

Centre for Research & Education on  
Violence Against Women & Children

*Learning to End Abuse*



# Caring Dads: Helping fathers value their children

Katreena Scott, Professor  
Faculty of Education  
Western University  
[www.learningtoendabuse.ca](http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca)

March, 2023

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# Working with fathers as part of ending violence against women and children

- Why talk about contact with fathers?
- How are fathers important to children's development?
- Caring Dads description and outcomes

# Drawing from...



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**Fathers  
& Kids**



**Safe and  
Understood**

**SSHRC**  **CRSH**

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada  
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé  
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# Contact between fathers and children in the context of domestic violence

- Although there are children who do not want any contact with their fathers, some want to have a connection.
- Even when children do not want to have contact with their fathers, fathers generally remain part of children's "emotional landscape."
- As the "adults in the room", it is our job to help ensure that children are safe (physically and emotionally) in any contact that they have with their fathers, well as supporting them in having their voice heard.

# Stories from others

- Work with fathers in Caring Dads – longing for fathers
- Work with teens in trouble, back to Dad if they can find them

And, fathers go onto parent other children in other families

And, when we fail to engage fathers and hold them accountable for their abuse, we unfairly burden mothers (in health services, education, and especially child protection)



# Recent Data from Within Child Protection

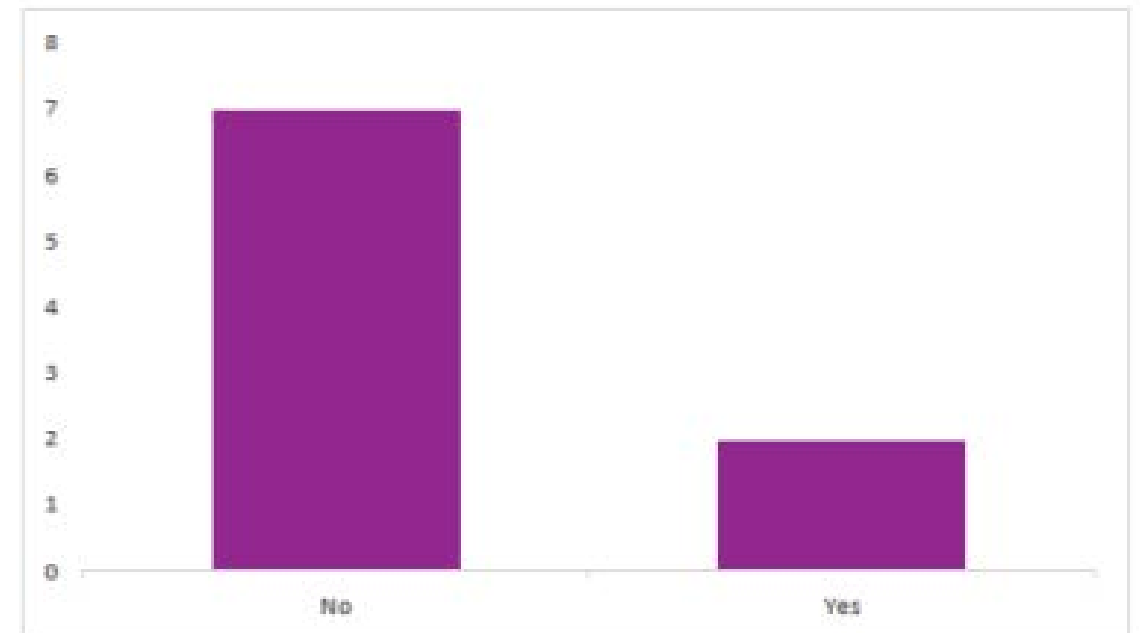
- Reviewed 40 cases from two different child protection services in Ontario, 20 cases closed after investigation, 20 that received ongoing service
- All cases were referred due to child exposure to DV, with fathers/father-figures as the alleged perpetrators
- Coded reasons for closure using data from case closure reports and from the review of notes in the final meeting between the child protection worker and supervisor.
- Reasons for closing include:
  - Safety Plan or risk management plan
  - Separation (e.g., “Father has left the home”, “both mom and dad have their own place”)
  - Mother acting protectively (e.g., “I believe [mother]...[can] act protectively of her children” and “mom was protective of them”.)
  - Children not affected or not present at the time of the incident (e.g., “children not present” or “the children had no idea of the incident”)



Reason for Closure (40 cases)	Number of cases
Mothers (or other primary caregivers) acting protectively	20
Separation	19
Children not affected/children were not present at the time of the assault	15
Risk management/safety plan involving father	1

Women's Shelter Canada Environmental scan of child welfare policies and practices in Canada (2022) by Robyn Hoogendam and Krys Maki

Steps to Hold the Abusive Partner Accountable in Child-Welfare Agency Practices (n=9)



# How are fathers important to child development?

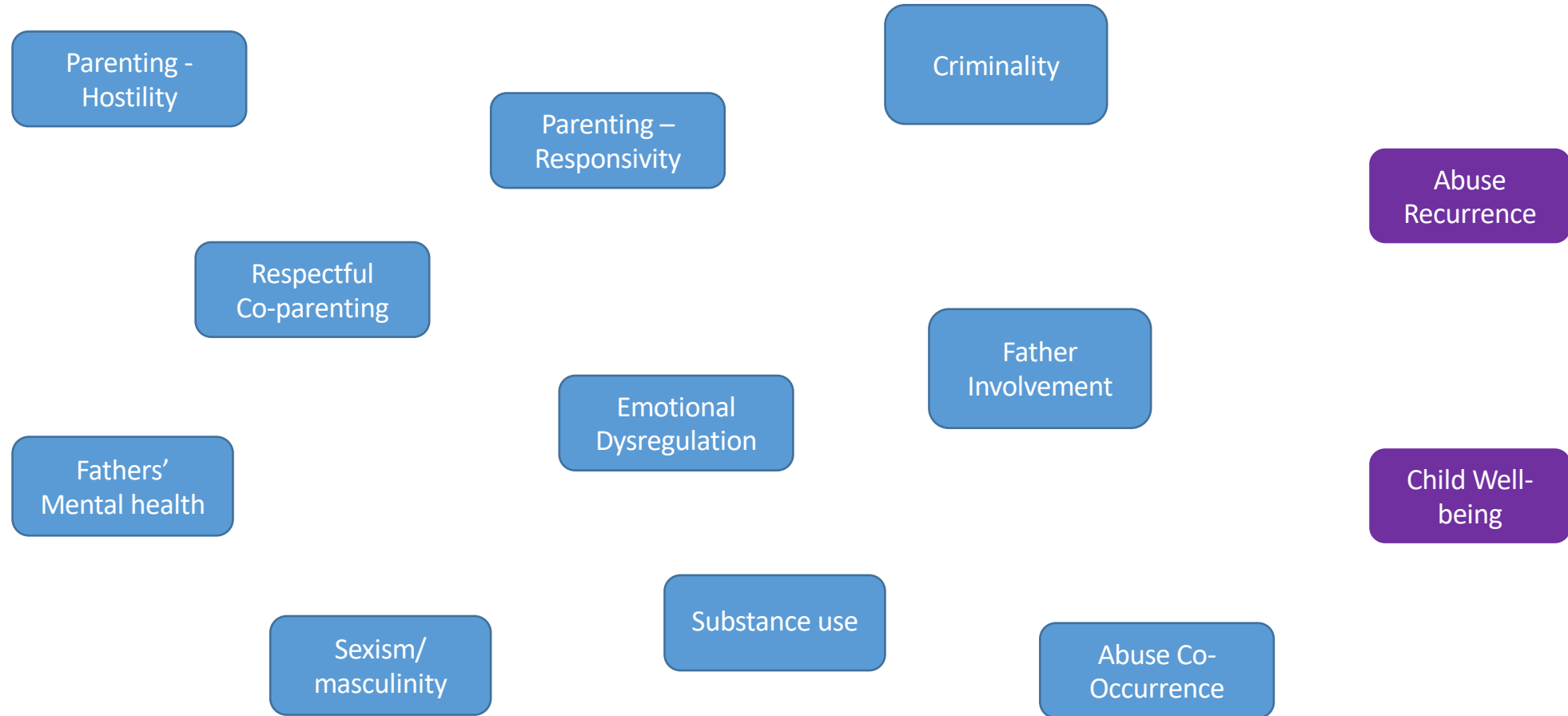
# Certainly, we need to end DV

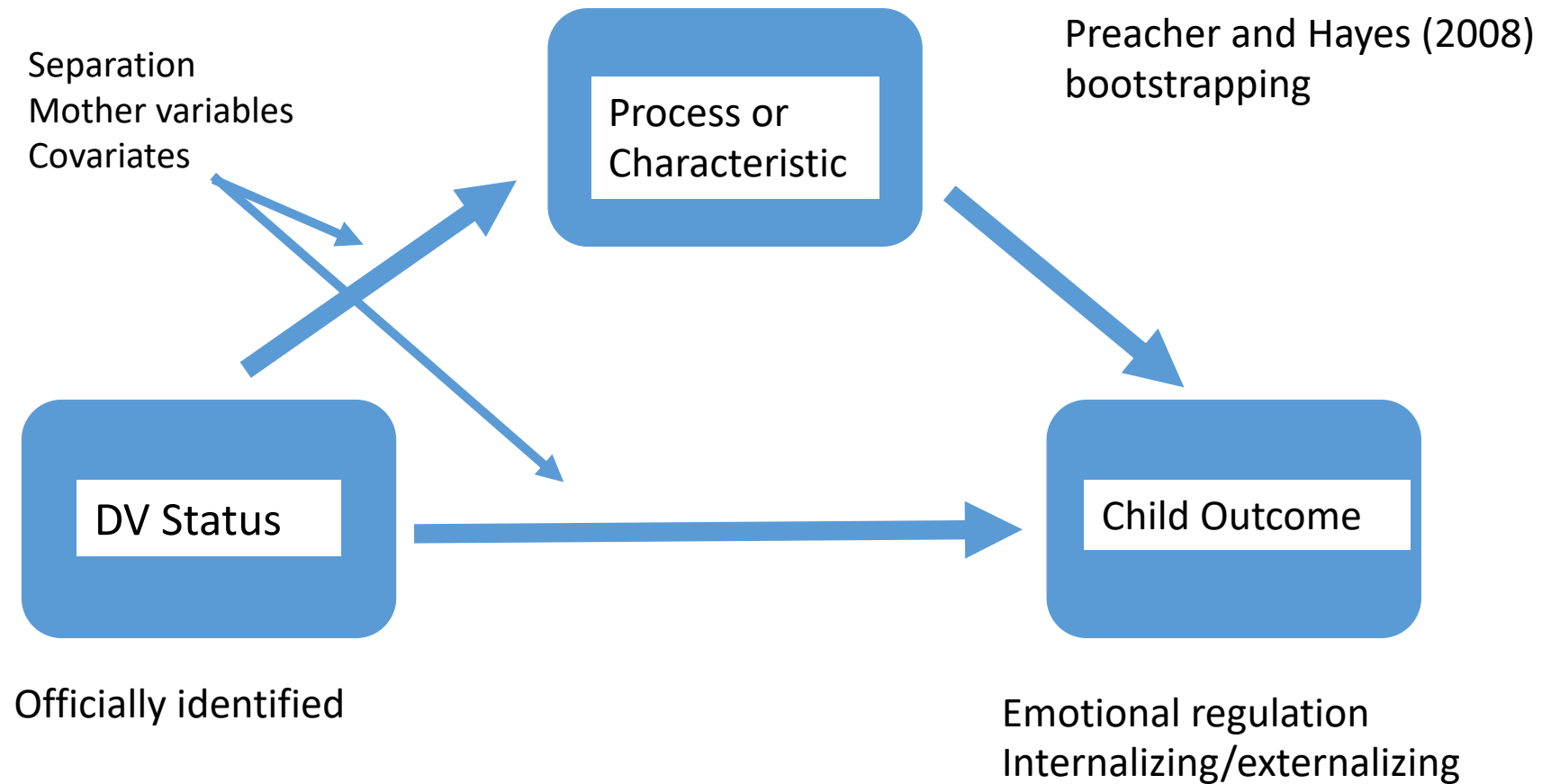
Domestic  
Violence



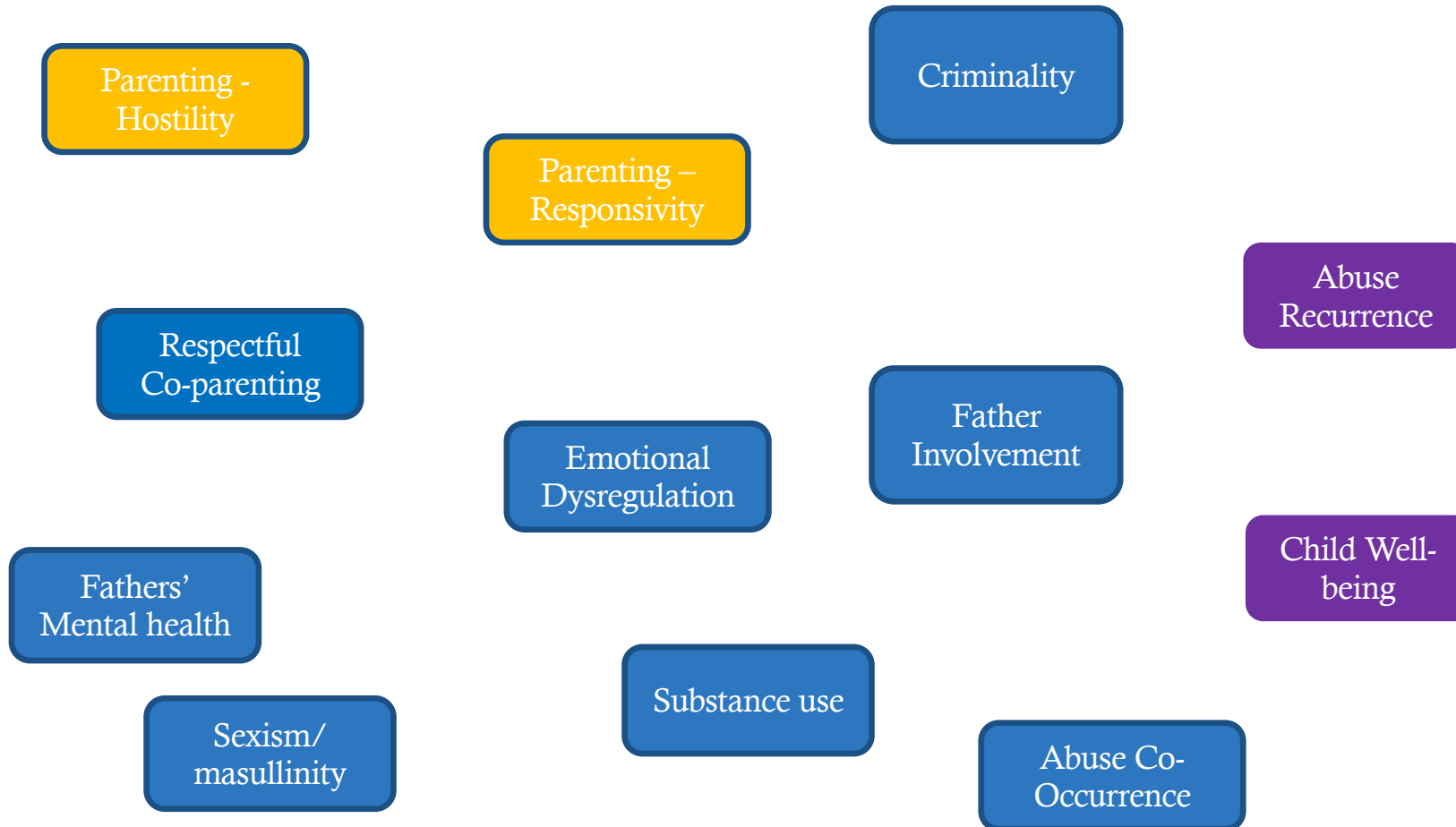
Outcome

# Possible Contributors





# What is going on in the parent-child relationship?



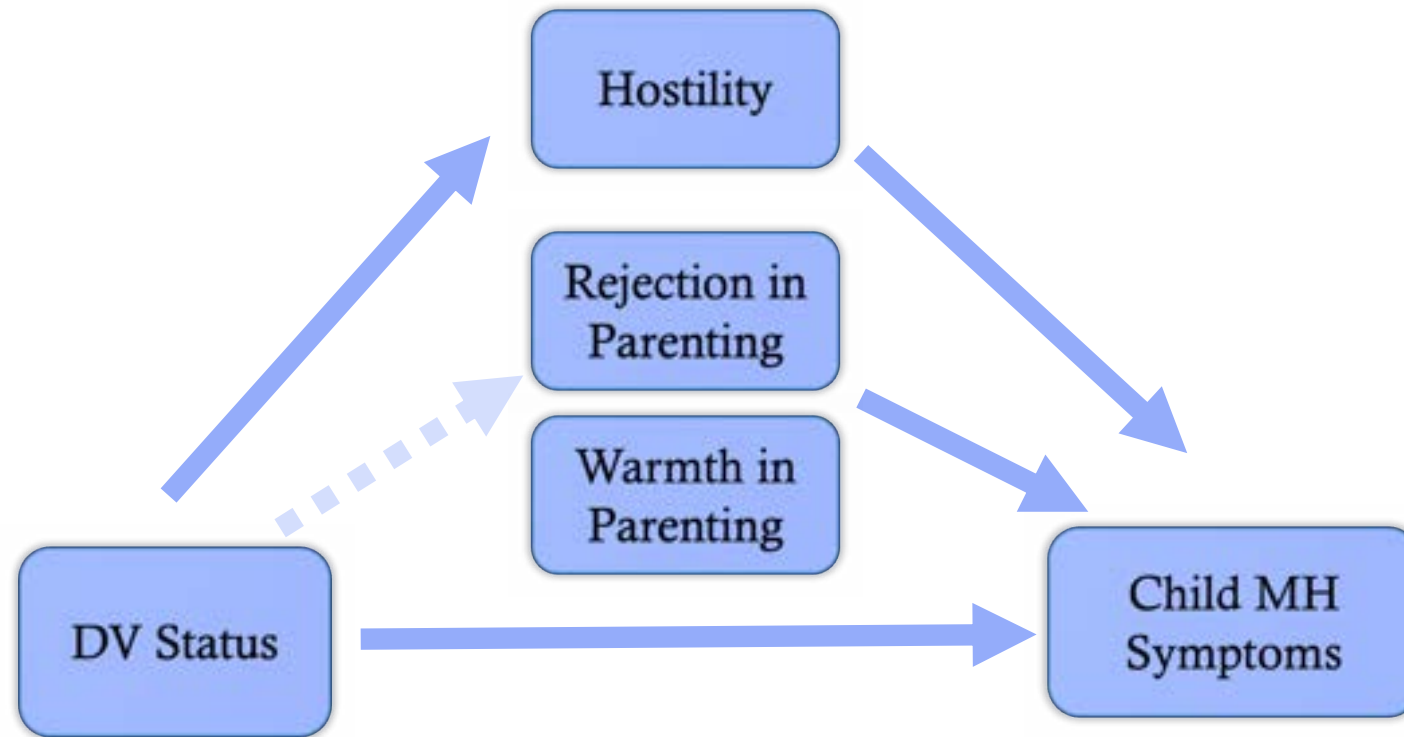


# Methods: Fathers and Kids Study

- Study of the influence of fathers in high-risk circumstances
- Fathers with a confirmed history of domestic violence (n=123)
- Comparison group with no reported involvement with any services for domestic violence (n=101)
  - Online advertisements
- Multi-method, multi-informant
- Over 200 Time 1 assessments of fathers
  - 60 in-person Time 2 assessments with fathers and children, 30 or so more time 2 online
  - 50 mothers

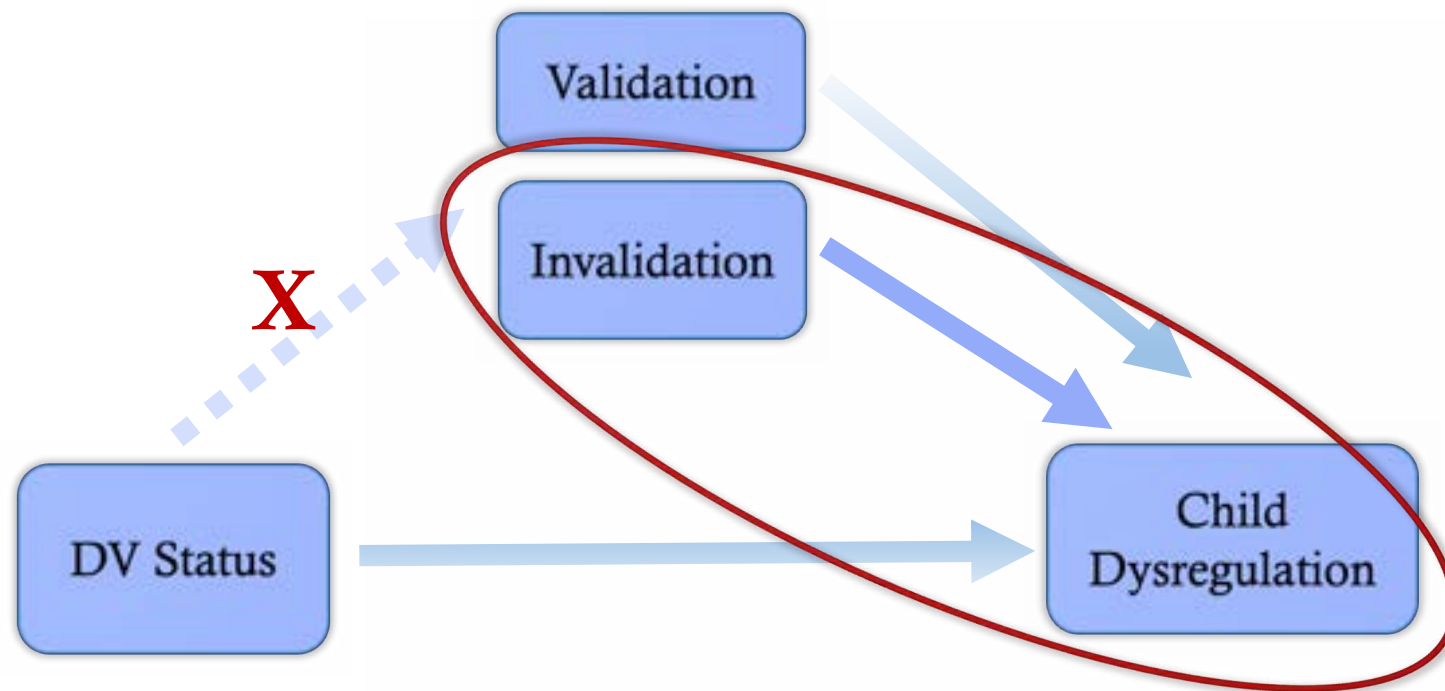


# Fathers' Self-Report



# Observed Validation and Invalidation

- Subgroup of 61 families where we were able to bring in fathers, children and get information from (most) mothers



# Take Away

- Fathers' observed invalidation and fathers' reports of rejection/over-reactivity are consistently related to problems for children
- Fathers who have perpetrated domestic violence are not necessarily more invalidating of their children, though there is evidence for higher levels of hostility

There is reason to keep rejection/over-reactivity/hostility as an important consideration, though this is likely to be an additional concern only for some fathers with a history of DV perpetration

# Coparenting

Parenting -  
Hostility

Criminality

Parenting –  
Responsivity

Respectful  
Co-parenting

Abuse  
Recurrence

Emotional  
Dysregulation

Father  
Involvement

Child Well-  
being

Sexism/  
masullinity

Substance use

Abuse Co-  
Occurrence

# Coparenting/Parenting Alliance

Aspect of the parents' relationship with each other that is concerned with parenthood and childrearing (Weissman & Cohen, 1985; Feinberg, 2003; McHale, Waller, & Pearson, 2012)

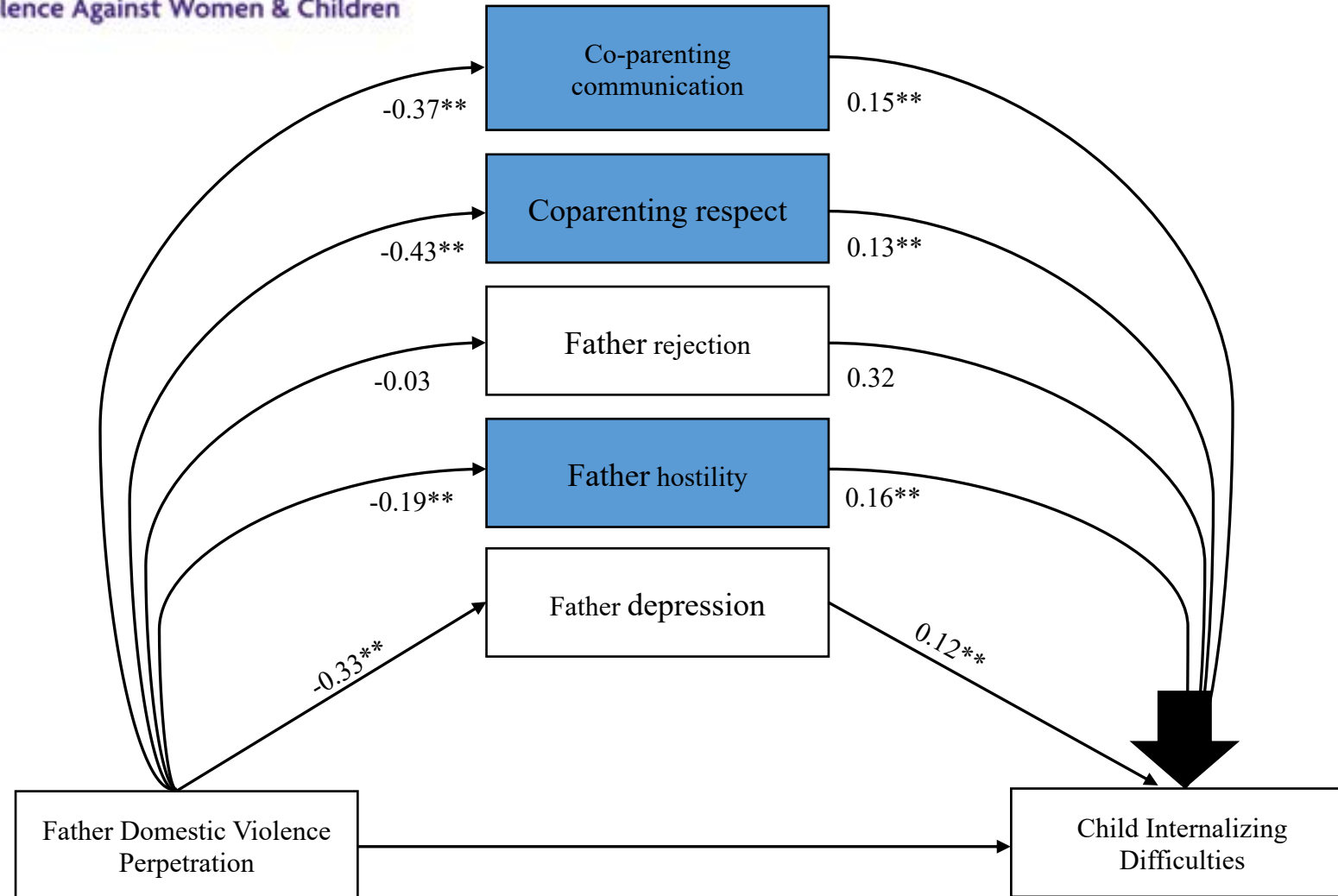
- Investment in child and belief in other parent's investment
- Valuing other parent's involvement with child
- Respecting judgment of other parent
- Communication with other parent re the child

*Not the nature of the plan in place for separated parents.*

# Research on Coparenting

- Consistent relationship between coparenting and child internalizing, externalizing, and social difficulties, *with greater effects in separated as opposed to intact families* (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010).
- Evidence that for fathers especially, coparenting conflict is associated with declines in emotional availability, sensitivity and with increased paternal psychological control of children (Davies, Sturge-Apple, Woitach, & Cummings, 2009; Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006).
- This is an area of difficulty (unsurprisingly) for fathers with a history of perpetrating DV (Hardesty, Crossman, Khaw, & Raffaelli, 2016; Scott et al., 2018; Stover, Easton, & McMahon, 2013)

# Results



$c'$   
 Co-parenting communication and teamwork difficulties  $b = -0.07$   
 Co-parenting respect difficulties  $b = -0.07$   
 Father rejection  $b = -0.24^{**}$   
 Father hostility  $b = -0.08$   
 Father depression  $b = -0.06$



# Delving Deeper



## Open ended interview questions

*“I’d like you to describe your child’s other parent in your own words. When I ask you to begin, I’d like you to speak for two minutes, telling me what she is like as a parent. How would you describe her parenting?”*

*“Now that I have a sense of what [name] is like as a parent, let’s talk about the way you parent together...”*

## Fathers & Kids Study Participants

Randomly selected

10 fathers - history of domestic violence

10 community ‘comparison’ fathers

## Thematic analysis

Interviews transcribed and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (Hayes, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2006) using NVivo software

Thompson-Walsh, Scott, Dyson & Lishak (2018)

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# Results: DV Fathers

## 2 Themes

# Theme: My ex-partner is a bad mother

- She's a bad mother in these specific ways
  - “[She is] constantly yelling at my son if he doesn't want to listen. I try to tell her there is no need to yell at a child because the more you yell at him, the more he's gonna want to keep doing it and doing it [...].” (DV3)
  - “I don't like, first of all, I don't like the, the amount of television watching that goes on in the house. Even when I was there I didn't like that shit, and I know it even goes on worse now, know what I mean? I don't think television is for any human being in this planet, and that especially kids.” (DV6)
- She's not a great person
- I have only limited positive opinions about her as a mother

## Theme: My ex-partner is responsible for our difficulties co-parenting

- She's responsible for our breakdown in communication
  - “[...] like unfortunately she doesn't like communicating with me for some odd reason, I mean like she's told me that she doesn't to want to talk to me unless [our son] is involved but like even then she doesn't like to talk to me about him which I find kind of odd [...]. I mean like I said like she doesn't really communicate like very well, even though she said that we should only communicate when it comes to [our son] [...].” (DV5)
- She makes it difficult to communicate

## Continued: My ex-partner is responsible for our difficulties with co-parenting

- She's responsible for our high level of disagreement
  - *“So we agree some of the time, but the majority of the time she doesn't want to agree with me, so, I don't know.” (DV3)*
- She makes it impossible to handle disagreements
- She undermines my authority as a parent
- She has power over my contact with and decisions about our child

# DV Fathers: Mitigation

- Important characteristic of DV fathers' narratives
- Mitigated praise
  - “She’s a good mother when she wants to be a good mother.” (DV7)
  - “Yes [...] as a mother, she, she, she has, she gives the kids the proper love they need, I would say 'cause when I pick them up, they’re happy, you know. But [laughs] a lot of things that go on, the way she parents, I don’t agree with man.” (DV6)

# Community Fathers

Three major themes

- I value my ex-partner's involvement with our child
- We are good as co-parents
- How we co-parent impacts our child

*“I mean we make sure to talk to each other with respect, keep the tone nice and pleasant, you know what I mean even if you could be saying nice things, but the tone is off, you know what I mean, children key in to all that, so we’re very aware of the environment we create when we’re, when we’re together.” (CF8)*



# Community Fathers: Mitigation

- Important characteristic of community fathers' narratives
- Mitigated criticism
  - “[...] her style of parenting is different than my own, and she doesn't like to, you know, just sit around and hang out and talk [...] but what she's good at is she coordinates activities such as swimming and group activities [...] now that [our daughter] is becoming older, they seem to be closer and talking more” (CF9)
  - “But I feel that she could maybe do more around like, like physical interaction or what not right, she could do a little more. But again, it's really splitting hairs.” (CF2)

# Take Away Points

- Markedly different themes
  - Valuing ex-partner as person and mother versus disparagement
  - Cooperation in coparenting versus blame
  - Recognition versus absence of attention to potential impact of ongoing coparenting conflict on children
- Easy to imagine their partners experiencing criticism, blame, and ongoing verbal abuse described by women in literature

# Domestic Violence as a Parenting Choice

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- Children are heavily impacted by the ways in which their father treats their mother
- In the context of domestic violence, fathers respectful or hostile/abusive coparenting is as important, or more important, than his parenting in predicting children's outcomes

# Back to child protection

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Are child protection workers aware of, and able, to work with these issues?

# Areas of agreement and need

- Most agree that the time and energy it takes to engage fathers is worth it

and

- Talking to fathers is a very important part of my work to ensure child safety

# But....

- This statement is not understood: In cases of domestic violence, the child's safety is directly linked to the non-offending parent's safety and wellbeing. (47% are unsure or disagree)

Workers are less confident in their skills in these areas:

- I am good at talking to fathers about the need to end their abusive behaviour
- When I refer a father to intervention, I have a specific idea of the changes I want to see him make
- I feel like I have a range of ideas about what to do when fathers don't seem to be changing

# Caring Dads as filling a bit of that gap



# Caring Dads

- **Fathers' Group**

- 17 week program – 2 hour group and individual sessions
- Groups consist of 8 to 12 fathers
- Referrals primarily through Children's Aid (child protective services) and probation, though also from child and family mental health, addictions, etc.

- **Mother Contact**

- **Coordinated Case Management**

[www.caringdads.org](http://www.caringdads.org)

# Eligibility

*“If the child has to deal with him, then we have to deal with him”*

*“Eyes on the child, men in the room”*

Men are ineligible if....

- They have no contact with their children.
- Their partners openly object to their involvement in intervention (this needs case by case problem solving).

# Caring Dads Principles

Aim and priority is on the safety and well-being of children

Children's safety and well-being is intrinsically connected to that of their mothers

Intervention must be prepared to address clients whose motivation for change may be low

Focus needs to be on promotion of child-centered fathering rather than building on child-management skills (& child-centred fathering needs an intersectional understanding)

Because abusive fathers have eroded their children's emotional security, children need to lead the pace of change

# Caring Dads Goals

4

Rebuilding trust & planning for the future

3

Recognizing and challenging abuse / neglect

2

Child Centered Parenting

1

Engaging Men

1

## Engaging Men

- Engage men to prevent dropout
- Enhance motivation to change
- Promote small successes to lead to later goals



- *“His mother’s ruining it for us. She’s envious...has him saying I’m an alcoholic, and now he won’t come to work with me anymore.”*
- *“They said he has an emotional problem but he doesn’t. He’s just lazy.”*
- *“The system is biased against men”*
- *“She is the one who needs this program, not me”*

- If we fail to engage these fathers and require evidence of behavioral change, who will?
- A failed referral in the context of mandated intervention is an important indicator of risk:
  - About a 20% increase in risk for re-assault associated with dropout from a batterer program

## 2

## Child Centered Parenting

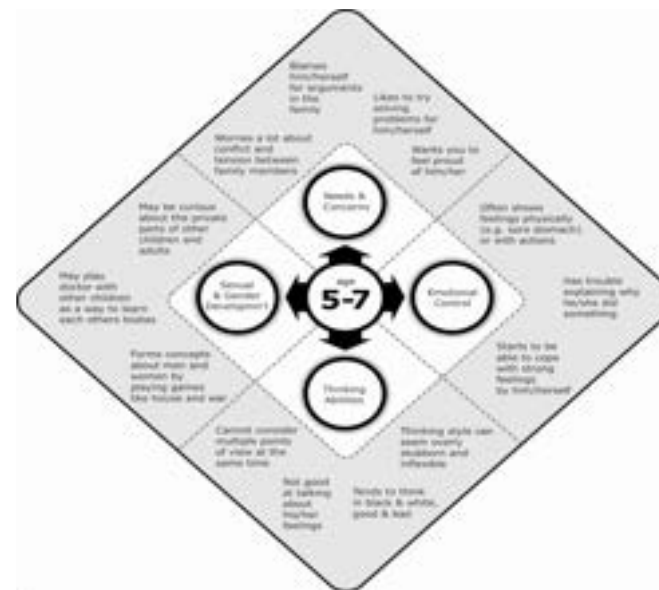
- Parenting continuum
- Positive involvement
- Supporting children's relationship to their mothers
- Listening to and knowing children
- Understanding child development
- Dad's self-regulation – thoughts, feelings, actions





Parent-Centered  
or Abusive

Child-Centered  
or Nurturing





3

## Recognizing and challenging abuse / neglect



# Individual session(s)

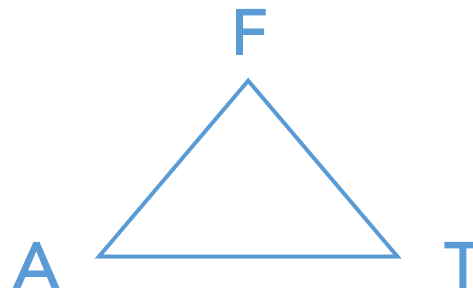
- Opening: (5 min)
- Review/establish concrete behavioural goal: (5 min)
- Promoting Change (10 min)
- Discuss Resources (5 min)

# Link to SOS Goals

Engagement	Fathers will be receptive to meetings, i.e., he will return phone calls, attend scheduled meetings. He will be respectful in his overall interactions with the society.
Child-Centred Fathering	Fathers will recognize, and be able to engage in discussions, about the importance of children's relationships with their mothers.  Increase attention to, and time <i>with</i> , children (e.g. Father will be reliable in meeting his parenting commitments)
Awareness and Responsibility for Abuse	Reducing hostility and over-reactivity (e.g. Father will respond calmly and non-punitively to instances of annoying child behavior)  Developing respectful co-parenting/ stopping blame/reducing conflict (e.g. Father will be respectful, calm and cooperative with children's mother during transfers)
Rebuilding Trust	Fathers can clearly articulate the harm his past violence has had on the co-parenting relationship and on the trust that his children's mother has in co-parenting with him.

# Putting it Together: Using all the tools

- Parenting continuum and understanding child development
- Effects on child, mother, and father-child relationship
- Thoughts, feelings, action
- Child-center alternatives



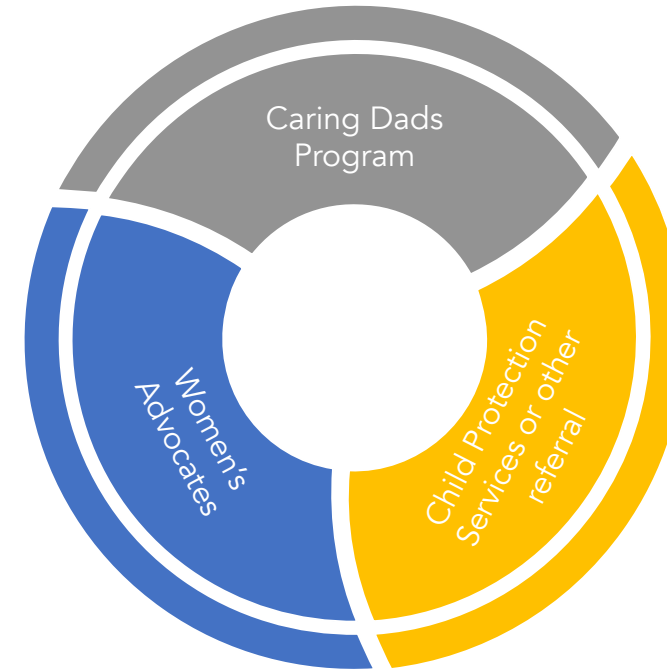
*Remember - we have  
already done all of  
these pieces!*



4

## Rebuilding trust & planning for the future

**Guiding Principle:** Men's participation in Caring Dads must have the potential to benefit children regardless of his success, or lack of success, in change.



# Caring Dads: State of Evidence

# Evidence Base: Key resources

- Scott, K., Dubov, V., Devine, C., Colquhoun, C., Hoffelner, C., Niki, I., Webb, S. & Goodman, D. (2021). Caring dads intervention for fathers who have perpetrated abuse within their families: quasi-experimental evaluation of child protection outcomes over two years. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 120, 105204.
- McConnell, N., Barnard, M., & Taylor, J. (2017). Caring Dads Safer Children: Families' perspectives on an intervention for maltreating fathers. *Psychology of violence*, 7(3), 406.
- Diemer, K., Humphreys, C. Fogden, L., Gallant, T, Spiteri-Staines, A. Bornemissa, A. & Varcoe, E. (2020). [Caring Dads program, Helping fathers value their children: Three site independent evaluation 2017-2020. Final Report. University of Melbourne.](#)
- Scott, K. L. & Lishak, V. (2012). Evaluation of an intervention program for maltreating fathers: Statistically and clinically significant change. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 36(9), 680-684.
- Hood, R., Lindsay, J. & Muleya, W. (2014) Evaluation of Caring Dads: a single site evaluation in an urban local authority: interim report. London: Faculty of Health, Social Care & Education, Kingston University and St George's, University of London.  
<http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/id/eprint/29990>



# The Bottom Line

- In men's reports pre to post
  - Reduced over-reactivity, rejection, indifference, stress
  - Increased respect for children's mothers
  - Reduced hostility and depression
  - Greater positive involvement
  - 98% would recommend to another father



# The Bottom Line

- In women's and children's reports
  - Substantially reduced domestic violence
  - Less depression and anxiety
  - Children describe fathers as more interested, less mean

*“He’s kinder, nicer. He’s more interested. Yeah, he was interested before but, like, he actually listens to everything you say.”*

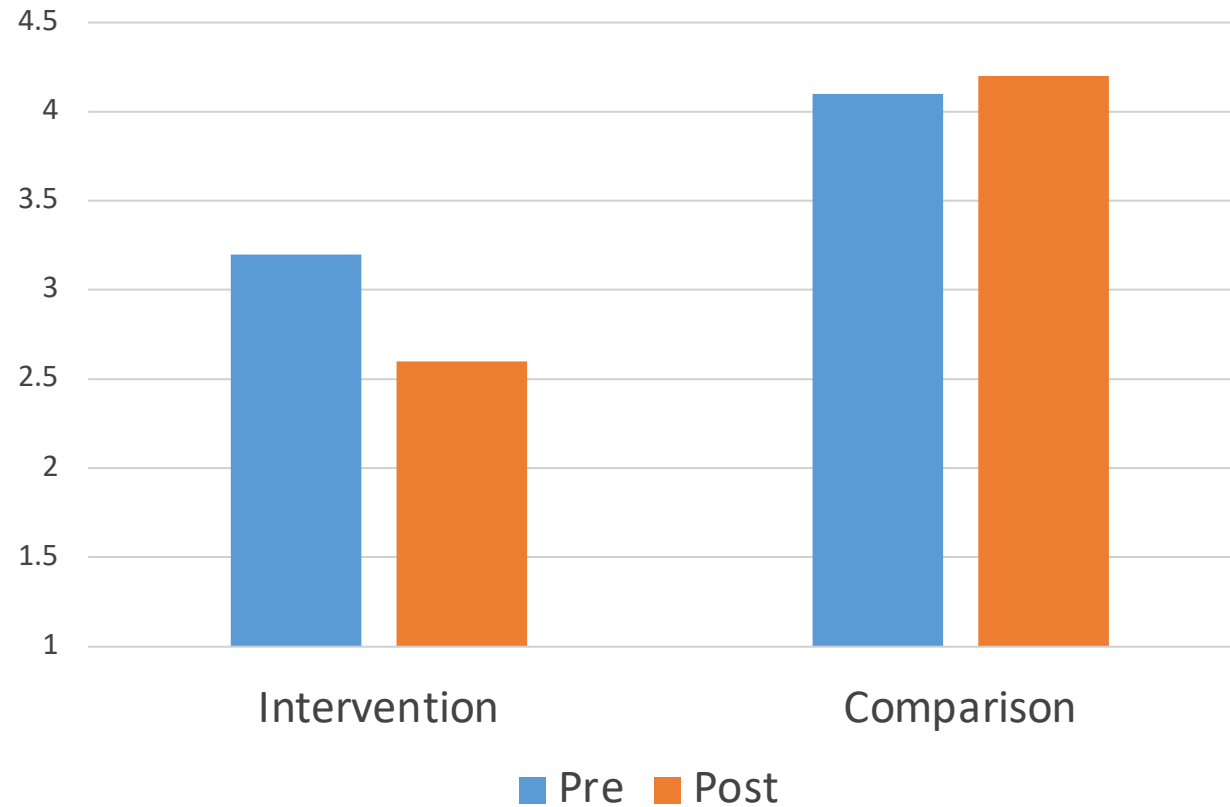
# Data from CAS-based Caring Dads programs

- 70 fathers who completed Caring Dads as part of the Safe and Understood project
- All involved with ongoing services

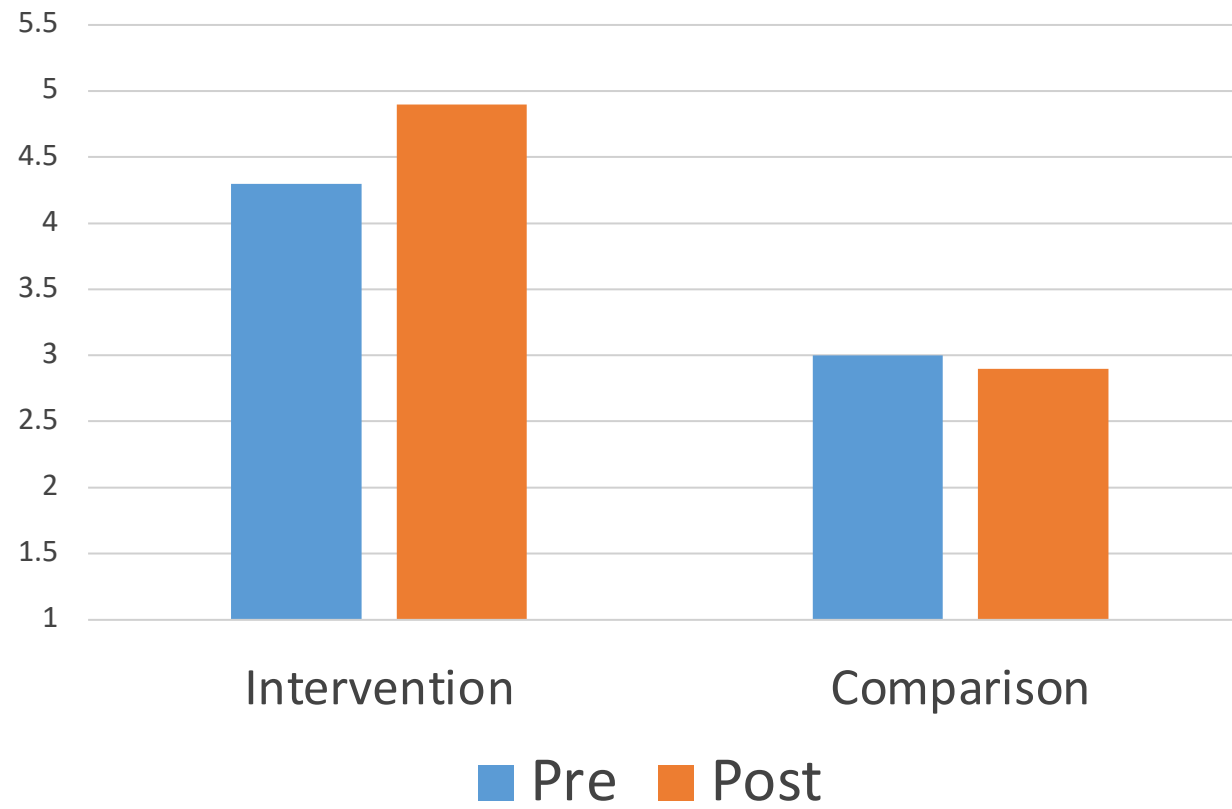
# Outcome Domains Core

Domain	Pre	Post	Stat	Significance
<b>Co-parenting</b>				
Exposure to adult conflict ( $\alpha$ .90)	2.23	1.56	T(69) = 2.70	P = .009
Total score ( $\alpha$ .86)	3.81	3.97	T(56) = -1.04	ns
<b>Parenting</b>				
Child centered involvement ( $\alpha$ .57)	4.81	5.37	T(74) = -5.01	P=.000
Warmth ( $\alpha$ .75)	4.19	4.44	T(54) = -2.65	P = .01
Over-reactivity/hostility ( $\alpha$ .88)	3.53	2.65	T(33) = 1.72	P = .094
Sense of Impact ( $\alpha$ .79)	5.51	6.25	T(38) = -1.66	ns
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>				
Psychological symptoms ( $\alpha$ .79)	1.14	0.70	T(63) = 4.10	P=.000
Anger management (partner)	2.95	3.14	T(60) = -2.36	P = .021
Anger management (child)	6.87	2.74	T(31) = 8.49	P = .000

# Mothers' Report on Fathers' Dysregulation



# Mothers' Report on Co-Parenting Endorsement

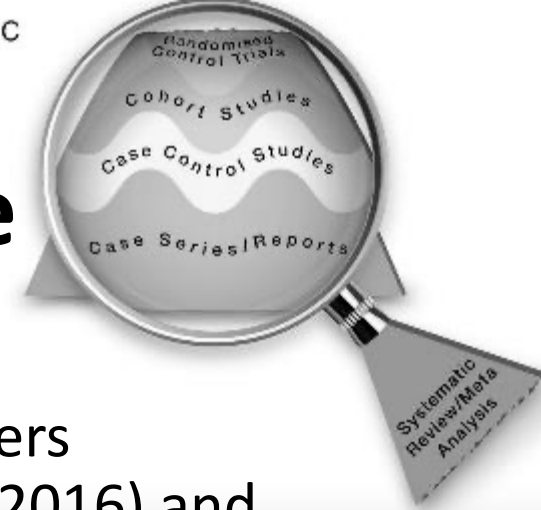


# Parent vs Child-Centred Interaction

- Getting them to listen, getting me to be less angry about it. ...the main one being ..the sort of continuum as they called it, with the parent centered activity and the child centered activity on the other side and hot it, every situation has to be looked at in terms of that. Is what you're doing serving their interests or your interests or how much of each. I sort of **have to get into a different, different mind** I guess and, grab myself almost and say "examine this, what are you thinking?"
- It helped me a lot. Personally, it helped me being able to deal with, with the emotional part of my kids and myself. It helped me to reestablish myself as a child again. As opposed to just a parent. So that way I could understand and **look through the eyes of my kids and see where they are coming from....**
- I like what they taught about you know, **being child based parenting as opposed to you know manipulating kids** and I just like that type of theme.

# Program Evaluation: Feedback from Fathers

- 84.8% felt that attending the group improved their relationship with child's mother
- 98.1% would want to recommend this program to another father
- What could be improved?
  - “This program was better than I thought it would be”
  - “No suggestions coz this program was all really great learning”
  - “Very caring staff. Knowledgeable”
  - More contact with worker, more integration with partner, come with child, longer, more practice
- *Um, I'm a better father than I was prior to the CD program, I think more of an insight into the understanding what children's needs are. I think that's more, yeah that'd be more – like, **a better understanding of what they need from me rather than what I need from them.**” (CD participant 73)*
- *“One of the main things was to change our way of thinking about our children's mother. That really worked for me. That made me realise some of the habits that I'd formed. I realised that the habits that I'd formed were very, very negative and I've seen it in my children, the way they're treating their mother . . .” (ID 9, father, living with partner and children)*



# Caring Dads: Quasi-Experimental Evidence

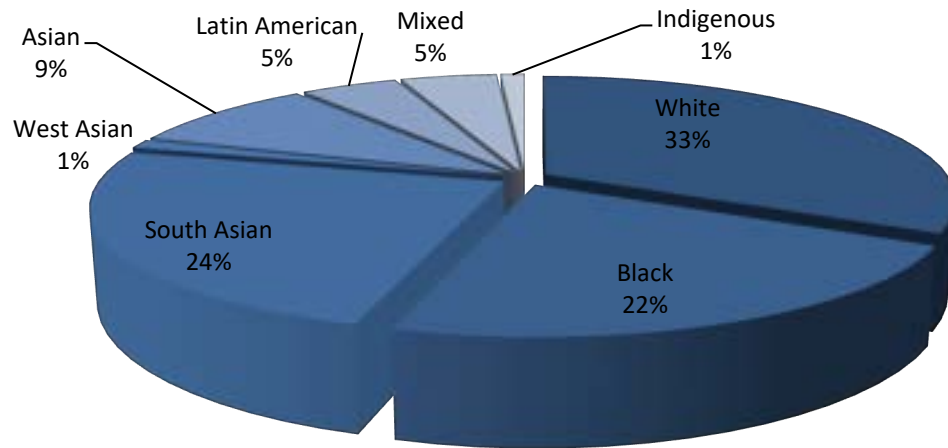
- Quasi-experimental research design to compare outcomes for fathers referred to Caring Dads over a 3.5-year period (Oct 2012 to March 2016) and who either completed or did not complete intervention.
  - 85 completed the Caring Dads program
  - 100 comparison group
- Three specific outcomes were examined over a two year period:
  - Frequency of contact between fathers and child protection workers
  - Length of case opening
  - Child protection outcomes (re-referral and care)



# Establishing Similarity of Groups

	Intervention (n=85)	Comparison (n=100)	
Age	M = 35.78 (SD=9.05)	M = 37.90 (SD=10.01)	
Primary caregiver at the time of referral?	Dad = 13% Mom = 67% Both parents = 4% In Care = 8% Kin = 8%	Dad = 5% Mom = 83% Both parents = 1% In Care = 7% Kin = 4%	
Number of children	M = 2.18 (SD=1.13)	M = 2.00 (SD=.10)	
Average child age	M = 5.91 (SD=3.89)	M = 4.98 (SD=4.09)	
Nature of protection concern (n=185)	Physical/Sexual harm = 25% DV/Emotional Harm = 56% Caregiver capacity = 38% Other = 7%	Physical/Sexual harm = 21% DV/Emotional Harm = 59% Caregiver capacity = 37% Other = 4%	
Verified for one versus more than one concern	1 verification = 67% 2+ verifications = 33%	1 verification = 66% 2+ verifications = 34%	
Verified concerns against both mom and dad	Dad = 61% Mom = 5% Both = 32% Other = 2%	Dad = 68% Mom = 8% Both = 23% Other = 1%	
Needed protective care at some point during review period	40%	34%	

## Demographics (virtually identical across reports)



- Average age of fathers was 36
- Mothers PCP around three quarters of the time
- Average of two investigated children per father, so a total of 400 children
- About equal number of male and female children
- Average child age was 6½

# Frequency of Contact and Length of Opening

	Intervention	Comparison	Statistic
<b>Contact (n=76)</b>			
Phone contacts	M=16.84 (SD=14.36)	M=9.37 (SD=9.54)	t(74)=2.672, $p=.009^{**}$
Face to face contacts	M=13.45 (SD=10.88)	M=7.08 (SD=7.05)	t(63)=3.029, $p=.004^{**}$
<b>Length of Opening (n=185)</b>			
Length of opening, total months <sup>1</sup>	M=26.68 (SD=17.39)	M=24.36 (SD=16.21)	t(141)=.821, $p=.416$

# What should we aim for?

- Within the CAS agency we are working with, 40% of cases of child exposure to domestic violence are “repeat users”.

# Child Protection Outcomes

	Intervention	Comparison	Statistic
<b>Contact Ended</b>			
Ongoing protective involvement by CPS preventing harm (i.e., Crown Ward, foster care)	N=82 4%	N=99 8%	$X^2 (1, N = 181) = 1.537, p = .215$
Contact with dad definitely ended at time of case closure	1	0	n/a
<b>Recidivism Among Fathers with Contact</b>	N = 78	N = 91	
Re-referral verified against dad	N=78 20.5%	N=91 36.0%	$X^2 (1, N = 169) = 5.061, p = .024^{**}$

# Next Steps

Caring Dads for Arabic Diaspora

Military adaptation

Caring Dads for Black fathers



# Summary and Final Thoughts





# Leeds supports



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NS0WNIDuZ2g>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop  
&v=s3Z\\_NN1zctw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=s3Z_NN1zctw)