

TIPSHEET #1 ON ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

EVIDENCE-INFORMED GOALS FOR FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS¹

Addressing Domestic Violence (DV) with fathers in Responsible Fatherhood Groups (RFGs) requires attention from the program as a whole to be successful. We recommend the following four goals:

1

Foster a program-wide commitment to understand and address domestic

violence. Fatherhood programs should help all staff develop a nuanced definition of DV. A nuanced definition involves understanding coercive control (non-violent aspects of DV), fatality risk factors for female survivors, and men's experiences of partner abuse. It also involves understanding that fathers can be adult perpetrators or victims of DV, childhood victims of DV (with subsequent trauma), and stepfathers in families traumatized by DV. Program leaders should ensure that all staff have training to process information and/or to process their own attitudes toward and experiences with DV. If possible, programs should hire clinicians with DV expertise or provide staff access to clinical consultation to help them develop the necessary knowledge and skills.

2

Develop authentic collaborations with Domestic Violence Programs.

Collaboration with DV advocates and programs is an essential way to enrich DV-related content and meet the needs of fathers. We recommend three strategies for developing authentic, productive collaborations with DV programs. **FIRST:** *find areas of common ground*, of which there are many. DV advocates and fatherhood practitioners both grasp the importance of preventing DV, are committed to helping children, ending cycles of violence and are working with very low-income families experiencing multiple forms of trauma. **SECOND:** *build personal relationships* and establish trust by talking openly about each other's motivations for the work and understanding of DV, racism, and poverty. **THIRD:** *engage in mutual education*—learn about each other's work and clientele. Just as fatherhood practitioners need to understand gender issues that affect women's experiences of and risk for DV, DV advocates need to understand low-income men's experiences of poverty, racial discrimination, unemployment, community violence, and the child support system.

3

Incorporate domestic violence content into existing core curricula.

Fatherhood curricula should include content about fatherhood and DV that includes activities and exercises for fathers in groups. This reflects our finding that many RFG facilitators want to address DV, but report needing more structure and guidance.

¹ See: Thomas, K.A., & Mederos, F. FRPN Grantee Report. Responsible Fatherhood Groups and Domestic Violence Education: An Exploratory Study of Current Practices, Barriers, and Opportunities. January 2020.

Although some curricula have DV supplements, most facilitators were not aware of these materials. Integrating DV into core fatherhood curricula will help make discussions of DV and what fathers can do a routine part of RFGs.

4

Stay true to the purpose of Responsible Fatherhood Groups. Although addressing DV and its impact on families should be an important concern for RFGs, it should complement – not eclipse – other issues and skills that low-income fathers need. RFGs are not batterer intervention programs (BIP), but they are a vehicle for DV education and prevention focused on men as fathers and co-parents. RFGs need to make decisions about allowing men who are or have perpetrated DV as adults attend fatherhood groups. Currently, some programs require prior participation in a BIP before entry into the RFG; others permit concurrent participation in the RFG and BIP. These decisions require a deep understanding of DV, fathers' needs and preferences, the types of BIPs in the community, and funding requirements.