



Child Support Program Toolbox for Working Cases with Domestic Violence

Brett Johnson, Natrona County Child Support

Ida Aguirre, New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Michael Hayes, Office of Child Support Enforcement



Why Does Domestic Violence Matter to Child Support?

- Review six reasons.
- Rank in order from most important (1) to least (6).
- No right or wrong answers!
- Work with partner to pick top two reasons.



Why Does Domestic Violence Matter to Child Support?

- Financial support can help victims leave and stay away from an abusive relationship.
- Staff safety is increased when domestic violence (DV) cases are appropriately documented and appropriate security measures are taken.
- Ensure a DV case is not mishandled, resulting in things going terribly wrong.
- Customer safety is increased when child support staff respond appropriately to safety concerns.
- Knowledge of DV dynamics helps child support agency staff understand customer actions and leads to improved case processing and reduced frustration.
- Time invested working a DV case on the front end pays off in the long run.



POLL: In your agency, what do you think gets in the way when it comes to making child support safer for victims?

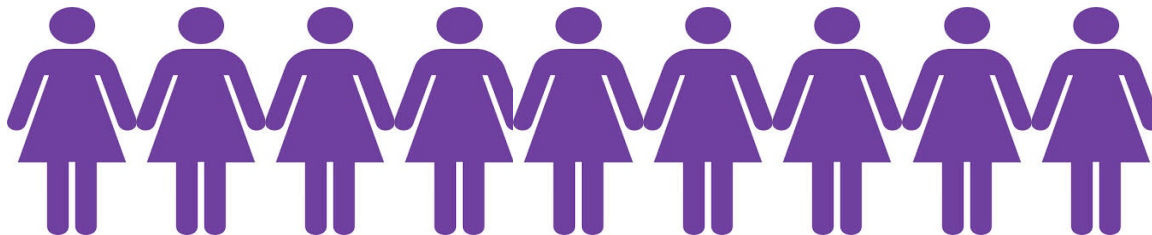
- a. Staff lack training and knowledge about DV.
- b. Most staff don't really think it's their job to deal with DV.
- c. Victims don't tell us about their safety concerns.
- d. Leadership hasn't made it a priority.
- e. We haven't established partnerships with DV experts or DV service providers.
- f. We don't have the time to respond to DV issues with all our other performance measures.
- g. We have to remain neutral.
- h. Other



- Financial stability... for
survival... ship.

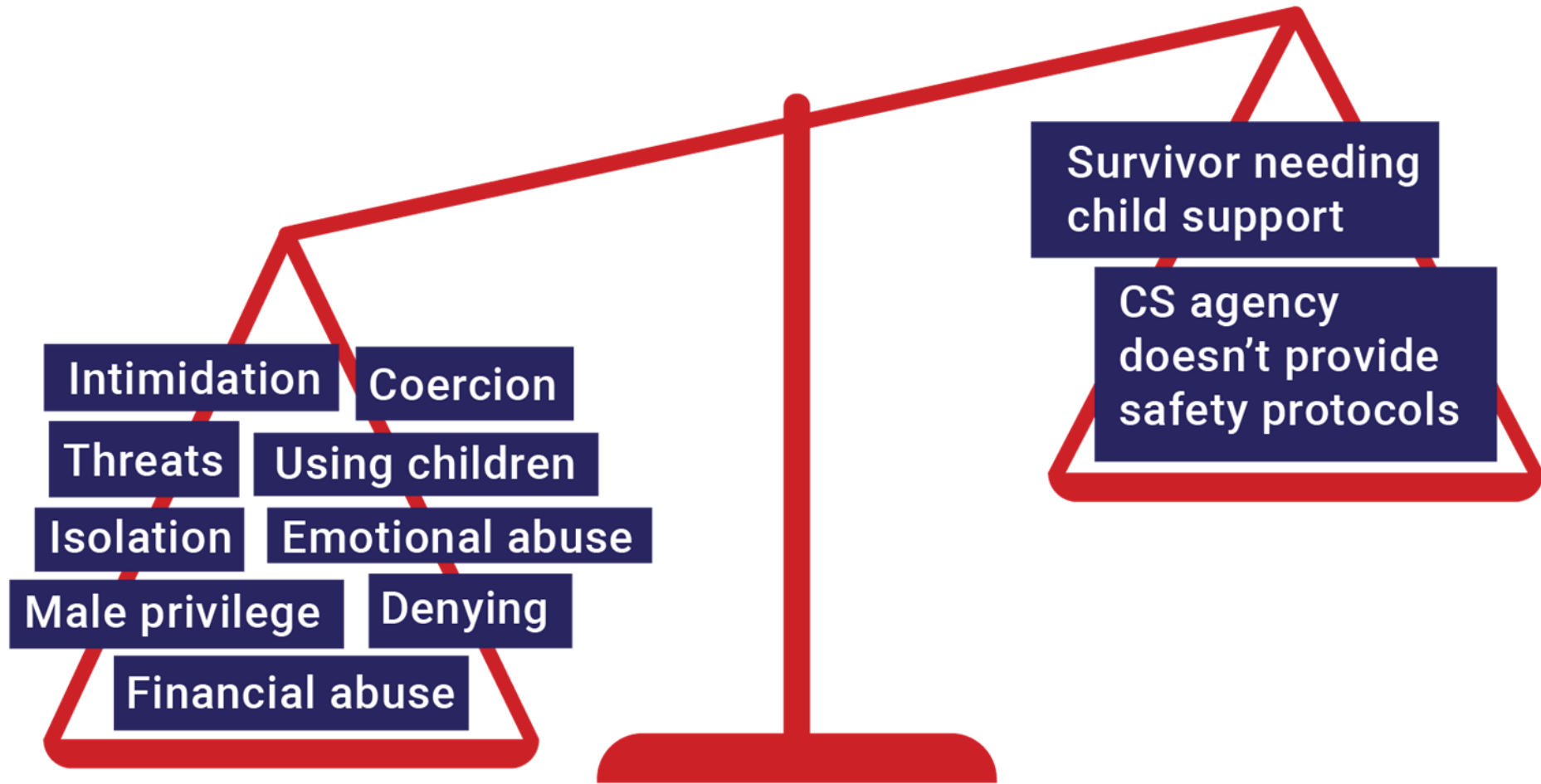
Can we get child
support safely in
your state?

- 90%... child support if
they can do so safely,





“Neutrality” Helps the Oppressor





~~“Are you a
victim
of domestic
violence?”~~



Model Screening Questions and Practices (handout)

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT
An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

Domestic Violence Expert-Informed Model Screening Questions and Practices

Background guidance on screening practices for caseworkers

- DV victims are frequently reluctant to share their history with strangers. It's critical to build trust through an interactive process that empowers a victim by respecting their self-knowledge and choices.
- DV victims, and their children, may have suffered trauma that can affect the victim's ability to process information and participate in the process.
- It's important to provide opportunities for the victim to share important information at all stages of the interview, and during subsequent contact points, to develop trust in the process and the case manager's supportive role.
- It's also essential to provide repeated opportunities to ask questions and receive information for a procedurally just and transparent process.
- Validate the importance of what is shared by the victim and support them as they disclose information.
- Respecting the victim's right to make choices for themselves and their children is a key strategy for engagement.
- Don't force disclosure – that should not be the goal. Instead, provide repeated opportunities for universal education on domestic violence and how the child support agency can enhance survivors' safety throughout the child support process.
- You will not be conducting a forensic type of interview. Our goal is to ask questions to get information on domestic violence or safety concerns to make this process safe for the victim and children, and to provide information, resources, and referrals, as appropriate to their situation.

Model Framing Questions

(Caseworkers: screening questions to the respondent)

We take the safety of families receiving child support services seriously, and we can modify some of our processes to help with safety concerns. There are a few questions we ask everybody receiving our services to help us provide the right mix of services for your case. We don't share your answers to these questions with the other parent. We also know that things in relationships can change and so you can change your answers to these questions in the future.

- We usually for a confidential child support any safety the other parent.
- We don't share information that we should be sharing with the other parent.
- Do you have information about resources that are available in our area. Would you like information about these resources?
- (Caseworkers: If you are working with a specific advocate or staff person at a local domestic violence program, include the name and the role that person can play; for example, safety planning, counseling, connecting children to services, advocating for civil legal protections.)

Model Framing Language and Screening Questions

(Caseworkers: Below is a script of framing language and screening questions to use with both the applicant and the respondent.)

We take the safety of families receiving child support services seriously, and we can modify some of our processes to help with safety concerns. There are a few questions we ask everybody receiving our services to help us provide the right mix of services for your case. We don't share your answers to these questions with the other parent. We also know that things in relationships can change and so you can change your answers to these questions in the future.

- We often work with parents who have experienced violence or are afraid of the other parent. I have information about resources that are available in our area. Would you like information about these resources?



Trauma-informed Care

- An approach that assumes an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma.
- Recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role trauma may play in an individual's life--including service staff.
- Shifts focus from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”
- Assesses and modifies the organization, management, and service delivery system to include a basic understanding of how trauma affects an individual seeking services.





Trauma-informed Care (con't.)

- Promotes a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing
- Framework of care that is comprised of common themes, including:
 - Awareness of how behaviors and symptoms connect to traumatic experiences
 - Emphasis on physical, psychological, and emotional safety
 - Opportunity for people to regain a sense of control
 - Focus on strengths rather than deficits





What is Trauma?

Trauma is an event or series of events that overwhelms an individual mentally, emotionally, or physically.



What is Trauma?

Episodic Trauma

- Witnessing or experiencing threatened death
- Sexual assault
- Natural disasters

Chronic Trauma

- Domestic violence
- Child abuse
- Military combat

Historical Trauma

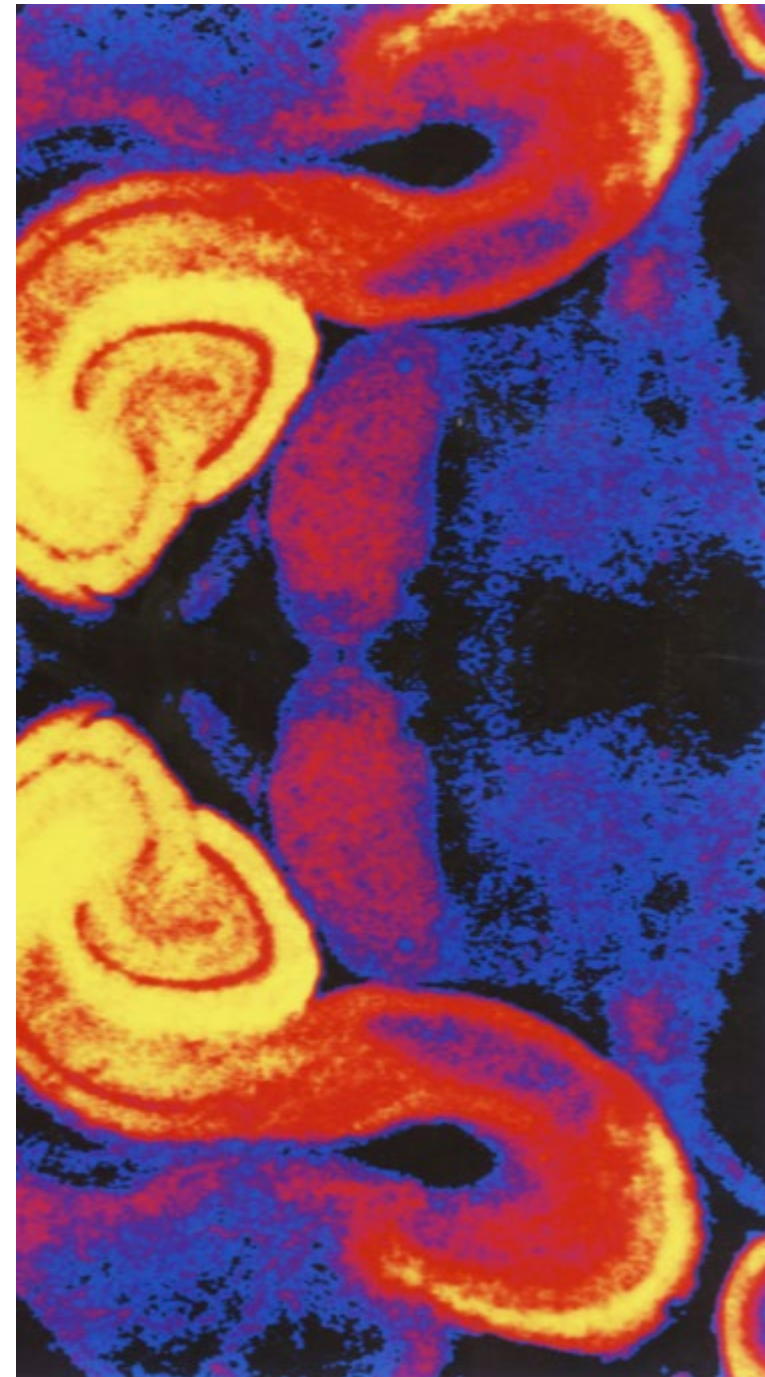
- First used by social worker and mental health expert [Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart](#) in the 1980s, focused on the ways in which the psychological and emotional traumas of colonization, relocation, assimilation, and boarding schools manifested within generations of the Lakota population.
- Collective, cumulative wounding – targeting a population, but held personally



What Does Trauma Do to Us?

Chronic trauma interferes with neurobiological development and the capacity to integrate sensory, emotional, and cognitive information into a cohesive whole.

- Hyperarousal
- Re-experiencing/intrusion
- Disassociation/avoidance/withdrawal





Conventional Approach vs. Trauma-informed Approach

Conventional Approach

- You are sick – what's wrong with you?
- Symptoms
- Treat sickness

Trauma-informed Approach

- You've been injured – what's happened to you?
- Adaptive responses
- Treat injury



Some of What to Expect

- Alternate between anxiety/arousal and depression/withdrawal
- Triggering events – sights, sounds, smells, anniversaries
- Impatience with processes

Some of What to “Do”

- Think “trauma first”
- Safety and stabilization
- Processing and grieving
- Reconnection





Practical Tips (handout)

- Offer support and validation – help survivors manage feelings.
- Provide context for survivor’s questions – modify information delivery to support processing and planning.
- Inquire about what helps and what hurts when others try to assist – deliver on promises.

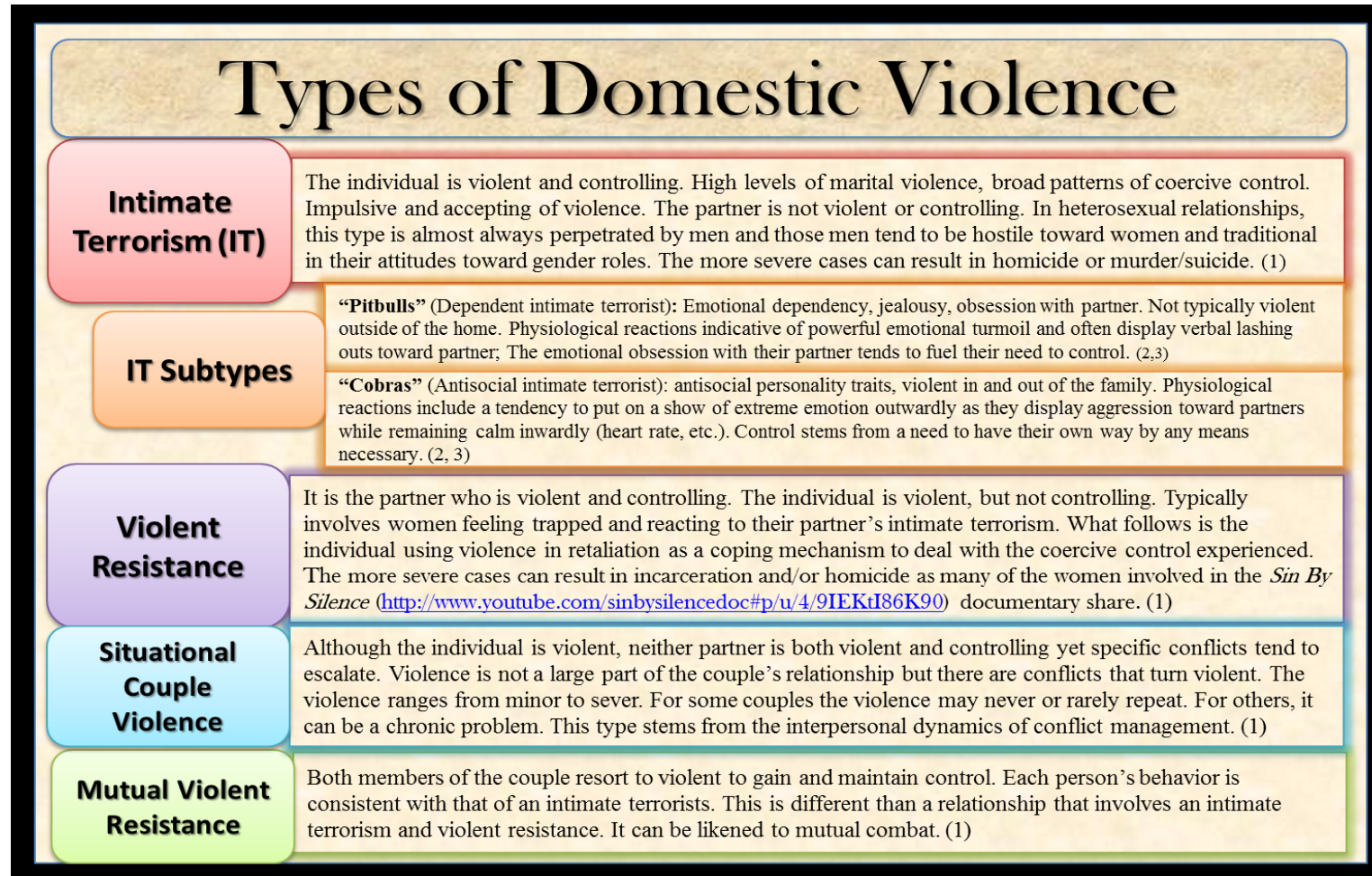


What is an Abuser/Batterer?

- Are they different?
- Why do we care?
 - Answers:
 - Yes. One can be a very effective abuser without physically harming the victim
 - We want to identify level of physical violence to protect victim and children, and ourselves
 - We also need to be on lookout for power differentials with or without physical violence



Kinds of Batterers/Johnson's Typology





Characteristics of Abusers

- Often very charming and personable
- Very convincing
 - Masters of minimization
 - They *believe* they are the victims
 - If there was violence, it was the victim's fault
 - Believe the system is slanted against them; we're only here to take the female's side
 - "She won't let me see my kids"
 - Likely to ask for 50/50 visitation, even if don't intend to exercise it.



When speaking with abusers

- V's safety must always top-of-mind
 - Who opened this case?
- NEVER tell batterer that victim disclosed violence
 - If you have to bring it up, do it in context of objective marker in case file. "I see there's a protection order in place."
- Tell them you don't represent either side (You don't)
 - "You're our customer every bit as much as your ex"



High Risk Situations

- Strangulation or “Choking”
- Threatened homicide/suicide
- Use of threat to use weapon
- Victim is scared for her safety/children’s safety
- Recent breakup/New partner in victim’s life/Child who is not abuser’s
- Violence while victim was pregnant
- Stalking behaviors
- Controls most of victim’s daily activities
- https://www.dangerassessment.org/uploads/DA_NewScoring_2019.pdf



What if,

Someone told a lie...

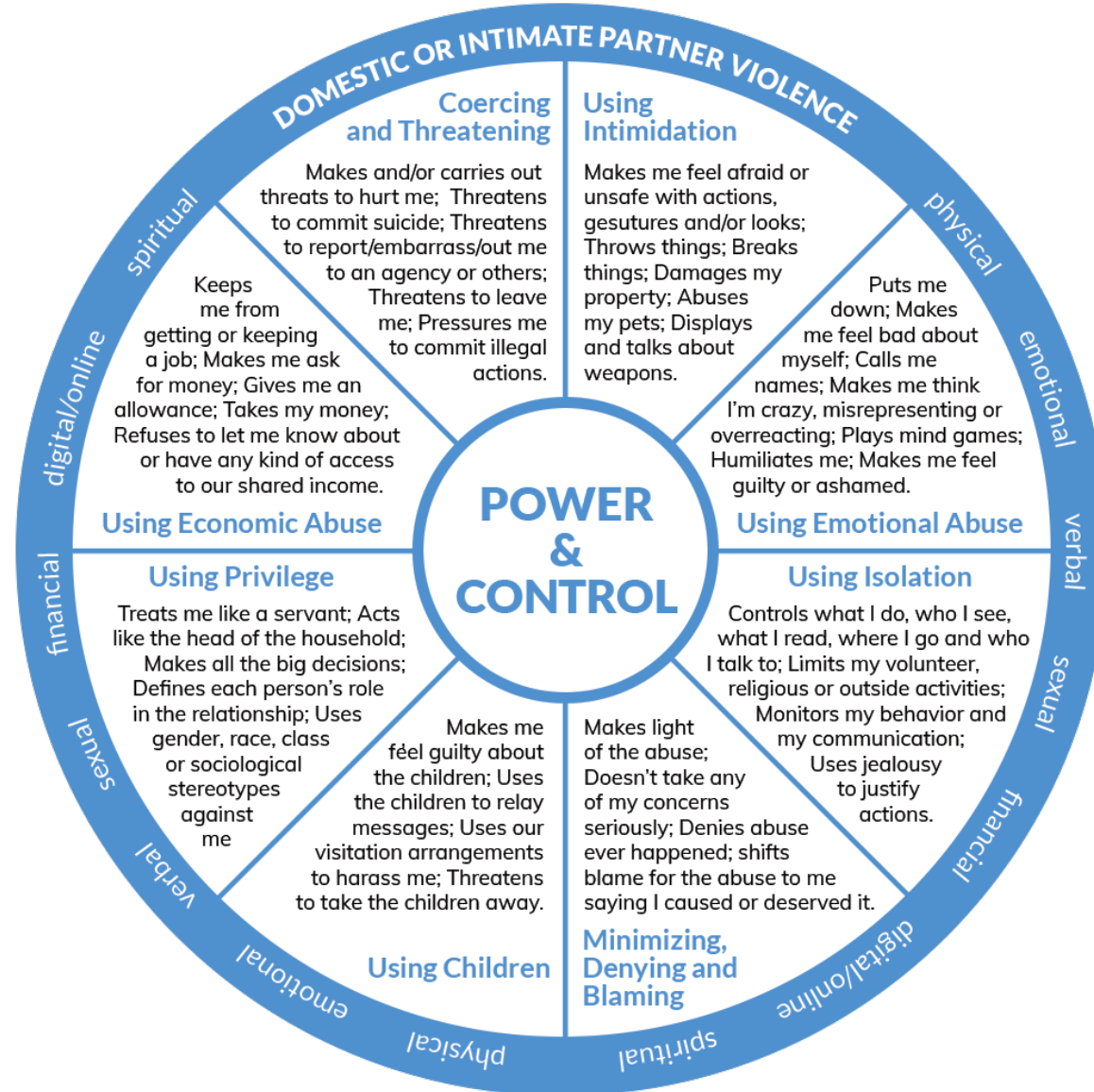
**That Alcohol or Other Drugs caused
Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault?**



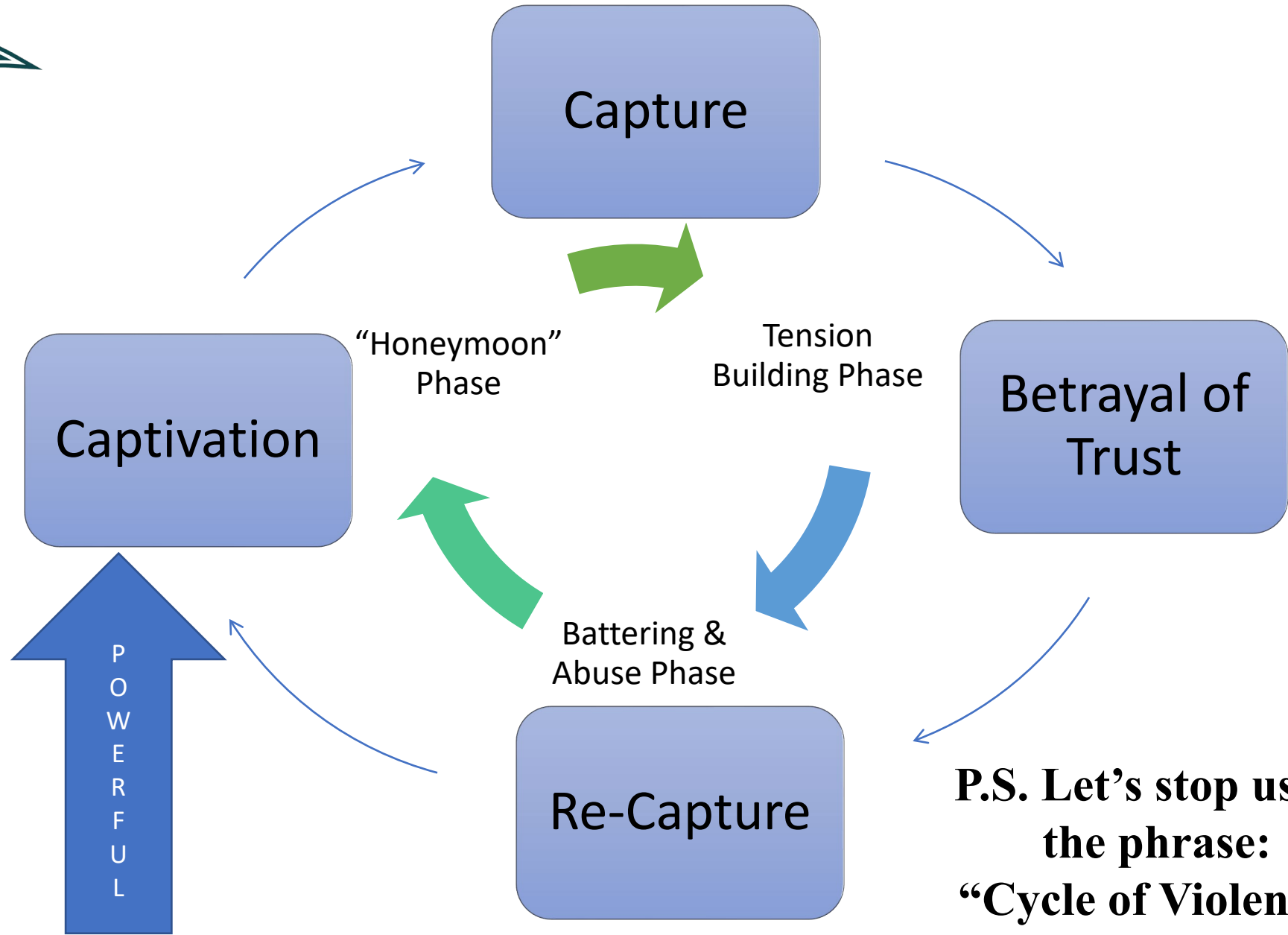
**Who would *benefit* from this misinformation?
Who would be *harmed* by this information?**



Power & Control



The *Revised Cycle of Violence: *Understanding the motivation of the perpetrator*



**P.S. Let's stop using
the phrase:
"Cycle of Violence"**



How to work with *people who have chosen to commit DV*

- Remember there are both female & male offenders
- Redirect when you start hearing victim/survivor blaming and/or minimizing
- Redirect when you start hearing that they insist THEY are the victim
- Maintain survivor's confidentiality!!!!
- If you're feeling "judgmental," seek help from your supervisor
- Listen, everyone's story makes sense to them
- BE PATIENT!