

The Child Support Program Responds to Domestic Violence

According to a 2013 study from the Texas Child and Family Research Partnership, 3.6 million custodial parents with cases in the Title IV-D child support program have experienced domestic violence with the other parent on their child support case. That is 40% of custodial parents in the child support program. Domestic violence is not limited to custodial parents; rates of domestic violence for noncustodial parents may be as high as 1 in 4 during their lifetime ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), 2022). Perpetrators of domestic violence frequently take physical custody of children and file for child support services to continue to harass and financially abuse the other parent. In order to successfully fulfill the child support program's mission of ensuring that all children receive the financial and emotional support they need to thrive, state and tribal child support agencies must have comprehensive, domestic violence expert-informed policies, case management procedures, legal practice, community partnerships, and training.

One of the primary reasons domestic violence survivors stay with or return to an abusive partner is financial dependence. [Research from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence](#) found that two-thirds (67%) of survivors surveyed said they stayed longer than they wanted or returned to an abusive relationship because of financial concerns, such as not being able to pay bills, afford rent/mortgage, or feed their family. The Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) found that more than 90% of women with current or former abusive partners want to pursue child support if they can do so safely and confidentially. The intersection with the child support program is clear. Child support can give domestic violence survivors the ability to leave an abusive relationship because it can be a primary source of income for custodial families.

Because the child support program serves both parents, it has a unique responsibility to reduce the risk of violence and help survivors pursue child support safely. Without safety modifications, child support processes may be biased in favor of the battering party who manipulates, coerces, intimidates, or threatens the other party into making child support agreements or parenting time arrangements that are not based on fact or the best interest of the child. These power and control tactics must be mitigated through safety-informed child support practices for the process to be truly neutral for a survivor. From a federal, state, tribal, and county public policy perspective, child support agencies must take a clear stand against violence and for family safety.

Child support programs can put the safety of families and program staff at the forefront of their work by identifying and responding effectively to domestic violence; providing safe opportunities to disclose domestic violence; and developing safe and confidential responses to domestic violence.

OCSE Training

Over the last six years, OCSE has developed and delivered in-person and virtual domestic violence training for child support professionals in 30 states and more than 40 tribal child support agencies. All training is provided at no cost and is coordinated with state, regional, tribal, and local domestic violence service providers and coalitions.

- **Safer Access to Child Support for Survivors of Domestic Violence** – core staff training that focuses on the impact domestic violence has on parents in the child support program and on effective delivery of child support services. The training builds

knowledge and skills to deliver child support services more effectively to survivors of domestic violence. The training curriculum has been provided to multiple state training units through a train-the-trainer model, allowing states to continue delivering this model training to existing and new child support staff.

- **Balancing the Scales of Justice for Survivors of Domestic Violence** – specialized training for child support attorneys, hearing masters, and other judicial officers that focuses on specific legal practice issues, court management, and the role of the attorney in promoting safety for survivors.
- **Ten Things (plus one) that Every Child Support Professional Should Know about Domestic Violence** – training offered at multiple state and regional conferences that introduces connections between child support services and domestic violence dynamics and provides practical steps to increase survivor safety.
- **Child Support “Navigator”** – training offered in collaboration with state domestic violence coalitions and legal services providers to provide information and tools to advocates as they help survivors navigate child support and parenting time.

OCSE Resources

OCSE maintains a wide range of domestic violence resources to help child support professionals and parents on its [Family Violence webpage](#):

- [Domestic Violence Awareness Tear Sheet Flyers](#) – state ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) and [tribal](#) flyers that child support agencies and courts can post in lobbies, reception areas, offices, and restrooms. The posters educate about domestic violence, child support safety options, and provide contact information to the National Domestic Violence Hotline or StrongHearts Native Helpline for confidential support and safety tools.
- [Child Support When You’re Afraid of the Other Parent](#) – “palm card” designed to provide survivors and domestic violence advocates with key information about child support processes, potential risks, questions to ask child support staff about safely getting child support, and safety options that may be available with local courts and child support agencies.
- [Enhancing Safe Access to Child Support: IV-D Program Inventory and Planning Resource](#) – roadmap for state and tribal child support agencies, in partnership with domestic violence experts, to assess current policies, procedures, and partnerships related to survivor safety and identify areas for program improvement.
- [Domestic Violence Expert-Informed Model Screening Questions and Practices](#) – practical strategies state and tribal agencies can use to provide universal safety information and multiple opportunities for survivors to disclose their domestic violence safety concerns to child support workers.
- [Safely Pursuing Child Support - Training Tools](#) – basic training resources that state and tribal child support agencies can use as part of their domestic violence training program. Materials include a [resource guide](#), [slide deck](#), and [talking points](#) to help local trainers deliver the curriculum.
- [Safely Pursuing Child Support: A Caseworker Desk Card](#) – resource for child support workers on how domestic violence dynamics impact survivors in their caseload and practical tips for responding. It includes guidance for helping survivors by offering and

explaining safety modifications available within the child support process and connecting survivors to domestic violence and other external resources.

- Two policy guidance documents highlight model practices for ensuring safety for survivors using family violence indicators and good cause exceptions to child support cooperation requirements. These documents are available on the OCSE Family Violence webpage:
 - [IM-15-02](#) – **Safe Access to Child Support Services: Scope of the Issue**
 - [IM-19-06](#) – **Model Procedures for Domestic Violence Cases**

Collaboration and Partnerships

OCSE recognizes it takes more than just training and resources to provide child support services safely; it takes ongoing partnership and collaboration with domestic violence experts and programs. OCSE has significantly expanded its work with national domestic violence resource centers, state and tribal domestic violence coalitions, and local domestic violence service providers to provide training and technical assistance to state, tribal, and county child support agencies. More than 100 domestic violence organizations across the country have welcomed the opportunity to:

- Provide domestic violence presentations
- Review child support agency policy and procedures
- Develop education materials
- Train domestic violence advocates to be child support “navigators” for survivors
- Provide in-depth training to child support professionals on topics such as trauma-informed care, human trafficking, domestic violence and child welfare, and culturally responsive approaches to domestic violence

One especially promising partnership model is the establishment of a contractual relationship between state child support agencies and state domestic violence coalitions for ongoing training and consultation. This allows state domestic violence coalitions to build capacity and understanding of child support processes and policies. It also allows coalitions to help the child support agency with conducting risk and lethality assessments for survivors accessing child support services. These activities are allowable expenditures under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. (See [PIQ 12-02](#) Section 2: Child Support Educators, Section 4: Case Management, Section 6: Prevent and Reduce Domestic Violence, and Section 7: Prevent and Reduce Domestic Violence in Child Welfare Cases for more information.)

At the federal level, OCSE has strengthened its collaboration with ACF’s Family Youth Services Bureau, their [Family Violence Prevention and Services Act \(FVPSA\) Program](#), and their national resource centers on domestic violence. OCSE’s [Child Support When You’re Afraid of the Other Parent](#) resource was produced in partnership with FVPSA national resource center grantees. OCSE’s [Domestic Violence Expert Informed Model Screening Questions and Practices](#) was developed with input from staff with the National Resource Center and the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Most recently, FVPSA Program staff reviewed and consulted on the development of OCSE’s Safe Access for Victims’ Economic Security (SAVES) demonstration and national training, technical assistance, and the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

FVPSA State Domestic Violence Coalitions

FVPSA State Domestic Violence Coalitions are the ears and voices of survivor advocates and programs within their state. The FVPSA Program is the primary federal funding stream for [State and Territorial Domestic Violence Coalitions](#), which coordinate state- and territory-wide improvements within local communities, social service systems, and programming regarding the prevention and intervention of domestic violence. The coalitions provide comprehensive training and technical assistance on a multitude of social, legal, and economic issues that affect survivors' safety and well-being. Coalitions partner with government, private industry, non-profits, and faith-based communities, and other stakeholders to coordinate and improve the safety net of services available to survivors and their dependents. For a complete list of state domestic violence coalitions and their contact information, see [FVPSA Grants for State and Territorial Domestic Violence Coalitions](#).

- [End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin](#) – houses a direct service provider, the [RISE Law Center](#), which provides legal services for immigrant survivors of domestic violence. RISE staff provide trainings on the topic of child support many times each year.
- [Texas Council on Family Violence](#) – dedicated to creating safer communities and freedom from family violence. The Texas Council and the Texas Office of the Attorney General have created [Get Child Support Safely](#) to help survivors of domestic violence get child support.
- [Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) – through a collaboration with the Division of Child Support, [trains advocates and child support workers](#) and addresses capacity, TA and systems advocacy.

FVPSA State Administrators

FVPSA State Administrators work with their stakeholders as family violence issues arise and develop state domestic violence plans to meet the needs of survivors and their families. Here's a page with a PDF containing a [list of entities receiving FVPSA State and Territory Formula Grant Program funding](#). The list includes each agency's name, address, and website.

Working with domestic violence agencies is essential to accomplish the core mission of the child support program. A number of child support agencies have taken the first step by inviting domestic violence advocates and experts from state, tribal, and local programs to be part of an interdisciplinary team that conducts a child support and domestic violence program inventory using OCSE's [Enhancing Safe Access to Child Support: IV-D Program Inventory and Planning Resource](#). OCSE subject matter experts are available to help with facilitating and convening meetings between child support agency leadership and domestic violence leaders to map out an action plan for ongoing partnership and collaboration.

Moving Forward – Safe Access for Victims' Economic Security (SAVES) Demonstration

In September 2022, OCSE awarded demonstration grant funding to one tribal and 12 state child support agencies for the Safe Access for Victims' Economic Security (SAVES) project. SAVES is a new national demonstration model designed to develop, evaluate, and implement best practices to provide safe access to child support and parenting time services. Over the next five years, states and tribes receiving SAVES demonstration funding will implement comprehensive

domestic violence safety policies, procedures, and outreach activities to increase access to child support and parenting time services for parents not currently receiving child support due to safety concerns. Demonstration sites will work across public assistance programs to implement survivor-centered good cause procedures and engage the courts and legal services providers to improve legal practice, parenting time order establishment, and access to justice for survivors. Each demonstration site will also establish formal advisory councils that include survivors of domestic violence so they can share their lived experience expertise in all aspects of program development.

In addition to the demonstration sites, OCSE funded a national training, technical assistance, research, and resource center (SAVES Center) to provide support to the national child support program. The SAVES Center will expand existing and create new resources and training needed by child support professionals nationwide to ensure that survivors of domestic violence receive child support and parenting time services that promote long-term safety and financial independence. Similar to the demonstration sites, the SAVES Center will engage survivors as lived experience experts in advising and guiding the resource, training, research, and policy review. The SAVES Demonstration sites and the SAVES Center are partnering with multiple state, tribal, and national domestic violence leaders who are part of FVPSA's national network of resource centers and state and tribal coalitions. This further strengthens the federal partnership between OCSE and FVPSA.

FVPSA Domestic Violence Training and Technical Assistance Resources

The FVPSA Program funds domestic violence training modules and free online resources that can help child support agencies learn more about supporting domestic violence survivors and their children.

National and Special Issue Domestic Violence Resources

A [national network of resource centers](#) exists to address the impact of domestic violence and dating violence within specific issue areas such as health, mental health, substance abuse, child protection, and legal services. These organizations also provide training and technical assistance; produce tools for advocates and practitioners; conduct research; and partner with agencies to increase their overall capacity to support individuals and families impacted by domestic violence. The training materials and resources below help child support professionals whose caseloads may include families experiencing domestic violence and raise awareness of issues faced by survivors. OCSE encourages child support programs to become familiar with these available resources.

- [**The Child Protection, Child Custody, and Domestic Violence Center**](#) – Provides expertise on the intersection of child maltreatment and domestic violence through information, training, and technical assistance to states, coalitions and local domestic violence service providers. It operates a toll-free line with experienced staff who can provide information, referrals/resources, and technical assistance in both English and Spanish around child protection and custody issues in the context of domestic violence.
- [**Promising Futures Without Violence**](#) – Online resource center that houses evidence-based interventions, program models, and training curriculum and tools focused on best practices for serving children, youth, and parents experiencing domestic violence.

- [**National Resource Center on Domestic Violence**](#) – Provides a wide range of free, comprehensive, and individualized technical assistance, training, and resource materials for domestic violence intervention and prevention, community education and organizing, public policy and systems advocacy, and funding.
- [**National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health**](#) – Promotes survivor-defined healing, liberation, and equity by transforming the systems that impact survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families. It enhances agency- and system-level responses to survivors and their families through comprehensive training and technical assistance, research and evaluation, policy development, and public awareness.
- [**Trauma-Informed Domestic Violence Services**](#) – Provides an overview of trauma-informed approaches to working with survivors and their children and the research that supports this approach.
- [**Capacity Building and Program Technical Assistance**](#) – Provides comprehensive, specialized technical assistance and training to FVPSA formula grantees, including state and territory domestic violence coalitions, state administrators, and tribal programs. It provides support and technical assistance for partnerships between child support agencies, state coalitions, and state administrators.
- [**National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence**](#) – Offers personalized, expert technical assistance and online toolkit for health care providers and domestic violence advocates to address domestic and sexual violence.
- [**Safe Housing Capacity Building Center**](#) – Provides training and technical assistance on addressing domestic violence survivor’s housing needs. It is a member of the Safe Housing Technical Assistance Consortium, a federal technical assistance consortium that leverages federal resources for housing, homelessness, and domestic and sexual violence service providers and advocates. This initiative strives to improve coordination across service systems; integrate trauma-informed assessments for violence into a coordinated response; help continuums of care (CoCs) develop partnerships with victim services providers; and identify policies and practices that promote positive outcomes, resilience, and stability for survivors and their children.
- [**Battered Women’s Justice Project: Criminal and Civil Justice Center**](#) – Promotes change within the civil and criminal justice systems that enhances their effectiveness in providing safety, security, and justice for battered women and their families. It provides technical assistance to advocates, civil attorneys, judges and court personnel, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, probation officers, batterers intervention program staff, defense attorneys, policymakers, and survivors of domestic violence and their families and friends.

National Hotlines

Sharing [national, state, and local hotline information](#) for local domestic violence intervention programs is a key strategy to connect survivors to services. Programs can share this information directly or post in public spaces frequented by staff and families. Knowing who to call is important when safety is a concern. Free and confidential help is available for survivors of domestic violence 24 hours a day. These hotlines can help survivors of domestic violence and dating violence find support and assistance in their communities:

- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) – 24/7 confidential crisis intervention services for survivors of domestic violence and their families through phone, chat, and text referral services in over 200 languages
- [National Dating Abuse Helpline](#) – Confidential support for teens, young adults, and their loved ones seeking help, resources, or information related to healthy relationships and dating abuse in the U.S.
- [StrongHearts Native Helpline](#) – 24/7 safe, confidential, and anonymous domestic and sexual violence helpline for Native Americans and Alaska Natives, offering culturally appropriate support and advocacy

National Culturally Specific Domestic Violence Resources

A national network of organizations addresses the impact of domestic violence and sexual assault, and implements culturally relevant trauma-informed services for ethnic and racially specific communities. These organizations provide training and technical assistance; produce culturally relevant tools for advocates and practitioners; conduct culturally relevant research; and strengthen partnerships between culturally specific organizations and service providers.

- [Ujima: The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community](#) – National resource center that addresses domestic, sexual, and community violence. It responds to and develops an active approach to ending violence against women in the Black community. It provides education and outreach, training and technical assistance, resource development, research, and public policy efforts.
- [Esperanza United](#) – National network of advocates, community members, organizations, service agencies, professionals, researchers, policy advocates, and activists from the community and social justice organizations working to eliminate gender-based violence in Latin communities. This organization offers training, technical assistance, and critical resources to help further promote the need for strong communities working together.
- [Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Gender Based Violence](#) – National training and technical assistance provider and clearinghouse on gender violence in Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities. It serves a national network of advocates, community members, organizations, service agencies, professionals, researchers, policy advocates, and activists from community and social justice organizations working to eliminate violence against women.

National Culturally Specific Sexual Assault Capacity Building Centers

- [Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition](#) – Statewide tribal coalition and national tribal technical assistance provider has worked since 2001 to end gender-based violence and enhance tribal, state, and federal responses to sexual violence and sex trafficking. It serves as a new FVPSA Culturally Specific Sexual Assault Capacity Building Center (CSSAC) for tribal communities.
- [Mujeres Latinas en Accion](#) – A new CSSAC for LatinX communities that provides programs and services for those who have experienced domestic violence or sexual assault.

- [Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity](#) – A new CSSAC for the Asian and Pacific Islander communities that serves survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking in Iowa.

American Indians and Alaska Native Domestic Violence Resources

These national organizations address the impact of domestic violence and dating violence within sovereign nations to reduce disparities. They provide training and technical assistance; produce culturally relevant tools for advocates and practitioners; conduct culturally relevant research; and strengthen partnerships to support development of village-based responses to domestic violence.

- [Alaska Native Women's Resource Center](#) – Dedicated to strengthening tribal government responses through community organizing efforts, advocating for the safety of women and children in their communities and homes, especially against domestic and sexual abuse and violence.
- [National Indigenous Women's Resource Center](#) – National technical assistance provider to Alaska Village programs and Tribal Coalitions across Indian Country. It offers free trainings, networking, toolkits, resources, and culturally relevant responses to intimate partner and gender violence and promotes the leadership of Indigenous programs serving their communities.
- [Native Hawaiian Resource Center on Domestic Violence](#) – Provides technical assistance and training; partners at the community, state, and national levels; and develops policies and resources to prevent, intervene, and eliminate domestic violence and increase safety for survivors and their families.

We hope you'll find these resources and tools useful as you help survivors safely and confidentially obtain child support.

In partnership,

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