Safe from the Start

CHILD AWARE CONFERENCE April 2013

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www.salvationarmy.org.au/safefromthestart
Safe from the Start

• Project Background
• States of Mind Research
• Aims & Objectives (do no harm)
• Partnerships: Universities/DV services, Brainwave Trust

Outcomes
• Evidence based, early intervention and collaborative approach
• Training Program
• Resource Kit
Overview of resources and current research

- National training program – Child Aware -2012 and evaluation UTAS
- Set up website: www.salvationarmy.org.au/safefromthestart
- Counselling/Training DVD
- Indigenous SFTS (Tas) - current
- Culturally & Linguistically Diverse + Phoenix Centre – current project
- International UK – the Netherlands
- Tas Aboriginal children’s books
You can make a difference to children who have been exposed to family violence!

What is Domestic Violence?
Definition?

- A pattern of coercive behaviour used to maintain control - it is a learned behaviour
- Combination of physical, emotional, sexual spiritual or financial abuse
- A continuum of behaviour rather than a stand alone and isolated event
- Can affect every area of a victims life
- Never justified by the behaviour of the victim
- Always the responsibility of the perpetrator
- Found across all demographics
- Not healthy for children who live with it

Training

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• 18th Century European laws gave a man the right to beat wife with impunity. Everything was his property.

• 19th Century laws regulated the nature and severity of punishment

• Later believed to only affect a small proportion of certain classes

• 1960’s - DV was recognised as public concern

• 1970’s - perpetrators seen to be pathological and subsequent evolution of feminist refuge movement
Indigenous Context

- Violence in the Indigenous population is a multi-dimensional problem that manifests itself in a range of health and related social outcomes.

- We need to recognise the damaging effects imposed by colonisation and dispossession on the relationships Indigenous people have held with their kin, their lands and their communities.

- The high rates of domestic and family violence in Indigenous communities must be seen in the context of colonisation, disadvantage, oppression and marginalisation.
One in three Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15

In 2005, over 350,000 women experienced physical violence

25% of assaults Australia-wide related to violence in the family

Indigenous women and girls are 35 times more likely to be hospitalized due to family violence related assaults than other Australian women and girls

Majority of victims are under 45

77% of victims were female compared to 23% male

73% don’t tell police

36% of women said children had witnessed the violence

86% of children are in the same, or an adjoining, room when a domestic violence incident occurs (Abrahams, 1994)

80% of women had not sought help from services at all

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Duluth Wheel

Nonviolence

Negotiation and Fairness
Seeking mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict • accepting change • being willing to compromise.

Economic Partnership
Making money decisions together • making sure both partners benefit from financial arrangements.

Shared Responsibility
Mutually agreeing on a fair distribution of work • making family decisions together.

Responsible Parenting
Sharing parental responsibilities • being a positive non-violent role model for the children.

Non-threatening Behavior
Talking and acting so that she feels safe and comfortable expressing herself and doing things.

Respect
Listening to her non-judgmentally • being emotionally affirming and understanding • valuing opinions.

Trust and Support
Supporting her goals in life • respecting her right to her own feelings, friends, activities and opinions.

Honesty and Accountability
Accepting responsibility for self • acknowledging past use of violence • admitting being wrong • communicating openly and truthfully.

Equality
Children’s experience of domestic violence and/or family violence.
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Particular impacts on 0-6 years

Babies

Can’t understand but hear the noise and feel the tension

Get stressed at loud noises such as banging and yelling (both sudden and predictable)

Sense a distracted, tense, unhappy mother and abusive father or father figure

May be injured physically i.e. Shaken baby syndrome

May suffer physical maltreatment, compromised nutrition and health

May be scared to explore and play

May become upset if not getting needs met when they want them met
Particular impacts on 0-6 years

Pre-schoolers
What they experience is more real than what you tell them
May worry or have nightmares about being hurt themselves
May believe they caused the fight
Hope that a TV character will come and save them
May tune out by focussing hard on something else
May worry about being arrested or taken away
May worry that Mum will leave
May try and make it stop by, for example, yelling at the abuser
Feelings experienced by Children exposed to adult violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fear and anxiety</th>
<th>Confusion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Shame</td>
<td>• Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loneliness / isolation</td>
<td>• Insecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of loss</td>
<td>• Guilt</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Poor self concept</td>
<td>• Conflicting loyalties</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Betrayal</td>
<td>• Responsible for the violence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Children's coping mechanisms

- Hide
- Keep quiet
- Aim to please the abuser
- Watches the abuser to anticipate violence
- Watch TV or play computer games as an escape
- Build walls around themselves and their feelings as a protection
- Take on adult responsibilities at an early age
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Brain Development
Brain Formation

- The brain starts forming prenatally - Before birth, the brain produces trillions more neurons and synapses” (connections between the brain cells) than it needs.

- As the neurons mature, more and more synapses are made.

- At birth, the number of synapses per neuron is 2,500; by age two or three it is about 15,000 per neuron.

- A newborn's brain is about 25 percent of its approximate adult weight.

- By age 3, it has grown dramatically by producing billions of cells and hundreds of trillions of connections, or synapses, between these cells.
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Adult - Child Interaction

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Poor caregiver – infant interactions

- Maternal depression
- Substance abuse
- Family violence
- Physical, sexual or verbal abuse

All these damage deep structures in the brain that affect the quality of future social interactions
3-Year-Old Children

Normal

Extreme Neglect

©1997 Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D., ChildTrauma Academy
Brain Wiring

• A child’s experiences influences the wiring of his/her brain and the connection in the nervous system.

• Loving interactions with caring adults strongly stimulate a child’s brain, causing synapses to grow and existing connections to get stronger. Connections that are used become permanent.

• If a child receives little stimulation early on, the synapses will not develop, and the brain will make fewer connections.
**Myths & Facts**

- **Myth** At birth the brain is fully developed, just like one's heart or stomach.
- **Fact** - Most of the brain's cells are formed before birth, but most of the connections among cells are made during infancy and early childhood.
- **Myth** The brain's development depends entirely on the genes with which you are born.
- **Fact** - Early experience and interaction with the environment are most critical in a child's brain development.
- **Myth** A toddler's brain is less active than the brain of a college student.
- **Fact** - A 3-year-old toddler's brain is twice as active as an adult's brain.
As a child enters school age, neural wiring affects:

- A child’s ability to focus
- The speed at which a child can process and retain information
- The child’s ability to recognise patterns
- How the child absorbs new information
- How a child understands what others are thinking or feeling
- The ability to grasp and conform to the norms of classroom behaviour.
The cognitive and emotional effects of domestic violence and/or family violence on children

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Cognitive Effects

- Brain development is impaired
- Affects ability to learn and function at school
- Suffer from poor concentration
- Fear and instability may inhibit sense of exploration and play
- Child is confused by conflicting messages
- Child may escape into fantasy world
- May tune out noise by concentrating on something else
Emotional Effects

• Babies use disassociation and hyper vigilance as defences in first year of life and both are likely to be used in response to trauma

• Childs perception of their own safety is closely linked to the perceived safety of their caregiver - the child is psychologically robbed of both parents – ‘One is a terrifying aggressor, the other a terrified victim’

• Child develops negative core beliefs about themselves and may experience depression, anxiety, insecurity and low self esteem

• A child under 11 is more likely to develop symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder after exposure to DV.

• Child develops warped emotional responses – i.e. uses inappropriate emotion to deal with situations
Training Potential impacts of DV on infants and toddlers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT IN INFANTS AND TODDLERS</th>
<th>POTENTIAL IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take in information from the world around them through five senses</td>
<td>Loud noises, vivid visual images associated with violence can be distressing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Form secure attachments</td>
<td>Parents may not consistently respond to infant’s needs, negatively affecting the parent-child bond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Become more active explorers of their world through play</td>
<td>Fear and instability may inhibit exploration and play; imitation in play may be related to witnessed aggression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn about social interaction and relationships from what they hear and observe in their families</td>
<td>Learn about aggression in observed interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn how to express angry feelings and other emotions in appropriate ways</td>
<td>Learn unhealthy ways to express anger and other emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences and observations most important in forming meaning to their world</td>
<td>Confused by conflicting messages (e.g., what I see v. what I am told)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome is more important that the process</td>
<td>May be distressed by perceived unfairness, father’s arrest and trip to refuge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Think in ego-centric ways – it’s all about me!</td>
<td>May attribute violence to something they did</td>
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<tr>
<td>Form ideas about gender roles based on social messages</td>
<td>Learn gender roles associated with violence and victimisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing physical independence (e.g. dressing self)</td>
<td>Instability may inhibit independence; may see regressive behaviours</td>
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A child who lives with violence is forever changed, but not forever ‘damaged’ – there is a lot we can do to improve their future prospects.

Baker & Cunningham
SOME GOOD NEWS!

• Living with violence as a child is not a ‘life sentence’ for a bad future

• Most psychological problems in children will diminish once the violence stops

• Children are resilient and can thrive

• Not all children need professional treatment to overcome the effects of violence: there is a lot a mother can do to help her children
SOME GOOD NEWS

• Early brain development research reinforces an important message about children - from birth on, children are ready and eager to learn and grow.

• When children have less-than-optimal experiences early in life, there is hope for the future. Understanding how brain development is affected by negative experiences gives us the opportunity to intervene and to prevent future difficulties.

• All caregivers need to understand the importance of the early years and to apply appropriate methods for stimulating children's learning and growth.
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Play Therapy
Play Therapy

- Started in 1920’s by Anna Freud with child patients
- Has dual goals – symptom relief and removing obstacles to the child’s development
- The child can express their feelings in fantasy and then eventually move to a state of discomfort
- Play therapy consists of a combination of verbal as well as behavioural interactions
- Don’t have too many options at once or you risk over-stimulating the child
- Shouldn’t go too far beyond the metaphor or game

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Play Therapy

The primary purposes of play therapy are:

1. To help troubled children to express and obtain relief from their conflicts and anxieties symbolically through play in the context of a therapeutic relationship.

2. To facilitate children’s future growth and development.
Play therapy
importance of play

• An activity done just for the fun of it serves crucial functions for the young
  – Expands intelligence
  – Is a testing ground for challenges children will face
  – Stimulates the imagination and encourages creative problem solving
  – Helps develop confidence, self-esteem, a sense of strengths and weaknesses, and a positive attitude
  – Is a huge factor in brain and muscle development
  – Some children use play to master fear-provoking pasts and anticipated futures
‘Play is the royal road to the child’s conscious and unconscious world, if we want to understand their inner world and help them with it we must learn to walk this road’

• Nancy Boyd Webb
Adults role in play therapy

- Participate
- Play along with the child
- Interpret – making connections between the child’s symbolic play and the child’s own life
- Ask child to describe the play activity
- Suggest motives or feelings in the context or metaphor of play
- Set limits when the need arises
- Do more than just distract with a toy
Range of play therapy methods

Art

- Drawing – person, family, house, tree

- Modelling clay – clay needs pounding, poking, squeezing, cutting and squishing

- Suggested art supplies – crayons, paper of different colours, scissors, glue, paste, sticky tape, finger paints, magazines for cutting out, play-doh with rolling pins, cookie cutters etc

Storytelling – helps child consider alternative solutions to problem situation.
Puppet play

Use of puppets rests on assumptions that child identifies with the puppet, and projects his or her feelings onto the play figure.

Allows the child to talk about feelings with no acknowledgment that the child has similar feelings.

Use hand puppets, finger puppets, fantasy puppets etc.

Doll Play – often child names family of dolls same as their own family.

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Working with infants

- An infant doesn’t need a designated program to have a therapeutic experience

- Relationship experience is a big healer

- The more good experiences a baby has in a relationship the more chance there is for connections to be made - emotionally and neurologically

- Quote “when neurons fire together they wire together and survive together”

- Offer something even if it is only a single encounter
Working with Mum

- The goal for intervention is to heighten the Mother’s capacity to perceive and respond to the child’s needs separately from their own.

- It is important to emphasise that the focus of responsibility for the violence does not rest with the child.

- The child needs their mother to reassure them that they be taken care of and protected, that nothing that happened was their fault and they are loved forever and unconditionally.

- Help mothers to understand that good parenting is the most important role we play in life, it is a learned behaviour and is the best way to promote healing and health in children who lived with violence.
Positive messages for mothers

- There are no perfect mothers
- Single parents can be good parents too
- Mothers can be good role models for boys
- Learning to be a parent is a life-long process
- Stopping exposure to violence was the best thing they could do for their children
- People are there to help
- They can model and teach non-violent problem solving, attitudes, and behaviour
- Mothers can change the lives of their children starting today.
Safe from the Start Kit

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Thanks to Fahcsia for the CHILD AWARE GRANT in 2012!!

And everyone here for your interest.!!

www.salvationarmy.org.au/safefromthestart