

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting 2/9/10

Attendance: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change Counseling Center), Regina Rosann (ARMS), Stacey Womack (ARMS), Jennifer Warren (Men's Resource Center/Women's Counseling Center), Songcha Bowman (Multicultural Counseling Services), Jacquie Pancoast (ChangePoint), Chad McGhee (Allies in Change), Elka Grisham (Allies in Change), Dean Camarda (MRC/Allies in Change), Ryan Alonzo (Bridges to Safety), Sara Windsheimer (Choices DVIP), Samantha Naliboff (VOA Home Free), Johnnie Burt (ARMS), Cassandra Suess, Emily Szeliga (Allies in Change), Ashley Boal (Portland State University), Michael Crowe (Washington County Probation), Susan Ranger (Washington County Probation), Paul Lee (MRC)

Minutes by Ashley Boal, edited by Chris Huffine

Meeting Topic Discussion: Couples Counseling with Late Stage Abusive Men

Standards- couples counseling should not be a primary intervention but does not prohibit as one piece of the intervention.

Is couples counseling ever a good idea?

Do we ever know if someone is ready?

The truth is, we can't stop a couple from getting couples counseling if they truly want it. They can always wait until after he's no longer a part of the system.

Is it in her best interests for us to not try to intervene before that (e.g., to identify more knowledgeable couples counselors, to be able to still monitor him in case things go badly)? To support couples counseling pre-completion may give the provider the opportunity to understand if his program of being non-abusive is really working.

It is possible that if real change occurs, couples counseling won't be necessary. For some couples the only real issue is his history of abuse and inappropriate behavior with her. For some couples, the abusive man becoming non-abusive and respectful (and her recovering from his past abusive behavior) is all that is needed for the relationship to thrive.

Another concern is that domestic violence isn't a couples' problem, it is an abuse problem. Accountability is not a couples' problem and doesn't really need couples counseling to be addressed. Relationship issues are completely different, abuse shouldn't be on the table, it should be stopped at this point.

Who is getting couples counseling? Think about SES implications of assuming everyone is getting counseling.

Professionalization of the field, is it a therapeutic setting? The field has changed, higher degrees= more latitude to provide therapy.

It was suggested that providers should never encourage group members to seek out couples counseling.

There may be benefits to couples counseling in certain circumstances (i.e.- cultural differences, faith communities).

Not all couples counseling is the same

Consulting with the partner while he is still in the group. This is not traditional couples counseling, but more like a “parent-teacher conference”. The intent is to get her input on how he is doing and what’s coming up for her. It is intended to assist with treatment planning. It would typically be done later in intervention and only with her strong interest. The intent is to purely focus on him and his work. Given that she’s going to know better than anyone how he’s doing, if she’s open to this, it can be a productive and helpful meeting (and validating of her experience).

Couples intervention when the man is still abusive. This is also not traditional couples counseling, although it may appear to be to the couple at first glance. This occurs when the abusive man is not court-mandated and the only way he will seek out services is via “couples counseling”. Once it is clear that DV is present, that becomes the primary focus. The couple is educated about dv, its impact, etc. The hope is that eventually he will agree to specialized work on his abusive behavior (either through a group, or if he's a resistant, individual). The next best would be for her to agree to some specialized counseling to address being in an abusive relationship. Once that transition is made the couples work would end. A couples intervention is utilized when this is the only way they will seek services. To refuse to see them as a couple prevents any possibility of intervention and increases the risk of them seeking out the services of a different couples counselor who will be more ignorant about the dv issue (which is typical) and actually do traditional couples counseling.

Traditional couples counseling. Abuse has appeared to have stopped. He is being accountable, collaborative, respectful, open, and they are wanting and needing counseling. The issue is no longer his abuse, it is other issues. She has no fear of being candid and disclosive. She feels safe and an equal in the relationship. However, it is vital that even though DV is not the focus the couples counselor be knowledgeable about domestic violence and its legacy within a relationship. It is analogous to couples counseling with someone who used to have a drug or alcohol problem that affected the relationship who is now clean and sober. While the focus is not on the addiction, it is very important for counselors to understand what lingering effects and possible risks (e.g., relapse) still exist due to that issue.

Probation and couples counseling

Can you/do you ever prohibit a man from participating in couples counseling? Yes- man needs permission to participate from courts/probation- we think this is true throughout the state.

PO officers are sometimes asked to allow couples counseling. This can put the P.O. in a difficult position. Is the couple ready? Does she truly want it? If they block it the couple might have counseling any way or simply wait until after he is off probation and there is no supervision or

monitoring. They need guidelines as to when an individual should utilize couples counseling. What would a guideline look like?

Recommendation to probation- talk to BIP about exactly what is going on

Determining whether couples counseling is appropriate

Case by case distinction on whether it is appropriate.

How do you know if a man is ready for couples counseling? There has to be safety in the room--how do you establish? Talk to the partner as well as the man, but still don't know for sure if everyone is being honest.

What if the victim doesn't feel safe, can victims say they no longer want to participate? Some won't even participate to begin with. Victims need to be encouraged and empowered so they will speak up if they don't feel safe

Who is encouraging victims to begin counseling? Has there been collusion and victim blaming that make the victim agree or seek out counseling?

It was suggested that perhaps any partner that wants couples counseling would first need to meet with a victim advocate to make sure it is appropriate. This could be similar to the protocol some counties use prior to modifying a no contact order.

We are working with human beings who are extremely complex- have to remind ourselves that we aren't the expert on every person, need to look at things very individually

When should couples counseling be offered?

Having a man start couples counseling while still in the program may be good because you still have access to info that you wouldn't have afterwards and can confront the individual. It would also be easier to hold him accountable if he is still on probation and in a program.

After they complete their letter of accountability? Still have follow-ups at that point. Still refer out even though still in follow-up?

It was suggested that it shouldn't happen until a man is well into the program—at least 40 weeks in.

Who should provide the couples counseling?

Who is qualified to offer couples counseling when there has been a history of domestic violence? How do we know who is qualified? Possibly get an approved list of couples counselors like the approved list of providers. Perhaps anyone on the list would need to document education about DV. Probation could also interview/screen potential couples counselors who would then be added to a referral list.

Is it appropriate for BIP provider to provide couples counseling? There was a diversity of opinion within the group. No, it would be a dual role/dual relationship. It is not appropriate for the provider to also do the couples work. Yes, the provider may be one of the only ones who knows whether the man is ready to participate in couples counseling. The provider is in the best position to hold the man accountable in the couples work.

Perhaps, victim services doing couples counseling may be a good option.

Accountability and victim education are both important, does it need to be in the same place?

Need to be consistent with messages survivors are getting and with messages batterers are getting- saying women plays a role changes messages we are trying to give that battering is a choice and about accountability

Educating couples counselors

Need to do community education so that you have couples counselors who are knowledgeable about dv and batterer intervention who are appropriate to refer to in the community.

Coordinated community response and couples counseling- should couples counselors be part of the coordinated community response. How do we do this without collusion?