WHILE INTOXICATED”

— [Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*](#)



Listening to children:

Does our society know how to listen to children?

- Children will say they are afraid, miss dad, will be ambivalent and they want to see him- very few abused children say they don't want to see their parents.
- Children talk about abuse often because they want something to change.



- Children disclose little bits of information over long periods of time
- Children may stop making disclosures because...

‘no one listened’

‘no one stoped the abuse’

‘Talking about it didn't change anything’

When to engage children in Counselling

- Many children who have been exposed to domestic violence would benefit from professional help
- Due to court ordered contact, therapy may not be safe due to ongoing abuse

Questions

- Is counselling safe for the child?
- What do court orders say?
- Do no harm?
- Benefits and risks?



When to engage children in Counselling decision making guide

- **Engagement in Counselling - Decision making guide**

-

- **Separation / Legal involvement**

- - Stage of separation and court process/s. Agreements, parenting orders, court orders
- - DVOs in place, conditions and people named on any DVOs?
- - Current or past Police or Child Protection investigation

-

- **Contact**

- - What does contact look like, division of time, specified arrangements
- - Is this contact a verbal agreement, mediation, court ordered?
- Or perpetrator enforced (they pick up the children when they want to)
- - How much influence do the protective parent and children have on contact?
- - What do handovers look like (e.g. contact centre, McDonald's car park; is violence occurring)

-

- **Family dynamics / abuse**

- - Pre-separation dynamics between the father and child (e.g. favoured or scapegoat)
- - What types of abuse was the child exposed to or did they experience directly?

-

- **General safety of the family**

- - Is the perpetrator still living with the family?
- - Where does the perpetrator live?
- - Age and agency of children

- **Protective factors**

- - What safety plans are in place and are there any immediate dangers?
- - Does the safe parent believe that the child is safe on contact?
- - What other supports are in place? (e.g. physical safety mechanisms, personal support)
- - Supportive relationships for the child (e.g. supportive grandparents or school)

- **Tactics of perpetrator**

- Will they undermine counselling?
- Threaten the child not to talk to the counsellor
- Tell the child that they know what happens in therapy
- Threaten that they will find out what happens in counselling
- Tell the child that counselling is only for crazy people or counselling will make you weak

-

- **What involvement does the perpetrator expect if counselling proceeds?**

- - Will want updates
- - Will not know the children are attending
- - Will want to be involved during counselling
- - Will not consent to counselling
- - Are they afraid of counsellors? They will be likely to stay away



SAY NO
TO
VIOLENCE

THANKYOU



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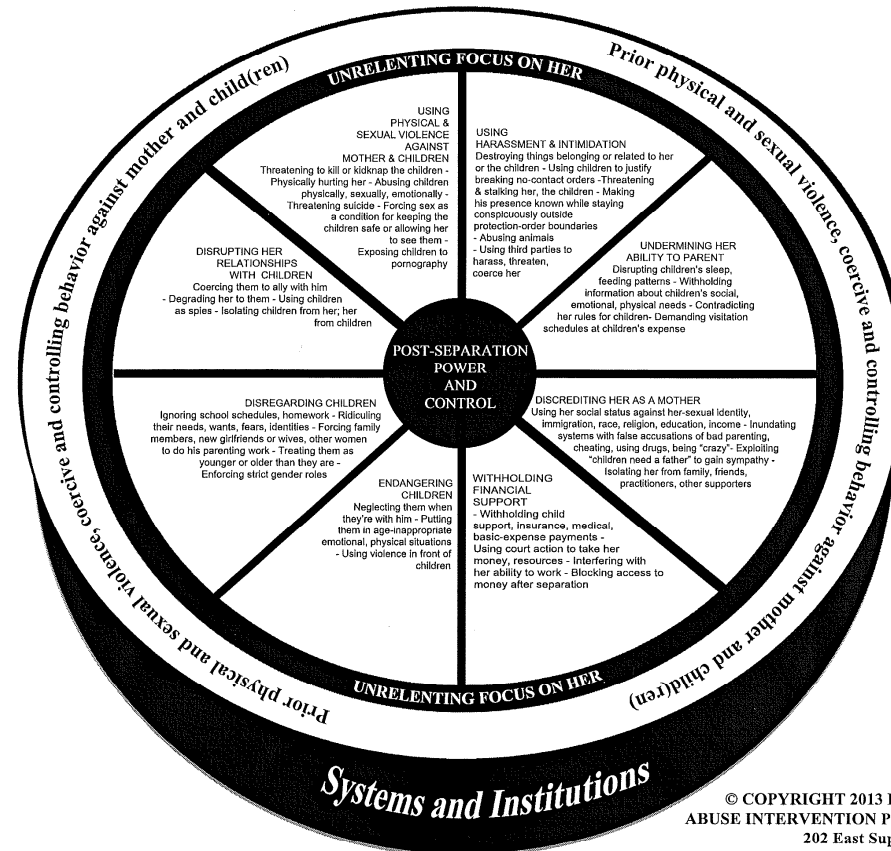
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Post Separation Power and Control Wheel



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