

The *Safe and Together* Model and Cross System Collaboration

The *Safe and Together* model is a field tested approach to helping child welfare and its partners in making good decisions for children impacted by domestic violence perpetrators. The model is designed to 1) improved competencies such as risk and safety assessment, case decision making, interviewing, and documentation, and also to 2) improve cross systems collaboration. The *Safe and Together* model can be useful to a variety of disciplines and systems including child welfare, community based mental health organizations, domestic violence agencies, the courts and law enforcement. While child welfare agencies are central to the safety and well being of children, any professional working with children and families impacted by domestic violence perpetrators can benefit from training and technical assistance based the principles and critical components of the *Safe and Together* model. In fact, when professionals across systems are trained in the *Safe and Together* model they gain a common framework for discussing concerns, challenges and solutions for families.

Assumptions, Principles and Critical Components

Developed initially for child welfare, the assumptions, principles and critical components of field tested model are valuable for professionals in multiple disciplines. The following are some of the assumptions undergirding the *Safe and Together* model:

- Safety, permanency and well-being of children are impossible to achieve without the competent and skillful response to domestic violence by the professionals and systems involved with families.
- The interests of domestic violence survivors, child welfare and other systems are in significant alignment: reducing or eliminating the safety and risk concerns posed by domestic violence perpetrators.
- Child welfare and other systems need to develop their capacities and competencies to intervene more effectively with domestic violence perpetrators, particularly as it relates to the safety and well being of children.

To improve practice and create better outcomes for children and families exposed to domestic violence perpetrator's behavior, the following principles can help guide practice:

- From the perspective of safety, healing from trauma, and stability, it is in the best of interest of children to remain *Safe and Together* with the non-offending domestic violence survivor.

- A partnership with the non-offending domestic violence survivor is the most effective and efficient way to promote the safety, permanency and well being of children in a family impacted by a domestic violence perpetrator.
- A partnership with a non-offending domestic violence survivor needs to be based on a comprehensive assessment of her active efforts to promote the safety and well being of the children.
- Systems can improve outcomes for children and families by increasing their capacity to intervene with domestic violence perpetrators, particularly as it relates to the safety and well being of children.

Implementation of these principles in cross system collaboration and case practice is supported by a focus on identifying the following critical elements of a case:

- The domestic violence perpetrator's pattern of coercive control.
- Specific behaviors the perpetrator has engaged in to harm the children.
- Full spectrum of the survivor's efforts to promote the safety and well being of the children.
- Adverse impact of the perpetrator's behavior on the children.
- Other factors including substance abuse, mental health, cultural and other socio-economic factors that may impact the domestic violence.

Implications of the Safe and Together Model for Criminal Courts, Law Enforcement, Probation & Parole

Professionals within the criminal justice system, including judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation/parole and law enforcement officers may benefit from reviewing domestic violence cases within the framework of the ***Safe and Together*** model. For example, a more intensive focus on assessing how perpetrators harm children can assist criminal justice professionals in understanding a) the risk domestic violence perpetrators pose to their families' safety, b) the means by which they may pressure a victim to recant and c) the sentences and services that can be more appropriately ordered. The ***Safe and Together*** model can also help guide the development of conditions of probation, shape batterer intervention programming to address the impact on children and parenting, and improve the response of child advocacy teams to child sexual and physical abuse. The ***Safe and Together*** model's focus on understanding of perpetrator's pattern of coercive control and actions to harm children can help law enforcement document the impact of Violations of Restraining Orders and other court orders on the safety and well being of children.

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Implications of the Safe and Together Model for Dependency and Family Courts

Judges, attorneys, Guardians ad Litem, court evaluators and others within the family and dependency court system can benefit from utilization of the ***Safe and Together*** model in a) assessing the risk

domestic violence perpetrators pose to children prior to making case decisions, b) making sure that appropriate information is available to court ordered evaluators c) the development of neglect petitions that maintains a focus on the danger posed by the perpetrator and the protective capacity of the domestic violence survivor, and d) determining the needs of the children. Decisions on the best interest of children need to be based on accurate, specific information about the domestic violence perpetrator's pattern of behavior and its impact on children beyond simply whether the children saw the violence or not. For example, information about how the perpetrator may be using the children as a weapon against the other parent or interfering with their children's basic needs or relationship with the other parent is critical to any assessment of the children's best interests. Similarly, decisions regarding the best interests of children require information about the domestic violence survivor's full spectrum of efforts to promote the safety and well being of the children in the family. The **Safe and Together** framework uses a behavioral lens which helps guide assessment and decision making. With its focus on patterns of coercive control, actions that perpetrators take to harm children and the protective behavior patterns of domestic violence survivors, the Safe and Together can provide an "evidence based" focus for assessments and decision making.