

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 6: Children & Youth Resilience



### Introduction & Importance

Resilience is the human capacity to face, overcome and be strengthened by adversity. Resilience is critical to healthy child development and overcoming trauma, including the trauma of exposure to domestic violence. Advocates need to actively incorporate the promotion of children and youth's resilience as a part of standard practice to advocacy. Programming for children and youth is strengthened when it is based on knowledge of how to help children develop resilience.

### 10 Children & Youth Resiliency Assets

The following characteristics can support resiliency. Domestic violence (DV) agencies should consider these ten resiliency assets when designing services for children and youth (CY). Childhood exposure to domestic violence can have serious, long-term, negative consequences. Many CY who grow up with domestic violence survive and thrive.

#### 1. Nurturing, Predictable Environments

- a. Create predictable environments so CY feel secure and know what to expect.
- b. Form guidelines that are minimal, flexible and trauma-informed.
- c. Incorporate age-appropriate space for playing and learning that accommodate the needs of CY and protective caregivers (PC).
- d. Establish consistent routines and clear expectations for CY with the PC.
- e. Co-create a transition plan with the PC for when they leave shelter, separate from the abuser, or continue living with an abuser; that continues to reinforce the PC's values and views on safety.

#### 2. Relevant Relationships

- a. Provide opportunities for CY and PC to strengthen and rebuild their relationship.
  - i. Build respect between child and protective caregiver relationship.
  - ii. Protective Caregiver can help their children feel safe and secure.
- b. Facilitate conversations between child and PC to foster healing from abuse.
- c. Offer community resources of interest to the children, youth, and PC.

#### 3. Support Protective Caregivers

- a. Provide caregivers with information on the effects of exposure to domestic violence on children, youth, and families.
- b. Offer opportunities to learn about child development.
- c. Support protective caregivers during times of stress and difficulty of parenting in public.
- d. Verbalize when the protective caregivers use their positive parenting skills.
- e. Model healthy communication, respectful problem solving, and understanding children's needs.
- f. Model and teach positive parenting practices.
- g. Practice strategies that protective caregivers can use for relaxation and stress management.
- h. Offer protective caregivers ways to help their children cope with trauma behavioral responses.
  - i. PCs who feel connected to the children's support group can discuss their own experiences with their children and support what their children have felt and learned.

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 6: Children & Youth Resilience



### 4. Individual and Group Education

- a. CY should understand:
  - i. They are not alone in coping with abuse.
  - ii. The abuse in their family is not their fault.
  - iii. The abuse in their family is also not their PC's fault.
  - iv. Their feelings and perceptions of the abuse that occurred are valid
- b. Cope with the complex feelings they have for their caregivers.
- c. Provide opportunities to practice equitable, nonviolent problem solving.
- d. Teach age-appropriate critical thinking skills.
- e. PCs should be involved with individual education and provided information about the content of groups.
- f. PCs receive support for talking with their children about what they learned or experienced in group.

### 5. Individual and Family Safety Planning

- a. Coordinate safety planning for protective caregivers and children to avoid the unintended consequences of separate safety plans for the same family.
- b. CY and PCs devise age-, culturally-, and language-appropriate plans for their family's safety.

### 6. Coping with Trauma Behavioral Responses

- a. Offer opportunities for CY to talk, be listened to, and feel supported in different aspects of their lives.
- b. Provide CY with opportunities to express themselves and process their experiences through words, art, and play.
- c. Practice expressing their feelings with different methods and in different environments.

### 7. Internal Strength Recognition

- a. Practice respectful conflict resolution, good communication and healthy social skills.
- b. Incorporate techniques for relaxation, self-soothing, stress management, anger management, and behavior regulation.
- c. Verbally recognize the unique strengths and abilities of each child, and foster recognition of the good within themselves.
- d. Offer CY meaningful participation in their family, school, domestic violence program, and community.

### 8. Health and Well-Being Promotion

- a. Identify each child's needs in these areas:
  - i. Physical and mental health
  - ii. Developmental growth
  - iii. Behavior
  - iv. School
  - v. Home life
  - vi. Social relations
  - vii. Consequences of exposure to abuse
- b. Collaborating with the child and the child's PC, develop a plan to address these needs.
- c. Develop cooperative relationships with community organizations that serve children.

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 6: Children & Youth Resilience



### 9. Foster a Sense of Connection and Belonging

- a. Refer families to resources that will offer them access to health care, education, housing, employment and social services.
- b. Provide opportunities where protective caregivers can build social support for themselves and their families among extended family, friends, religious organizations, community groups, etc.
- c. Offer volunteer opportunities for youth who have been with the agency for a bit.

### 10. Cultural Traditions and Awareness

- a. Provide services that are consistent with each family's cultural values and beliefs.
- b. Refer families to events and groups where children and families can build strong cultural identity and pride.
- c. Develop ways of supporting the food, languages, holidays and customs of all families.

## Agency Resiliency Characteristics

In addition to addressing resiliency in CY programming, Domestic Violence agencies can best assist families exposed to Domestic Violence by adopting sustainable, program-wide strategies that support both children and protective caregivers. Below are suggestions to consider incorporating into the agency as a whole. To accomplish this, programs can:

1. Train all staff to interact with CY and to support Domestic Violence survivors as protective caregivers.
2. Require all staff, regardless of their positions, to understand how each of their job responsibilities affect children, youth and parenting.
  - a. For example, assisting PCs with protection orders, locating housing, or coping with their own trauma responses may have repercussions for children that should be discussed with the protective caregivers. PCs may also want help with explaining these changes to children.
3. Increase the number of adults available to positively interact with CY.
4. Increase adult-to-child ratio in CY support groups with staff and volunteers.
5. Offer or refer to respite care for PCs.
6. Encourage informal interactions with CY such as play, individual conversations and help with homework.
7. Assist PC and children in managing trauma responses without blame or shame.
8. Fully integrate services for adults, children, and teens to create services that reflect the connections between family members.
9. Implement comprehensive, interactive, and sustainable training for new CYA to prepare them for the many aspects of their position.
  - a. Training for new children and youth advocates should be as thorough and participatory as training for all other new staff positions.
10. Establish sustainable methods of children and youth services during staff transitions.
  - a. Doing so prevents a lag in services when new CYA feels they need to reinvent the agency's children's programming during staff turnover.

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 6: Children & Youth Resilience



### Support Group Practices that Promote Resiliency

#### Group Suggestions

Develop a group culture that all children and adults practice mutually respectful behavior.

Create a predictable, structured environment and a routine group schedule so children know what to expect.

- Plan a variety of activities for the entire meeting and alternate periods of movement and quieter activities.
- Have a back-up plan.
- Incorporate flexibility within groups to allow for adaptations to meet the needs of the CY in group, don't be afraid to change plans spontaneously if group dynamics demand it.

Make group a good experience for everyone with activities, playfulness, humor, and snacks.

- Include activities that incorporate all learning styles.
- Reinforce group themes through art, play, drama, games and music.
- Acknowledge and incorporate others' cultural experiences.

Many groups include an opening and closing activity, such as circle time.

- Opening activities can incorporate positive affirmations and expressing feelings.
- Closing activities can involve relaxation and visualization.

Reinforce group topics by repeating important themes in reoccurring group meetings and incorporate them into routine interactions with children.

#### Facilitator Suggestions

There should be at least two adult facilitators at all times.

- Groups tend to run more efficiently with two adults
- One adult will be available to give individual attention to children who need it while the other runs the group.
- Utilizing two facilitators is especially important when there is a wide age range in group.

If you establish group guidelines with the children, make them positive, everyone in group understands the guidelines, and apply them consistently. Common guidelines for children's domestic violence support groups are:

- No physical or verbal abuse or threats.
- Respect each other's opinions, feelings and personal space.
- **Confidentiality:** What's said in group stays in group. This guideline is intended to protect the privacy of group members. It should not prevent kids from talking to their PC about their experience in group. Discuss this guideline with the group, and generate suggestions for sharing their experience with their PCs without using names or disclosing personal information about other group members.

Arrange a method of communicating with protective caregivers of the children in your group.

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 6: Children & Youth Resilience



When children are experiencing trauma response behaviors during group give them opportunities to calm down and rejoin the group.

- Be calm, respectful and supportive.
- Avoid shaming and reprimands.

When a child is experiencing trauma response behaviors

- Verbally recognize what you are witnessing.
- Offer 2-3 options when asking questions.
- If the child needs to leave the group
  - Have identified spaces where they would like to have a break.
  - Ask if they would like to talk when they are done with their break.
- If the child continues the trauma response behaviors talk with the PC about strategies to being in group.
- Have self-care activities for children to use during their break.
- Have self-care activities or items for children to use during group.

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 6: Children & Youth Resilience



### Resources

Center for the Study of Social Policy: [Protective & Promotive Factors Action Sheets](#) includes the research brief about each protective factor as well as an “action sheet” for service providers about their role in supporting families to build each protective factor. The action sheets include what to look for, questions to ask and activities to do with parents related to each protective factor.

Children of Domestic Violence: [The Change A Life Program](#) free, evidence-based online program. This program teaches you how to become The ONE for a child growing up with domestic violence – a caring adult who steps in and offers simple support and messages of hope that can foster a child’s resiliency and help change their life.

Here are some links to websites that offer different activities to help youth to calm down. [50 activities and games dealing with anger](#), [Relaxation games](#), [Create Your Own Anti-Anxiety Kit for Children](#).

[Kelly McGonigal: How to Make Stress Your Friend](#) new research suggests that stress may only be bad for you if you believe that to be the case. Psychologist Kelly McGonigal urges us to see stress as a positive, and introduces us to an unsung mechanism for stress reduction: reaching out to others.

[Promising Futures: Promoting Resiliency](#) provides protective factors that promote resiliency among children and youth experiencing domestic violence.

Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health: Collective Impact: [Resiliency Workgroup](#) this workgroup focuses on how to promote resiliency to children and families with mental health challenges. On the left panel you can see the current resources under ‘What We’re Reading,’ ‘What We’re Playing,’ and ‘Other Resilience Resources.’ Under ‘Looking for Resilience Resources’ this group identified the top resources they would recommend on resiliency for children and youth, families, communities, agencies/institutions, systems, and building a resilient culture.

---

*Please notify the Children & Youth Prevention & Outreach Coordinator, [Cody Warner](#), if ANY of the links are no longer working.*

---