

Risk Assessment, Risk Management and Safety Planning for Children living with Domestic Violence: A Critical Role for Social Workers and Social Service Workers

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Canadian Domestic Homicide
Prevention Initiative



SSHRC  CRSH

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
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Presentation Outline

The CDHPIVP

The homicide of Jared Osidacz

The Context

Findings from CDHPIVP literature review & key informant survey/interviews

- Risk factors
- Risk assessment
- Safety planning
- Risk management

Implications – Gap between Research and Practice

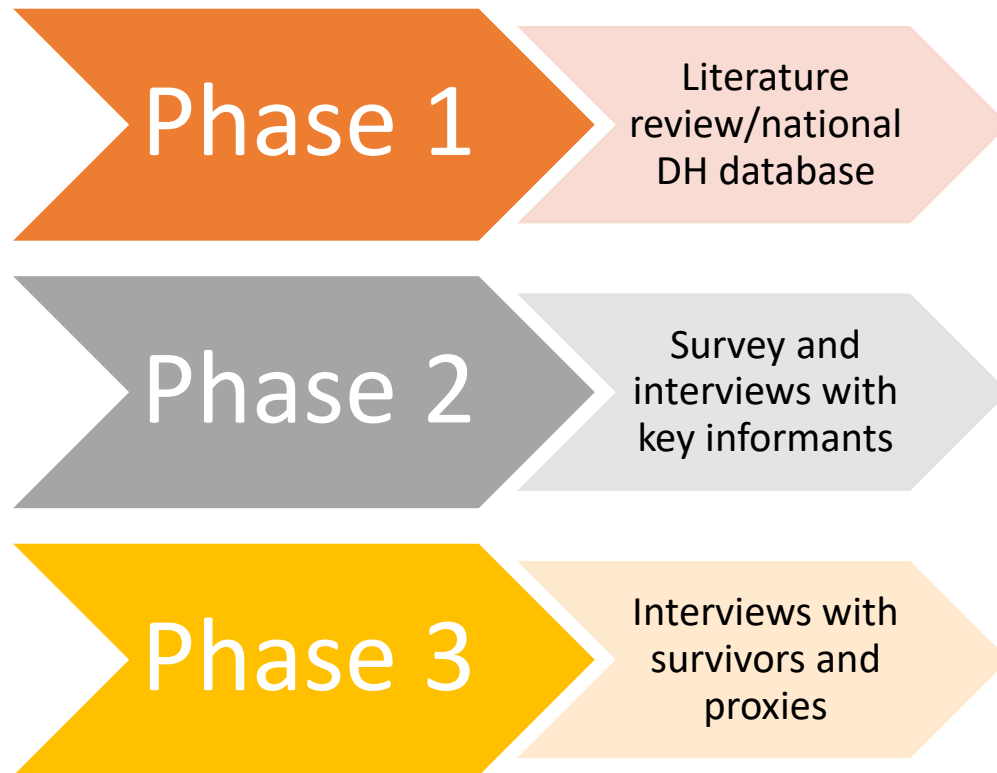
Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations (CDHPIVP)

- 5-year project (2015 – 2020) funded by the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to:
 - Conduct research on domestic homicides in Canada;
 - Identify protocols/strategies to reduce risk, particularly among 4 vulnerable/marginalized populations: indigenous, immigrant/refugee, rural/remote communities & children killed in context of DV
 - Improve access to risk assessment, risk management and safety planning strategies, particularly for vulnerable populations;
 - Share this knowledge with the wider community;
 - Reduce serious repeated domestic violence/homicide in Canada.



Canadian Domestic Homicide
Prevention Initiative

Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations (CDHPIVP)





Recognizing Harm to Children Living with DV

Exposure to DV may affect children's well-being at every age and stage of development: PTSD, significant emotional and behavioural problems

Exposure to DV is one of the most frequent forms of maltreatment = 1 in 3 of substantiated cases annually

1 in 3 substantiated cases children are age 3 or less

1 in 4 children became physically involved as the abusive incident was occurring

Children Killed in the Context of Domestic Violence

Three situations:

1. Indirectly as a result of attempting to protect a parent during a violent episode

2. Directly as part of an overall murder–suicide plan by a parent who decides to kill the entire family (altruistic motivation)

3. Directly as revenge against the partner who decided to end the relationship or for some other perceived betrayal.

Harm to Children

10-20% of domestic homicide victims are children (based on Canada, US, NZ and AU Fatality Reviews)

Many are eye witnesses to horrific tragedy and trauma

Many lose one or both parents – some are caught in subsequent custody disputes between paternal and maternal family systems – few receive counselling

Child Domestic Homicides in Canada: Data from Reviews

Committees	Number of Cases/Number of Deaths	Child Victims
Alberta Family Violence Death Review Committee (Jan 2008 – Dec 2015)	132 deaths (75% of victims killed by current/former partner; 15% by family member)	11% of deaths involved victims under the age of 19
BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel (Jan 2010 – Dec 2015)	75 cases resulting in 100 deaths	17 cases children living in the home (total of 27 children) 2 deaths; 3 injured or threatened Some witnessed homicide or found victim
Domestic Homicide in New Brunswick (1999 – 2008)	32 cases resulting in 32 deaths	25% of the victims were under the age of 15
Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (2002 – 2015)	346 cases resulting in 489 deaths	9% (36) of the homicide victims were children
Saskatchewan Domestic Violence Death Review (Jan 2005 – Dec 2014)	48 domestic homicides with 9 related suicides	15 victims were children (14 being 10-years old or less)

The homicide of Jared Osidacz



<http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/areas/julie-craven-2011>

Voice of a Survivor: Julie Craven

- Her son, Jared, was killed by her ex-partner
- The case was the subject of an Inquest into a more collaborative response to domestic violence and enhanced training
- These are her views about some of the things that could have been done differently
- Not presented as a blaming exercise but rather a reflection
- After the video reflect on how you are feeling, the key elements of her message without being defensive, and what you would do differently

Julie Craven

- Video

Reflections

- How you are feeling?
- What are the key elements of her message without being defensive?
- Think about examples of information that you would have wanted or needed at various points and how you would get it
- What would you do differently?

Our Reflections

- There were missed opportunities
- Communication, coordination and collaboration amongst the various system players may improved the outcome
- Lack of effective protocols/resources
- Lack of education about DV and dangerousness amongst system players and lack of genuine understanding about roles
- Sometimes the only safe access is no access

Learning Points

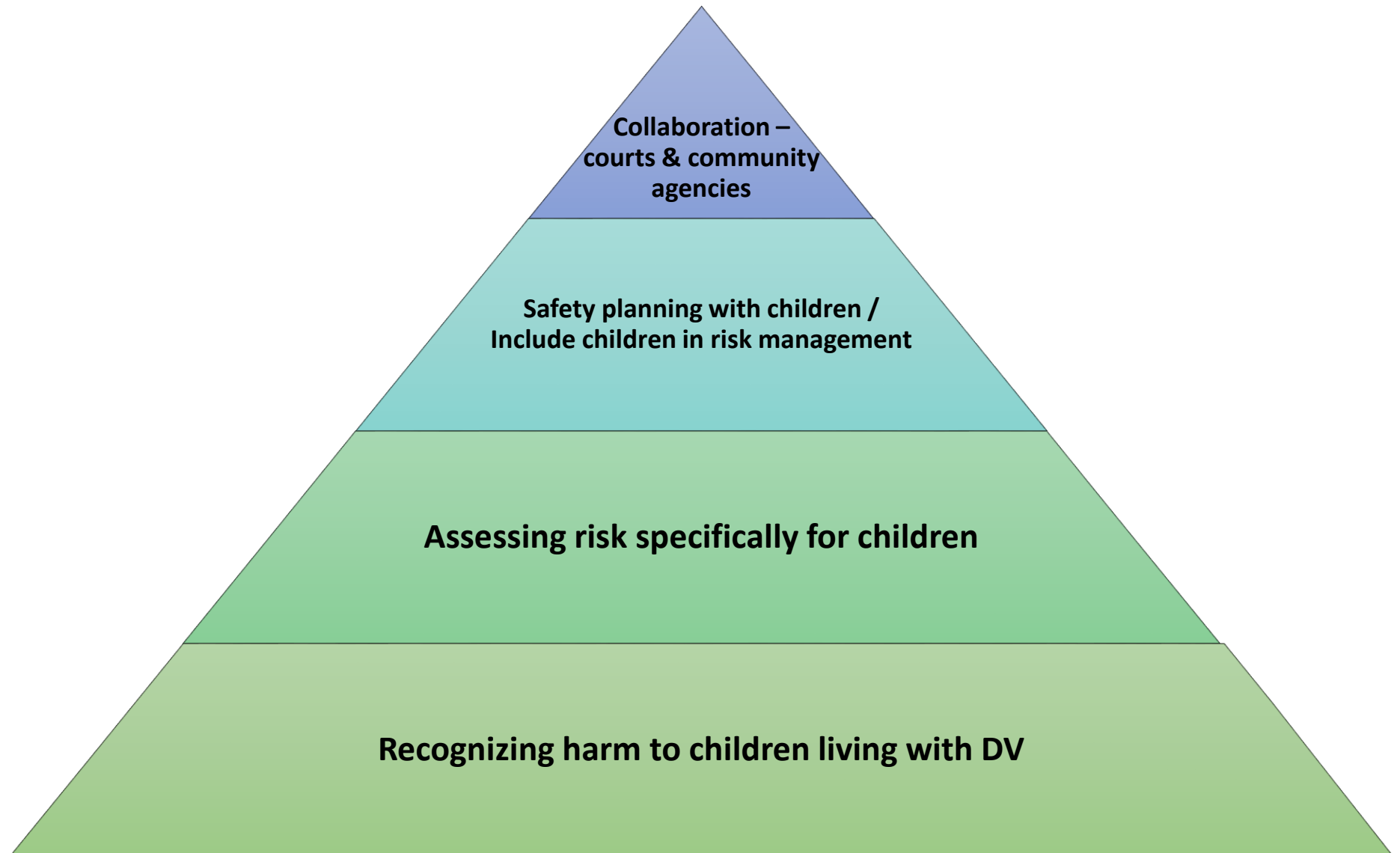
In certain cases,
you may not
be able to
prevent a
tragedy

These
tragedies
furnish an
opportunity

Examine the
system:
What were the
missed
opportunities?

Prevent
future
tragedies

The Context: Best Practices for Children Exposed to DV



Findings from CDHPVIP (Literature Review & Key Informant Survey/Interviews)

- Risk Factors
- Risk Assessment
- Safety Planning
- Risk Management

Social Workers and Social Service Workers play a critical role in many sectors that work with families experiencing domestic violence:

- Healthcare
- Mental health
- Social service
- Child protection
- Child custody assessments
- Victim services
- PARs
- Education

Assessing Risk Specifically for Children

CDHPIVP Definition of Risk Assessment:

Evaluating the level of risk of harm a victim (or others connected to the victim) may be facing including the likelihood of repeated violence or lethal (dangerous) violence, based on a professional's judgment and/or a structured interview and/or a tool (instrument) that may include a checklist of risk factors.

Understand the Risks

Consistent Risk Factors

- Separation
- History of DV
- Paternal mental health

Intersectional Factors

- intergenerational trauma/generational cycle of violence
- Isolation/dual relationships/confidentiality
- Language barriers
- Culture and stigma barriers
- Distrust/fear of systems
- Limited resources
- Substance abuse

Risk Assessment Tools

Risk Assessment Tools

- None unique for children
- In general: risk to mothers=risk to children

Structured Tools

- Danger Assessment
(www.dangerassessment.org)
- ODARA
(<http://odara.waypointcentre.ca>)
- Child Protection
(www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/childrensaidd/Child-Protection-Tools-Manual-2016.pdf)
- Other (e.g., Family Violence Investigation Report (FVIR), Internal to agency)



Challenges for Risk Assessment

Barriers to Disclosure of Violence for Children

- Normalizing the violence
- Fear of being taken away
- Do not know their rights
- Distrust service providers
- Lack of knowledge of where to go for help



Role of Child Protection Services

Central to assessing risk



DV and child maltreatment co-occurrence – 60- 75%



Obstacles to CPW effectively identifying and responding to DV

- Personal characteristics
- Professional factors



Risk assessment tools utilized not specific to DV?

Role of Courts

- Lack of information sharing among three courts: child protection, child custody & criminal proceedings
- No consistent DV screening in Canadian family law system
- Use of risk assessment tools is inconsistent across Canadian jurisdictions



Role of Healthcare and Education Sectors

Healthcare

- Not routine/mandatory to screen for DV in pediatric settings– some research suggests screening is ineffective(lack of training/referrals to specialized resources)
- Duty to Report – children exposed
- Barriers to DV screening

Education

- Recognizing and responding to signs of children exposed to DV
- Duty to Report

Safety Planning with Children

CDHPiVP Definition of Safety Planning:

Finding strategies to protect the victim and those around the victim such as an alarm for a higher priority police response, letting others around her know of the risks, a different work arrangement, readily accessible items needed to leave home in an emergency.

Safety Planning with Mothers AND Children



- Respect adult victim's autonomy but children's safety at forefront
- Recognize complexity of risk assessment & safety planning in DV cases (e.g., CPS)
- Emphasize parental well-being and capabilities including protective strategies of mothers
- Include collaborative arrangements

Strategies mothers use to physically protect children during DV include:

- *physically separating children from violence*
- *calling third party for help*
- *using signals to warn children*
- *calming the perpetrator or attempting to stop the arguing*
- *sending children to live with relatives*
- *obtaining protection orders (Haight et al, 2007)*

Address physical and
emotional safety

Ongoing, developmentally
appropriate, individualized,
guided by child, multiple
methods (e.g., role playing)

Prevention of violence is not
the child's responsibility

Safety Planning with Children

Safety Planning within Context of Child Custody and Access Disputes

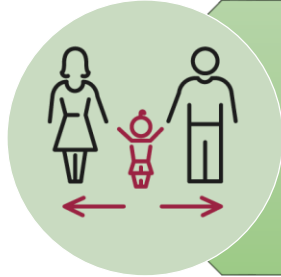
- Presumption children need to have relationship with both parents balanced with safety planning for mother and children
- Lack of DV training with custody evaluators
- Therapeutic and legal support for children (e.g., Speaking for Themselves program)
- Safety provisions in place prior to custody/visitation – court approved parenting plan include safety strategies
- Collaboration with community agencies

Including Children in Risk Management

CDHPiVP Definition of Risk Management:

Strategies intended to reduce the risk presented by a perpetrator of domestic violence such as close monitoring or supervision, psychosocial interventions to address the violence and/or related issues such as mental health and addictions

Custody, Access, and Supervision



Access may be a problematic source of contact between victims & perpetrators



Managing risk after separation may depend on court findings & orders



Custody & access arrangements are critical

Custody, Access, and Supervision continued...



Barriers to effective parenting plans for children:

- Lack of consistent screening for DV
- Lack of understanding of evidence/dynamics of DV
- Conflicting reports about DV
- Lack of assessment of risk
- Increased access/security of supervision centres

Parenting Programs

- Engaging men as fathers
 - A reminder of potential trauma from own childhood
 - Motivation for intervention as fathers
 - E.g., Caring Dads, Strong Fathers



Role of Child Protection Workers in Risk Management

Unique position to engage with perpetrators in order to support the safety of victims and children



Child protection workers' own perspectives:

- Lack training to specifically manage DV perpetrators' behaviours
- Limited available resources at their disposal to work with violent men

Differences in perspectives toward appropriate interventions and goals

- Separation as a goal of intervention?
- Discontinuation of services once separation has been achieved

Implications for Practice:

Risk Assessment, Safety Planning, & Risk Management

Children must be considered

Awareness and education on dynamics of DV

Culturally-appropriate/culturally-informed training for professionals

Implications for Practice: **Risk Assessment**

Risk to mother = risk to
child

Case coordination –
sharing information
on risk across
multiple systems

Develop tool or use
standardized tool that is
commonly used – need
to address
intersectionality/culture

Implications for Practice: **Safety Planning**

Leaving the relationship may not always be an effective safety plan

Victim autonomy and child safety may be competing priorities

Implications for Practice: Risk Management

Parenting programs in conjunction with other programs aimed at:

Preventing post-separation violence/safe co-parenting

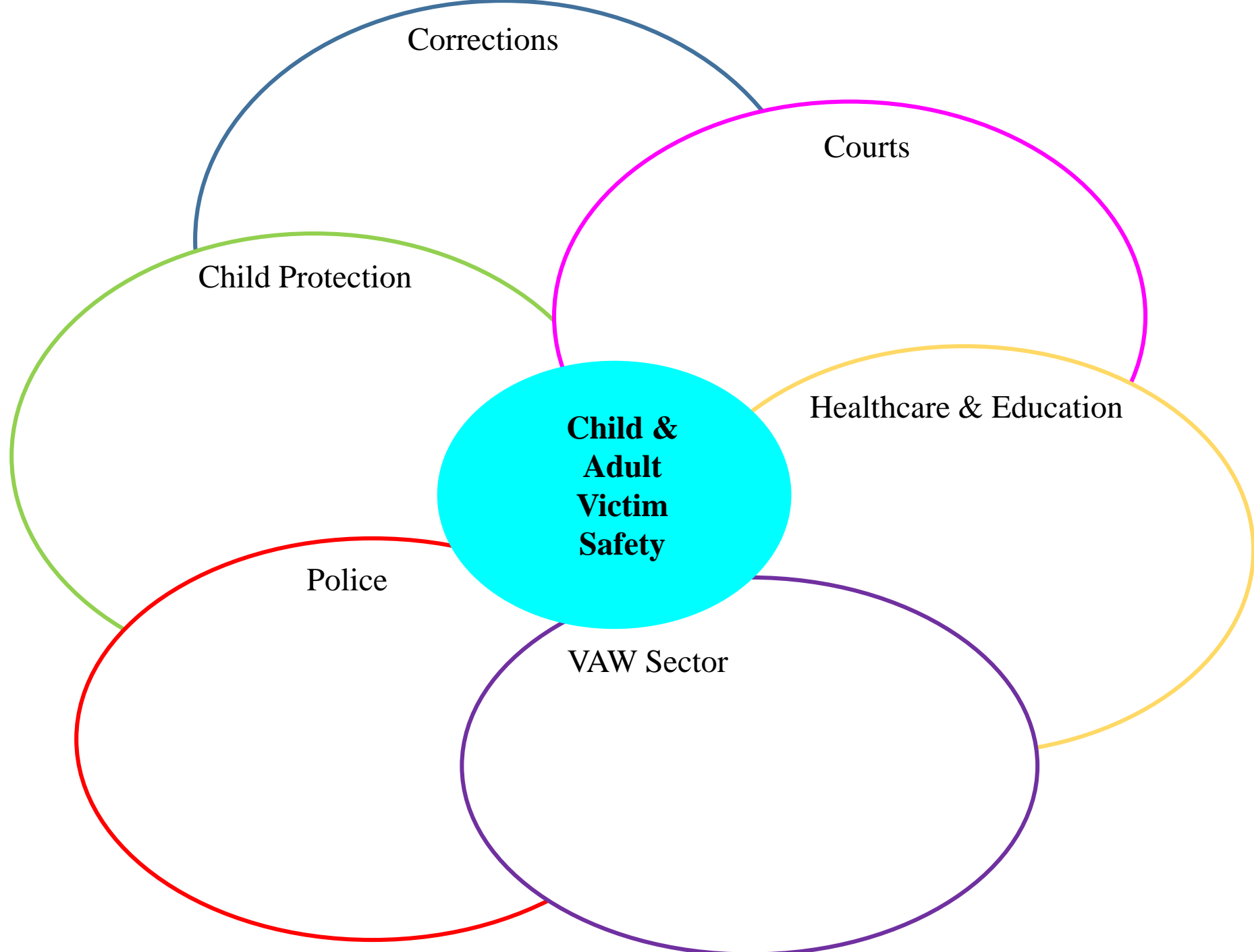
Promoting accountability and change

Education on DV-related issues (i.e., the effects of DV exposure on children)

Ongoing evaluation of parenting programs

No access or supervised access

Continued training, supervision and support aimed at increasing skills and confidence in working with perpetrators of DV



Examples of Encouraging Programs

Caring Dads

- Group intervention that works with fathers to change patterns of abuse, increase awareness and application of child-centered fathering, and promote respectful co-parenting

www.caringdads.org

Here to Help (Child Development Institute Toronto)

- Group intervention that provides a safe and supportive environment for mothers and children to talk about the violence they experienced and process their emotions together

<https://www.childdevelop.ca/programs/family-violence-services/group-programs>

Nurturing Parenting Program – Infants to Preschoolers (PHAC)

- Family-centered trauma-informed initiative that builds nurturing parenting skills as an alternative to abusive and neglecting parenting and child-rearing practices

<http://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ppractice/nurturing-parenting-program-infants-toddlers-and-preschoolers/>

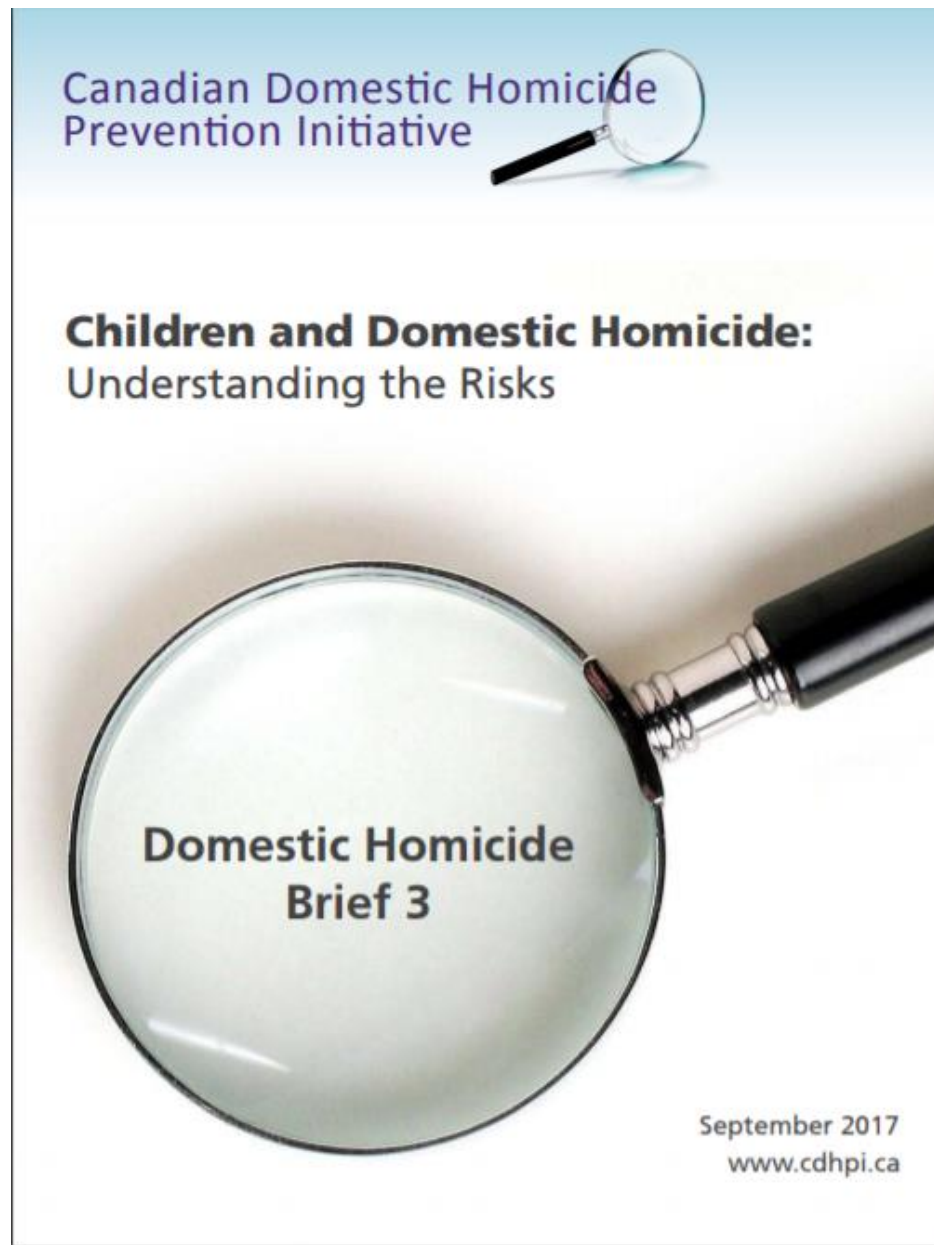
Children in Between: A Co-Parenting Program for High Conflict Solutions (Center for Divorce Education U.S.)

- Helps parents manage stressful and difficult situations during separation or divorce and protect children from conflict

<https://www.highconflictsolutions.com/>

TO LEARN MORE...

Visit our website at
www.cdhpi.ca



http://cdhpi.ca/sites/cdhpi.ca/files/Brief_3-Final.pdf

To get involved....

Complete the online survey and volunteer to participate in an interview (www.cdhpi.ca)

To complete the survey and volunteer for interview, please go to

https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7UtzziUW37vFCT3

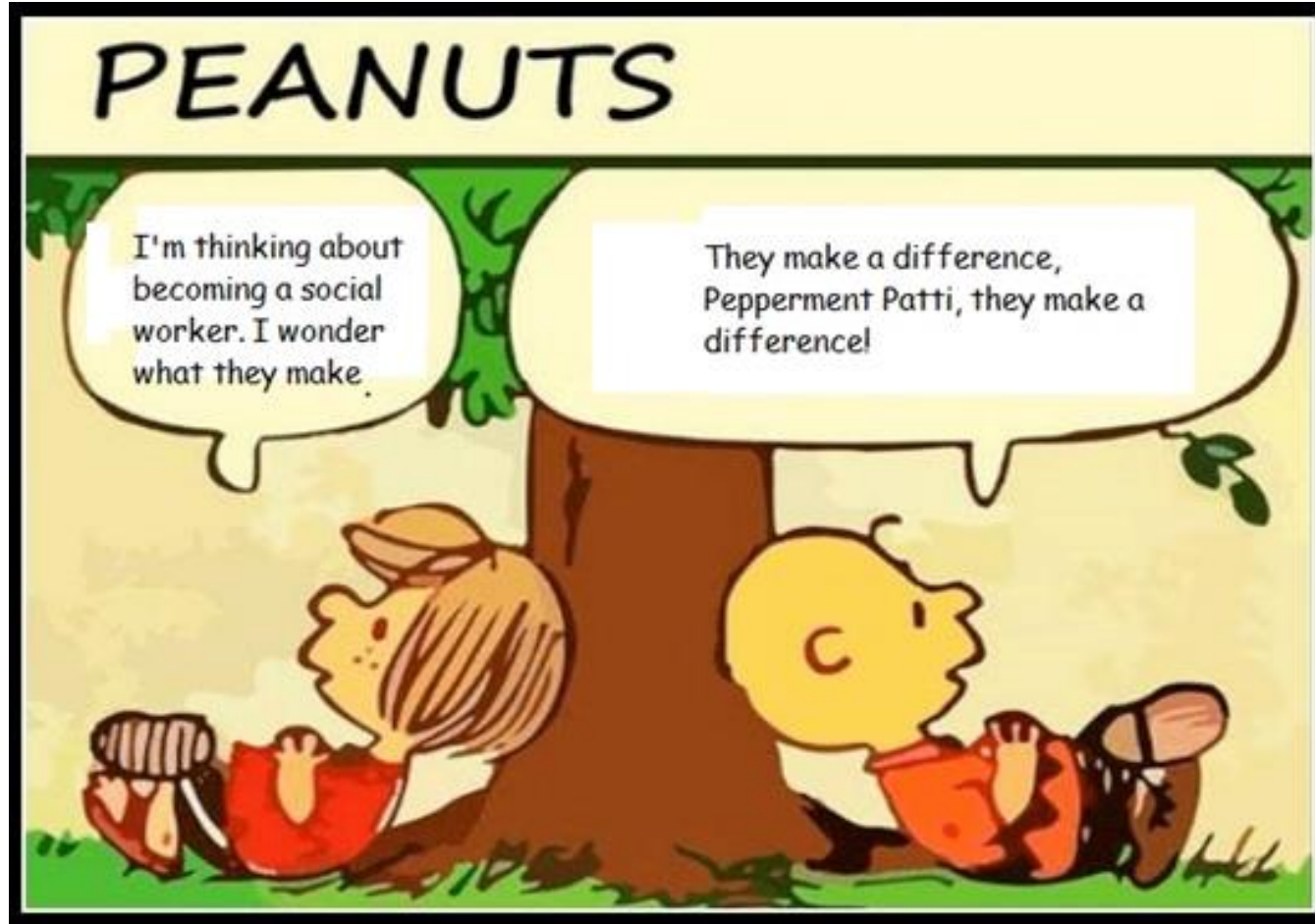
OR



PEANUTS

I'm thinking about becoming a social worker. I wonder what they make.

They make a difference, Peppermint Patti, they make a difference!



Questions ???

More Information at Canadian Domestic Homicide
Prevention Initiative (www.cdhpi.ca)

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Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children
www.learningtoendabuse.ca