

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Minutes: 8/28/01

Present: Gus Picazo (Changepoint), Stan Brown (Clackamas County Mental Health), Michael Davis (Changepoint), Lee Parker (Changepoint), Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), Margaret Langslet (PSU), Odelia Garcia (Northwest Treatment Services), Marc Hess (Multnomah County Community Justice), Stacey Womack (ARMS)

Minutes by Margaret Langslet and edited by Chris Huffine

Topic: Confrontation- Walking the Fine Line Between Colluding with and Alienating the Client

-The minutes from the meeting on June 9, 1998, which was also about how to effectively confront clients were shared. Contact Chris Huffine if you wish to get a copy of those minutes.

-Confrontation depends on the ego strength of the client and the level of potential violence as a result of confrontation. The lower the client's ego strength, the more likely they are to become defensive and reactive. This reactivity is of concern, since it could lead to an increased risk to the safety of the victim. Abusive men in a group are far more likely to take their frustrations out on their partner than the group leader. Therefore, confrontation, particularly strong confrontations need to be pursued in a careful and conscientious manner to increase victim safety.

-
Another factor that contributes to how the confrontation is received is to what extent the confrontation is perceived as being humiliating or shaming. Many men view it as a power play and you are showing them up. The more a sense of shame and humiliation are raised, the more the man is likely to take it out on others.

-Confrontation is value laden. At first confrontation equals being in a person's face, but when you know what confrontation is you can point things out in respectful ways.

-
A major goal of confrontation should be to have the conflict exist within the person, rather than between the person and others. Use the guideline of focusing on how the conflict can be internal to the man and not between him and others. If it is internal, then it can lead to change and this takes the facilitator out of the conflict. Certain questions can help this. For example, "what does that (your abuse) get you?" and "Is that really what you want (the particular outcome of the abuse)?"

-**Motivational Interviewing** offers a number of techniques that can be particularly useful in confronting men around their behavior. One, just mentioned, is working to have the conflict internal. Another is "rolling with resistance"--don't immediately confront people or it becomes the group expectation and they can monitor confrontation. Another is to constantly raise internal discrepancies. For example, if your client thinks he is a good dad and he is abusive in front of his kids, raise the internal discrepancy of how

exposing children to abuse is not being a good dad. These discrepancies can help motivate him to change. Realize that there is often ambivalence- view this as a piece of the process, not negatively. Another important aspect to motivational interviewing is an awareness that there are various stages of change. A total of six have been identified: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and relapse. It is suggested that to help men change, they need to be confronted with techniques consistent with the particular stage they are in. A good book that elaborates on all of this is Motivational Interviewing by Miller and Wayne.

-Work at having group norms rather than counselor norms. It is tougher to get into power struggles with a group than it is with the facilitator. The more the other men can do the confronting, the better.

-Providers should begin with an alignment with the client. The intake is not to confront what he says, but to get information. Even if he has legal charges, there can be an acknowledgement that at least he is there and affirms his motivation to change. This can help the client to get engaged more quickly. Strive to meet the client where he is at. If you pace yourself with him and then lead him, you are more likely to engage him than to lead him from the beginning.

-Another good book

On confrontation is Invitations to Responsibility by Alan Jenkins. One concept it outlines is finding exceptions to the resistance, points where the therapist and client are aligned. Another concept is acknowledging the client's positive intent, even if the behavior or choices are abusive ones. You can then point out the discrepancy between their positive intent and negative behavior.

-

An alternative view from all of the above is that providers should be direct and confrontational in their interventions consistently and from the very beginning. This would include confronting and changing specific language used, thinking errors, defense mechanisms, etc. There is an expectation that men will be held fully accountable for their behavior continually from the beginning. There tends to be a more heavy focus on education/re-education. There is little tolerance for any drift or deviance from the accepted program stance, behavior, etc. There was no one at the meeting today to represent (or defend) this perspective.

-

One problem with being highly and rigidly confrontational is that clients may (accurately) perceive the facilitator as being controlling, doing what they tell the client not to do. Another problem is that while it can garner superficial compliance it may not lead to change underneath. The client says the "right thing", even if he doesn't really believe it, just to avoid the confrontation.

-Just because one is not confronting everything a client is saying does not mean that collusion is occurring. It is possible to model appropriate non-controlling behavior while also being directive, but allowing the client to make his own choices. Providers can be confrontational in a respectful, direct way and men respect that.

-Motivational interviewing is very direct and the therapist takes responsibility for where the client is going. If you align with the client at first, you can go deeper and quicker with confrontation.

-When doing self-disclosure, I use stories about my friend Bob because it is a roundabout way to get the men to listen and people get drawn into stories. But, with psychopathic men I don't do this because then it becomes all about the facilitator.

-

Certain client qualities need to be taken into consideration when deciding how to confront them. One example is the man's level of sensitivity to criticism. Some are much thinner-skinned than others. Those who are less sensitive to criticism, often because they are emotionally cut off, can be confronted much more directly and bluntly without becoming defensive. If the client is more sensitive then the facilitator has to be more careful, gentle, and tactful with the confrontation or it is unlikely to be very well-received.

-

Some clients are disconnected because they had critical, authoritarian parents, so they learn to tune out their feelings. If this is the case, does confrontation work? It is like playing on the client's home turf. Providers need rapport and alignment with the client to start confrontation. You need to get to the point where you can confront and pay attention to the client. The client should believe that you are on his side and you want to make his life better.

-Arguing

or heatedly debating with the client is a flag that the conflict is an external one rather than an internal one. Arguing in that way with the client is indicative that the facilitator is drifting from their role and is often counter productive. At that point it stops being about him and his issues, and instead is about trying to win the argument. When you find yourself arguing, how should you get out of it and not get into an argument? The provider should change the direction of the conversation and rethink themselves. If you are arguing, then you have gotten hooked and have lost sight of the process. Go back over it later and think about how to approach it. If the facilitator talks too much, it is a bad sign and they are doing the work for the group. If this happens, they should bring it back to the group.

-Group should be a place to practice skills, not to make arguing skills better.

-

If you find yourself doing individual therapy in group- take a step back. Use circular questioning, Socratic questioning to reinvolve the group.

-It is more of a challenge in lower functioning groups

to have the group actively involved and the facilitator may need to work harder and talk more. But, the harder the facilitator works, the less the group works. When I started doing groups I talked more than I do now.

-Some clients have ADD problems and it can go far enough that you have to ask him to leave, although it is rare. The clients test how much control they have.

-Providers have to remember that there are many ways of dealing with a problem and not just one way. We should trust the process and your own personality will come through.

-

How do we deal with our own anger in the group? If a provider gets angry, it is a sign that they are getting hooked and the quality of the facilitator goes down. If the provider is reacting, they need to remember to put on the brakes. When anger rises up it is a double-edged sword. You can use anger and notice a pattern of an issue to work on. If I get angry I remind myself that it is not about me and it is not personal. Anger may also be a symptom of burnout. It may indicate that a break is needed.

-

Some clients may try to push the facilitator's buttons, especially if they made the client feel uncomfortable. You have to decide not to go with it, defuse your own feelings and make it a non-issue.

-You can try to confront clients by

"leading them to a mirror" and this is helpful if the man is blaming the victim. The point is to get the man to refocus on himself and his part in the process. Ask the man how they got with their partner if she was so bad, what moved them apart, if they dated again, what qualities would they not want repeated and what they need to do to attract that kind of person. It is an indirect way to get the man focusing back onto himself

-Courtenay Silvergleid, a graduate student from PSU, wrote part of her thesis about confrontation. She interviewed staff of

a batterer intervention program as well as graduates from the groups. She focused on two models of confrontation. The psychotherapeutic model involves joining with and supporting the men in a non-judgmental way. The feminist model involves more direct confrontation and accountability. Based on her interviews with staff and group members, she concluded that an intervention using a hybrid model is best because the men need support to handle the confrontation. There were quotes from graduates and they said that they appreciated the confrontation as well as the support from the group, and felt both were important.

-

Should non-court-mandated men be confronted differently from those who are court-mandated? Because there often is not someone monitoring their involvement, non-court mandated men are more likely to drop out and find it more easy to do so. Motivational interviewing is more important with volunteer clients and

you have to be gentler because they are more likely to drop out. You need a relationship with the man and motivational interviewing does that and the man needs to feel understood.

-With volunteer clients, especially over the phone, words like “anger” and “temper” are more often used. While we all know the issue isn’t about anger or temper problems, those are the euphemisms our society uses to talk about abuse and control. It may be necessary to use such terms when attempting to recruit and retain voluntary men, at least over the phone and at the intake session. Once they’re enrolled and engaged with a group, the more direct terminology can be used. Joining and creating a connection is an important process of change for all men, however, there is a smaller window of opportunity for voluntary men, so such a process needs to happen quickly. If it doesn’t, they are more likely to drop out.

-I tell all my clients that they don’t have to be here, but if they leave then there are consequences for their actions. Clients have options and choices.

-I see colluding when the facilitator loses the focus of stopping the men from using abusive behavior. Sometimes the man is resistant, but after a while wants to change even though they deny past abuse. The facilitator can be distracted by the man’s apparent growth and change and overlook accountability for past abuse. If we were doing therapy that would be all right, but not for batterer intervention.

-When doing alcohol and drug and batterer intervention, it can be a trap when the man does great with his substance problems. Some people think that if the man is not using alcohol or drugs, then he is not going to abuse. There are some connections, but alcohol and drugs do not cause violence.

Most clients, when they let go of alcohol and drugs, the power and control does not stop. It may be less extreme violence and more subtle. It is generally accepted that alcohol and drugs are related to violence, but are not causal. In some cases, mostly physical cases, if you take away the alcohol and drugs, then the man stops using physical violence. Every alcoholic I’ve worked with has been a control freak, and they tried to control their alcohol use. In order to go where they did, violence was an option for them.

-There needs to be more research on this topic and what works better with different men. There should be more research about the connections between alcohol and drug use and abuse.

-Using videos is a good way to raise internal discrepancies. Some good movies are