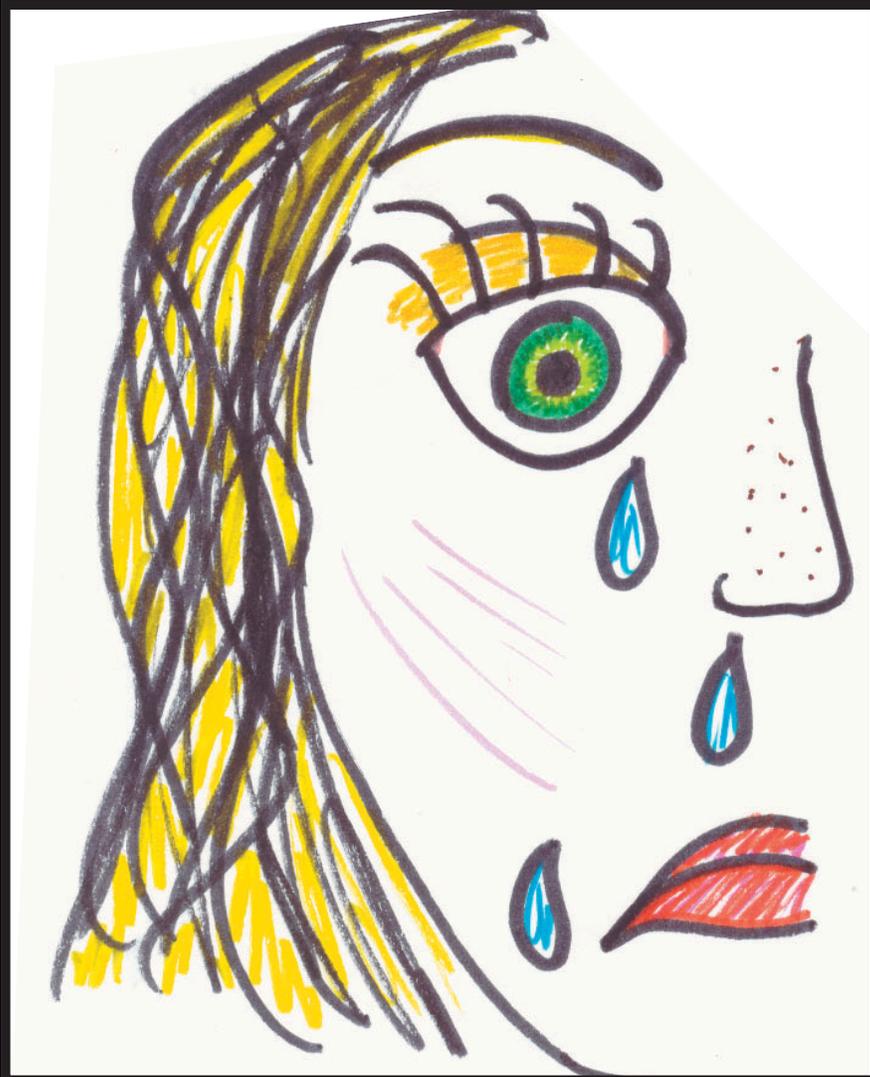


Through Their Eyes:

*Domestic Violence and Its
Impact on Children*

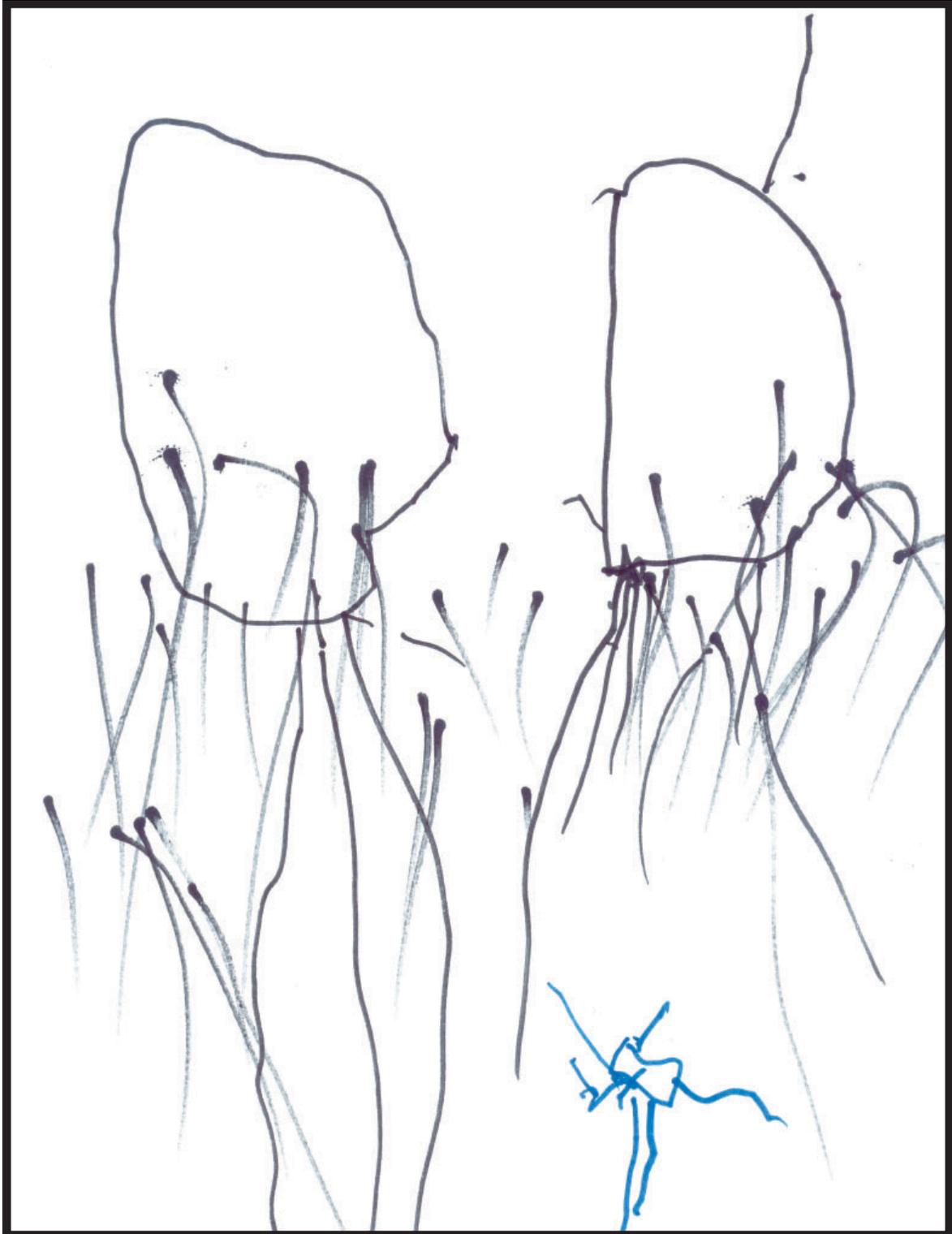




Let Mom
be OK!!
Please

Please, God
make them
stop!
PLEASE!





Introduction

Domestic violence shatters the lives of its victims and diminishes the quality of life for everyone in the community. It is the leading cause of homelessness for women and families. It also can be incredibly traumatic for children who witness it.

The YWCA of Seattle • King County • Snohomish County is committed to providing women of all ages with the practical tools, support, and education they need to create safe, productive lives. Our Teen Peer Advocates work with young women in area high schools to help them avoid unhealthy relationships that lead to dating and family violence. Our advocacy-based counseling and transitional housing services help women who have experienced domestic violence rebuild their lives. Our Children's Domestic Violence Program uses specifically

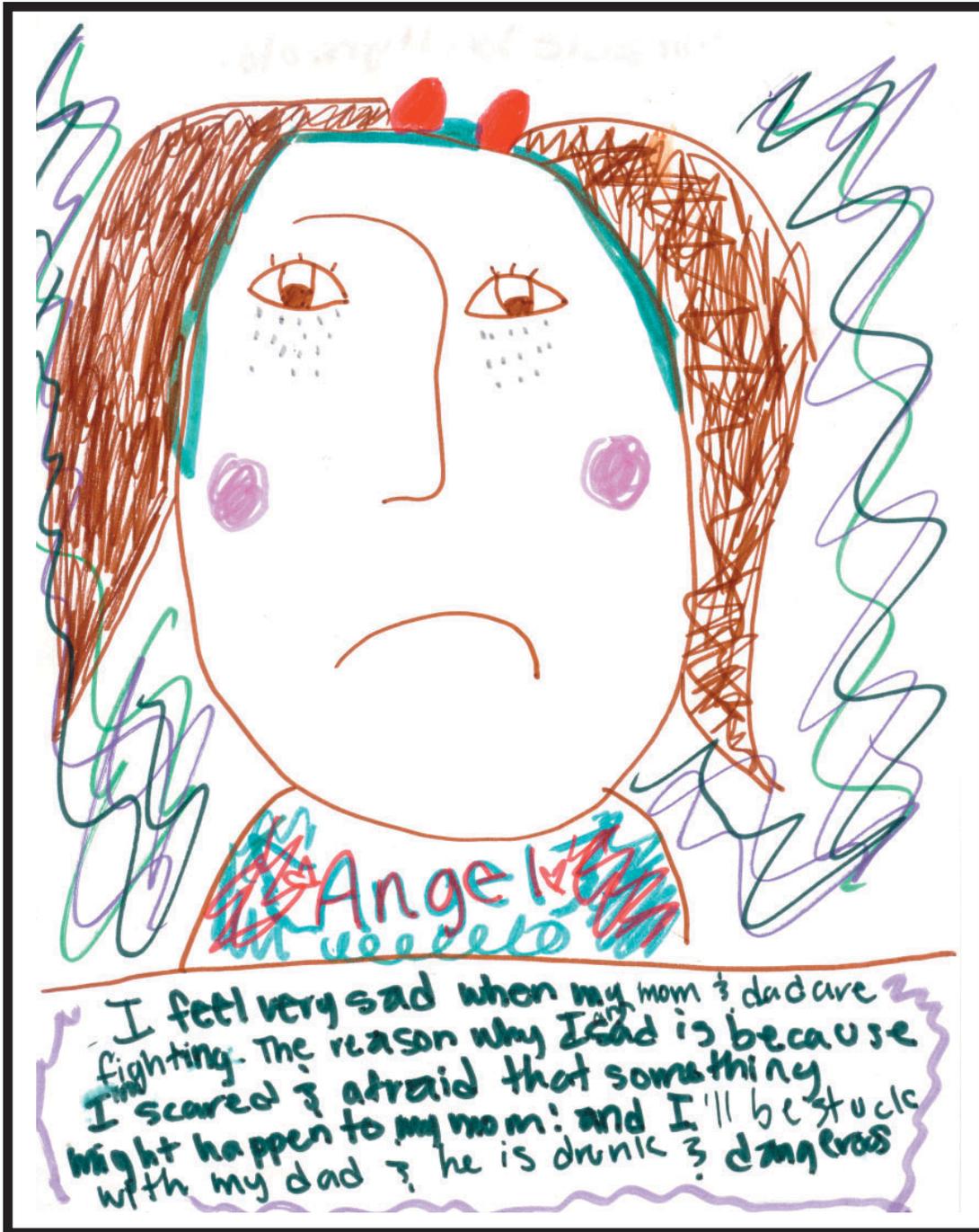
designed activities to help children understand and heal from the effects of witnessing domestic violence.

Through Their Eyes tells their stories—through their artwork and in their words. Participants in our children's program are sharing their experiences to help all of us understand how domestic violence has affected their lives. Experts in our community build on these powerful stories to help us learn more about the effects of domestic violence on children and how we can help.

Eradicating domestic violence requires a community effort. We urge readers of this book to learn more about domestic violence and to join the YWCA in our efforts to create a community where every person can live in dignity, free from violence.



Sue Sherbrooke
YWCA CEO



- Domestic violence is the single greatest cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44.¹
- Each year in the U.S., medical expenses from domestic violence total at least 3 to 5 billion dollars.²
- Washington State domestic violence programs served 25,031 adults and children in 2001.³

The Impact of Domestic Violence

After dinner, Anita cleans the kitchen thoroughly, but it isn't clean enough for Mike. He becomes enraged and verbally abusive, eventually hitting her so hard that he breaks her arm.

Marion and Larry split up a year ago, and are still struggling with a messy divorce. On weekend nights, Larry stalks Marion by car, following her every move and threatening to kill her if he ever finds her with another man.

Ziba communicates with a girlfriend via instant messenger. Sean goes on the computer and tracks her history. He accuses her of having an affair, calls her stupid, and then throws a heavy chair through the window in the kitchen.

These situations aren't imaginary. They happen in homes around us all the time. Domestic violence is an enormous social problem that persists in the U.S. in the 21st century. Though it goes by other names such as spousal abuse, family violence, intimate partner violence, the ultimate aim of all forms of domestic violence is the same. It is a pattern of behaviors used by one person in a relationship to coercively control the other.

Perpetrators of domestic violence believe they are entitled to control their family members. Domestic violence is not caused by frustration, stress, alcohol/addiction, or poverty. It is not an issue of anger, though often it can appear that way. Instead, it is a set of behaviors designed to maintain

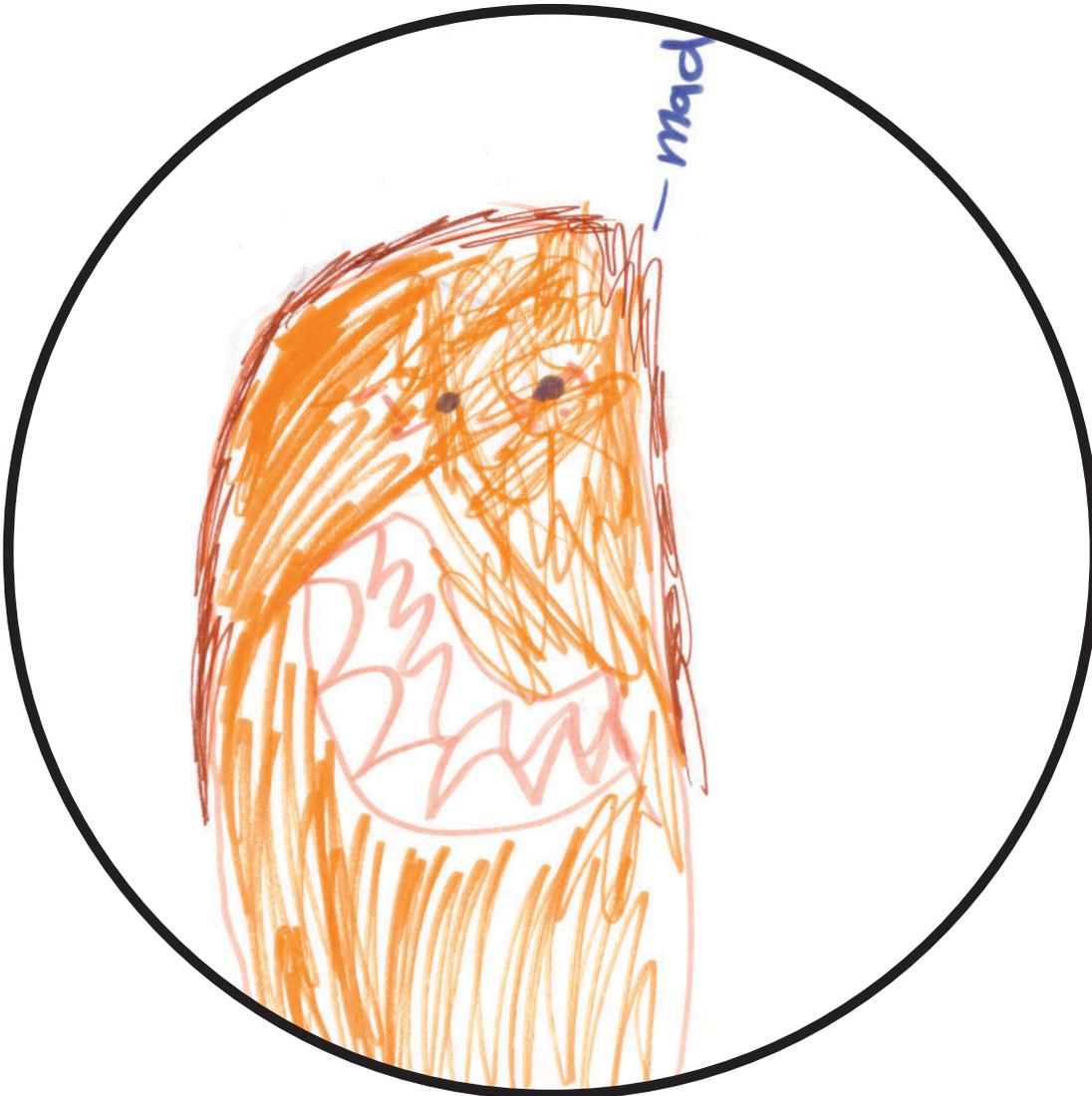
dominance over one's intimate partner.

Domestic violence can take many different forms, some of them very subtle. Examples of domestic violence include: name-calling or putdowns, isolation from friends, family, and the community, withholding money, actual or threatened physical harm, sexual assault, stalking, and intimidation. The behaviors commonly escalate over time. Domestic violence can be practiced in plain view of the public eye, but more often, it is kept in the confines of a home. It is often hidden by both the perpetrator and the victim to avoid any legal or personal consequences.

Studies show that domestic violence happens among all cultures and classes. Though violent behavior in general is often linked to economics, domestic violence occurs in economically advantaged families as well as low-income families, and it cuts across all races and ethnicities. Domestic violence also occurs in a variety of intimate relationships. Partners may be married or not married, heterosexual, gay, or lesbian, living together, separated, divorced, or dating.

When we talk about domestic violence as a social issue, however, we recognize that the vast majority of domestic violence happens in heterosexual relationships where the abuser is male and the victim is female. Thus, for the purpose of this book, we refer to abusers as men and

- *Because of space and funding restrictions, Washington State domestic violence programs had to refuse 32,967 requests for shelter in 2001.⁴*
- *Intimate partner violence accounted for 22 percent of the violent crimes against women in 2000, compared to 3 percent of the crimes against men.⁵*



- *Physical violence against women by intimates is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behavior. Surveys have found that women whose partners were jealous, controlling, or verbally abusive were significantly more likely to report being raped, physically assaulted and/or stalked by their partners. This supports the theory that violence*

victims as women and we will also be looking primarily at relationships that involve children.

Domestic violence creates a culture of fear and intimidation that can affect every member of a family. In his quest for control, the abuser forces everyone within the range of his authority to respond to his behavior. This often includes any children who are in the home.

Children were present in all of the stories from the beginning of this chapter. Anita's three daughters, ages 6, 8, and 10, were in the room

watching when Mike broke her arm. Marion's two children, ages 5 and 7, rode in the backseat of the car when Larry stalked her; he told them he was going to kill her. Ziba's daughter Marjan was in the living room with her friends, celebrating her 12th birthday when Sean exploded. All of these children were exposed to domestic violence in real and disturbing ways.

Studies have shown that there is significant overlap between domestic violence and child abuse—homes where one is present are likely to have the other. The majority of

studies have found that from 30 to 60 percent of families where child maltreatment or woman battering is identified, it is likely that both forms of abuse exist.⁹

But it is also clear that children can be affected just by witnessing domestic violence in their home. Children who witness violence can suffer a range of physical and/or emotional harms, even if they themselves have never been physically abused. For the remainder of this book, we will be looking at children who have witnessed domestic violence only. However, we will also argue that witnessing violence may in itself be harmful to children. It is part of the system of control perpetrated by the abuser.

“Each child has a unique set of experiences, and each is impacted in a unique way,” says Dr. Jeffrey Edleson, Director of the Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse. “Lots of kids come out fairly intact and healthy. Others may experience the same violence exposure, but end up devastated. One of the main tasks of early childhood is to develop secure attachments. Domestic violence disrupts that process. It also disrupts self-regulation and deep relationships. For some children, the danger is being involved and being injured and seeing your mother injured. For some children, the domestic violence exposure may not be the only risk in the child’s life.”

Witnessing violence in the home can disrupt a child’s normal relationships to her or his parents. Children can be confused and frustrated by the abuser’s behavior. They can feel powerless and angry at not being able to stop the incidents, and they are often consumed by fear. They also can develop a warped concept of power and control. They may feel that they have the power to control the batterer’s behaviors and they often blame themselves or see themselves as the reason he became angry. Conversely, they can start thinking that other people control how they behave. During a supervised play therapy session, one 5-year-old child proclaimed that if his little brother wouldn’t have grabbed his truck, he wouldn’t have had to hit him with it.

Additionally, adults perpetuate a culture of silence by minimizing or



is often part of a systematic pattern of dominance and control.⁶

- *At least 119 women were murdered in Washington State by their current or former partner between 1997 and 2001.⁷*
- *In that same time span, abusers killed at least 17 children in the context of violence toward their partner.⁸*

refusing to talk about the abuse. Mothers may try to protect their children from the trauma of the violence by denying that anything bad has happened or minimizing the severity. This sends the message that children cannot or should not talk about what they have

first place, and it fits neatly into the batterer's agenda.

Parents often think their children do not know that the violence is occurring. But children are almost always aware of abusive behavior that is happening in the home. They come in contact with it through a variety of ways, both directly and indirectly.

They always notice the tension that is present in their home — a “walking on eggshells” feeling.

They worry, they try to please, and they often try to “fix” the problem in order to avoid a blow-up. If there is more than one child, children may talk about it among themselves. The media often shows us the image of a younger child crawling into bed to seek comfort and reassurance from an older child.

The Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse's "Child Involvement Survey" looked at how children became involved in domestic violence incidents in the home, even when they are not direct victims of violence. The results showed overwhelming evidence that domestic violence does not confine itself to the partner relationship.



seen or heard. It may also change their view of the situation, and lead to confusion. Without an outlet to discuss the incident(s), children may draw their own conclusions, which can often include self-blame or blame of the mother. Sadly, this is exactly what mothers are trying to avoid in the

When an incident happens, children are often visual witnesses. They may see slapping, punching, hitting, or other physical abuse toward their mother, or they may witness loud arguments and explosive outbursts directed at inanimate objects. In some instances, children try to intervene, often to protect their mother, and are injured in the process.

A variant of this is that children overhear violence happening in another room. Sergeant Deborah Nicholson of the Seattle Police Department's Domestic Violence Unit notes that children are often the ones who call 911 when violence happens, either with or without their parents' approval. In the drawing on page 6, a young girl huddles under her blankets in her bedroom, listening to her father abuse her mother and praying for it to stop.

Children also see the aftermath of violence in their homes—broken furniture and windows, injuries and emotional disturbances in themselves and in their mother. Anita's 6-year-old daughter began crying when a favorite toy was found on the floor, broken, after a violent episode.

Children can also become involved when they are used as a tool by the perpetrator of the abuse. This can be either physical or emotional. In the stalking scenario, Larry knew that his children would report back to their mother about his behavior, thus making her frightened for herself and the safety of her children. Another child was told by her father that she would receive one dollar for every time she made her mother cry.

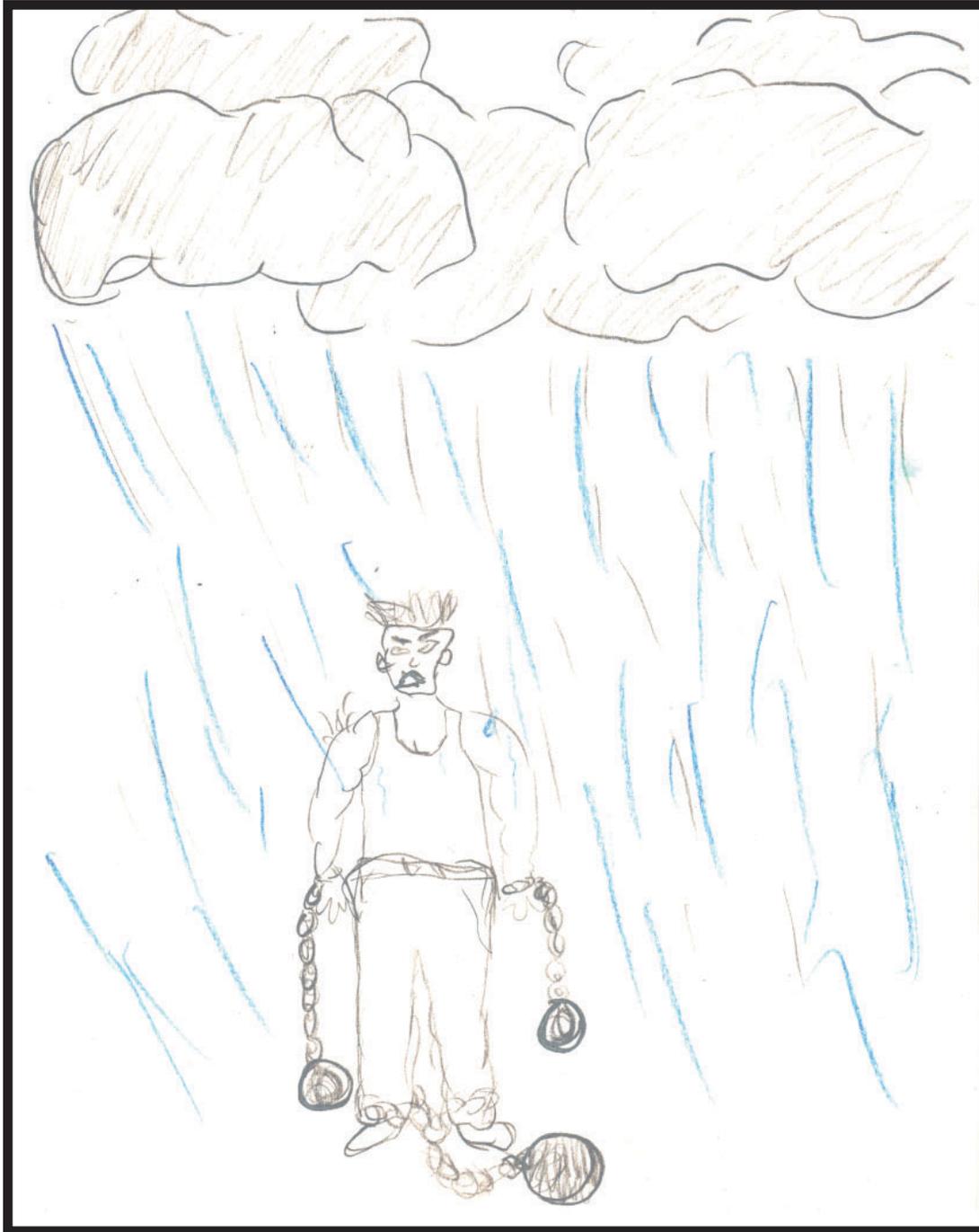
In Ziba's story, Ziba's husband chose to yell and throw things at Ziba during Marjan's birthday party. The police arrived, and the incident ended with Marjan's father being arrested. Once she stopped worrying about her mother's safety, Marjan was mortally

embarrassed by her father's behavior. She worried that her friends, who witnessed the incident, would stop liking her. When their parents found out about the incident, friends were not allowed to come to her house, which was exactly what the batterer wanted in the first place. He did not consider Marjan's feelings or social status at all—he was frustrated by not being in control of his house.

Obviously, not all batterers or incidents are so straightforward or manipulative, but battering behaviors are always a choice and are most often done so that the batterer can assert his control.

These experiences can have profound and damaging psychological and physical effects on children. We will look at some of the ways that children can suffer from these experiences in Chapter 2.

- *44 percent of parents reported that their children watched an entire violent incident*
- *83 percent of children overheard abuse from another room*
- *Over 1/2 of children were threatened with physical harm*
- *Over 1/3 of children were accidentally injured*
- *Over 1/4 were hurt intentionally by the abuser when they tried to intervene¹⁰*



Experts who work with families affected by violence tell us again and again that the best way to support children is by supporting their mothers. This often means changing our way of thinking about victims of domestic violence. We need to remember that:

- *No one chooses or deserves to be in an abusive relationship.*
- *Victims are not at*

Does Domestic Violence Affect Children?

Witnessing domestic violence can have profound emotional and physical consequences for many children. We say “many” because there are some children who come through with no lasting consequences. Others recover from the experience(s) very quickly. Factors influencing this may be the child’s individual makeup, time elapsed since the event(s) and the frequency and severity of the violence. Children who are also victims of child abuse may have more complex needs.

“It’s wrong to think that [children’s responses] are uniform,” says Dr. Jeffrey Edleson of the Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse. “It’s doing an injustice to the children.”

But for some children, witnessing domestic violence in the home can turn into a developmental issue. It can cause a profound disturbance that can affect every aspect of the child’s life. Problems often fall into one of three categories: behavior and emotional, cognitive functioning and attitudes, and longer-term effects, including developing a world view in which violent behavior is acceptable.

The physical signs are often the most obvious, though they can be attributed to other causes. In younger children, physical problems may include low

birth weights and digestive problems. As children age, physical effects of witnessing domestic violence may include bedwetting, stomachaches, ulcers, headaches, insomnia, and nightmares. They may also include eating disturbances, and for older children, severe acne.

Often the physical signs can be indicators of more serious emotional problems. Kiana was almost three years old and had spent her life in a home where her mother was abused. She began to manifest symptoms of anorexia. Her weight hovered around 18 pounds, and she refused to eat. A physician at a prominent local hospital declared that she couldn’t possibly have a mental health condition such as anorexia, yet Kiana’s condition improved after her abusive father was no longer in the home and she received counseling.

fault. The batterer is always the one responsible for the abuse.

- *Most battered women care about their children’s safety and want to protect them.*
- *Leaving an abusive relationship does not ensure that a victim and her children will be safe.*
- *Women and children have the right to be safe from harm.¹¹*



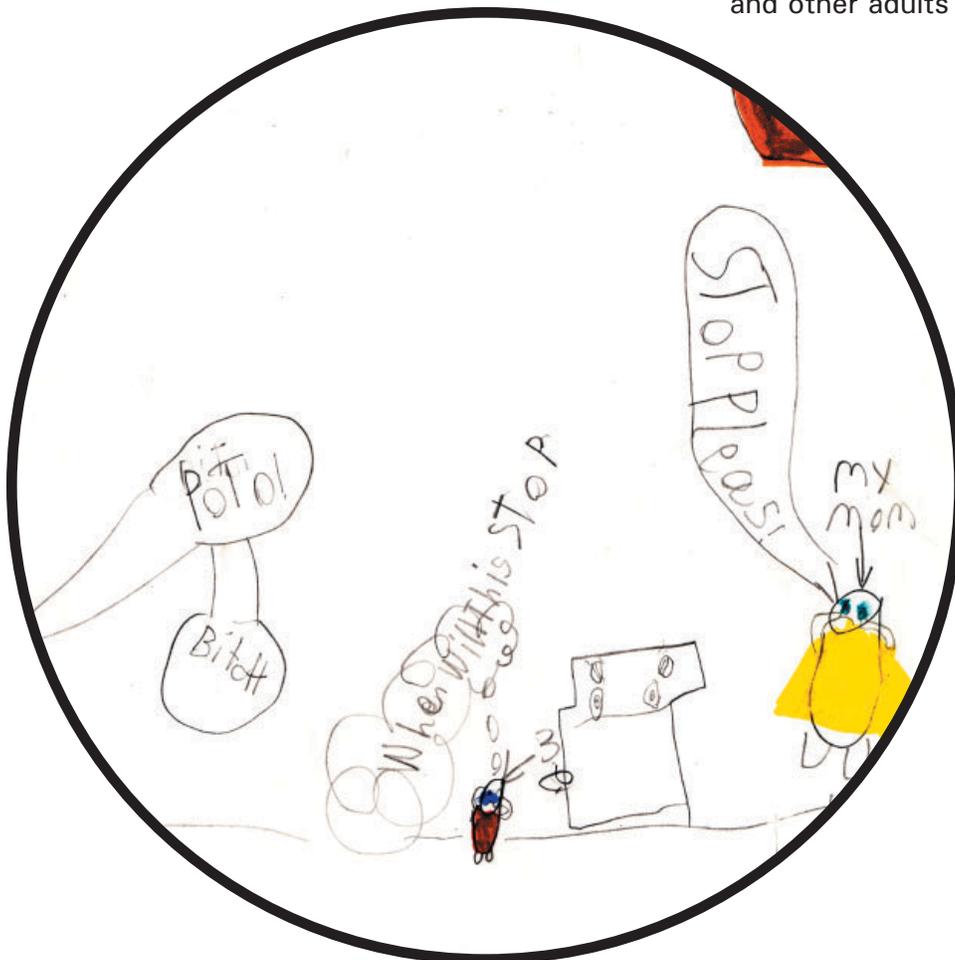
Anorexic symptoms can develop because food intake is one of the only things that children feel they can control. It can also be because they are subconsciously hoping to disappear. Many children who witness domestic violence assume they are the problem or the reason for the problems in the household. They may describe happy families as those without children. Or, they may make statements about how the world would be better off without them or children in general.

The emotional realm for children who have witnessed domestic violence is

intricate and complicated. Children who have witnessed domestic violence can have behaviors that many would consider “adult,” including:

- Depression
- Hypersensitivity/hypervigilance (this often gets mis-diagnosed as Attention Deficit Disorder)
- Low self-esteem
- Repressed or overt anger and resentment
- Extreme guilt, self-blame, and shame
- Developmental regression
- Impaired ability to form typical social relationships with peers, teachers and other adults

- *Children develop the core of how they think, feel, and act within the first 33 months. An abuser’s behavior can actually disrupt typical development during these years.*
- *Cortisol, a chemical secreted by the brain during stressful, “fight or flight” situations, can, when secreted in*



excess, actually destroy synapses in some parts of the brain. Cortisol can be transferred to a fetus via amniotic fluid.

- *Intense stress during a child's brain formative years may actually alter the brain's DNA.*
- *Babies of depressed mothers show less motor activity, less eye contact and withdraw more often.¹²*

- Suicidal thoughts or suicidal plans

Often, these suicidal plans are better thought out or more complete than one might expect. Nine-year-old Jacob had been threatened by his father with a gun, and as a result, he'd developed a suicide plan that involved either running into traffic or shooting himself with his father's gun. His father's actions had essentially communicated to him that his life meant nothing and he was mirroring that back to the world.

There are a number of behavioral problems that can be associated with witnessing domestic violence. Common behaviors can include:

- Aggressive, anti-social behavior toward peers and adults, including their mother
- Fear or anxiety about separation, especially from mother
- Withdrawal from social contact and inability to form typical peer relationships
- Learning and attention problems at school
- Choosing inappropriate peers or friends
- Violent behavior aimed at peers, younger siblings or animals

An example is the story of Yim. Despite her healthy face and bright



appearance, 9-year-old Yim could not look anyone in the eye. She grew her bangs long, and hid her face behind them as she walked around her neighborhood. Other kids were happy to make her the scapegoat—they made her the butt of their jokes and the object of their merciless torment. Because her father had always treated her poorly, Yim accepted this as normal.

Expert Lundy Bancroft and others state that the most destructive thing that can happen to children who witness violence is the destruction of the mother/child relationship. Batterers will often stop a mother from picking up a crying infant, or prevent them from comforting a sick or scared child. Batterers often have a distorted understanding of child development and expect unreasonable levels of maturity from their children. Mothers are forced into an untenable situation,

where they can either diffuse the situation by appeasing the batterer at the expense of meeting their child's immediate needs or meet the child's needs, only to face the rage of their abusers. Children who don't have their needs met consistently can, over the long-term, learn not to trust that their mother will come to their aid.

Children who are exposed to domestic violence over a period of time often develop warped attitudes about violence. They may learn that it is acceptable to use violence as a means of conflict resolution and that it enhances self-image. Alternately, those who identify with the survivor may learn that violent behavior directed at them is acceptable.

Some children may become awed by the batterer's behavior. They may learn to idolize or worship the power and control he possesses. They also realize that they can be safer and are rewarded if they remain on his good side. This can translate into joining in on the abuse of their mother. It can also manifest as children trying desperately to please an abuser. Seven-year-old Katie was terrified of the roller coaster at the local theme park. When she told her father, he called her a baby and a spoilsport. In order to please him and avoid ruining their "fun" day, Katie made herself go on the ride. Instead of praising her bravery, her father scorned her for crying and covering her eyes, and then forced her to ride the roller

coaster six more times until she "got over her ridiculous fears."

In another story, 5-year-old Alex and his toddler brother had been living in a home with violence for several years. When Alex was playing a game with a counselor, his brother toddled by and Alex reached out and delivered a forceful whack that sent his brother flying. When the counselor asked him about his behavior, he leaned over, patted her leg, and responded, "It's OK. It will make him a better person."

Another lasting effect of domestic violence is that children can learn to suppress their emotions. Silence and secrecy often surround homes where domestic violence is present, and children assume that if adults are not talking about it then they aren't supposed to either.

Children may have difficulty verbalizing the emotions that come up after witnessing the abuse of their mother. They may drop hints, but parents caught in abusive relationships are often too distracted to notice. Parents may also minimize specific incidents of violence in an attempt to protect their children.

This is why some children who have witnessed domestic violence can develop behavioral problems. Because they do not have the skills to verbalize exactly what is wrong, they end up using other means to convey that they are hurting or upset.

A strong relationship to their mother may help many children survive witnessing domestic violence. However, batterers may also take deliberate steps to upset the mother-child relationship. This can, in turn, cause more difficulties for the child(ren).

An abusive person may:

- *Undermine the mother's confidence in herself and/or her parenting*

Many of the emotional and behavioral realities of children living in violent situations are visible in their artwork. Drawing can be an effective tool for children who have witnessed domestic violence because it allows them to validate what they have seen. It also allows treatment providers to see the child's interpretation of the situation. An incident of domestic violence can look very different to a child than it does to their parent, the police or other adults.

The drawings throughout this book were created by participants in the YWCA's Children's Domestic Violence Program, which we will examine in detail in Chapter 3.

Art can show us how children remember incidents: often, one clear detail or image stands out amidst the chaos. In essence, these details have been etched into the child's mind and stand out nearly as sharply as the incident itself.

- *Undermine the mother's authority in the family and cause the children to lose respect for her*
- *Retaliate if she attempts to protect the children*
- *Cause depression in the mother, which in turn prevents her from meeting the emotional needs of her children*
- *Frighten the children*
- *Isolate the mother and the children from friends and other relatives¹³*





Many of us feel confused and helpless when we think about dealing with a child who has witnessed abuse. But there are some very simple things you can tell children that can help them feel more comfortable.

- *The violence is not your fault.*
- *You are not alone—other families have this problem too.*

Strategies for Helping Children

One of the greatest risks for children witnessing domestic violence is that they may learn to use violence themselves. As they move toward their teenage years and adulthood, they may become depressed or may take up high-risk behaviors such as promiscuity or substance abuse. Without an effective model for problem solving and conflict management, children are more likely to resort to violent behaviors or accept violence as normal.

Children who witness violent behavior in the home may believe that violence solves problems. They may resort to violence rather than using critical thinking or conflict resolution skills. They may also begin to believe that anger is the cause of violence.

And it isn't just behaviors. Children also absorb attitudes from their parents as well. Boys may learn to devalue women and use violent behaviors themselves; girls may learn to view these behaviors as normal or acceptable. Both may develop distorted perceptions of gender roles. Lundy Bancroft, an expert in the field of children and domestic violence, notes that boys may begin to make statements such

as, "there's only so much a man can take!" or "You don't know when to shut up." These children often have difficulty making the connection that domestic violence is about power and control and not about anger.

This information is troubling, but it does have solutions. One answer lies in education and treatment. "Educational programs are one way to stop this," explains Sergeant Deborah Nicholson of the Seattle Police Department Domestic Violence Unit. "One way we're going to have an impact on domestic violence is to reach out to the children and work with their parents."

The YWCA's Children's Domestic Violence Program uses a unique model to address the needs of children who have witnessed domestic

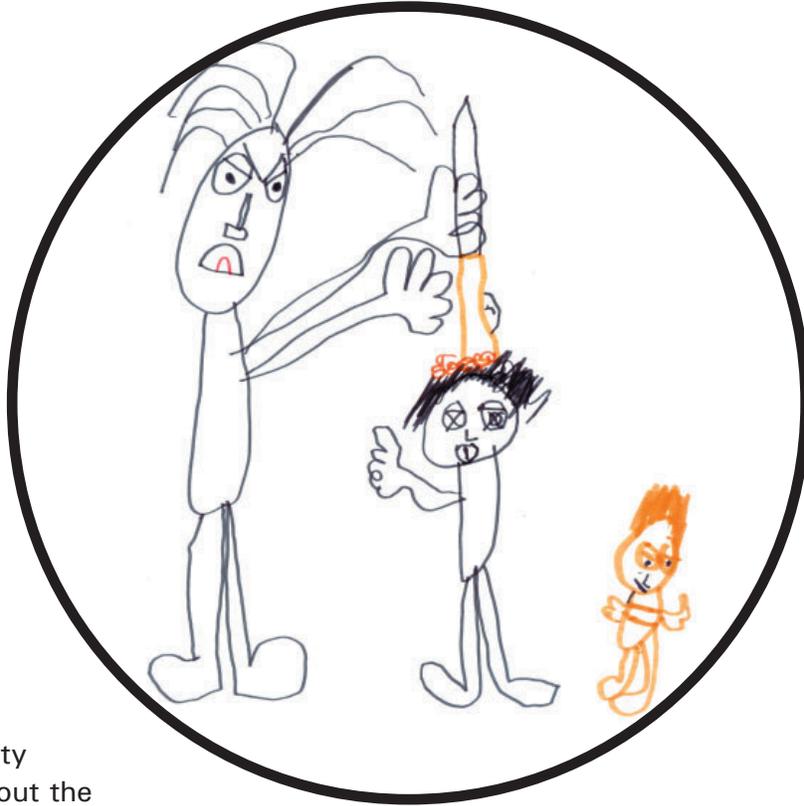
violence. During the 10-week program, children meet weekly with a domestic violence specialist and learn about safety planning and conflict resolution. Children are encouraged to vocalize their experiences of domestic violence—often for the first time—and discuss them with trained staff. Most importantly, these children receive reassurance that they are not at fault for what they have seen.



- *What you think and how you feel is very important.*
- *Feeling angry and scared is normal. It's OK to talk about it.*
- *Never get in the middle of a fight. Remember your safety plan and use it to get away and call for help.*
- *You are a wonderful child and you are very loved.¹⁴*

“The Children’s Domestic Violence Program offers children a time to discuss and think over their experiences in a safe and non-threatening manner,” says Kellie Rogers, principal advocate for the program. “Children have the opportunity to create their own safety plans and to learn about the dynamics of domestic violence in a developmentally appropriate manner. The staff members of the Children’s Domestic Violence Program are aware that children will most likely have future contact with the batterer, especially if he is their father. The program’s curriculum teaches children skills so that they will be able to handle the abuser’s past, present, and future behaviors with the least amount of damage to themselves.”

One of the tools used by the Children’s Domestic Violence Program is drawing. Art is an effective and easy way for children who have experienced violence to convey their experiences and to define their own emotional worlds. The pictures you see throughout this book were produced by children in the program. Many children find it easier to put their feelings into pictures rather



than to express them out loud. Drawing pictures allows them freedom from judgment and pressure.

Another strategy that Rogers employs is empathic listening, or truly listening to what the children are saying. Sometimes, in working with children who have been defined as “difficult” by their school or day care, she discovers that she is the first person to sit down and ask the child why they were engaging in troublesome behaviors.

Additionally, children receive information about creating their own safety plan. The safety plan helps them protect themselves during an incident.

Rogers relates one story of a child using a safety plan developed in the Children’s Domestic Violence Program.

If you know a child who is experiencing domestic violence in her or his home, you can help that child create a safety plan if s/he voluntarily expresses interest in leaning about how to manage fear or anger and how to protect himself/herself.

Here are some things you can say:

- *If you can’t get outside safely, then go to your room or other safe place in the house.*

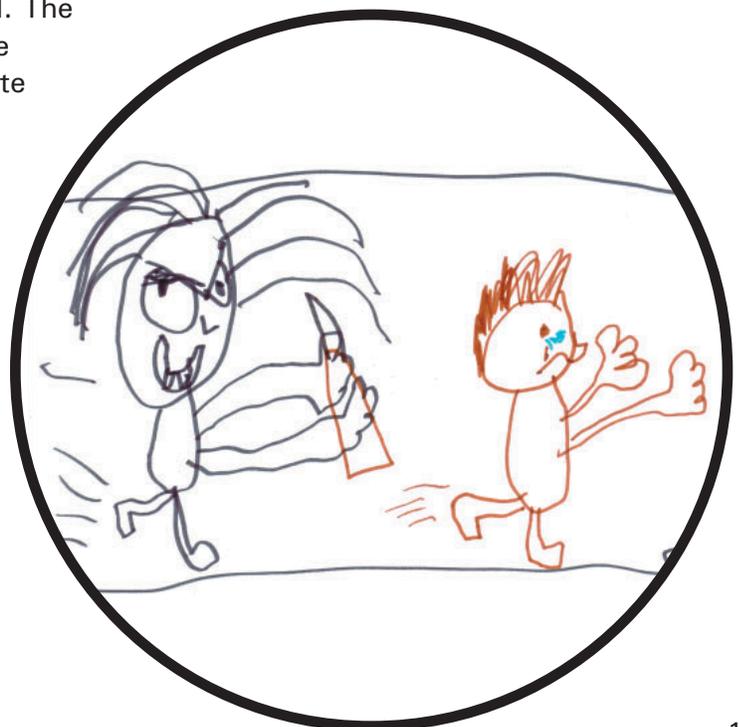
"Rebecca and I completed our safety plan on Thursday evening. The next Saturday, there was a serious incident in her home. On Monday, I talked to Rebecca and she was so proud that she had remembered and used her safety plan. Her description was powerful. She said, 'Kellie, I did it, I did it exactly right! I ran downstairs to the laundry room and waited for my mommy and we ran as fast as we could across the backyard to the neighbor's house!'"

The story demonstrates the power of safety planning. If children know what to do and can follow through, their recollection of the incident can be drastically different than the helpless, worried confusion of not knowing what to do. In Rebecca's case, the batterer had a gun, and the police needed to call in a SWAT team to diffuse the situation.

Safety plans need to be fluid. The Children's Domestic Violence Program helps children rewrite their plans if locations or situations change or if the child attempted to follow it and was unsuccessful. The Children's Domestic Violence Program acts out safety plans with children so that they are comfortable with using them, and so that they can remember them during stressful or frightening situations.

Much of the Children's Domestic Violence Program works because it operates on an individualized level with each child. Advocates have the ability to be flexible with each child and determine what would best serve him or her.

According to Dr. Jeffrey Edleson, an essential component when working with children affected by domestic violence is to consider each child's unique situation. "When people hear about this problem, they're horrified. They think every child is in great, great danger. This leads to overreaction to many of these children and stereotyping of them. We need to think carefully about each one of these children. This is a message for practitioners as well as parents. Each child is an individual. The best result is when we work with both the children and their mother."



- *Stay out of the fight. You can be hurt by things that get thrown or by blows intended for someone else.*
- *Go to a friend or neighbor's house.*
- *Figure out how many different ways you can get out of your house or apartment.*
- *Call for help (911).*
- *Find an adult you can trust and tell them what is happening with your family.¹⁵*



Rogers agrees. “The program has been successful because it offers individualized, advocacy-based counseling in the home of the child, and this is a unique approach,” she says. “Children respond very well when in their own environment. It is also valuable to work from the perspective of the child(ren) and to have the flexibility to mold the curriculum to fit their individual needs.”

Here are some success stories from the Children’s Domestic Violence Program.

Adam was 5 years old when he began refusing to go to school. When he arrived at school, he would scream, kick, throw temper tantrums, and generally act out in an aggressive and forceful way. His behaviors were so severe that his mother often had to stop her daily activities and collect him. Four months had passed, and the staff at Adam’s school was at wit’s end. After hearing that Adam had been exposed to domestic violence, the school called Rogers in for a consultation.

“So, why don’t you want to go to school?” she asked him.

His answer was startling: the day before Thanksgiving, Adam had watched his father strangle his mother—Adam had called 911. The police came, arrested his father, and took his mother to the hospital, where she’d had to stay for an extended recovery period.

He told Rogers that he needed to be at home to save his mom. He couldn’t save her while he was at school. After all, he’d been the one to call 911 and he’d received a special award from the police. His mother would have died without his intervention.

Rogers negotiated with TANF/DSHS administrators, the mom, and the school to arrive at a solution for Adam’s extreme separation anxiety. The process took six weeks: For the first two weeks, his mother came to school with him and spent the day by his side; the following two weeks, she went to school until lunchtime, then returned home and was available by phone in case Adam wanted to call her. During the final two weeks, she stayed home but was available by phone all day.

The strategy worked. Adam now looks forward to attending school. He

Helping an adult victim of domestic violence is one very effective way to help her children. When victims feel supported, they are more likely to take action to protect themselves and their families. If someone you know is being abused:

- *Listen, don’t judge.*
- *Let the victim know it is not her fault—there is never an*

wants to be a police officer when he grows up.

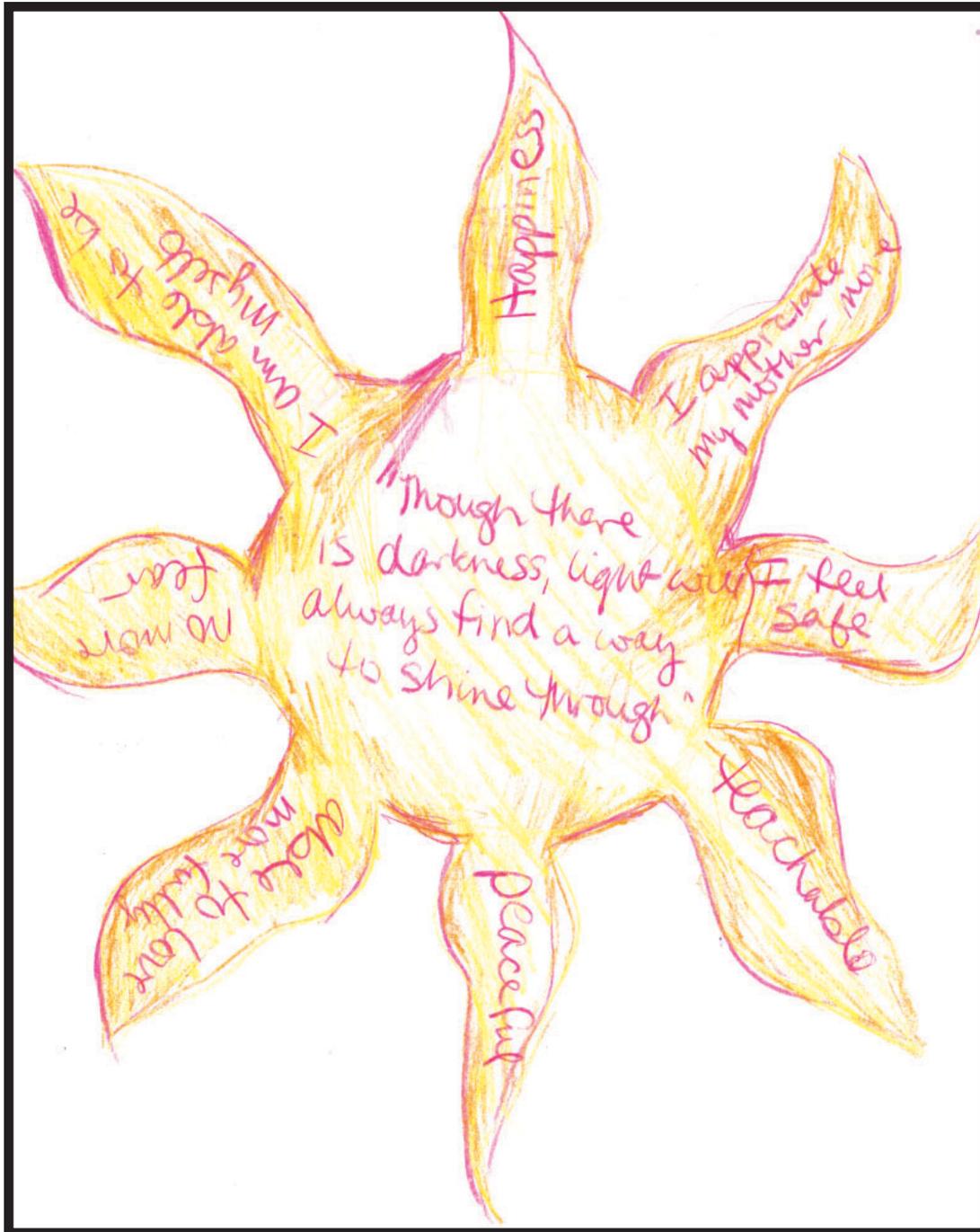
Jacob, the 9-year-old boy whose father threatened him with a gun, had similar results after completing the program and participating in ongoing play therapy. He began to overcome his separation anxiety, and was eventually able to attend summer camp. He had a great time, and can't wait to go back. For the first time in his life, he was able to engage in what Rogers calls "normal little boy behaviors."

Yim, the little girl who was tormented by neighborhood kids, met a karate instructor who lived in her neighborhood through the Children's Domestic Violence Program, and began taking classes in self-defense. The instructor, who happened to live nearby, began looking out for her and intervening when the neighborhood kids treated her disrespectfully. Within six months, Yim was no longer hiding. She now walks with confidence through the neighborhood and chooses friends that treat her with respect.

excuse for violence in a relationship.

- *Let the victim know that non-judgmental and confidential help is available. Help the victim find resources that can assist her. Some good starting points are listed in Chapter 5.*
- *Offer to keep copies of paperwork such as social security cards, birth certificates, or bank information.¹⁶*





Speaking out against domestic violence can feel like an enormous and difficult task. Here are some easy ways you can show your community that violence is not acceptable.

- Remind yourself that blaming the victim of violence is not acceptable.
- Learn the warning signs of abuse and how to support a friend.

Visions for the Future

All of this may sound overwhelming, but the hopeful news is that we are taking steps to overcome the problem of domestic violence. When women are ready to leave a violent relationship, there are hotlines, shelters, service agencies and other resources available. With proper intervention and treatment, children who have behavioral or emotional problems from witnessing domestic violence can and do recover.

There is still work to be done if we want to eradicate violence. It is critical that we keep issues related to domestic violence in the public eye. This means talking to our elected officials, educating our peers, and sharing information amongst friends and community networks. It means changing our attitudes about how we treat people affected by domestic violence. And it means being a resource for the children we know that might be at risk.

The first issue we need to address is lack of available resources. A number of different organizations have taken steps to provide services for those people affected by domestic violence. But programs that focus on the effects on children are scarce. The YWCA Children's Domestic Violence Program is one of the only programs of its kind in Washington State.

Some have suggested creating co-located services for children. This means that programs would be



offered in conjunction with shelters, advocacy programs and support groups. Others have suggested expanding existing advocacy programs to include children. Mental health care providers who work with children could be specifically educated on common problems children who have witnessed domestic violence face and taught how to respond.

Some organizations are addressing the lack of resources through legislative action. The Family Policy Council is an organization in Washington State that works to make systemic changes that can help improve the lives of families and children. A detailed description can be found at www.fpc.wa.gov.

In 2001, the Family Policy Council took on children and domestic violence as one of its core issues. The organization, along with the Children's

- *Invite someone from a local domestic violence agency to speak to your community group.*
- *Request that speakers on domestic violence talk to classes in your schools.*
- *Ask local schools to display books and materials on domestic violence in visible locations.¹⁷*



Domestic Violence Program was instrumental in developing a piece of legislation for Washington State that charges abusers a fine for incidents, with the money going to fund domestic violence programs. This is one example of how new funding can be developed for innovative services.

It is also important that we change our attitudes about women who are affected by domestic violence and hold batterers accountable for their actions. As a culture, we tend to blame the victim. Women and their children often face significant financial, legal, and safety barriers when they leave their batterer. Many times, women will stay in a violent relationship to protect their children from having unsupervised contact

with the unsafe parent.

Exposure to abuse is harmful, but it is important to remember that the perpetrator of the abuse is the one at fault. Women in these situations are generally very protective mothers. According to Dr. Edleson, many mothers take the child or children's welfare into account.¹⁹ Some battered

mothers may have difficulty parenting due to severe depression or substance abuse, sometimes associated with the effects of the abuse on them. But other battered mothers have been shown to parent effectively even under the stress of abuse.

National experts have stated emphatically that the most effective and immediate way for social services to increase safety for children who have experienced violence in the home is to support the autonomy of the non-abusive parent. In most cases, the mother is the victim, the primary caregiver, and the one most concerned about the child(ren)'s safety.

Supporting her autonomy means:

- Holding the abuser accountable for the abuse, and asking, "Whose

In 2000, the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention devised a framework to guide agencies, advocates, and individuals involved with helping children affected by violence. These principles can help us build safe places within our community for victims of violence. They also help us respond more effectively and efficiently to victims.

behavior needs to change to stop domestic violence, or whose behavior is causing the danger to the children?”

- Recognizing the non-abusive parent’s strengths, encouraging her own decision-making and aiding her in her efforts to care for the children.
- Making sure that victims can count on support (financial, emotional, and legal) and freedom from judgment when they seek services from advocates, mental health providers, health care providers, courts, police, Child Protective Services, DSHS, and housing authorities.

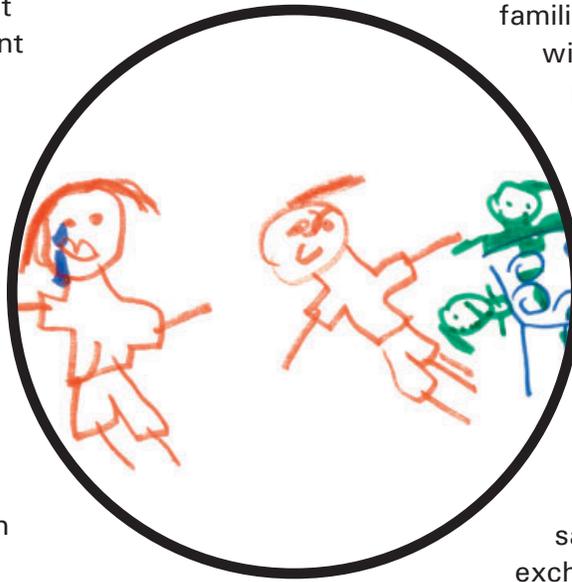
When survivors of domestic violence can trust that they will be respected and supported, they will act to secure safety for themselves and their children. The unacceptable alternative is that victims will remain isolated from services and communities.

All too often we assume that a woman is safe once she leaves the violent relationship. But she is much more likely to be killed once she leaves. In Washington State, at

least half of the domestic violence fatalities occurred either after or as the battered woman was attempting to leave.²⁰ For families struggling with custody issues, violence often erupts during visitations.

South King County is home to a program that is attempting to address these issues. For families where visitation with non-residential parents is an issue, the Safe Havens Visitation Center in Kent has been established through funding from the federal Office on Violence Against Women and the City of Kent to create safer visitations and exchanges in a secure, non-violent, culturally appropriate setting.

Tracee Parker, Safe Havens Project Coordinator, is working toward modeling non-violent, kind, and respectful behavior in an environment that holds the abuser accountable for past abuse. She says, “We’d ultimately like to end domestic violence. We are asking, ‘How can we, during a visitation, model non-violent behavior—kindness and decency—and hold the abuser accountable without humiliation and punishment?’”



- *Work together.*
- *Begin earlier.*
- *Think developmentally.*
- *Provide safety for children by helping their mothers.*
- *Enforce the law.*
- *Make adequate resources available.*
- *Work from a sound knowledge base.*
- *Create a culture of nonviolence.¹⁸*

And finally, we can take personal action. One of the first steps is to educate ourselves about domestic violence. The resources section of this book includes a reading and web site list. All of these sources will have information that can help improve our knowledge about domestic violence and how it can affect children.

Personal action may also include becoming a resource for children. It is important to let kids who may be experiencing violence know that we are there for them and that we will not intervene in ways that may put them at risk. This may also include talking to children about the ways that our culture devalues women and teaching children critical thinking skills so that they can understand the subtle negative messages they see in the movies, on TV, or in video games.

It is also important that we keep domestic violence on the

agenda of our elected officials. We encourage all readers to contact their Congressional representatives. Urge Federal Congress and the Washington State Legislature to address domestic violence and ensure that it does not get overlooked in policy or in funding.

The positive message to take away from this book is that we can and will bring about change for families affected by domestic violence. We can take steps to provide the services they need to move toward a safer future.

Children can and do recover from witnessing domestic violence. Children are extremely resilient, and with support from one or more loving mentors, they can find ways to cope. Expert Lundy Bancroft encourages us not to see children as passive, helpless victims. He says, "Side by side with children's distresses are their courageous efforts to find ways to be safe, to watch out for one another, to find people who will love them, to hold onto the belief that they don't deserve to be mistreated and neither does their mother."²¹

Violent behaviors do not always repeat themselves. Many adults who were victims of domestic violence as children grow up to live non-violent lives and maintain loving, healthy, happy relationships with their partners and their own children.



Writing, emailing, or calling your congressional representatives is an effective way to express your concern about domestic violence. If you are unsure of how to do this or who they are, here are some helpful phone numbers and web sites:

- *Contact information for Federal Senators can be found at www.senate.gov.*

Solving the problem of domestic violence will not be easy, but it is possible. As a society, we need to work purposefully toward changing the attitudes we hold about violence. We can communicate that violence in any form, and domestic violence in particular, is not acceptable. We can keep the plight of children who are affected by domestic violence in the forefront of our thoughts and share that message with others. And, we can support increased funding for services and research. Real change requires work on both global and local levels, and with your help, we believe that it is possible.

Notes:

All uncited quotes were taken from interviews conducted with the speaker by the YWCA.

All case stories were taken from participants in the YWCA Children's Domestic Violence Program. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the identities and safety of the YWCA's clients.

- 1 "Family Violence Prevention Fund Domestic Violence Fact Sheet," www.endabuse.org
- 2 "Health Concerns Across a Women's Lifespan: 1998 Survey of Women's Health" The Commonwealth Fund, 1999. New York, NY
- 3 "Covering Domestic Violence: A Guide for Journalists and Other Media Professionals, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence," www.wscadv.org
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes. "Extent, Nature and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey." NCJ 181867, July 2000
- 7 "Covering Domestic Violence: A Guide for Journalists and Other Media Professionals, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence," www.wscadv.org

8 Ibid

9 Jeffrey L. Edleson, "The Overlap Between Child Maltreatment and Woman Abuse," *Violence Against Women* 5(1999):2

10 Adapted from Minnesota Center Against Violence & Abuse, "How Children Are Involved in Adult Domestic Violence: Results From A Four City Telephone Survey," <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/link/documents/children/children.doc>

11 Adapted from Susan Schechter, "Expanding Solutions for Domestic Violence and Poverty: What Battered Women with Abused Children Need from Their Advocates," <http://www.vaw.umn.edu/documents/expandin/expandin.html>

12 Adapted from Robin Karr-Morse and Meredith S. Wiley, *Ghosts from the Nursery* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997).

13 Lundy Bancroft, Speaking at the Children's Justice Conference, Bellevue, WA, 2004

14 Kellie Rogers, Advocate, YWCA Children's Domestic Violence Program

15 Adapted from Next Door, www.nextdoor.org/children.html, 2002

16 Adapted from the South King County Community Network, <http://www.skccn.com/helpkids/adults.htm>

17 Adapted from the South King County Community Network, <http://www.skccn.com/helpkids/todo.htm>

18 Adapted from U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "Safe From the Start: Taking Action on Children Exposed to Violence," http://ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/summary_safefromstart/chap3.html

19 Jeffrey L. Edleson, "Should Childhood Exposure to Adult Domestic Violence Be Defined as Child Maltreatment Under the Law?" <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/link/documents/shouldch/shouldch.shtml>

20 Washington State Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project, www.wscadv.org/projects/FR/02_FR_report.pdf.

21 Lundy Bancroft, *When Dad Hurts Mom: Helping Your Children Heal from the Wounds of Witnessing Abuse* (Boston: Putnam's Sons, 2004), 262.

- Addresses and phone numbers for Federal Representatives can be found at www.house.gov or by calling 202.244.2131.
- Washington State Legislative representatives in the State House and Senate can be found at www1.leg.wa.gov/legislature or by calling 1.800.562.6000.



Resources

What can you do to take action against domestic violence?

You can:

- *Show your concern.*
Many of us learned early on not to ask questions about other people's families or relationships, especially if there seems to be trouble. But keeping violence private helps no one. If you believe someone is being abused or is affected by abuse, express concern and offer resources. S/he might not respond right away, but s/he will receive a signal that you are someone who cares.

- *Be a resource for children who have lived with violence.*
Providing love and support for children is one of the most important steps we can take. We must also be careful not to cause additional problems for the child(ren). This means not interfering or getting involved in ways that jeopardize her/his safety or cause eruptions at home.

Other things we can all do in our daily lives:

- Learn as much as you can about domestic violence and raise awareness about what you know with your friends, neighbors, and community.
- Cultivate a respectful attitude toward women in your family, workplace, and social life.
- Model non-violent, respectful

ways of resolving conflicts in the family. Talk with your family and loved ones instead of shouting.

- Talk to friends, neighbors, and family members when they belittle women, make a joke about violence, or ignore violence in the media.
- Write to music and movie companies, video game producers, and television stations to speak out about violence against women.
- Encourage projects with religious and civic organizations to raise consciousness about domestic violence.
- Sponsor a family through a local shelter, giving food and personal care items to women and families.
- Buy books, toys, and movies that support non-violence.
- Vote to ensure stable funding sources for domestic violence services.

When you fight it makes me
feel tense,
I feel as if I am trapped within a fence.
Both of your words are so cold,
And the fighting is getting old.

Why don't one of you do the right thing and leave,
And keep us all settled at ease.
I am tired of the screaming and yelling,
And you leave me no choice, but to be dwelling.

As I think about the fighting,
It makes me so angry that I begin crying.
Please stop this violence,
And stop making me feel so tense!

15-year-old girl

Suggested Reading and Web Sites

The books and sites below contain a wealth of information, stories, statistics and facts about how children are affected by domestic violence. Many of these resources were invaluable in the writing of this book.

Safety note: Computers record everything you do on the computer and on the Internet. If you are in danger, please try to use a computer where your abuser cannot gain direct access, or even remote (hacking) access. It might be safer to use a computer in a public library, at a community technology center, at a trusted friend's house, or at an Internet café.

Books:

Bancroft, Lundy
Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men
Berkley Publishing Group, 2002

Bancroft, Lundy
When Dad Hurts Mom: Helping Your Children Heal From the Wounds of Witnessing Abuse
G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2004

Graham-Bermann, Sandra A. and Jeffrey L. Edleson
Domestic Violence in the Lives of Children: The Future of Research, Intervention and Social Policy
American Psychological Association, 2001

Karr-Morse, Robin & Meredith S. Wiley
Ghosts from the Nursery: Tracing the Roots of Violence
Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999

McAlister Groves, Betsy
Children Who See Too Much: Lessons from the Child Witness to Violence Project
Beacon Press, 2003

Web sites:

Family Violence Prevention Fund
www.endabuse.org

Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women
www.mcbw.org

National Center for Children Exposed to Violence
www.nccev.org

Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse's site on Children and Domestic Violence
www.mincava.umn.edu/link/

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
www.wscadv.org

Domestic Violence Resources in Washington State

If you or someone you know is being abused, any of the following agencies can help you. You can call or visit web sites to get information, resources, and confidential discussions.

Safety note: Computers record everything you do on the computer and on the Internet. If you are in danger, please try to use a computer where your abuser cannot gain direct access, or even remote (hacking) access. It might be safer to use a computer in a public library, at a community technology center, at a trusted friend's house, or at an Internet café.

WASHINGTON STATE

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

State-wide hotline: 1.800.562.6025
www.wscadv.org

Note: Has contact information for most domestic violence programs in Washington State, including those for specialized populations.

METRO SEATTLE

YWCA Domestic Violence Legal Advocate

206.568.7859

New Beginnings – 24 hour crisis line

206.522.9472
www.newbegin.org

SOUTH KING COUNTY

YWCA Domestic Violence Community Advocacy line
425.226.1266, ext. 1017

Note: Available only in the daytime on weekdays.

Domestic Abuse Women's Network (DAWN) – 24 hour crisis line

425.656.7867
www.dawnonline.org

YWCA Children's Domestic Violence Program

425.226.1266, ext. 1029

Safe Havens Visitation Center

253.856.5140
www.ci.kent.wa.us/humanservices/safehavens.asp

EAST KING COUNTY

Eastside Domestic Violence Program – 24 hour crisis line

800.827.8840
425.746.1940
www.edvp.org

SNOHOMISH COUNTY

Snohomish County Center for Battered Women – 24 hour crisis line

425.252.2873
www.snococbw.org



Support Services and Advocates Explained

Every domestic violence situation is as unique as the individuals involved. Only you can determine what is safest and best for you and your family. However, there are advocates who can help you, and provide resources and information to help you live safely and free from violence. Here is a list of the different types of advocates.

1. **Community Domestic Violence Advocate**

A community advocate provides resources for a variety of services such as safety planning, domestic violence information, shelter, food, personal needs, support groups, options, etc. A community advocate can be reached through your local domestic violence agencies such as YWCA, Domestic Abuse Women's Network, New Beginnings, Eastside Domestic Violence Program and the Snohomish County Center for Battered Women. Numbers for these agencies are on page 29. There are also domestic violence community advocates available in some Department of Social Health Services offices. If you are a victim of domestic violence and you are applying for help at the Department of Social Health Services, ask your case-worker if there is an advocate available.

2. **Legal Advocate/Community Based:**

A legal advocate can provide information regarding the legal process, accompany you through the court process, provide resources for legal representation, and help file petitions in civil matters such as protection orders, dissolutions, modifications, etc. They can also assist in all criminal matters, including if you have been arrested for a domestic violence assault but feel you are the victim. There are legal advocates in community agencies, such as those listed on page 29.

3. **Court Advocate:**

A court advocate works for the prosecutors' office. If you are the victim in a criminal case, the advocate in the prosecutors' office may contact you regarding the case and offer safety planning, resources, or information regarding the legal process. The advocate may also help you communicate your thoughts and concerns to the prosecuting attorney, accompany you through the court process, attend hearings, or assist you with a protection order.

4. **Protection Order Advocates:**

Protection Order advocates also work for the Prosecutors' office in the Superior Courts. They are there to assist with filling out the protection order forms, explain the protection order hearing process, and support you during the hearing for your protection order.

5. **Children's Advocates:**

There are agencies that offer services for your children, including support for children who have witnessed abuse or have been abused or assaulted. These services can often be found through the agencies page 29. In South King County, you may contact the YWCA Children's Advocate at 425.226.1266, ext. 1029

You do not need an advocate for any legal process, such as obtaining a protection order, or to access community support services.

Advocates are available to offer support, resources, and encouragement.

This page contributed by Simone Tais, YWCA Domestic Violence Advocate.

Power and Control Wheel

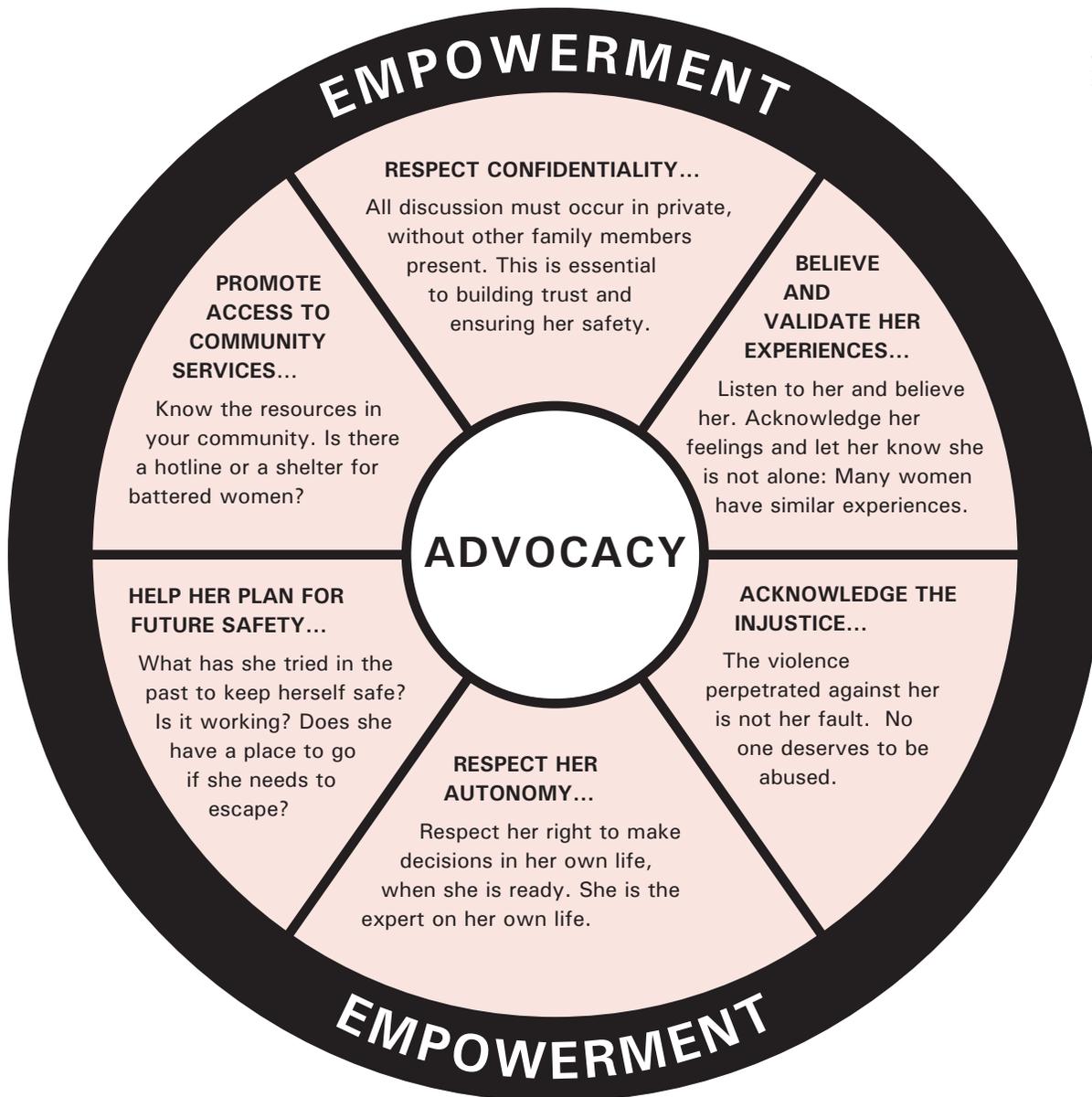
Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the woman's life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which is used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.



Developed by:
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
202 East Superior Street
Duluth, MN 55802
218.722.2781
www.duluth-model.org
Used with permission

Advocacy Wheel



Adapted from:
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
202 East Superior Street
Duluth, MN 55802
218.722.2781
www.duluth-model.org
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Afterword

Some of the stories and pictures in this book may have been difficult to read or to view. It is your interest and dedication that will, in the end, bring the changes necessary to end domestic violence. Children who gave their permission to tell their stories or show their artwork did so with the hope that together we can accomplish a change for the better.

Working with children is a huge honor, and I am grateful for the opportunities afforded to me as the children's advocate at the South King County YWCA. Sometimes my family and friends offer me sympathy as they assume that my job is difficult at best. They lament that it must be depressing to work with traumatized kids and that they would struggle with the frustration of always trying to "fix" the problems. I remind them that the children I work with are just like all kids: they are funny and strong and some of them are amazingly insightful. Unfortunately, they have all had to live with an abuser. What they need from me is a non-judgmental ear and ideas about how to look at their experiences or solve problems differently. Some of them carry the huge weight of guilt and grief, but all

of them are wonderful, and I am the one who is blessed.

I thank and commend the mothers and guardians who have trusted me to work with their families, as it takes great courage to invite a stranger into one's home and then to give that person access to one's child(ren). For the children: thank you for your bravery and for your willingness to try different things, and for letting me share your experiences. It is your stories and pictures that will make domestic violence real to a lot of adults. It is because of you and for you that grown-ups will change how they think about domestic violence. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the YWCA, and in particular, Linda Rasmussen and Celia Forrest, for offering a wonderfully supportive home to the Children's Domestic Violence Program, and also to Tizzy Asher and Leticia Christopherson for their extensive efforts to research, write, and design this book.

This book is dedicated to all families in the hopes of forever ending domestic violence, and in particular to those who have touched my life and who have given my work meaning.

Kellie Rogers

Children's Advocate

YWCA Children's Domestic Violence Program

Acknowledgements

The Children's Domestic Violence program was originally developed and sponsored by Catholic Community Services in South King County and became a part of the YWCA's service continuum in September 2003. Many thanks go to Janet Hedgepath, Program Manager for Children's Services at Catholic Community Services, for her invaluable developmental work with this program.

The South King County Community Network, one of 39 community networks formed by the Family Policy Council of Washington State, has been instrumental in bringing the effects of domestic violence on children into the forefront of public awareness in King County.

This book would not have been possible without the vision and guidance of Kellie Rogers, Children's Advocate for the YWCA Domestic Violence Program. The YWCA Seattle • King County • Snohomish County also wishes to thank the following individuals for their contributions to this project:

Tizzy Asher

Leticia Christopherson

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Linda Rasmussen

Simone Tais

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Dr. Jeffrey Edleson

Sergeant Deborah Nicholson

Tracee Parker

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To obtain more copies of this book, please contact Tizzy Asher in the YWCA Community Affairs department at 206.461.4449 or tasher@ywcaworks.org.



Our Mission:

The mission of the YWCA of Seattle • King County • Snohomish County is to advance the quality of life for women of all ages, races, and faiths, and their families.

The YWCA believes that working together we can create a community where:

- All women and families have a safe, stable place to live.
- All adults have the opportunity to earn a livable wage and achieve self-sufficiency.
- All children and youth can develop the skills they need to succeed in life.
- All people can live with dignity, free from violence, racism, and discrimination.