Slide 1

Parenting in the Context of Coercive Control

PROTECTING DELAWARE'S CHILDREN CONFERENCE
MARCH 2015

Slide 2

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

Slide 3

The Problem

Domestic Violence ➔ Parenting

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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

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

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 disregarding child's feelings
- Embarrassing, humiliating or shaming the child
- Creating a chaotic or unpredictable home life
- Isolating involvement with the child
**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

**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

**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
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

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

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 consent)

Examples:
- Persistently making false reports to authorities
- Engaging in harassing litigation
Slide 13

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

Slide 14

Batterers as Parents

- Physical Safety
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Support
- Emotional Abuse
- Economic Security
- Economic Abuse
- Protection from Abuse
- Tool of Abuse

- Parental Support
- Parental Autonomy
- Relentless Harassment
- Parental Sabotage

Impact on Child
Impact on Victim's Parenting
Being Accountable
Denying Impact

Slide 15

Common Ways Children Experience Abuse

- Exposure during pregnancy
- Direct intervention
- Direct harm
- Direct participation
- Direct observation
- Retained from abuse
- Witness physical effects
- Experience aftermath
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

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

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”
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

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

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 body
Slide 22

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

Slide 23

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

Slide 24

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
- Renegotiation of family structures
- Breakdown in trust and/or confidence in parents
- Economic instability
Slide 25

Children’s Experience

- Exposure during pregnancy
- Direct intervention in abuse
- Direct harm from abuse
- Participation in abuse
- Direct observation of abuse
- Active avoidance of abuse
- Observation of effects of abuse
- Exposure to aftermath of abuse
- Hear about abuse from others
- Seemingly unaware of abuse

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Slide 26

How Might Child React?

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Trauma
- Doom
- Confusion
- Distrust
- Insecurity
- Anger
- Guilt
- Shame
- Complicity
- Vengeance
- Moodiness
- Rage
- Abandonment
- Betrayal
- Fatigue
- Protectiveness
- Hopelessness

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Slide 27

Impact of Abuse on the Child

- Developmental problems
- Behavioral problems
- Emotional problems
- Cognitive problems
- Relationship problems
- Health problems
- Economic problems
Slide 28

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

Slide 29

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

Slide 30

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 antidepressants
- Re-living violence through play
- Fear of being alone or difficulty separating from parents
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

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

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
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

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

What’s the Impact on the Child?
• Developmental Problems
• Behavioral Problems
• Emotional Problems
• Cognitive Problems
• Relationship Problems
• Health Problems
• Economic Problems
• No Obvious Problems
Slide 37

Victim as Parent
• Heightened Responsibility for Protection of the Child
• Heightened Responsibility for the Care of the Child
• Loss of Control over own Parenting

Slide 38

Impact of Abuse on Co-Parenting
Parental Communication & Interaction
- Measured
- Volatile
- Constructive
- Unproductive
- Child-focused
- Parent-focused
- Concrete
- Indefinite
- Trustworthy
- Unreliable
- Safe
- Dangerous

Parental Decision-Making
- Practical
- Impractical
- Child-centered
- Parent-centered
- Responsible
- Unresponsible

Parental Roles and Boundaries
- Well-defined
- Unclear
- Child-centered
- Partner-centered

Slide 39

Recap
Domestic Violence Parenting
Parenting Plan
Co-Parenting
Parenting Abuse
Just Another Application of the Framework

- Identify Domestic Abuse
- Understand the Nature & Context of Abuse
- Connect Abuse to Standards for Decision-Making
- Apply Analysis to Actions & Decisions

Is abuse an issue here?
What is actually going on?
Why does it matter?
What can be done about it?

Comments and Questions
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