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Parenting in the Context of Coercive Control

PROTECTING DELAWARE'S CHILDREN CONFERENCE

MARCH 2015

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Learning Objectives

Recognize potential post-separation parenting and co-parenting implications of coercive controlling abuse

Employ a context-based approach to evaluate parenting and co-parenting by abusive and abused parents and their effects on children

Develop parenting recommendations that account for the parenting and co-parenting implications of coercive controlling abuse

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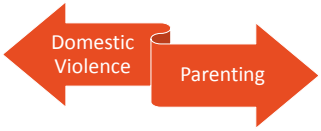
The Problem



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Common Parenting Challenges for Abusers

Physical or Sexual Abuse
Emotional Abuse
Economic Abuse
Using the Child as a Tool
Denying Impact of Abuse
Ignoring Child's Needs
Undermining Parenting
Relentless Harassment

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Physical or Sexual Abuse

Decisions and behaviors that directly harm the child's physical safety, security and wellbeing

Examples:

- Hitting, punching, slapping or pushing the child
- Using excessive or coercive discipline
- Forcing the other parent to abuse the child
- Sexually exploiting or grooming a child
- Using the child in pornography or sex trafficking

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Emotional Abuse

Wide-ranging decisions or behaviors that directly or indirectly harm the child's emotional safety, security, development or wellbeing

Examples:

- Rejecting the child or denigrating child's feelings
- Embarrassing, humiliating or shaming the child
- Creating a chaotic or unpredictable home life
- Fluctuating involvement with the child

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Economic Abuse

Decisions to or behaviors that unnecessarily harm the child's economic stability or security

Examples:

- Refusing to provide available financial support
- Interfering with the other parent's employment
- Denying the other parent access to resources
- Destroying the other parent's credit
- Trading money or support for time with the child

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Using Child as a Tool of Abuse

Decisions to or behaviors that employ the child to manipulate, control, threaten or harm the other parent

Examples:

- Using the child to monitor the other parent
- Pitting the child against the other parent
- Encouraging child to disrespect the other parent
- Threatening to take child from the other parent

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Denying Impact of Abuse

Decisions or behaviors that fail to acknowledge and repair the damage resulting from one's own abuse

Examples:

- Being intolerant of criticism for abuse
- Justifying abuse or blaming others for abuse
- Demanding respect in the face of abuse
- Refusing to apologize for abuse
- Interfering with other parent's treatment efforts

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Ignoring Child's Separate Needs

Beliefs that the child's interests, needs and perceptions are either:

- Indistinguishable from one or the other parent's
- Attributable to the other parent

Examples:

- Elevating one's own needs above the child's needs
- Believing child's needs are identical to one's own
- Believing that the other parent and child are conspiring

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Undermining the Other Parent

Decisions to or behaviors that either:

- Disrupt or harm the child's relationship with the other parent
- Interfere with the other parent's ability to parent or exercise parental authority

Examples:

- Refusing to enforce established rules
- Withholding information about the child
- Disrupting the child's schedule or routine
- Using a new partner to replace the other parent

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Relentless Harassment

Decisions to or behaviors that disrupt the everyday life of, and create persistent instability, insecurity or unpredictability for the child and/or the other parent, *usually under the guise of some seemingly legitimate principle (like safety, equality, fairness, duty, or parental concern*)

Examples:

- Persistently making false reports to authorities
- Engaging in harassing litigation

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Parenting Charts

- Parenting by Abusers
- Child's Experience of Abuse
- Child's Reactions to Abuse
- Impact of Abuse on Child
- Impact on Victim's Parenting
- Impact on Co-Parenting

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Batterers as Parents

Physical Safety	Physical Abuse
Emotional Support	Emotional Abuse
Economic Security	Economic Abuse
Protection from Abuse	Tool of Abuse
Being Accountable	Denying Impact
Separate Needs	Identical Needs
Parental Support	Parental Sabotage
Parental Autonomy	Relentless Harassment

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Common Ways Children Experience Abuse

- Exposure during pregnancy
- Direct intervention
- Direct harm
- Direct participation
- Direct observation
- Indirect observation
- Retreat from abuse
- Witness initial effects
- Experience aftermath

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Exposure During Pregnancy

The developing fetus experiences abuse *in utero*

Examples:

- Kicking or punching a pregnant partner
- Sexually assaulting a pregnant partner
- Attempting to induce a miscarriage
- Depriving a pregnant partner of sleep
- Denying or interfering with prenatal care

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Direct Intervention to Stop Abuse

The child takes affirmative steps to make the abuse end

Examples:

- Pleading with the abuser to stop
- Calling for help
- Pulling the abuser off the victim
- Physically assaulting the abuser
- Attempting to distract the abuser

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Direct Harm from Abuse

The child suffers verbal, physical or emotional harm during the course of abuse

Examples:

- The abuser intentionally injures the child
- The child gets caught in the crossfire
- The abuser blames the child for the abuse
- The abuser punishes the child for intervening
- The abuser tells the child, "you're next"

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Direct Participation in Abuse

The child joins in the abuse of the victim parent, through force, coercion, identification with the abuser, or self-preservation

Examples:

- The abuser uses the child to spy on the victim
- The child joins the abuser in taunting the victim
- The abuser orders the child to abuse the victim
- The abuser rewards the child for participating

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Direct Observation of Abuse

The child is an eyewitness to the abuse

Examples:

- The child watches an assault of one parent by the other
- The child is present to hear pleas for help or screams
- The child witnesses the abuser's degradation of the victim

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Indirect Observation of Abuse

The child hears but does not see the abuse

Examples:

- The child hears threats or screams
- The child hears pleas for help or mercy
- The child hears gunfire
- The child hears breaking furniture or windows
- The child hears blows to the victim's head or o body

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Retreat from Abuse

The child takes cover from abuse

Examples:

- Running away from home
- Locking himself or herself in the closet
- Hiding under the bed
- Tuning out the world or pretending like nothing's wrong
- Misusing alcohol and/or drugs

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Witnessing the Initial Effects of Abuse

The child observes the immediate effects of abuse

Examples:

- Blood, bruises, and other injuries
- Police officers and first responders
- Ambulances and emergency vehicles
- A parent being arrested or restrained
- Intense emotions or traumatic responses

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Experiencing the Aftermath

The child faces life altering change as a result of the abuse

Examples:

- Parental anxiety and/or depression
- Separation from the abuser
- Reorganization of family structures
- Breakdown in trust and/or confidence in parents
- Economic instability

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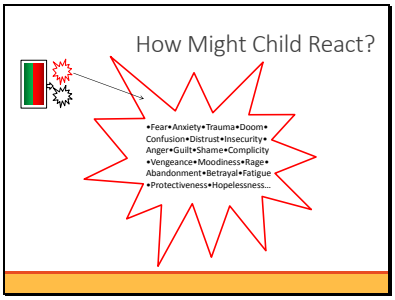

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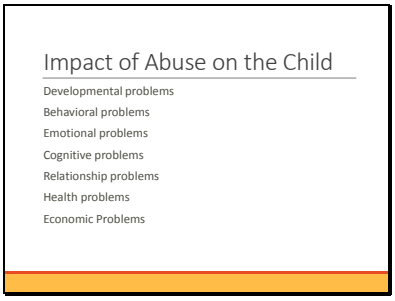

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Developmental Problems

Over- or under-stimulation of neural connections and pathways during infancy that can lead to lifelong challenges

Examples:

- Failure to meet physical or emotional milestones
- Maladaptive stress responses
- Poor sleep and awake functioning
- Emotional detachment or poor engagement

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Behavioral Problems

Outward conduct or actions that create difficulties for the child

Examples:

- Self harm (cutting, attempted suicide, drug use)
- Delinquency or criminal behavior
- Running away or defiance of authority
- Truancy
- Physical aggression and/or bullying

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Emotional Problems

Internal, often unconscious behaviors that cause a child to have difficulty coping

Examples:

- Nightmares or sleep disruptions
- Distraction or inability to focus
- Anxiety or restlessness
- Re-living violence through play
- Fear of being alone or difficulty separating from parents

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Cognitive Problems

Difficulties with thinking, learning, concentrating, or processing information

Examples:

- Poor skill development
- Poor verbal abilities
- Underachievement at school
- Poor or distorted memory
- Distraction or inability to focus

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Relationship Problems

Interpersonal interactions that create difficulties for the child

Examples:

- Inappropriate social responses to others
- Ambivalent attachment with caregivers
- Lack of empathy
- Bullying or peer victimization
- Diminished ability to trust others

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Health Problems

Physical manifestations that affect the child's general wellbeing

Examples:

- Headaches or chronic fatigue
- Asthma
- Intestinal problems
- Eating disorders
- Allergies or autoimmune deficiencies

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Economic Problems

Damage or harm to the child's economic stability or security

Examples:

- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Social isolation
- Increased responsibility to work outside the home
- Increased responsibilities at home

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No Obvious Problems

Some children, particularly adolescents and older children, may cope by re-directing their energies towards outside or adult activities or interests

Examples:

- Academic achievement
- Engagement in extra-curricular activities
- Assumption of parental responsibilities

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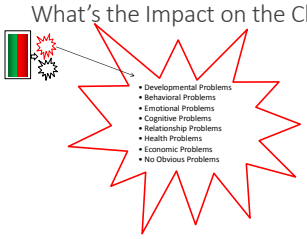
What's the Impact on the Child?



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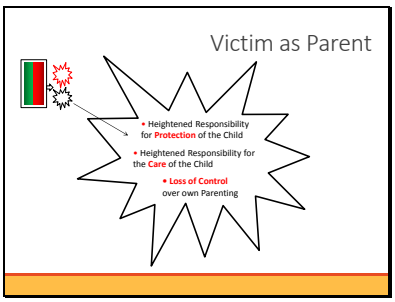

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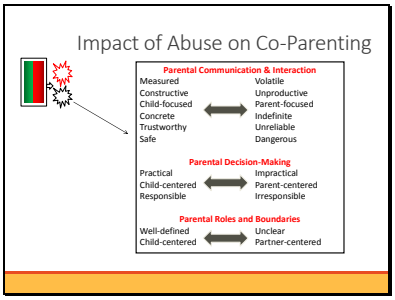

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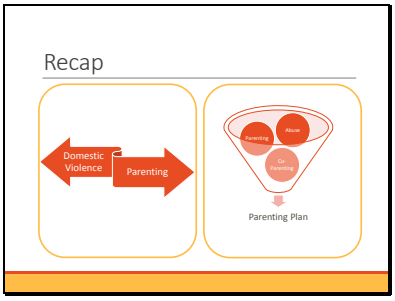

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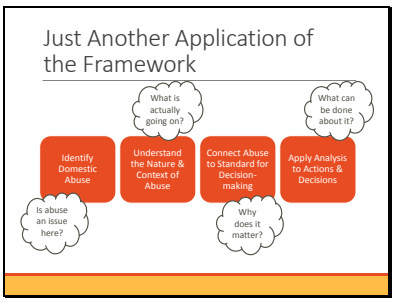

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