

## The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children & Families

### Activity 4L: The Lisa Recording

**Part 1:** Listen to the audio recording of a child's call to 911 during a domestic violence episode. In the large group, discuss how you think Lisa is affected by the situation.

**Part 2:** For homework you read the following section about domestic violence. Share any questions you noted about the material.

## Domestic Violence Issues

### THE PROBLEM

- Estimates of violence against a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend range from nearly 1 million to 4 million incidents each year.

US Department of Justice, *Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends*, 1998.

- Domestic violence is statistically consistent across racial and ethnic boundaries.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, *Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey*, 1995.

- In 2001, women accounted for 85% of the victims of intimate partner violence and men accounted for approximately 15% of the victims.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *Intimate Partner Violence*, February 2003.

- As many as 95% of domestic violence perpetrators are male.

A Report of the Violence Against Women Research Strategic Planning Workshop sponsored by the National Institute of Justice in cooperation with the US Department of Health and Human Services, 1995.

As a CASA/GAL volunteer, it is important for you to be aware of the possibility that domestic violence exists in the families you encounter. If you suspect domestic violence is occurring, make sure the victim has several opportunities to talk to you alone. The partner who has been battered is often terrified of revealing the truth for fear of further violence. Observe body language carefully. Look for typical characteristics:

- A conspiracy of silence prevails.
- The batterer often seems more truthful, confident, and persuasive than the victim.
- The victim may seem angry and frustrated.
- There is often no police or medical record of the violence.
- There is a recurring cycle of family tension, followed by the batterer's explosion, followed by a period of calm (often filled with apologies and promises) that then begins to build back to tension.

Domestic violence is about control and domination. When a battered partner leaves the family home (or the batterer is forced to leave), the

batterer feels a loss of control formerly exerted. This makes the batterer even more likely to be violent. This increased level of danger makes many victims reluctant to leave, even when the consequence of staying may be the placement of children in foster care.

### DEFINITION

Domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks and economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use to control their current or former intimate partners (e.g., spouses, girlfriends/boyfriends, lovers, etc.). Domestic violence ranges from threats of violence to hitting to severe beating, rape, and even murder. Victims and perpetrators are from all age, racial, socioeconomic, sexual orientation, educational, occupational, geographic, and religious groups. Abuse by men against women is by far the most common form, but domestic violence does occur in same-sex relationships, and some women do abuse men.

### CAUSES

Domestic violence stems from one person's need to dominate and control another. Domestic violence is not caused by illness, genetics, gender, alcohol or other drugs, anger, stress, the victim's behavior, or relationship problems. However, such factors may play a role in the complex web of factors that result in domestic violence.

Domestic violence is learned behavior; it is a choice.

- It is learned through observation, experience, and reinforcement (perpetrators perceive that it works).
- It is learned in the family, in society, and in the media.

### LEGAL SYSTEM RESPONSE

The legal system can respond to domestic violence as a violation of criminal and/or civil law. If the violence has risen to the level of assault, it can be prosecuted criminally. While definitions and procedures differ from one state to another, physical assault is illegal in all states. Law enforcement can press charges in criminal court with the victim as a witness. Victims may also secure a restraining/protective order and, in rare instances, may bring a civil lawsuit.

Whether a case proceeds in civil court or criminal court is dependent on a number of factors, many of which are beyond the victim's control. Availability and willingness of court personnel to act in domestic violence cases vary widely. Unless judges and attorneys, including prosecutors, have been educated about the dynamics of domestic violence, protective laws are inconsistently enforced. The repeated pattern of the abused spouse bringing charges and subsequently dropping them often discourages law enforcement personnel from giving these cases their immediate attention. Thus the victim is revictimized.

The other setting in which the legal system and domestic violence may intersect is a court hearing regarding allegations of child abuse and/or neglect. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you should be aware that a determination of domestic violence within the child's home will

significantly influence placement decisions and what is expected of the nonabusing parent to retain/regain custody. The standard risk assessment conducted by child welfare agencies to evaluate whether a child needs to be removed from his/her home generally includes domestic violence as a factor that negatively relates to the child's safety at home. A child found to be living in a violent home is more likely to be removed. A child abuse or neglect case also may be substantiated against the battered parent for "failure to protect" the child because the victim did not leave the batterer, even if the victim lacked the resources to do so or it was not safe to do so.

## BARRIERS TO LEAVING A VIOLENT RELATIONSHIP

For people who have not experienced domestic violence, it is hard to understand why the victim stays—or returns again and again to reenter the cycle of violence. The primary reason given by victims for staying with their abusers is fear of continued violence and the lack of real options to be safe with their children. *This fear of violence is real; domestic violence usually escalates when victims leave their relationships.* In addition to fear, the lack of shelter, protection, and support creates barriers to leaving. Other barriers include lack of employment and legal assistance; immobilization by psychological or physical trauma; cultural/religious/family values; hope or belief in the perpetrator's promises to change; and the message from others (police, friends, family, counselors, etc.) that the violence is the victim's fault and that she could stop the abuse by simply complying with her abuser's demands. Leaving a violent relationship is often a process that takes place over time, as the victim can access resources she needs. The victim may leave temporarily many times before making a final separation.

Adapted from *Domestic Violence: A National Curriculum for Children's Protective Services*, Anne Ganley and Susan Schechter, Family Violence Prevention Fund, 1996.

## IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Lenore Walker, author of *The Battered Woman*, describes the world of children who grow up in violent homes:

*Children who live in battering relationships experience the most insidious form of child abuse. Whether or not they are physically abused by either parent is less important than the psychological scars they bear from watching their fathers beat their mothers. They learn to become part of a dishonest conspiracy of silence. They learn to lie to prevent inappropriate behavior, and they learn to suspend fulfillment of their needs rather than risk another confrontation. They expend a lot of energy avoiding problems. They live in a world of make-believe.*

Children in families where there is domestic violence are at great risk of becoming victims of abuse themselves. Studies indicate this group is 15 times more likely to experience child abuse than children in nonviolent homes are. Over half of children in families where the mother is battered are also abused. In some cases, children may try to intervene and protect their mothers, getting caught in the middle of the violence. In most cases, however, children are also targets of the violence.

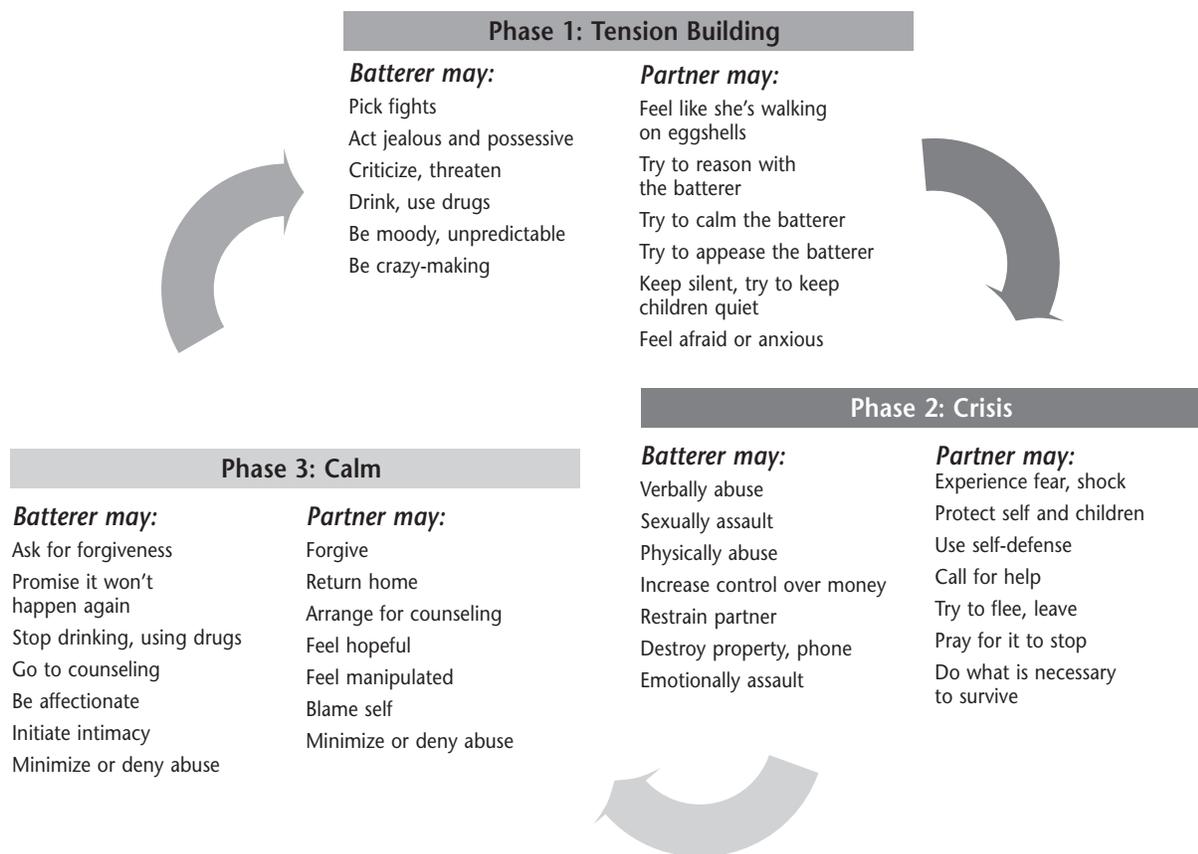
At least 75% of children whose mothers are battered witness the violence. In some cases, the batterer deliberately arranges for the child to witness it. The effect on children's development can be just as severe for those who witness abuse as for those who are abused. Witnessing violence at home is even more harmful than witnessing a fight or shooting in a violent neighborhood. It has the most negative impact when the victim or perpetrator is the child's parent or caregiver.

Statistics from "Children: The Forgotten Victims of Domestic Violence," Janet Chiancone, *ABA Child Law Practice Journal*, July 1997.

## THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

The cycle of violence can happen many times in an abusive relationship. Each stage lasts a different amount of time in the relationship, with the total cycle taking from a few hours to a year or more to complete. Emotional abuse is present in all three stages.

A person does not need to have experienced the following behaviors to be in an abusive relationship. These are some examples of abusive behaviors. There are many more not listed.



Adapted by Eastside Domestic Violence Program (EDVP), Bellevue, Washington, from *The Battered Woman*, Lenore Walker, New York: Harper and Row, 1980. Reprinted with permission from EDVP.

## Activity 4M: Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

Read the following stories told by mothers whose children have witnessed domestic violence. Then read the section “What Can a CASA/GAL Volunteer Do?” As you read, note which suggestions would be helpful to Annette’s children, to Jocelyn’s children, and to Cheryl’s. Discuss your responses in your small groups.

In the large group, share a sample of your responses and answer the following question:

- What else might you recommend for these children and their families?

### *In the Words of Their Mothers*

#### ANNETTE

The kids were carrying a dreadful secret. If they talked, they would lose their dad, and they would be responsible for “breaking up” the family. If they didn’t talk, they felt like they were taking part in my abuse. The kids were torn to pieces by the time we left him. And even that didn’t end it. Every time he had visitation, he’d grill them about me, and he was always trying to make them choose between him and me. He’d coach them on things he wanted them to say to me and then they’d have to decide: “Should I say it or not?” He tried to turn them into weapons in his war on me.

#### JOCELYN

One morning after my husband left for work, my sons were in their room and as I cleaned the kitchen, I realized that they were role-playing one of our fights. My youngest called his brother a “rotten \*#@\*” and I wanted to die. Over the years the imitation continued. The older one wanted to beat up his dad for me and tried on a few occasions. But the younger one walked around the house calling me a fat pig. Eventually he started to hit me. That was too much. It opened my eyes. I wouldn’t tolerate this behavior from an 8-year-old, so why was I tolerating it from my husband? I realized that my kids were growing up with a totally distorted image of what a family is, what a normal mom is, what a normal dad is, what love is. They’d already learned to disrespect women—to disrespect me.

#### CHERYL

One day my husband laid into me because I was delayed at the church and I wasn’t home with dinner on the table when he came in from work. He cursed me out and carried on, and afterwards my son said to me, “I’d be mad too if I came home and my wife wasn’t there.” He was only 9 years old. I hated the way he thought about women and the way he talked to me, and I realized that if we stayed there he was going to wind up thinking and acting just like his father.

From *When Love Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can’t Do Anything Right*, Ann Jones and Susan Schechter, New York: Harper Collins, 1992.

## What Can a CASA/GAL Volunteer Do?

### Be both knowledgeable and concerned about domestic violence.

Children from violent homes are at a higher risk for abuse than other children. According to *A Nation's Shame*, a report compiled by the US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, “[D]omestic violence is the single, major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in the US.”

### Take into account the history and severity of family violence when making any recommendation for placement of a child.

Many professionals in the field of domestic violence believe that you cannot protect the child unless you also protect the primary nurturer/ victim (usually the mother). As part of that perspective, they advocate for placement of the child with the mother regardless of other factors, saying that to do otherwise further victimizes the mother at the hands of the system.

**Determine the best interest of the child.** It may be that, with proper safeguards in place, the victim can make a safe home for the child while the threat from the batterer is reduced by absence, treatment, and/or legal penalties. It is also possible that the victim has shortcomings that prevent her from caring for her family at even a minimally sufficient level. You should assess the situation with a clear understanding of domestic violence dynamics, but in the end, you must make a recommendation based solely on the best interest of the child.

### Seek resources for children from violent homes.

- Children need:
- Positive role models and supportive environments that will help them develop social skills and address feelings about the violence in a constructive manner
  - Help adopting alternative, nonviolent ways to address and resolve conflict (through specialized counseling programs, therapy, domestic violence victim support groups, youth mediation training, and relationships with supportive mentors)

### Recommend help for parents.

- Try to ensure that domestic violence victims are treated fairly by the legal system and not further blamed in child abuse/neglect proceedings.
- Advocate in your community for things like housing, emergency shelters, legal procedures, and court advocates that increase the safety of mothers and children and support the autonomy of the adult victim.
- Encourage parenting classes for battered parents focused on empowering them to become more effective parents and teaching them how to help children cope with the consequences of witnessing domestic violence.
- Advocate for treatment programs for batterers followed by parenting classes focused on how to parent in a noncoercive, nonintrusive manner.

Be alert to any signs that domestic violence has recurred or even that contact between the batterer and the victim is ongoing if that might compromise the child's safety. The foremost issue is the safety of the child.



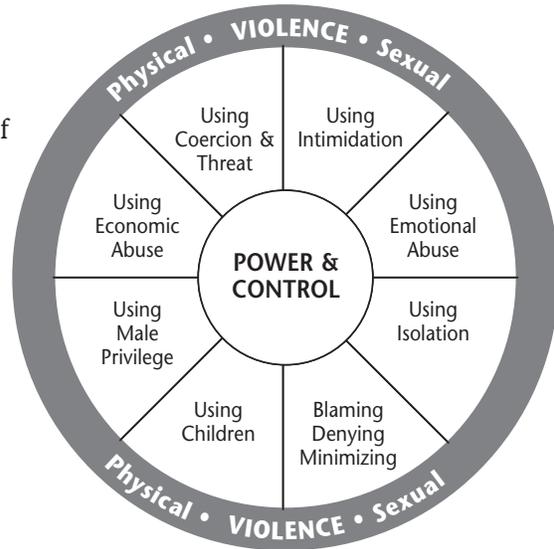
### LEARN MORE!

You can find further information in the article “Domestic Violence: Safety Tips for You & Your Family,” which appears in the Chapter 4 Resource Materials.

# Understanding Domestic Violence

## THE POWER & CONTROL WHEEL

Abusive relationships are based on the mistaken belief that one person has the right to control another. When the actions described in the spokes of this wheel don't work, the person in power moves on to actual physical and sexual violence. The relationship is based on the exercise of power to gain and maintain control. The dignity of both partners is stripped away.



## THE EQUALITY WHEEL

Healthy relationships are based on the belief that two people in a relationship are partners with equal rights to have their needs met and equal responsibility for the success of the partnership. In this equality belief system, violence is not an option because it violates the rights of one partner and jeopardizes the success of the relationship. The dignity of both partners is built up in a relationship based on equality.



Adapted from a model developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota.

## Connection Between Family Violence & Abuse of Pets

- It is estimated that 83% of homes with abused or neglected children also have abused or neglected pets.

B. W. Boat, "Links Among Animal Abuse, Child Abuse and Domestic Violence," *Social Work and the Law*, 2002.

*The abuser may threaten to harm or kill the family pet to ensure the child's silence or compliance. . . . Some children may even allow themselves to be victimized to save their companion animal from being harmed or killed.*

*Many women in abusive homes are hesitant to flee with their children to a place of safety because of prior threats made by the abuser toward companion animals in the home. If a companion animal is*



## LEARN MORE!

A complete copy of this article about animal abuse and child abuse appears in the Chapter 4 Resource Materials.

*left behind in the home, abusers may use the pet as a pawn to force their domestic partners or children to return home. When companion animals can be placed in a safe environment . . . abused family members are more likely to leave the abusive home.*

Allie Phillips, "How the Dynamics Between Animal Abuse and Child Abuse Affect the Forensic Interview Process," *Reasonable Efforts*, Vol. 1, Number 4, 2004.

As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you can observe a family's relationship with their companion animals and ask children whether anyone has threatened to harm their pets. Children are often more willing to talk about a pet than about themselves.

### THE ADVOCATE

*This is not about  
rescue, so as to feel good  
when the child lights up with a  
smile.*

*This is not about  
the comfort of compassion.*

*This is hard work,  
struggling with ripped families  
and children in clouds of pain,  
anger dancing round their heart  
in the turmoil of a world  
made crazy. This is caring,  
yes, but also what is just,  
what should be demanded.*

*It takes love  
and a certain measure of courage,  
and in the simple act  
of person helping person,  
it becomes extraordinary.*

— Mercedes Lawry



## Homework

### POVERTY—THE NUMBERS

*In 2004, \$15,219 was the federal poverty threshold for a three-person family. A three-person family earning less than \$7,610 lived in “extreme poverty” (less than half the federal poverty level). In that year, more than 5.5 million children lived in extreme poverty. These families earned less than \$634 a month, \$146 a week, or \$20 a day to meet all basic needs: food, clothing, shelter, health care, etc.*

From *The State of America’s Children 2005*,  
Children’s Defense Fund, [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org).

Consider the above information about the federal poverty level. Assume you have \$15,000 a year to live on. Using the cost-of-living information the facilitator distributes and the Monthly Budget Worksheet, devise a monthly budget for \$1,250 that includes expenses for housing, utilities, food, clothing, transportation, entertainment, childcare, and medical expenses. Think about what strengths or abilities a person needs in order to live on \$15,000 a year.

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES

**Reminder:** Earlier in training, you selected an agency to research. The facilitator provided a worksheet as a tool to assist you in gathering information about services provided, access to services, etc.

This activity was assigned early in training to allow time for you to gather the information. You will share the materials and information that you gather during the Chapter 9 training session, when community resources will be introduced.

## Monthly Budget Worksheet

EXPENSE	MONTHLY ALLOCATION
Housing	
Utilities	
Food	
Clothing	
Transportation	
Entertainment	
Childcare	
Medical Expenses	
Other	
	<b>\$1,250</b>