Centralizing Children’s Needs: Child Inclusive Practice in Parenting Disputes in Domestic Violence Cases

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Child Inclusive Practice

Aim
Direct involvement of child & constructive feedback to parents
to enhance understanding of their child’s needs & to
minimize risks

Individual Child Session
Develop understanding of:
- Child’s experience of the family separation, including
  exposure to conflict or violence
- Child’s development, coping capacity & adjustment
- Family relationship dynamics
- Child’s support network
- Child’s perspectives & wishes
CHILDREN REFLECT THE WORLD IN WHICH THEY ARE RAISED

(Perry & Pollard 1998, P.35)
Adverse Effects on Children from Exposure to DV

Possible Long & Short Term Consequences:

- Serious physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioral, developmental, emotional & relational problems
- Poor life satisfaction, self esteem & future relationships
- Disrupted tasks of childhood
Adverse Effects on Children from Exposure to DV

*There is no greater hell than to be a prisoner of fear*

(Beingolino quoting Ben Johnson, 2010, p. 258).
Children’s Exposure to Abuse, Distress, Trauma

**Impact:** Hyper-reactive and reflexive firing of threat-related neural systems

**Results:** formation of non-resourceful dominant neural pathways & corresponding neural deficits
- Dominant sensory and threat response pathways
- Deficits in anticipatory & regulatory pathways for modulation of emotion, autonomic functions, & behaviors

(Sinnamon, 2012)
Physiology of Fear: Adrenal Alarm

EEG: Negative Emotion

Fight/Flight/Freeze Response:

- Energy directed for protection
- Suppresses immune system
Reasons to Include Children

Child inclusive research on children exposed to domestic violence show children:

- Want to be included in discussing future family relationships
- Coping capacity enhanced
- Feel recognized, heard, & understood
- Overcome fear of disclosure
- Build hope for their future
The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children

- Protecting children is everyone’s responsibility
- Emphasis on early intervention and prevention in assisting children & families
- Contact with all services offers an opportunity for innovative cross sector collaborative practice
Some Inherent Challenges for Practitioners

Many inborn challenges in CIP in cases where domestic violence is an issue:

- Each case is unique
- Risk identification and management – risk is never static
- Families often have multiple and complex needs
Some Inherent Challenges for Practitioners

- Screen for appropriateness for CIP:
  - Parents’ cognitive capacity & emotional functioning
  - Relational dynamics – potency & pattern of violence
- Manage power imbalance & complex needs
- Prepare parents to appropriately invite child
- Child session:
  - Engage anxious child & explore relevant sensitive information
  - Aware of & manage signs of trauma
  - Provide constructive & safe feedback to parents that addresses child’s needs
  - Motivate parents to follow up with recommended referrals for self or child
What children experience effects how they mature and function as adults (Perry 2000)

Change is possible. Let’s collaborate to develop child inclusive best practice to address each vulnerable child’s needs.