

Family Violence Prevention Fund

Fathering After Violence: The Reparative Framework

Based on the qualitative research conducted at the beginning of the Fathering After Violence initiative, we developed a theoretical framework to conceptualize the process of healing between children and their fathers who have renounced violence. This model is a work-in-progress based primarily on in-depth interviews with six men who had stopped their violence and had started to heal their relationships with their children. After analyzing the information from the interviews, we discovered a series of similar actions taken by each of the men in question. These findings helped us conceptualize the steps needed to be taken in BIPs to begin supporting the healing process between men and the children in their lives. We named this the "Reparative Framework" and described the following actions in the project's implementation guide:

1. Changing abusive behavior. It is imperative that fathers stop all kinds of abuse immediately. This is one of the fundamental goals of batterer intervention and, of course, a prerequisite to starting any reparation.
2. Modeling constructive behavior. Children learn by example. Fathers need to know that as they stop modeling destructive behaviors, they have to make a concerted effort to model positive ones. A key teaching concept in this project is that a father cannot be a good model for their children if he is abusive, disrespectful or hateful to their mother.
3. Stopping denial, blaming and justification. Most batterer intervention works towards having men take full responsibility for their abusive behavior. In the context of this framework, programs need to teach fathers about the negative effects that denial, blaming and justification can have on children.
4. Accepting all consequences for one's behavior. Violence prevention activists often think of consequences primarily from the criminal justice system perspective. Fathers involved in a reparation process need to understand that facing the consequences of their behavior may also include accepting rejection and the loss of trust, love and even contact with their children.
5. Acknowledging damage. It is important that fathers realize the amount of damage they have inflicted and let their children know that they understand specifically how they have hurt them.
6. Supporting and respecting the mother's parenting. Men who are abusive often continue to undermine the authority of the other parent. Fathers need to restore the sense of respect for the mother's authority and decision making and fully support her parenting, especially if the father finds himself in a secondary parenting role.
7. Listening and validating. Fathers need to prepare and be willing to receive anger, hurt, sadness, fear and rejection from their children. It is essential that they understand that this is part of the healing process and not a way for the children to manipulate the situation.
8. Not forcing the process nor trying to "turn the page". Except for the actions that involve personal change work, every action in this framework has to take place on the children's own terms and timing. Fathers have to learn how to be patient, not try to push healing or contact with their children, and should be open to talking about the past as many times as their children need to do it.