



Positive Intervention for Children Affected by Domestic Abuse

ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD PICADA GROUP

PURPOSE OF THE GROUPS

Two groups are run: one for children and the other for mothers of the children on the group.

The purpose of the children's group is to give children an opportunity to move beyond what has happened in their family in a safe and therapeutic way. The programme is focused on helping children understand that what has happened between their mother and father (partner, boyfriend etc) is not their fault, and helps them to identify, express and manage their feelings about the abuse, separation and loss. The programme also focuses on helping children develop safety plans in should they be exposed to further abuse. Strategies on managing intense feelings are explored through fun, child-centred activities. Positive conflict resolution through role modelling and play help children to practice new skills explored in the group. Group guidelines also help to create a safe and stable environment for children to share their experiences.

The purpose of the mothers' group is to provide the women with an opportunity to understand what their child is learning and doing each week so they can better support their child through this process and understand, cope with and effectively manage their child's behaviours. The women will also make connections with each other and the group often becomes a supportive network itself. The primary focus, however, is on understanding and supporting their children who are participating in their own group. The mothers' group is run concurrently with the children's group and mothers are offered the opportunity to participate. It is strongly recommended as an essential benefit. For some women, they may be uncertain about attending a group for a number of reasons, but it is critical that mother's understand that their group is primarily for the benefit of the children. The mothers' group is not a woman abuse programme and they are not required to divulge or share personal experiences if they do not wish too.

"When women can truly understand and connect with their child's experience, through the desire to help their children, they are also helping themselves" – Sandra Graham-Bermann.

VISION

- To stop the cycle of domestic abuse and lessen the effect on children exposed to domestic abuse.
- Through intervention at the child's level, help children to begin to heal by providing them with the opportunity to attend groups.
- To engage and support mothers to validate, inform and support their children's healing.
- To address the intergenerational effects of violence and to impact the values and beliefs that enable violence, power and control to occur in families, the community and society as a whole.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Women and children should be able to live their lives free of violence and abuse.
- The safety and well-being of children and their mothers is of paramount importance when offering this service.
- Groups should be available to children and their mothers from diverse cultural communities, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities and differently abled persons such as hearing impaired, developmentally, or mobility challenged.
- While both women and men will experience domestic abuse, the theoretical underpinning of the group model is based on the understanding that women are more likely than men to experience domestic abuse and to experience severe and/or repeated incidents of violence and abuse. This said, where possible, the children's group should have at least one male facilitator to provide a positive role model to the children as well as demonstrating respectful working relationships between the genders.
- The service provided is nurturing, non-judgmental and well-informed.
- Research and evaluation is valued as a means of ensuring an effective, quality service.

MISSION STATEMENT

- To provide children an opportunity within group settings to tell their stories – to be heard, validated and believed, and to begin to understand and heal from exposure to domestic abuse.
- To provide mothers with an opportunity to understand their child's experiences and to validate and support their healing. To assist women to create links and build bridges between themselves and their child.
- To provide a nurturing, safe and positive environment for children and their mothers.

STRUCTURE AND FORMAT OF THE GROUPS

- Weekly group sessions run for two hours, over twelve weeks, concurrently for mothers and children. The mothers group runs towards the beginning of the week and their children follow in groups on subsequent days.
- Two facilitators are needed to facilitate each group, with a possible third observer (trained), dependent on the number of children in the group.
- Both are run as a closed group, ideally with no more than 8 attending each group to allow for sufficient time for discussion. No new members are added to the group over the 12 weeks.
- Both groups are held on location at a partner agency in the community, the location of which is only disclosed to those attending the group.
- Both groups are co-facilitated by practitioners from local partner agencies, with appropriate backgrounds (social work, children's workers etc), associated with Domestic Abuse Forum. All facilitators are CRB checked and have received appropriate training on the Community Group Programme for Children Exposed to Women Abuse.
- Each session runs with a structured, standard format with key themes each week. The standard format help to maintain the concurrent nature of the programme, promotes predictability and consistency for those attending the group(s),

decreases anxiety and increases the confidence of those attending in knowing what to expect from week to week.

- Group rules are brainstormed by the group during the first session with a few guidelines offered by leaders. Confidentiality, respect for one another and no hurting are key guidelines.
- Whilst it is best to have an equal split of gender, it is not always possible. With a group of 8, no less than 3 of a specific gender would be appropriate, for example if three girls were in a group and one was absent, there would still be two girls to pair together.
- Weekly individual and group files are maintained, and group summaries serve as proof that the child has participated. They are not detailed accounts or assessments of the child's participation, merely a description of the child's positive contribution in group. The group summaries will be provided to the mother and referrer at the end of the 12 weeks.
- If any child and/or mother disengage with the group during the 12 weeks, one of the facilitators will make contact with the family to make efforts to re-engage with them.

REFERRAL PROCESS

1. Suitability

Not all children will be appropriate for PICADA. The alleged abuser must have been out of the home for at least 6 months with evidence that the abuse is no longer going on. The referring practitioner also needs to determine if the child's behaviour can be connected to having witnessed domestic abuse. If they are, the practitioner needs to find out about the child's interpretations, in order to assess the appropriateness for the group.

Reasons for inappropriate referrals may include when the family is in crisis, e.g. the family is not safe/the children have been removed by Social Services. There may be other situations where children with: mental illness, self harming behaviour, suicidal thoughts, depression, severe anxiety, severe aggression, severe post traumatic stress disorder, an experience of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, substance misuse issues, emotional risks due to ongoing custody and access issues, no memory of the violence (although this may be a means of coping) would not be suitable for the group. Children from the same school or from the same family should not be on the same group. This is not an exclusive list, but meant as a guideline in assessing appropriateness of children for the group.

2. Initial enquiries

Enquiries regarding PICADA from service users and professionals (statutory and non statutory) will be taken by the identified contact. Professionals wishing to refer a service user to the group must complete a referral form and ensure that the following has been considered / gathered before making a referral:

- Consent from the service user to be referred to the group
- Whether the alleged abuser has left the home; there is any ongoing abuse; there is contact and/or court orders or care proceedings taking place with the alleged abuser
- Age and any special needs/concerns of the child
- Details of the past violence/abuse (type, duration, frequency, severity, how recent)

- Whether the child has any memory of the abuse

Referrals **can not** be accepted where the mother is still in a relationship or living with the alleged abuser, or where there is abuse still taking place.

Cases where there is contact with the alleged abuser will be considered on a case by case basis. Where there are care proceedings in place, the consenting parent should inform their solicitor regarding the group. Should the other parent challenge the decision, it will be up to the court to determine. Where there are no care proceedings in place, yet there is contact, ways of managing this will be discussed at the assessment stage.

Once all the above has been considered and the referrer feels that the PICADA referral is suitable, the completed referral form should be submitted to the named contact for them to make contact with the mother.

For any self referrals, the referral form will be completed over the phone with the mother.

3. First contact with mother

Telephone contact will be made with the mother by the identified person taking referrals (this may have already been done if the mother has self referred). During this conversation, any outstanding details on the referral form are completed, discussion is had around how to talk to the children about the group and a meeting is arranged to build rapport and share information about the group, carry out the risk assessment, and to discuss memories of the abuse with the child.

4. Face to face assessment meetings

The meeting will usually take place in the mother's home, however some may choose to come into the agency for a meeting with their children. When discussing a home appointment, the safety of the worker(s) attending must also be considered.

All families must be visited with all efforts made to ensure that the family is visited within a short enough time span so they do not worry over a longer period of time, or forget about the group.

One facilitator of the children's group and one facilitator from the mother's group will arrange to meet with the child and mother to get to know each other and talk about the group. The mothers' group facilitator talks to the mother about: what the programme is/is not; carry out a risk assessment; develop a safety plan if required; begin initial assessment regarding appropriateness of the referral; connect the family to other resources whilst waiting for the group; ensure correct contact information and encourage women to connect with the group co-ordinators if the information changes; provide an estimated time frame for when they will be participating in the group; discuss any issues around contact with the alleged abuser.

The children's group facilitator talks to the child about memories of hurting in the family between the mother and father (partner, boyfriend etc). This helps to determine if the child is able to acknowledge the violence and abuse and if the child is ready to talk about it. If the child is having difficulty in talking about it, group leaders may look to the mother for permission for the child to talk about it. Denial of the abuse would mean the child was not appropriate for the group; it does not

necessarily mean that the abuse did not happen, but that the child may not be ready to talk about it, that the child was not exposed to it or the child may not remember it.

5. Acceptance

It is the child's choice to attend the group. Those children who acknowledge the abuse but refuse to attend should be respected and not accepted onto the group. Some children may tell their mothers that they do not want to go, but when they meet the group facilitators they decide that they wish to try the group. It may (or may not) be appropriate to negotiate with the child about trying the group.

Once a mother and child is accepted onto group, a standard letter will be sent out to the mother confirming their place on the group, detailing dates, time and location of all group sessions.

6. Contact with school

Due to the groups being run during school hours, the mother should discuss the child's absence during this time, with the school. Facilitators will be available to have discussions with the school of the child making them aware of the group process, benefits and the impact of taking time off school to attend. A decision around whether the mother and/or the facilitator make contact with the school should be discussed and agreed during the assessment visit. Safety measures to be put in place for when the child returns to the classroom after attending the group should also be discussed, for example ensure that the teachers concerned are aware of where the child has been and confidentiality is maintained from the other pupils. A standard letter to schools has been drafted.

7. Support for facilitators

All facilitators should debrief after each group and have regular supervision whilst group is occurring. After each 12 weeks is completed, all facilitators should meet to discuss mutual experiences, problems and for general support as well as ad hoc meetings throughout the 12 weeks.

CLIENT FEEDBACK AND COMMENTS

Feedback from both the children and mothers attending PICADA will be collected and suggestions taken into account for how the groups can be improved, as well as compliments and good practice being shared with other agencies/local authority areas.

Children are asked to complete pre and post group questionnaires, these include measures of children's self esteem as well as questions relating to responsibility for abuse and safety planning. The two questionnaires ask the same questions so that any change in children's understanding, attitude or feelings can be monitored. Children also have opportunities on this form to make general comments about how they have found the experience of participating in PICADA. Mothers receive a post questionnaire in which they are asked to identify whether they feel their children's participation has resulted in various benefits including an understanding of how to keep themselves safe, increased communication with their

mother, a better understanding of responsibility for abuse, increased self esteem and so on. Mothers also identify areas where they feel they have benefited personally from participating in the process. Mothers can also make general comments about the programme on this form. These evaluations, once completed, are used to review the success of each programme and to help inform any changes which need to be made as well as follow up support which may be necessary for individual cases.

COMPLAINTS

The complaints procedure will depend on the nature of the complaint i.e. who and/or what the complaint is regarding. Informal complaints should initially be dealt with by a group facilitator. Where this can not be resolved, the complaint should be made formal by putting it in writing and sent to:

Community Safety Manager
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Town Hall
St. Ives Road
Maidenhead
SL6 1RF

The formal complaint should detail the exact nature of the complaint, who the complaint is from (and their relationship to the child/young person attending PICADA) and the desired outcome.

DISCLOSURES

If a facilitator has any concern that a child on the group may be at risk of harm or neglect, they should follow guidance as per the Berkshire Child Protection Procedures. Practitioners are reminded that "If you have any concern that a child/young person **may be at risk of harm or neglect**, please contact the Duty Team in Social Care straight away. They will advise you on an appropriate course of action. If it is safe to do so (i.e. if it doesn't place a child/young person at risk of greater harm), please notify the parent/carer, or young person before making the referral".

Mothers being referred to the programme will also be made aware of any confidentiality boundaries that the facilitators are duty bound by.

OUTLINE OF GROUPS

Mother's Groups

1. Making connections
2. Breaking the silence – defining the experience of woman abuse
3. Honouring feelings – moving forward towards healing
4. How being exposed to woman abuse affects children – understanding and honouring children's experiences
5. Personal safety planning for mothers and their children
6. Who is responsible when abuse happens? – understanding accountability for abuse
7. Honouring and understanding anger – how to help children express it in healthy ways
8. Understanding conflict – guiding children to solve problems in helpful not hurtful ways

9. Grieving the losses – celebrating choices and change
10. Staying connected – getting the support I need in my life and in the community
11. Choosing healthy relationships
12. Celebrating how far we've come – moving toward ongoing healing

Children's Groups

1. Getting to know you
2. Breaking the secret about abuse that happens in families
3. Understanding our many feelings
4. Children's experiences of hurting in their family
5. Staying safe when abuse happens – my personal safety plan
6. "It's not our fault" – beginning to understand responsibility for abuse
7. Understanding and expressing anger
8. Learning about problems – how to solve problems in healthy ways
9. Dealing with family changes when abuse has happened
10. Sexual abuse prevention/self-esteem – staying safe from sexual abuse
- 10b. Abuse in dating relationships – what can you do?
11. Self esteem – the best me I can be!
12. Saying goodbye