

# Power and Control Dynamics

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LOU FELIPE, PHD

The Kempe Center  
FOR THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT  
OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT



University of Colorado  
Anschutz Medical Campus



Children's Hospital Color

Miranda Encina  
Culturally Responsive  
Technical Assistance  
Specialist

[Mencina@violencefreeco.org](mailto:Mencina@violencefreeco.org)



Violence *free*  
COLORADO™

Together we can end relationship abuse

As Colorado's state domestic violence coalition, Violence Free Colorado works with hundreds of organizations and individuals in local communities across the state to prevent and end relationship violence, and support those affected by relationship abuse.

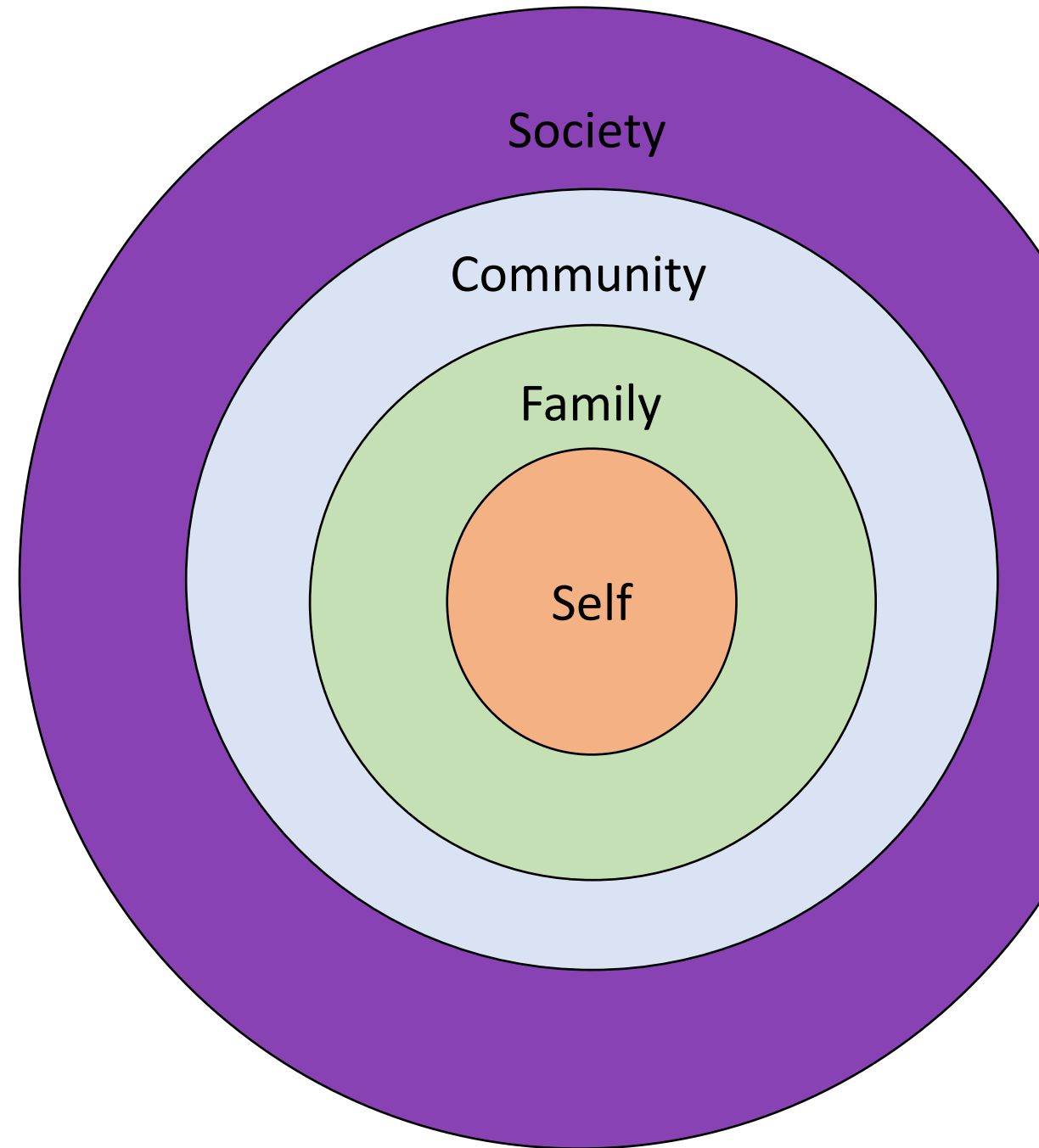
# Goals:

- To have knowledge of power and control dynamics, the cycle of violence, and why survivors may stay in domestic violence relationships.
- To understand and recognize how domestic violence impacts children on multiple levels.
- To examine how domestic violence and child abuse intersect.
- How to support children who witness violence.



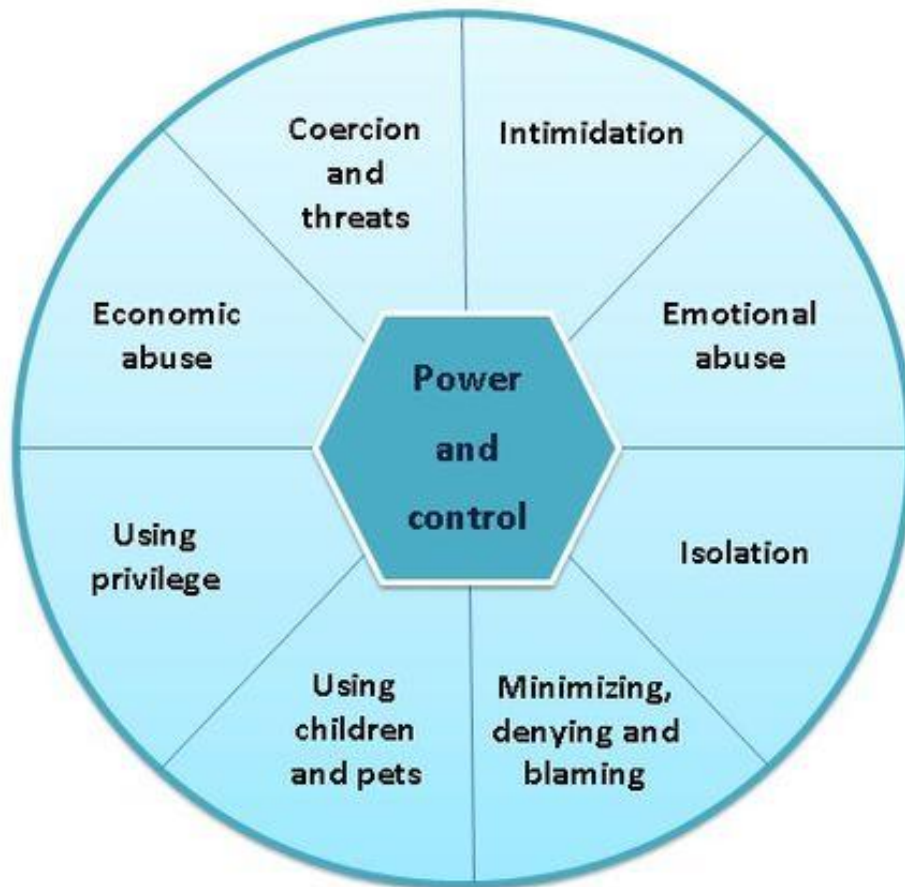
# Witness to stories

- Meeting survivors where they are
- Hold space for complexity
- Movie Vs Snapshot
  - "What happened before, during and after"



# Power and Control Domestic Violence

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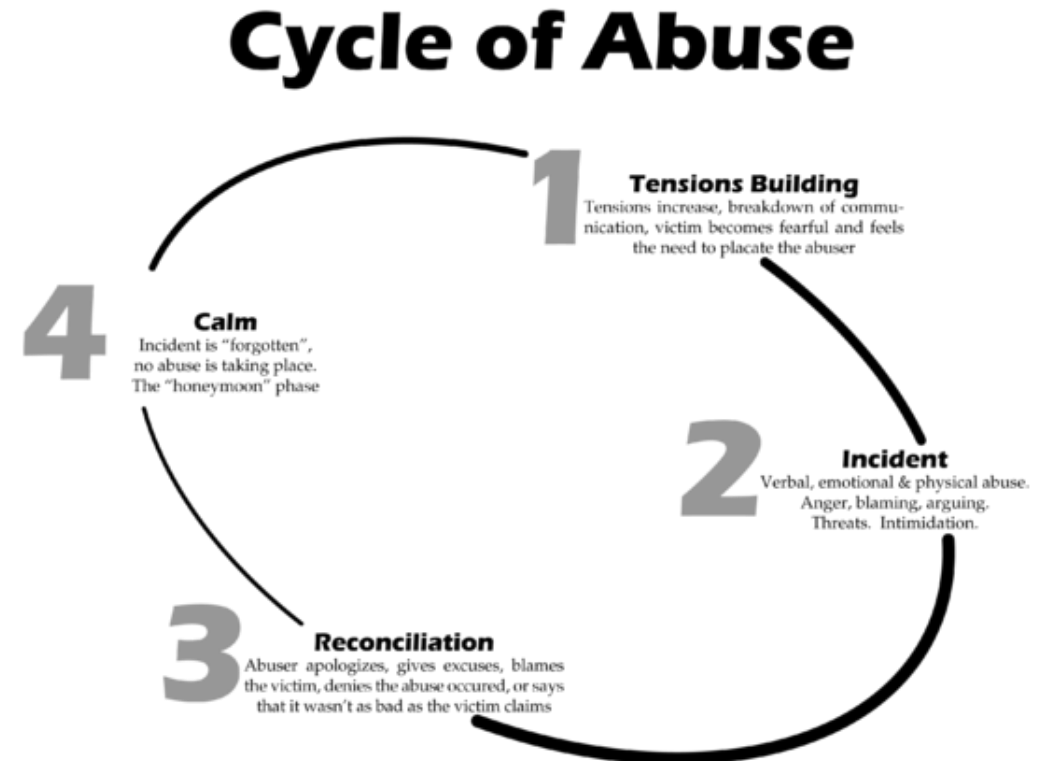
"Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another."

- Whose world is getting smaller
  - Access to insurance, medicine, bank accounts, lease...

# Cycle of Violence

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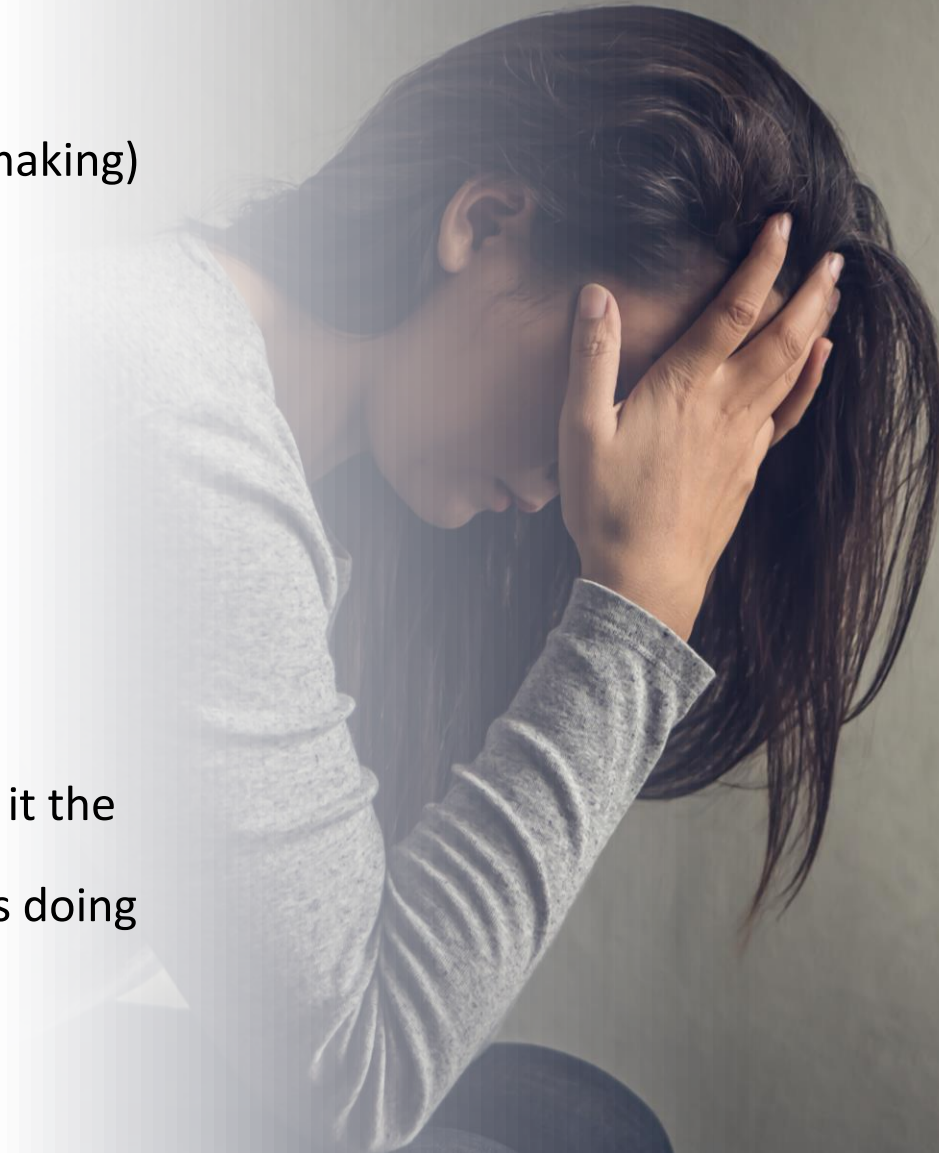
- Increase in frequency and severity
- Can get shorter between phases
- This can be predictable
  - Around a paycheck
  - Holidays
  - Kids school vacation
- Survivors often know what this is, but do not have a name for it.
  - Safety plan around survivor's experience





# Why do people stay?

- Parenting
  - more control over parenting (discipline, school, decision making)
  - Fear of Kidnapping
- Immigration- language barriers
- Housing
- Insurance
- Being outed as LGBTQ+
- Denial minimization
- Love
- Family beliefs
- COVID
- Partner holds a powerful position in the community
- They know what abusive person is doing

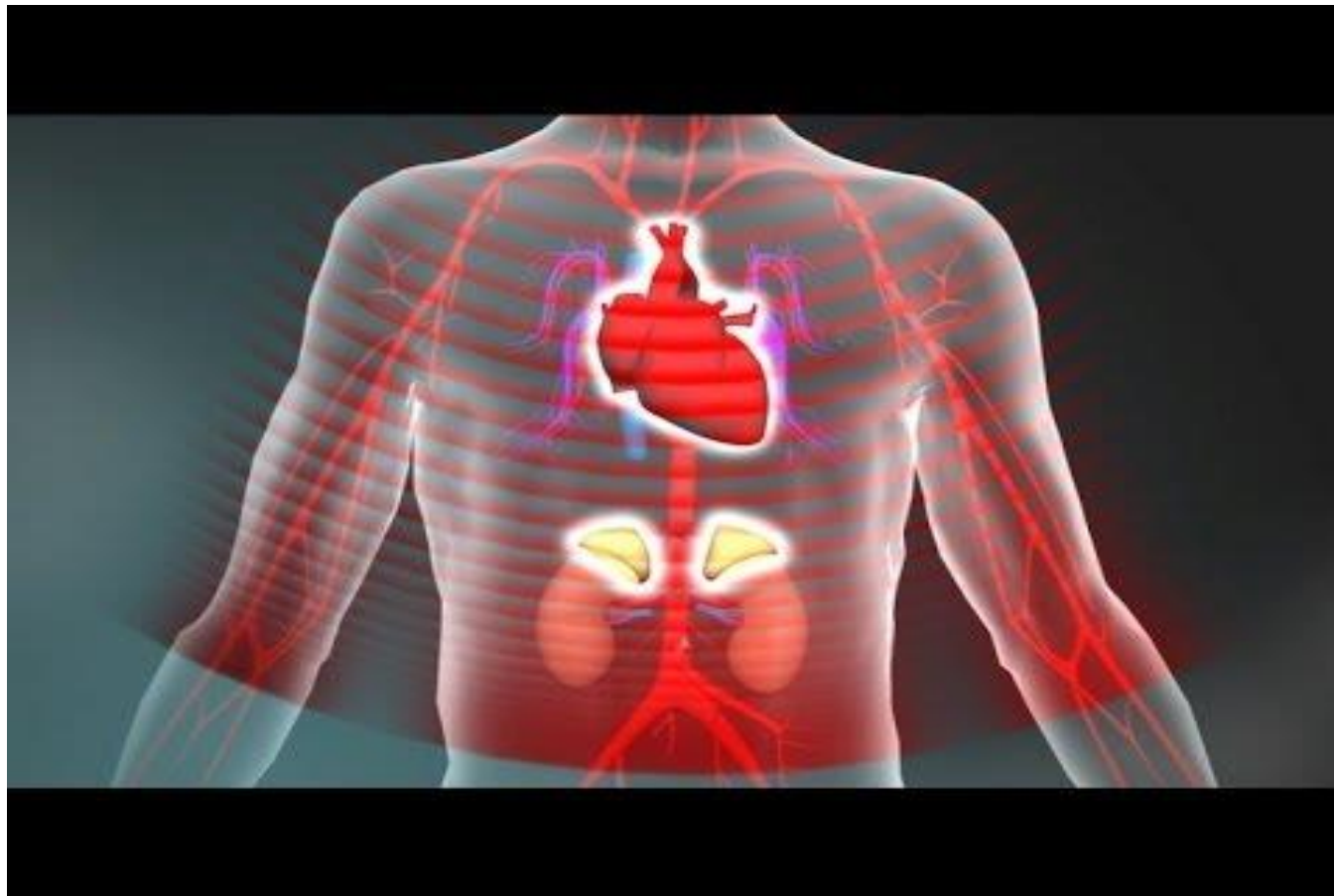


## Lethality indicators

70% abuse escalation

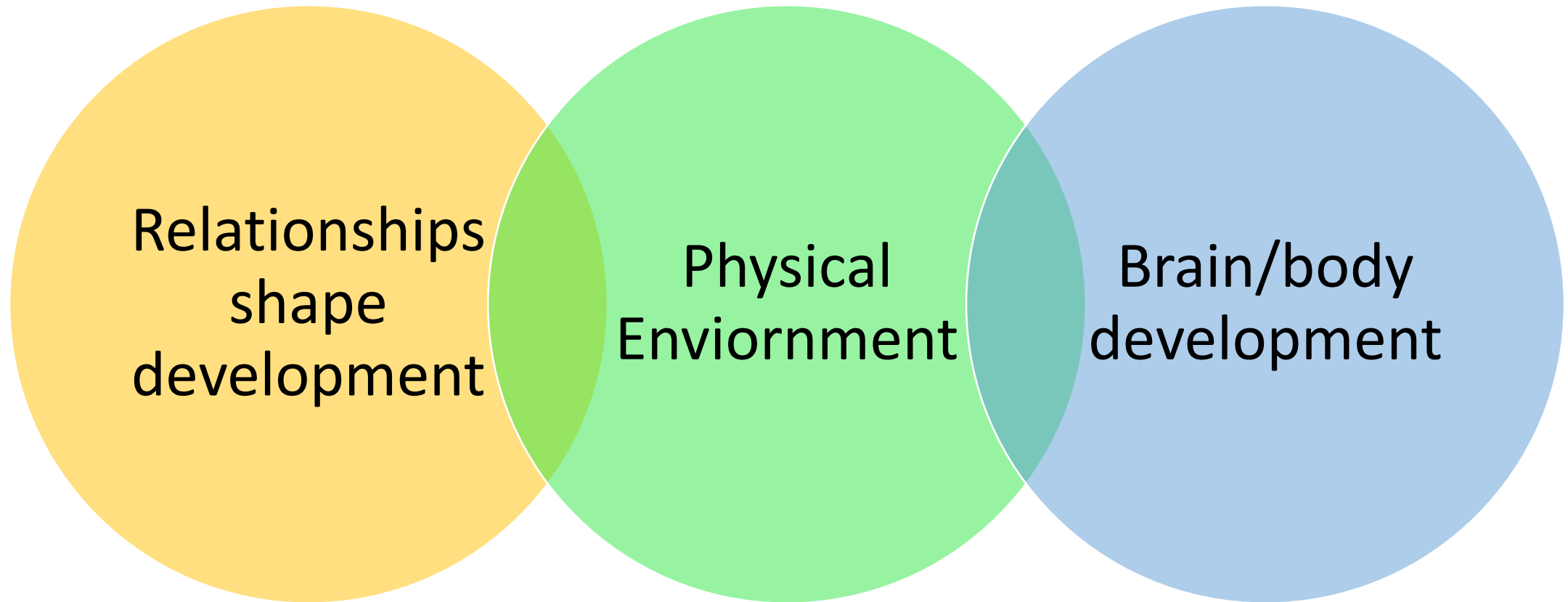
- Animal abuse
- Suicidality
- Believes they could die
- Threats to kill survivor
- Pregnancy
- Choking or strangulation

# Impact on Children





# Impacts on Children



# Recognizing signs of trauma

- **Sleep difficulties:** Frequent waking, nightmares, fear of falling asleep
- **Somatic complaints:** Headaches, stomach aches, aches and pains with no clear medical cause
- **Increased aggressive behavior, angry outbursts**
- **Increased activity level**
- **Hypervigilance:** Worries, fears, overreaction to loud noises or sudden movements
- **Regression:** Loss of skills learned at an earlier age, “babyish” behavior
- **Withdrawal:** Loss of interest in friends, school, or other activities the child used to enjoy
- **Numbing:** Showing no feelings at all, not bothered by anything
- **Increased separation anxiety:** Refuses to go to school, very upset when left with babysitter or childcare provider
- **Distractibility:** Has trouble concentrating at school or home
- **Changes in play:** Repeatedly acts out or recreates violent events in play, less able to play spontaneously and creatively



# IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN & YOUTH BY DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE



Prenatal	Developmental Needs	Potential Impact of DV
	Rapid physiological and neurological development	Increased cortisol in the stress response system of the pregnant parent may lead to poor fetal growth and later emotional and behavioral symptoms such as startling easily, hyper-arousal, and avoidance of physical contact
	Pregnant parent needs to obtain adequate rest, nutrition, and medical care	Isolation, stress, and withholding of resources may inhibit parent's ability to access adequate prenatal care
	A safe environment in which to fully develop	Physical violence may result in miscarriage, injury to fetus, or low birth weight
Age 0 – 1.5 Is the world OK?	Developmental Needs	Potential Impact of DV
	Form secure attachment with primary caregiver(s)	Non-offending parent(s) may be experiencing trauma response. Parents may not be able to consistently meet infant's needs, leading to deprivation of sleep, food, touch, etc.
	Take in information and begin learning about the world through use of senses	Loud noises and violent images can be distressing, and can shape learned information about the world.
	Determine whether or not the world is a safe place to be or if it is full of unpredictable events	Infants may experience threat or injury, and therefore experience the world as an unsafe place.

<b>Age 1.5 – 3</b> Am I OK?	Developmental Needs	Potential Impact of DV
	Further exploration of the world through play	Child may be afraid to explore and play because of experiencing / witnessing tension or violence. Possible imitation of violence seen in play.
	Begin to individuate and assert independence (becoming mobile with the ability to walk away from parents, picking which toy to play with, making choices about what they like to eat, wear, etc.)	Child may try new things but experience failure and frustration without proper support given from caregivers. Child may become afraid to individuate.
	Observe interactions between people and begin learning about social relationships	Child may begin to learn aggressive behavior as a norm.
<b>Age 3 – 6</b> How much can I do?	Developmental Needs	Potential Impact of DV
	Rapidly increase initiation and planning of activities; imagination should be encouraged.	Fear of doing things wrong may inhibit child’s attempts to do things for themselves.
	Increase physical independence and test boundaries	Child may continue to experience fear of exploring and trying new things. Child may test boundaries unsupervised and be harmed.
	Learn to express emotion	May learn unhealthy expression of emotion, or not learn to express emotion at all. Children may learn to link anger and violence.
	Think in ego-centric ways	May begin to believe they are the cause of violence or that their actions can prevent violence of perpetrator. Child may be injured by trying to intervene and stop violence.
	Make meaning of the world based on observation; “Why?”	Confusion due to conflicting messages about violence they receive at home and elsewhere. Internalization of victim blaming.

<b>Age 6 – 11</b> How well can I do it?	Developmental Needs	Potential Impact of DV
	Start to develop sense of achievement based on social and academic success; peer group starts to gain greater significance	Symptoms of trauma may inhibit success at school and socialization may be thwarted based on learned behaviors and lack of emotional regulation / expression.
	Initiative should be encouraged and reinforced so child gains confidence in ability to achieve goals	Parents may not be able to encourage or support initiative of child, or teachers may fail to see impact of trauma and instead label child based on behaviors. Child may begin to lack confidence and internalize negative labeling.
	Very impacted by societal norms regarding social location. They need affirmation of their identities based on social location.	If perpetrator is using superiority as tactic of abuse, child may be internalizing oppression and/or superiority based on own identities.
	Children begin to have complex thoughts about right and wrong.	They are more susceptible to accepting inaccurate, unhealthy explanations heard to excuse violence; such as the victim deserves the abuse.
<b>Age 12 – 18</b> Who am I?	Developmental Needs	Potential Impact of DV
	Major transition between childhood and adulthood; Increased independence; Child is reexamining identity and finding out “who they really are” They explore possibilities and start to establish their own identity	Older children in household may feel responsibility to care for parent(s) and siblings (impacted by cultural expectations as well) and therefore feel they cannot pursue / explore interests
	Peer group is incredibly important and major source of social feedback	May see a higher degree of risk taking behavior based on what they have witnessed throughout childhood/adolescence. They may want to be alone and not be interested in spending time with friends.
	Incredible amount of physiological changes are occurring	Increase in size & stature may embolden adolescents to try to intervene when violence occurs, increasing their risk of injury.

# Intersections of Domestic violence and child abuse

General Neglect- may focus safety, survival and meeting abusive persons needs more than the child.

Physical Neglect- May not have control over space, "unsafe" caregivers, being left along.

Failure to thrive- may not have access to money to buy food, decision making on meals, physical needs may not be met due to attention being on abusive person.

Medical Neglect- appts are inconsistent, don't have access to insurance, no transportation, language barriers, blame.

Educational Neglect- shelters, time is controled, school is not prioritized, fear of being in school, kidnapping.

Physical abuse- may discipline harshly

Emotional abuse- may deny extend of abuse on kids, shame and guilt, normalizing of abuse



# Inquiry/Safety Planning

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## Safety planning with kiddo

- "What do you do when you're scared?"
- Leaving the room
- Not getting in the middle
- Who/where to go for help
- Plugging ears/closing eyes
- Journaling
- Breathing exercises

## With adult

- "tell me about your strengths as a parent?"
- "tell me about your support system?"
  - Who do you call when you have good news?
- "Tell me about how you have coped with stress in the past?"
- "Are there ways I can work with you that reduce stress?"

# How to support a child who has witnessed violence

Healing begins  
in relationship

predictability

Tell their story  
through talking  
and play

choices

Reminders of  
love, belonging

Inform non abusive parent of  
how kids respond to  
trauma/violence

Alternative ways  
to conflict  
resolution

Strengths





# Resources

- [Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence](#)
- [National Center Against Domestic Violence](#)
- [Recognizing Signs of Trauma in Children and Youth](#)
- <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>