

“Let’s Talk About Intimate Partner Violence”: Tip Sheet and Action Steps Supporting Families Affected by Domestic Violence in ZTT’s ITCP – 4/22/22

1. Get to know the domestic violence providers in the communities serving client families.

Find out what’s available in your area – services for victims, their children, and for partners who cause harm. You can begin by contacting your state coalition: <https://ncadv.org/state-coalitions>. Invite local domestic violence providers to present to your team. Having established partnerships helps the process of making referrals and preparing clients for what to expect from these services. *If it’s safe to do so, offer a hotline number with service provider.* Victimized partners can talk more openly with a DV advocate who may be mandated to keep conversations confidential.

2. Plan to routinely meet alone with each partner during your initial contacts and then periodically throughout the course of the family’s involvement with the Infant-Toddler Court Team Program.

Why is this recommended? Intimate partner violence (IPV) is common. Even if it’s not identified, you can explain that it’s our practice to meet separately at the beginning and then at regular intervals during the families’ involvement. Someone experiencing IPV will not feel safe disclosing in front of their partner and, in fact, may be controlled by a glance, a gesture, or some other reminder to stay silent about the abuse. Regularly scheduled individual contacts gives you the opportunity to ask about and monitor for any increased risk of harm. Risk is fluid in these situations. You can then adapt your service plan based on safety concerns (e.g., separate the partners at court hearings, hold separate family time meetings with each partner and child, resume supervised visitation, etc.)

3. In recommending services and developing a coordinated plan for the family, it’s important to keep these considerations in mind:

Babies and young children are best served by maintaining consistent contact with protective adults. Adults experiencing intimate partner violence strive to protect their children despite the traumatic impact of their abusive partners’ behavior and actions. Think about how you can support ongoing contact between victimized partners and their children, while creating greater safety for all.

Use of coercive tactics and threats by the abusive partner can derail access and progress:

Abusive partners may seem more competent and reasonable. They may use coercive tactics, such as threatening to call CPS or societal stigma about mental health and substance use to undermine their victimized partners’ credibility to authorities and prevent access to sources of support, treatment, or recovery that might lead to greater safety and well-being for IPV survivors and their children.

What’s not recommended for service plans when IPV is present:

- Anger management classes for abusive partners are *not helpful* in addressing the underlying relationship dynamics; they may gain more tools to manipulate and control their partners.
- Couples counseling is also contraindicated unless and until it’s between equal partners. Couples counseling may escalate risks to the victimized partner.
- In addition, *be cautious about recommending ongoing, joint family time with both parents present* when IPV is a concern.

4. **Establish a universal screening protocol with talking points that a caseworker (or frontline investigator) can use with every family that enters the program:**
 - Begin with community team reflection and discussion: How would we go about implementing this process? What benefits do we see? What potential barriers or concerns do we have?
 - Then, seek out Zero-To-Three in-house or outside consultation to develop a protocol that works for your team.
5. **To learn more about intimate partner violence,** check out the **selected resources** in the webinar slide handout, “Let’s Talk About Intimate Partner Violence.”

Consider a team “viewing” event for each of the 3 webinars in the ZTT series on “Supporting Infant-Toddler Court Program Families Affected by Domestic Violence” (2021):

- Part 1- Understanding the Dynamics of DV <https://youtu.be/slXQbyEb-c>
- Part 2- Best Practices for Engaging with Families Affected by DV <https://youtu.be/Zyr3MEa9qQg>
- Part 3- Supporting Families Affected by DV to Achieve Better Outcomes
<https://youtu.be/V60i3oeMN2s>

After viewing, talk about what stands out for you and how you can apply this to your practice.

Offer to facilitate a book discussion open to community partners on Rachel Louise Synder’s *No Visible Bruises: What We Don’t Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us* (2019). Available in paperback.

Watch the Netflix series *Maid* (2021) as a team and reflect on what stands out for you and how that might affect your practice going forward. Based on the memoir by Stephanie Land, this series highlights the struggles of a young mother who has experienced intimate partner violence, as she strives to build a better life for herself and her young child.

