

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes – 7/11/00

Present: Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), Michael Davis (Changepoint), Paula Manley, Guruseva Mason (Transition Projects), and Courtenay Silvergleid (Portland State University)

Topic – Empathy, Who Cares?

How do we work with men in trying to build empathy? Chris suggested that folks revisit the minutes that Vivian sent out after the May 23rd meeting which provided a list of the 3 things that each of us do to encourage empathy development. Below are some additional thoughts and suggestions generated during the meeting.

1. Michael notices shifts in men on this issue when he deals with the issue of shame.
Referring to Brad Shaw's stuff, he believes the need to power over comes from our own insecurities. Feelings of powerlessness lead to shaming the other person. Shame is a cover up – passed onto someone else. First one must be able to empathize with oneself, then with others.
2. Another tactic employed is discussing the use of objectifying language. Turning the situation around, helps the men recognize how much labeling bothers them and increases their empathy for its effects on others.
3. Discussing the impact of domestic violence on kids tends to have an impact.
4. Discussing how seeing your partner as an opponent doesn't further the relationship in addition to blocking empathy sometimes works.
5. One technique that Chris uses to build empathy for children's experience of domestic violence is by taking a situation and magnifying it for the men. For example, he reads a journal regarding DV and asks where the men are on emotional intensity, then he shows a clip of DV and asks the same thing, then he asks the men to imagine how they would feel if the scene were real, rather than acted, then he asks them to imagine how they would feel if the actors were his parents and not strangers, then he asks them to imagine that they are children. Chris feels this progression really encourages lightbulbs to go off.
6. Another exercise is to walk men through a story of how a single incident of D.V. is like a pebble hitting the water of a pond. There are immediate consequences, delayed consequences, long term consequences, impact on observers, delayed effects, impact on loved ones and society. It helps to let the men offer suggestions and ideas for each time of impact. Often movement happens when men don't want to see themselves as the type of man that hurts his children. It is selfish really.
7. Building empathy for the victim's recovery is very important and can often be accomplished through a discussion of what she might be going through.
8. Guruseva offered that it is a choice to dehumanize a person so he focuses on awareness of the choices being made. He also discusses the impact of their violence, both short term and long term.
9. It has also been helpful to have men try and get in touch with their own pain and suffering by drawing a picture of an early experience of abuse and then describing what is going on for them.
10. Lastly, role plays were suggested as another way to build empathy in clients.

Minutes prepared by Courtenay Silvergleid

