

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting minutes 7/10/2012

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Minutes by Jennifer Hopkinson, edited by Chris Huffine

Meeting Discussion Topic: Effective Confrontation

A key aspect of working with abusers is to help them become accountable for their abusive choices so that they can make different, non-abusive choices. This typically involves confrontation. What do folks do to effectively confront the men with whom they work?

What is confrontation? Pointing out inconsistencies, discrepancies in writing and verbal statements, etc. Another aspect of confrontation is treating dissonance. This involves identifying values and looking at how choices do or don't line up with those values. Challenging them to do more and believing that they can.

Avoid power struggles. How? Motivational interviewing strategies such as being OK with where the participant is at and rolling with resistance. How do you not engage in power struggles without colluding? Goal is not to look good or look like we are holding men accountable at the moment, but to work towards long-term change. Immediate confrontation can result in short-term change or power struggle, but may create resistance to long-term or true permanent change. Power struggles can be used as a teaching opportunity. Acknowledge what it is, move on, or examine and discuss. Turn it over to the group to get away from facilitator/participant power struggles. Ask the group to give feedback. Asking participants to reflect and give introspection (opportunity to confront themselves). Power struggles may be an indicator of facilitator ego and not doing good work. When you feel exhausted or reactive, you may be overexerting your agenda.

Some facilitators do avoid confrontation, which is also problematic, although there may be good reasons not to confront. Knowing when to confront in private vs. in front of the group. Acknowledging participant leadership and challenging them to help support the direction of the group. Peer culture-accountability level of the group may dictate the role of facilitator and need for confrontation. The more accountable and higher functioning the group, the less facilitators may need to intervene. The less accountable, the more the facilitators need to step in to help

shape the culture in a more accountable direction. Consider both where an individual is at but also where the group is at in terms of stages of change.

It is important to be consistent in confronting certain issues and all participants. Can use consistency and repetition in the group effectively to reinforce the message, participants begin to repeat and reinforce the message. This strategy cannot be easily done one on one which is one reason why the group modality is superior to individual work to address abuse issues.

Process comments can be powerful-talking about what is going on right now in a group. For example, 'Do you guys think he's being accountable?' Challenging behavior in the group as well as outside using veterans in the group. For example, "why didn't you speak up?", "h reminds me of you when you were new, do you have any advice for him?" When new folks start-introductions, then ask ongoing folks to give advice that would have helped them when they started.

It is important that confrontation be balanced with support. Both together are effective where one alone might not be. Rapport is a positive factor: stronger relationship = better able to confront more strongly and directly. Respect and allowing basic dignity facilitates confrontation effectiveness. Good rapport means better able to confront effectively. This also means allowing space for participants to talk about their actions and beliefs and a safe place to be honest. If the moment they say something that supports abuse they are confronted, they will quickly learn not to talk about those things or disclose those things and those beliefs go unaddressed. It is vital that the men are encouraged and supported in being honest and candid. This also applies to the group members. They need to be respectful of each other as well. Looking at whether you are using positive or negative reinforcers and trying to keep a ratio of 4(+): 1 (-).

What are other ways of giving support without colluding (e.g., "that's great John, you only abused her twice this week!")? Empathy for group and group members (e.g., "it sounds like you were in a lot of pain", but not sympathy (e.g., "no wonder you were abusive, you were in a lot of pain"). Empathizing, joining (e.g., "I understand that you may have been really hurting at that moment"), but still holding accountable (e.g., "in no way does what you were feeling excuse the behaviors you chose"). Role induction work can be a good way to give positives. This involves praising and reinforcing when a man is behaving appropriately in a group. Examples include affirmations for honesty, accountability, completion of work, etc.

Should we pace our confrontations to match where a man says he is at or where you assess them to be? Generally it is better to do the latter. For example, as a man is more accountable he typically can handle more direct confrontation. However, this should be based not on whether he is claiming to be accountable, but whether the facilitators assess him as being truly accountable. Doing the former can lead to inappropriately direct confrontations that may go over poorly with limited effectiveness.

Another reason to pace the confrontation is because if confrontation is done poorly with men who are having contact with their families, it can lead to escalation with the family members. How do you anticipate potential escalation or impact on family or partner if a participant is confronted and it doesn't go well or he takes it out on family/partner? What do you do or can you do to protect families and partners? Respectful confrontation can help limit the "power over" confrontation "rolling down hill". In other words, putting down an abusive man can help you feel better, but may lead him to then take his frustration out on someone else. Training in conflict resolution and mediation skills can help, using those tools to de-escalate people before they leave. The "Getting to Yes" model of looking for the win-win is another approach.

Recognizing BIP providers cannot cause or prevent further abuse or the choice to go home and take it out on a partner or family. That is his choice alone. But they can use skills, knowledge, and experience to look out for that possibility and try to help protect in the ways they are able. What other tools or options do providers have? Journal activity-a time when you came out of a group and you were agitated, how did you handle it, who did it impact and how? Three message themes from survivors whose partners attend/complete BIPs: not much is different; he's trying new things, he's working on it; we dread group night, he comes home feeling disrespected and takes it out on us. Another way to determine if confrontation is leading to escalation in the home is to communicate with the partner directly. Watching for group members who may be silent but showing other signs of escalation. Co-facilitators, if one takes confrontational role, other may be better to check in after or take supportive role

Shame and confrontation. Another challenge is the intersection between confrontation and shame. This is bi-directional: how shaming is the confrontation and how shame prone is the individual. It is important that confrontation be done without shaming the individual. Shaming tends to limit the effectiveness of confrontation. The idea is to emphasize bad behaviors rather than talk about bad people, bad choices not a bad person. Shaming ("you're bad") vs. responsibility ("you are responsible for the bad choices you make"). A fear of shaming can get in the way of being confrontative when it is necessary.

If participants have a lot of shame they will not be very accountable. They will also be more likely to see confrontation, particularly direct confrontation, as shaming, even when it is not. Participants who came in talking about how they are great guys ('Perpetrators are monsters, they are different') are likely to be shame prone. A good book that addresses these shame issues is "When Good Men Behave Badly" by David Wexler. John Bradshaw has written/spoken a great deal about this issue as well, particularly within the context of alcoholism and dysfunctional families. His video "Toxic Shame" is quite good. One of his classic books is "Healing the Shame That Binds You".

Another way of improving confrontation is talking with your co-facilitating and debriefing group. Talking a moment after the group to check in, coming back to something later or next time.