

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

A PCANY Primer





Domestic and Family Violence: A PCANY Primer

This brief will use the term “domestic and family violence (DFV)”, signifying PCANY’s approach to looking at and serving families in a manner that reflects current data/research and the changing demographics of family dynamics. The term includes domestic/intimate partner violence, elder abuse and child abuse. We are including animal abuse since animals are seen as companions and are often deemed part of the family; and research shows a correlation between this type of abuse and DFV. It encompasses these different types/forms of violence in order to allow for a more holistic frame, which will help those of us in the policy and program worlds to address families’ needs comprehensively.

Foundational to all of our work at PCANY is the development and support of healthy relationships prenatal through adulthood. Running through all relationships– parental, peer, partners, community– is the thread of connection. This connection can be directed toward positive, healthy interaction through intentional teaching about consent, respect, and boundaries and is the antidote to power and control dynamics in relationships.

Research tells us how important safe, stable and nurturing relationships are to young children. We know the impact on brain development, kindergarten readiness, third grade reading scores and high school graduation rates. We also know that these relationships early in life shape our expectations for how we should be treated by others throughout our lives. We teach the importance of body ownership and consent to preteens in middle school. But these messages often contradict children's lived experiences of someone else exerting power over their bodies. We all have a responsibility to change our interactions with children so that we build strong foundations for the development of healthy relationships for them throughout their lives. We need to build our own skills to do that.

It is time for our State to make decisions—including how and where to invest resources—based on this lens. We cannot continue to silo families, providing support to parents/caregivers and to children in a vacuum. Instead, we must look at each individual involved as one piece of the puzzle—connected to each other and to their communities— and offer resources accordingly. It is PCANY’s hope that New York State can move toward a system of service and data interconnectedness— DFV is the perfect place to start.

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (DFV)

It must be acknowledged that, within the discussion and research of DFV, there are a few terms used interchangeably to describe the phenomenon—intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and family violence. In this brief, DFV will be defined by the WHO (2013), UN (2015) and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) as: behaviors designed to intimidate, control, or manipulate a family member, partner, or former partner.

This includes but is not limited to the following behaviors:

physical assault and abuse, sexual assault and abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, economic abuse, social isolation and abuse, harassment, and stalking. These behaviors are some of the common behaviors used to have power and control over victims (Myer and Frost 2019).

DFV includes domestic/intimate partner violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and animal abuse.

Both the UN (2015) and the WHO (2013) recognize DFV as a gender- based phenomenon. While it is not always male to female perpetrated violence, DFV disproportionately affects women and children.

Domestic Violence versus Intimate Partner Violence (Terms are often used interchangeably—and incorrectly).

Domestic violence refers to violence that occurs between people who reside together in a household and are or were in an intimate relationship. Intimate partner violence refers generally to people who do not necessarily reside together but are or were in an intimate relationship.

TRAUMA AND PTSD

The American Psychological Association (2022) defines trauma as an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, sexual violence, or natural disaster. The specific disorder that can occur after trauma is known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The definition of PTSD is found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2013) and brings forth the nuance of how trauma can occur, such as when someone:

- 1) Directly experiences the traumatic event(s)
- 2) Witnesses, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others
- 3) Learns that a traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or friend
- 4) Experiences repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s). This does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures unless it is profession-related.

When addressing DFV, the notion of trauma is usually not isolated to one generation. According to the American Psychological Association (2019), intergenerational trauma is expressed when the descendant of someone who experienced a traumatic event presents challenging emotional and behavioral reactions that are similar to their ancestor or relative. This has been seen in families whose ancestors have been affected by slavery in America and the Holocaust. Intergenerational trauma is what occurs when adverse experiences are passed down from one generation to another. It is complex and often left unspoken.



TRAUMA AND ACES

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are negative events that are experienced during childhood. ACEs can be seen as an indicator but are not always traumatic (ex: a parents' divorce can be traumatic for one person but not for another). The seminal ACEs study of the 1990s identified 10 ACEs. ([link to OCFS site here](#))

TRAUMA AND TOXIC STRESS

If the stress or trauma that a person is exposed to persists over time, it can become toxic. Traumatic and negative event exposures that are abusive, neglectful, or unpredictable can result in toxic stress. Toxic stress is defined by the extreme, frequent, or extended activation of the stress response that causes distress in a person and that may lead to negative psychological and physical health outcomes (Hornor 2015 pg. 192).

Resilience is a positive factor that describes how a person deals with their adversities and traumas they have faced. According to the American Psychiatric Association, resiliency is defined as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities. Some of these factors are the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, the availability and quality of social resources, and specific coping strategies. Resilience is not simply 'bouncing back' but growing and learning.

Different Types of DFV

Child Abuse

The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) defines child abuse as "Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation"; and "An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm." This definition guides how states create their definitions and policies around child abuse. In New York State, Social Services Law and the Family Court Act define the different terms that fall under "child abuse":

1. An "abused child" means a child under eighteen years of age and who is defined as an abused child by the family court act;
2. A "maltreated child" includes a child under eighteen years of age:
 - (a) defined as a neglected child by the family court act, or
 - (b) who has had serious physical injury inflicted upon him or her by other than accidental means;

<https://codes.findlaw.com/ny/social-services-law/sos-sect-412.html>

Bullying

Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior in which someone intentionally and repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. Bullying can take the form of physical contact, words, or more subtle actions. The bullied individual typically has trouble defending him or herself and does nothing to "cause" the bullying. Cyberbullying is verbally threatening or harassing behavior conducted through such electronic technology as cell phones, email, social media, or text messaging*.

.A family situation where parents are involved in domestic violence is a high-risk predictor for bullying and victimization (Nocentini et al 2019 pg 41). Child abuse and maltreatment within the context of a parent-child relationship is also a relevant predictor for bullying and victimizations (Nocentini et al 2019 pg 41). Therefore, bullying can be both an indicator and an outcome of DFV.

*Adapted from APA Dictionary of Psychology

Elder Abuse

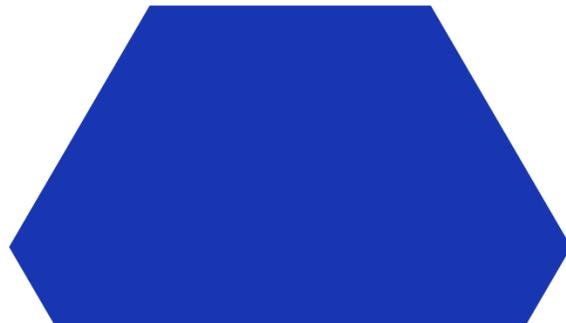
According to the CDC, elder abuse is an intentional act or failure to act that causes or creates a risk of harm to an older adult. An older adult is someone age 60 or older. The abuse occurs at the hands of a caregiver or a person the elder trusts.

Elder abuse (continued): This type of abuse follows the usual patterns (physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect), but also includes financial exploitation. Research shows that elder abuse in domestic settings (family homes more than nursing facilities) is an increasing issue, with adult children and grandchildren as the predominant abusers. Substance abuse is often a factor. Experiencing or witnessing abuse as a child can also come into play. (Storey, J. E. 2020)

Animal Abuse*

Violence towards animals and violence towards people are often an interconnected problem; it has actually been called "the Link" (Jegatheesan, Enders-Slegers et al. 2020). Violence towards animals is a strong predictor that the abuser may inflict violence on people, and can be seen as one of the first indicators that there is child abuse and domestic violence occurring within the home (DeGue and DiLillo 2009).

*It is suggested that animal cruelty/abuse in the home is directly related to the severity of the domestic violence experienced (Ascione et al. 2007). A new State law (Chapter 546) requires veterinarians to report suspected animal abuse to law enforcement. Proposed legislation—"Bella's Bill"—aims to establish a requirement that the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) must investigate any individual who is accused of or investigated for animal cruelty to ensure that there is no associated domestic or family violence (A.173). Law enforcement would notify and coordinate with OCFS on animal cruelty investigations and arrests.



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