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ADDRESSING THE COMPLEXITIES OF FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

When young people seek help from an emergency shelter funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), nearly 9 times out of 10 they cite "family dynamics" among the reasons they left home.

The term can indicate many kinds of conflict—arguing with parents or a step parent, not getting along with a sibling—but for many young people it reflects an atmosphere of violence and abuse at home.

In fact, data collected by FYSB shows that a quarter or more of youth served by the Bureau's Basic Center and Transitional Living Programs report abuse and neglect at home.

And research on street youth suggests that experiencing abuse at home increases the likelihood of being mistreated or becoming violent on the street.

As the Federal agency that administers both runaway and homeless youth programs and family violence prevention and services programs, FYSB believes it is important for grantees and youth workers to understand the complexities of both family and relationship violence—especially as they relate to runaway and homeless youth.

For instance, while basic center programs aim to reunify families, they have to tread carefully when abuse enters the equation. Ensuring that a youth can safely return home can become especially difficult if someone in the household has verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually abused the young person or another person in the home. Sending a young person back into a violent, abusive environment can be dangerous, youth workers say.

Another complication arises when a young victim of family or street violence has also abused others.

"In regular services, there are a perpetrator and a victim," says Chic Dabby, director of the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence at the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum. "In [runaway and homeless youth], the perpetrator is also a victim in some other context." For instance, a young person abused at home or sexually assaulted on the street might perpetuate the cycle of violence by abusing siblings or peers.

Youth workers have also found that runaway and homeless youth experience intimate partner violence—in which a boyfriend, girlfriend, or romantic partner physically, verbally, or emotionally abuses a young person—in different ways than their peers with stable homes do. Living on the street, young people are more likely to encounter violent situations and less likely to have people they can rely on to help them get out of those situations.

"Runaway and homeless youth have little or no support system," says Lauren Cosetti, a case manager at Sand Castles Runaway and Homeless Youth Services in Ocean City, Maryland. These young people may find it hard to leave an abusive relationship, she says, because they feel the abuser is the only person they can depend on.

At the same time, adolescent dating violence shares many of the same characteristics as adult relationship violence, says Dawn Schatz, who directs youth development programs at Child, Inc., in Wilmington, Delaware. Schatz says that, like adult abusers, many young people who commit violence are often seeking to exert control because they feel like their lives are out of control.

For that reason, FYSB has sought to promote collaboration between grantees in the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. In 2004, 13 domestic violence prevention programs partnered with runaway and homeless youth providers to conduct projects that ran through early 2006. FYSB funded an additional nine Domestic Violence/Runaway and Homeless Youth grantees in 2005, and the Bureau will announce new awards this year.

One project, a collaboration between the Mid-Atlantic Network of Youth & Family Services, called MANY, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, in Harrisburg, conducted a survey of workers at 54 youth-serving agencies and domestic violence services providers. More than 50 percent of runaway and homeless youth providers surveyed felt "extremely comfortable" addressing intimate partner violence with youth; the remainder reported feeling "rather" comfortable discussing the issue with youth. Still, nearly 40 percent said that in routine screening, they do not ask youth if they have been abused by a girlfriend or boyfriend.

"Most runaway and homeless youth providers screen for [family violence] but not necessarily partner violence," says Megan Klein Blondin, executive director of MANY. "The intake form asks what's going on at home, but youth won't necessarily relate that to their boyfriend or girlfriend or someone they've been intimate with."

The survey also found that while all runaway and homeless youth providers said they were familiar with local domestic violence providers, 30 percent of domestic violence service

"Our family violence and runaway and homeless youth providers are natural allies." — Curtis Porter, FYSB

providers did not know who provides runaway and homeless youth services in their communities. Klein Blondin adds that most runaway and homeless youth providers know how to get in touch with a domestic violence organization but not with groups dealing specifically with dating violence.

As a result of the survey, the two partner organizations have begun working to create protocols for identifying dating violence among runaway and homeless youth, and they also intend to increase connections between youth service providers and domestic violence providers in Pennsylvania.

"Our family violence and runaway and homeless providers are natural allies," says Curtis Porter, acting associate commissioner of FYSB. Both separately and together, the Bureau's programs are creating a safety net for youth at risk of abuse and mistreatment. ■

DIFFICULT REUNIONS: WORKING WITH FAMILIES TO OVERCOME ABUSE

Most of the time 14-year-old Donovan [not his real name] would only see his father if he managed to stay up late. Almost every night his father, a single parent, would drink at the casino where he worked, stumble home after midnight, and sleep until late in the afternoon. He would go back to work before Donovan came home from school and do it all over again. Some days his father wouldn't make it to work. He would take out his frustrations on Donovan, punching him for the slightest offenses.

Brian Nelson, director of Covenant House, a Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) grantee in Atlantic City, New Jersey, comes in contact daily with young people like Donovan who run away and end up living under the boardwalk because their parents abuse or neglect them. Indeed, 68 percent of Covenant House clients report some type of childhood physical abuse.

Nationwide, a quarter or more of youth served by FYSB's Basic Center and Transitional Living Programs report abuse and neglect at home.

Staff in federally funded youth shelters deal with the real life people behind these statistics daily. Required to reunify youth with their families whenever possible, staff members must determine what circumstances would allow for a child who has been abused to safely return home. Making that call can be one of the hardest decisions a youth worker or social services worker has to make.

According to data from FYSB's Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System, or RHYMIS, youth from abusive households reunify with their families less often than do their peers from nonviolent homes. These young people may be safer in transitional living programs or may be candidates for emancipation.

Still, studies in social work show that youth who return to their families are better off than those who leave shelters for other living arrangements. For instance, they do better in school, both academically and socially.

Unveiling the Truth

Whether or not a child can return home varies depending on the family dynamics. While some parents may simply require intensive counseling, parenting classes, or help with finding employment, others may have more entrenched problems. There may be prostitution in the home or emotional, sexual, or extreme physical abuse.

Before youth workers can decide whether the young person should be reunited with his or her family, they have to determine whether the young person has been abused.

When the physical evidence of abuse is obvious, most States require youth workers to call social

services within 24 to 48 hours. The young person is not allowed to go home until social services personnel complete their investigation. If the abuse is substantiated, the child is taken into custody of child protective services.

Youth workers at several FYSB grantees say that when abuse isn't evident, an outreach team from the basic center and a social worker will often visit the young person's home to see if it's possible to return the child home. Red flags include drugs or other illegal activities.

Then the young person receives a comprehensive assessment that may include a suicide assessment, and counselors talk to the youth to determine if a mediation session with the parents is feasible. Youth workers often need time to build a rapport with the young person.

"When we have kids come in, violence in the home is not the first thing they want to talk about," Nelson says. "They are homeless. They haven't eaten. They haven't taken a shower. Maybe a week or two later they may want to talk about what happens in the home."

Nelson says if evidence of abuse arises with young people 18 or older, he and his Covenant House colleagues let youth determine if their parents will be called. He says that it is usually not safe for parents from a violent household to come in for a mediation session with the child.

"But it's really a case by case kind of thing," he says.

Counseling With Caution

In less extreme cases of neglect, or if single parents who are overburdened are simply lashing out at children, counseling may be possible, if the abused youth is willing. If parents show a sincere interest in seeking treatment, youth workers set up a mediation session with the child and the parents. A social worker will lead the counseling sessions to see what areas have contributed to violence in the home and discuss where parents can seek additional support.

"The chance of abuse is lessened each time parents are offered some support," says Nelson.

But there are risks involved in inviting a suspected abuser to counseling sessions.

"It's always good to err on the side of caution and always believe the victim, because it could potentially be a deadly situation," says Pat Ferraioli, the director of education for the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. "People who are abusers are very skilled at having a rational, calm face."

"Even if they acknowledge that the behavior is inappropriate, many abusers feel they are entitled to do what they are doing," she adds.

Because of the potential for physical danger to both the young person and the youth worker, basic center programs try to get all of the facts from young victims, as well as other members of the household who may have been abused, before reaching out to the abuser.

"The chance of abuse is lessened each time parents are offered some support."
— Brian Nelson, Covenant House

Getting Families To Open Up

At Sasha Bruce Youthwork, a FYSB grantee in Washington, DC, youth workers use innovative ways to get families to open up about complicated issues at home.

Lachelle Richmond, cocoordinator of Sasha Bruce House, the organization's basic center, says the most effective tool for supporting youth is having them talk in groups. "That's when they are the most comfortable with disclosing what's going on. And they help and support each other."

Staff then reach out to the families and try to create a nonthreatening atmosphere where everyone can talk.

"We do retreats with our young people and our families, and in those retreats we do address needs—whether it's domestic violence, dating violence, parenting skills," says George Johnson, program director of Sasha Bruce. "We go overnight and work with the families in a different environment hopefully to instill in them the tools they need to return home."

"Many times, especially the mothers want to talk with someone about what's going on," says Johnson.

Sasha Bruce offers parent support groups where parents can talk about their frustrations with child rearing, or how they are overwhelmed as a single parent. They can share their experiences with other parents, while a facilitator helps to guide the discussion. They limit the groups to just four families to keep conversations intimate.

Facilitators, in the meantime, can use the sessions to assess whether a child should be returned home.

"If a parent comes to a session and says, 'I know what's going on and it's horrible and I need help,' that's one thing," says Johnson. "If we have a family session where we have parents who become enraged and say, 'It's absolutely not true and this kid can rot in hell,' then they are not going home."

A Different Way for Families To Interact

Deborah Shore, executive director at Sasha Bruce, says that their approach to counseling is to help families come to a point where their learned dysfunctional behavior changes to something more positive.

"We try to develop a different way for families to interact," says Shore. "We might have them create opportunities for anyone to call a family meeting when things get hectic. We are trying to get them to express themselves and listen, rather than resorting to physical means to discipline."

At Sasha Bruce, followup services can also focus exclusively on the young person. If the young person is part of the after school program located at the center, counselors may reach out to the young person there.

At Covenant House in Atlantic City, families may be referred to community-based services like anger management classes, drug rehabilitation, or parenting classes after they complete counseling at the facility. Or they may resume aftercare services with a licensed clinical onsite counselor.

In Donovan's case, Covenant House reunified him with his father after they underwent extensive individual, group, and family counseling. His father also completed a 6-month rehabilitation program. Covenant House continued weekly counseling sessions with the family after they reunited.

Shore says that they continue to follow up with families at Sasha Bruce for 6 to 8 months after they have completed counseling. Counselors will go into the homes of the families and do two or three family sessions per week to reinforce new behaviors.

"When we design the treatment plan, we present it to the family and the young person and get their input," says Shore. "Because ultimately, we want them to be able to solve their own problems." ■

FAMILY VIOLENCE ENCOMPASSES WIDE SPECTRUM OF EXPERIENCES

"Family violence" can include everything from cursing and verbal and emotional abuse to hitting and slapping to more extreme forms of physical and sexual abuse. The term can also refer to physical neglect: a young person left alone in an apartment for days or denied medical care by parents or caregivers.

Experts define the word "family" broadly in this usage. The perpetrator may not necessarily share a biological bond with the young person. Rather, he or she might be someone who lives in the same household with the youth, has a close, familial or dating relationship with him or her, or takes care of the young person.

"Youth workers have to be alert to the diversity of the exposures, and not have a stereotype that family violence is just one thing," says David Finkelhor, professor of soci-

ology and director of several research centers at the University of New Hampshire. For instance, he says, young people might have witnessed violence or emotional abuse between adults or among siblings, or they may have experienced it themselves.

Victimized youth may also perpetuate a cycle of violence. "Even when youth have been victims or witnesses, they may also be perpetrators," Finkelhor says.

Among youth served by runaway and homeless youth programs funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), emotional abuse may be much more common than the physical or sexual kind, says Stan Chappell, FYSB's director of research and evaluation. Adam Kleinmeulman's experience backs that up.

Kleinmeulman is a crisis counselor and therapist at Child, Inc., a FYSB grantee in Wilmington, Delaware. "A lot of times it's not so much physical, but it's a combination of emotional with a little bit of physical," he says, describing many of his clients as "emotionally tired." As examples of emotional abuse, he cites cursing, making degrading remarks, and punishing in passive aggressive ways.

Signs of an Abusive Household

The effects of family violence can be indistinguishable from the markers of mental health issues such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder and of common behavioral problems. Every young person reacts differently, experts say. Some display no symptoms at all.

"They may be very upset or act like it's no big deal," Finkelhor says. "They may be ashamed or up front."

"It's not like a cookie cutter thing," says Donna Leffew, clinical director at the Life Crisis Center, a domestic violence shelter in Salisbury, Maryland.

That said, there are clues that youth workers can look for to uncover whether a young person has been abused or witnessed violence at home. Signs of physical abuse may include bruises in uncommon places and unusual injuries, such as burns and fractures.

Signs of physical, emotional, and sexual violence might include acting out, aggression, problems at school or bad grades, an inability to concentrate, lack of emotion, depression, speech with a flat affect, low levels of intimacy, low self-esteem, and isolation. A normally outgoing young person might become withdrawn.

Additionally, youth who have suffered sexual abuse may behave in a sexualized way, act promiscuously or seductively, become involved in prostitution, or manifest physical symptoms such as a stomachache or headache, genital pain, difficulty walking or sitting, or eating and sleep disturbance.

Leffew notes that young people who've witnessed domestic violence can become just as isolated as those who've experienced abuse, or even more so.

"There's no one to console them," she says.

An Issue Among up to 30 Percent of Youth

Youth-serving agencies funded through the Basic Center Program, FYSB's short-term shelter system, reported abuse and neglect as an issue in 25 percent of runaway and homeless youth cases in fiscal year 2006. Among youth in the longer-term Transitional Living Program, the rate was about 30 percent. The data comes from the Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System, or RHYMIS, used by FYSB to collect information about youth in its programs.

"Abuse and neglect," as defined by RHYMIS, is broader than physical or sexual abuse, Chappell explains. "Abuse" refers to physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse; "neglect" could mean not being physically cared for or feeling ignored. (Though feeling ignored or rejected may be subjective on the part of the youth, it can contribute to the youth's reason for being out of the home.)

Chappell adds that information about abuse and neglect, as well as other issues youth have faced, is entered into RHYMIS at the end of a young person's case, "when youth have developed enough trust to disclose hidden issues." ■

YOUTH WORKERS' PATIENCE, OPEN MINDS GET YOUTH TO TALK ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE

Every once in a while, crisis counselor and therapist Adam Kleinmeulman sees the signs of abuse literally written out on a runaway youth's body. The message might appear in block letters drawn with permanent marker on the youth's skin, clothes, or backpack: "I'm homeless. My dad beats me."

But more often, Kleinmeulman, a crisis counselor and therapist at Child, Inc., a Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) grantee in Wilmington, Delaware, has to get young people to trust him before they'll tell him if they've been abused at home. "They come in one day and they don't say anything," he says about how cautious youth are in the beginning of a relationship that can take months to build. "And the next time they'll trust you enough to say [what's going on with them]."

Learning how to ferret out whether youth have experienced abuse at the hands of a family member or a guardian is important for runaway and homeless youth workers. Family violence may contribute to as many as one-third or one-half of runaway episodes, says David Finkelhor, professor of sociology and director of several research centers at the University of New Hampshire. And an abusive household may hamper youths' ability to reunite with their families, a major goal of FYSB's Basic Center Program.

Many runaway and homeless youth providers, like Kleinmeulman, find young people are reluctant to reveal the fact that they have experienced or witnessed abuse at home, especially when they aren't familiar with the youth worker asking them questions.

Youth may fear getting themselves—or their abusers—in trouble. "Kids are very hesitant to report the entire truth, whether they are identifying with the abuser or protecting the parent," says Heather McCure, a program coordinator at CAPTAIN Youth and Family Services, a FYSB grantee in rural Clifton Park, New York.

Their silence may also result from ignorance about what constitutes abuse, says Maureen Blaha, executive director of the National Runaway Switchboard, a nationwide crisis hotline based in Chicago and funded, in part, by FYSB. "If you grow up in a household where hitting and spanking is the norm, maybe you don't recognize it as physical abuse," she explains.

> *"Adolescents sometimes believe they should be stoic and are particularly reluctant to appear powerless or vulnerable." — Stan Chappell, FYSB*

Another reason youth keep abuse to themselves may be that they want to save face. "Adolescents sometimes believe they should be stoic and are particularly reluctant to appear powerless or vulnerable," says Stan Chappell, FYSB's director of research and evaluation.

"Youth may be reluctant to report abuse if they don't know what the response to the report will be or if they have experienced negative or ineffective responses by the legal or child welfare systems," says Marylouise Kelley, a program specialist in FYSB's Family Violence Prevention and Services Program.

The keys to getting youth to open up are being patient, building rapport, and not judging the young person, says Donna Leffew, clinical director at the Life Crisis Center, an anti–domestic violence agency in Salisbury, Maryland.

Kleinmeulman prompts young people with open-ended questions and fill-in-the-blank statements. "I never specifically ask, 'Do your parents beat you?'" he says, explaining, "It's just a little bit callous." Instead, if youth say they're dissatisfied about something, he might ask some questions in that direction.

Because it takes time for youth to become comfortable enough to reveal their secrets, youth workers need to keep asking the same questions over again, if they think abuse might have occurred, Kleinmeulman says. "You have to be patient and be willing to retread steps you've already gone through before."

Leffew recommends avoiding "why" questions. "As soon as you say 'Why?' they shut down," she says.

She also says youth workers should not talk negatively about the suspected offender. "They're going to have lots of confused feelings," she says of abused youth. "That person might treat them all right—and every kid wants their parents to love them no matter what."

Observation is important, too. Watching the young person interact with their parents can signal to Kleinmeulman the need to talk to the young person alone. "If the parent is in the room, the kid shuts down," he says. "And that's always a red flag to me to probe that area." ■

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUTH WHEN YOU SUSPECT ABUSE:

- Do you feel safe at home?
- Are you healthy?
- Do you feel sad?
- Do you feel dissatisfied?
- Has anyone ever questioned you or made you feel uncomfortable?
- Have you ever been hit?
- Has anyone ever thrown anything at you or deprived you of food and shelter?
- How would you end the following sentences?
    - "People tell me my problems are ________."
    - "I think my problems are ________."
    - "The hardest problem I have is ________."

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT? STEMMING RELATIONSHIP ABUSE AMONG STREET YOUTH

When research revealed that almost one-third of homeless and runaway youth in Hollywood, California, were or had been in an abusive intimate relationship, Lisa de Gyarfas knew that something had to be done.

As director of high-risk youth programs at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles, de Gyarfas looked to the literature on domestic violence for hints on how to develop interventions to help her young clients avoid abuse. But after talking to young people, de Gyarfas and her colleagues quickly learned that relationship violence among street youth is very different from domestic violence—starting with the term itself.

"'Domestic violence' sounds like a married couple who have a place to live," many young people told de Gyarfas.

"Dating violence" was equally problematic, since most homeless youth don't really date. And "violence" sounded too limiting, since aggression on the street can also mean monetary abuse or pimping.

In the end, the young people decided that the term "intimate partner abuse" rang the most true.

In a small way, the naming exercise taught de Gyarfas and her colleagues that abuse among run-

> *"Relationships on the street are ambiguous and complex."*
> *— Lisa de Gyarfas, Childrens Hospital, Los Angeles*

away and homeless youth is very different from dating violence among teens who have a permanent place to call home. Understanding these differences is key to developing relevant interventions for runaway and homeless youth.

What is relationship violence, and how is it different among street youth?

Given their circumstances, homeless youth are highly susceptible to becoming both abusers and victims. Data from the Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System, or RHYMIS, used by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) to collect information about youth served by its grantees, suggest that 25 to 30 percent of young people in runaway and homeless youth programs reported abuse and neglect at home. Other studies indicate the incidence is much higher. And research suggests that experiencing abuse at home increases the likelihood of being mistreated or becoming violent on the street.

Dawn Schatz, who directs youth development programs at Child, Inc., in Wilmington, Delaware, sees this connection every day. “Adults at home are modeling violent behavior, so that’s what these kids come to expect,” she says. “Abuse is normalized.”

Moreover, she says, “Any person who is in a position where they feel out of control is at risk of becoming abusive.” Because young people who are homeless have such little control over so many aspects of their lives, those who commit violence are often seeking to exert control where they think they can.

On the other side, homeless youth are also at risk of being abused. Some young people stay in abusive relationships to avoid becoming homeless. Others, who are already on the street, may stay for protection. Because homelessness puts youth in more violence-prone situations, an abusive partner may offer defense against the dangers of the street.

“Relationships on the street are ambiguous and complex,” de Gyarfas says. A girl might identify a relationship as one based on love, but it’s often for protection. “For example, a young girl might identify her pimp as her boyfriend,” she says. “It’s hard for young people to admit they are prostituting, so they use a different language for it.”

Because street youth often have no support system, using the term “boyfriend” may also foster a sense that there is someone they can trust. Lauren Cosetti, a case manager at Sand Castles Runaway and Homeless Youth Services in Ocean City, Maryland, says, “If they’re in an abusive relationship, it’s so hard to leave because the abuser might be the only person they can depend on.” She says, “Even if it’s not constant support, they think it’s better than nothing.” And if a partner buys a runaway or homeless youth what they need to survive, such as food and clothing, it’s easy for a young person to become dependant.

“A lot of times, a young person has a partner who is older and may already have an apartment. If a young girl runs away to live with her boyfriend, and that person becomes abusive, it’s really hard to go back,” says Schatz. “Because of pride, it’s hard for a teenager to admit to her parents that she was wrong. Also, in her own mind, because she left, she may already feel cut off from her family.”

How can youth workers identify relationship violence?

Cosetti says that it’s difficult for youth to recognize when a relationship is unhealthy. “Young people

haven't had a lot of relationships, so they don't have enough experiences to draw on, to know what's right and what's wrong."

Susan Spagnuolo, of the Mid-Atlantic Network of Youth & Family Services, agrees. "A lot of runaway and homeless youth simply don't know what a healthy relationship looks like," she says.

Service providers can help young people recognize relationship violence by questioning them carefully. Spagnuolo says, "Many service providers will ask, 'Are you experiencing dating violence?' thinking this is self-explanatory." Spagnuolo recommends asking specific questions, like, "Does your boyfriend get jealous a lot? Does your boyfriend monitor where you go or limit who you can talk to? Does your boyfriend call or text you all the time?"

By asking thoughtful, detailed questions, staff can find out what's really going on in a relationship and be sensitive to a young person's feelings. A young person might respond that she doesn't really feel comfortable with her boyfriend's behavior but she just thought that's what boyfriends do.

Schatz says, "With a lot of young people, there's this misconception that jealousy or possessiveness is a sign of love. A lot of the work is challenging that perception. Kids say, 'It feels good to have someone care about me or care where I am all the time.'" But then, she says, the attention can become too intense and unwanted, or the abuse will quickly escalate.

Cosetti sets up resource tables in school cafeterias and at community events and talks to young people about healthy relationships in heterosexual, as well as gay and lesbian, relationships. She finds young people in abusive relationships who don't even realize it.

What can youth workers do to help youth in abusive relationships?

De Gyarfas says it's important to help young people understand that hitting is not the only behavior that constitutes abuse. At group sessions, youth workers explain that abuse can be emotional, sexual, or financial. It can be stalking or intimidation. Any behavior that makes someone else feel uncomfortable, awkward, or frightened may constitute abuse.

Cosetti gives youth information on building self-esteem, creating personal boundaries, and communicating with their partners. They also discuss expectations and what young people want from a boyfriend or girlfriend.

The discussion may start with what qualities young people look for in a friend. "Kids always list things like someone they can talk to, someone they can trust, someone who respects them," Cosetti says. But there's often a discrepancy between what young people say they look for in a friend and how a partner is actually treating them. Cosetti says, "Young people begin to see that they're letting a boyfriend or girlfriend get away with things they would never let a friend get away with."

Similarly, de Gyarfas and her colleagues have developed a curriculum that helps street youth learn about intimate partner abuse through exercises and activities, including a brainstorming session about what they deserve in a relationship and what they won't stand for. De Gyarfas says, "The goal is to show these kids that they deserve more." ■

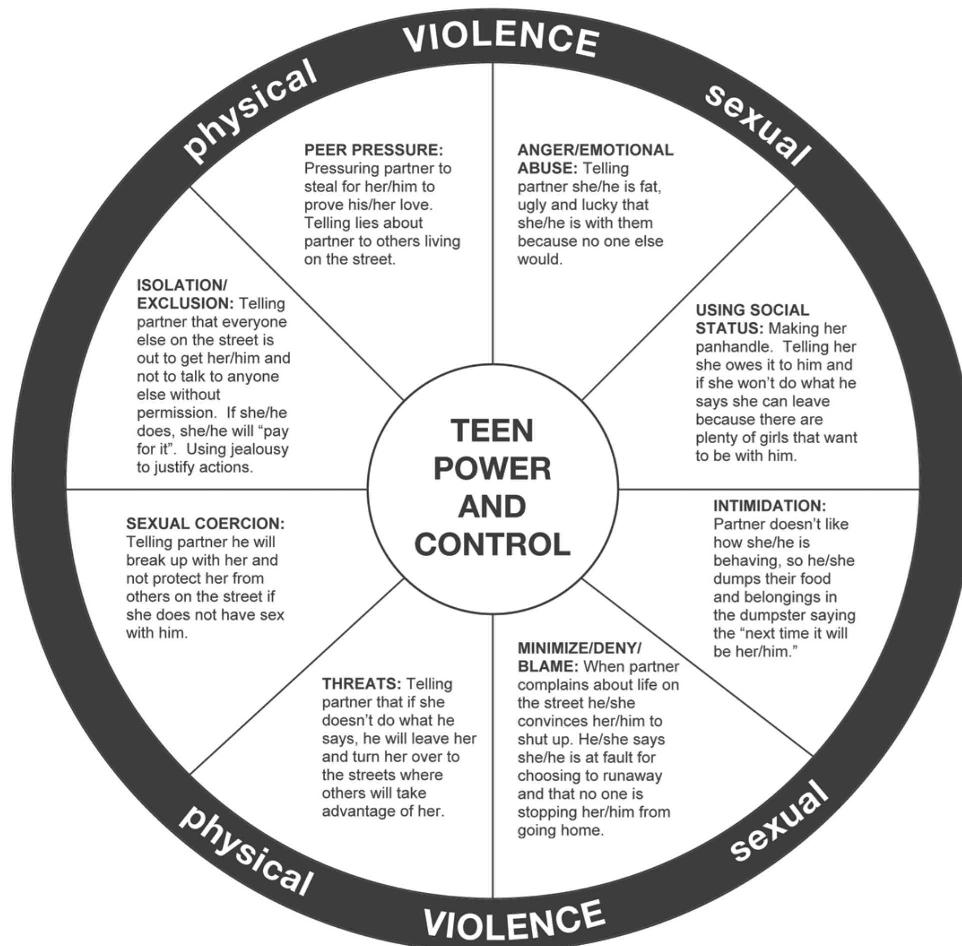
TIPS ON WORKING WITH VICTIMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE:

- Be familiar with your local domestic violence center's community education and training programs on intimate partner abuse.
- Help train staff at your local domestic violence shelter about issues runaway and homeless youth deal with on the street.
- Train new staff on the dynamics of relationship violence among street youth and how to intervene. Role play with staff how to respond to a young person disclosing relationship abuse.
- Learn how to work with young people to make a safety plan. Safety plans developed specifically for adolescents (though not tailored to runaway and homeless youth) are available at www.ncdsv.org/images/SafetyPlanforTeens.pdf and endabuse.org/programs/teens/files/SafetyPlan.pdf.
- Violence occurs in same-sex as well as heterosexual relationships. Be on the lookout for violence in all types of relationships.
- Provide group sessions for young people to discuss their concerns, needs, and perceptions about relationship violence and running away. Lisa de Gyarfas of Childrens Hospital Los Angeles suggests younger adolescents usually have more questions about what abuse really is, while older adolescents often want to process their experiences.
- It's hard for young people to admit being in an abusive relationship. If young people seem reluctant to attend group sessions, staff can encourage them by suggesting, "Maybe this is something you can share with a friend."
- Create collaborations with community education staff from both runaway youth and domestic violence service provider organizations to train students, parents, teachers, police, and community leaders on how to respond to relationship violence.

DOMESTIC ABUSE IS MORE THAN VIOLENCE

Experts on domestic violence see abuse as a pattern of behaviors. In 1984, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota, developed the Power and Control Wheel, which depicts the primary ways that abusive men control their victims. The wheel was designed by more than 200 battered women who participated in educational sessions the shelter sponsored. In 2006, the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence designed the Runaway Teen Power and Control Wheel as part of its Teen Dating Violence Among Runaway and Homeless Youth curriculum.

RUNAWAY TEEN POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL



Adapted from:
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
202 East Superior Street
Duluth, MN 55802
218.722.4134

Other models for looking at domestic violence can be used in conjunction with the Wheel of Power and Control.

USING CULTURE TO SAY, 'VIOLENCE IS NEVER OKAY'

When Jessica Nunan, interim executive director of Caminar Latino in Atlanta, Georgia, asked the high-risk young people in her relationship violence prevention group whether Latinos experienced violence differently than other racial and ethnic groups, they considered her question thoughtfully and answered in a word.

No.

They didn't think violence was more common or more accepted among Latinos. And the reasons they saw for the violence—alcohol and money—were often the same for Latinos and their non-Latino peers.

"They said that culture didn't really matter," Nunan says. "That violence affects all populations equally."

While stereotypes viewing some groups as more violent than others can hamper violence prevention, experts say that culture does matter when teaching young people to recognize and avoid relationship violence. Providing culturally competent interventions ensures that runaway and homeless young people get the strongest possible message that violence—whether physical, emotional, or sexual—is never okay.

Some tips for providing culturally competent care:

Find out who you are serving. Demographic information is key to tailoring interventions to the racial and ethnic groups prevalent in your community.

Avoid stereotyping. Studies show that no racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group is necessarily more violent than any other. Chris Cox, director of Hoyleton Youth and Family Services in Hoyleton, Illinois, was surprised to find a similar number of young people reporting relationship violence in all of the communities in which his agency conducted focus groups. As a result, his agency developed a countywide intervention.

Focus on the positive. "We've found that it is better to work from an asset-based approach," says Rosie Hidalgo, director of Policy and Research for the National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence. "It is so important to recognize the resiliency within cultures, not what is

wrong with a cultural viewpoint." For example, spirituality within the African American community can be harnessed to encourage respectful relationships. *Machismo*, which is often associated with chauvinism and violence in Latino culture, can also be seen and taught as a man's obligation to protect women and children.

Build trust. "Cultural competency is the same thing as doing good advocacy," says Chic Dabby, director of the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence at the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum. "To be an effective advocate, you have to spend time building the relationships." For many cultures, that means waiting for several meetings to pass before bringing up violence issues. It can also mean shaking lots of hands, inquiring about family members, and sharing cups of coffee or tea.

Recognize that there are differences within racial and ethnic groups. Within each racial or ethnic group, there are different nationalities and socioeconomic classes, different

languages and English proficiencies, and different spiritual beliefs. Recent immigrants may have different perspectives on relationship violence than acculturated or U.S.-born young people.

Consider how the diversity or homogeneity of the group will affect communication. For example, the bilingual group of young people at Caminar Latino can speak in "Spanglish," which makes it easier for youth with different language proficiencies to talk through issues comfortably. In that case, shared culture can bridge differences. But with a topic as sensitive as relationship violence, cultural norms can also impede open communication. In some Asian communities, Dabby says, victim-blaming can be so strong that young people may not open up around other young people from their neighborhood and may prefer to share their concerns in anonymous forums.

Have facilitators who know the culture. The young people at Caminar Latino say it's not a must, but they prefer to have a facilitator who already understands where they are coming from. "It makes it easier when they are talking about their lives to not have to explain things," Nunan says.

Get youth involved in developing or adapting curricula specifically for themselves and their peers. At the Hawaii Youth Services Network in Honolulu, an existing dating violence curriculum was adapted to include role plays and other activities targeted to runaway and homeless youth in the community.

Understand the role of family in the cultures of the young people you serve. Family can play both negative and positive roles in young people's lives. In Latino and African-American communities, extended family and close friends can serve as strong protective forces. In her work with the Asian-American community, Dabby has found that some family members and close friends may hurt more than they can help. "It's not necessarily protective to go to their parents," she says. "So, who are their allies? A relative? An aunt? Another family member? A young teen who has an elder sister? You need to work on identifying who would be a confidant." ■

> "It is so important to recognize the resiliency within cultures, not what is wrong with a cultural viewpoint." — Rosie Hidalgo, National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence

WHO TO CALL

Hotlines

Break the Cycle provides advice, referrals, legal information, advocacy, and counsel to young people and the people who care about them. Call 1-888-988-TEEN or visit www.breakthecycle.org.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides crisis intervention, safety planning, information, and referrals to victims and anyone calling on their behalf. Call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or visit www.ndvh.org.

The National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline provides support and information to young people to help them better understand dating and relationship abuse. Call 1-866-331-9474 or visit www.loveisrespect.org.

The National Runaway Switchboard provides prevention, education, and crisis intervention to help keep young people safe and off the streets. Call 1-800-RUNAWAY or visit www.1800runaway.org.

Technical Assistance and Resources for Providers

The Battered Women's Justice Project offers training, technical assistance, and consultation on promising practices of the criminal and civil justice system in addressing domestic violence. Call 1-800-903-0111, extension 1, or visit www.bwjp.org.

The Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence provides health care information and technical assistance. Call 1-888-792-2873 or 1-800-313-1310 or visit www.endabuse.org.

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence is a membership organization of grassroots shelter and service programs for battered women. Call (303) 839-1852 or visit www.ncadv.org.

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence provides technical assistance, training, and information to organizations and individuals working with victims of domestic violence and their children. Call 1-800-537-2238 or visit www.nrcdv.org.

Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women, provides technical assistance and consultation to help end violence against Native American women. Call 1-877-733-7623 or visit www.sacred-circle.com.

For more information about FYSB's Family Violence Prevention and Services Program, go to www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb.

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What's Inside

HOW RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH PROGRAMS ADDRESS THE COMPLEXITIES OF FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

Find out:

- How service providers work with families and youth to overcome abuse at home
- How relationship abuse among street youth is different than it is among their peers
- How youth workers can use cultural assets to prevent violence

THE EXCHANGE
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