



Emerge: Counseling & Education to Stop Domestic Violence

Spring Newsletter

Spring, 2011

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About EmERGE

Founded in 1977, EmERGE was the first abuser education program in the United States. Since its creation, EmERGE has been a national leader in working to end violence in intimate relationships.

EmERGE's mission is to eliminate violence in intimate relationships. In working toward this goal, EmERGE seeks to educate individual abusers, prevent young people from learning to accept violence in their relationships, improve institutional responses to domestic violence, and increase public awareness about the causes and solutions to partner violence. With the development of parenting education groups for fathers, EmERGE has expanded its mission to include a goal of helping men to become more responsible parents.

Quick Links

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Setting a Better Example



One major goal of EmERGE's Responsible Fatherhood Program is promoting a fundamental, yet often ignored, aspect of good fathering: treating the children's mother with respect. Historically in the courts and in the child welfare system, abusive men's parenting abilities have been mostly, and sometimes solely, based on their treatment of the children. When there is no evidence of child abuse, they are sometimes judged to be suitable parents, even when there is evidence that they have abused the mother of their children. Additional consideration is sometimes given to whether the children have been exposed to this abuse of the mother, but unless there is evidence that the children have directly witnessed it, the father's abuse of the mother does not count against him as a custodial parent. But even if the children have not directly witnessed their father's actions, they can still have a damaging impact. Several studies have

Upcoming Events

Community Works Benefit Fundraiser Featuring comedian Wendy Liebman & Friends!

**Join us on Thursday, April
21st, at the Somerville
Theater for the 4th annual
"Share a Laugh"
Community Works Benefit
Fundraiser, featuring
Wendy Liebman and
friends.**



To purchase tickets in support of
Emerge, visit
[Community Works](#)
and select "EMERGE" from the
drop-down menu. Or, visit
[Emerge](#) and purchase tickets
from our
website.

We hope to see you there!

confirmed that children are very likely to know about abuse of their mother even if they have not directly witnessed or heard it. Children are still exposed to the aftermath of abuse, which often includes physical, emotional and economic harm to their mother. The abuser may also undermine the mother's relationship with the children, and disrupt the lives of both mother and children. At worst, this can lead to the children to change homes and schools while weathering protracted legal battle over custody and visitation.

Part of this damaging aftermath also includes ongoing psychological abuse of their mother. This can range from overt verbal abuse to more subtle denigrations, often communicated nonverbally. It is common for some abusers to replace overt and illegal forms of abuse with more tacit, yet legal, forms of abuse. We point out to abusers that these subtle forms of abuse are no less damaging to children, and in some ways, are more harmful since children are left to decipher the underlying messages of contempt and blame. By continuing to blame the mother, whether verbally or nonverbally, the father is wittingly or unwittingly leaving his children with mixed messages of who is responsible for the disruption in their lives. We have seen many instances in which fathers have verbally affirmed their responsibility for their abuse of their children's mother while simultaneously contradicting this message with continued denigration or disrespect of the mother. In the Responsible Fatherhood Program, we point out that children, even as infants and toddlers, are often exquisitely attuned to these seemingly invisible signs of disrespect, even when fathers say that they are careful not to put down or otherwise "badmouth" the children's mother.

Can Respect Be Taught?

The Responsible Fatherhood Program is a 12-session parenting education program that is specifically geared for men with histories of domestic abuse. It has been adapted from the Caring Dads Model developed by the Changing Ways abuser intervention program and collaborators in London ONT. (See [Caring Dads](#)) While the curriculum of Caring Dads and the Responsible Fatherhood Program includes many of the common features of more generic parenting education groups, there is a unique emphasis on helping fathers to set a more positive example to their children in terms of their treatment of the children's mother. One lesson, called "Setting a Better Example," highlights different aspects of respectful behavior towards the mothers of their children and asks group members to rate themselves on how well they are modeling those behaviors for their children.

The exercise begins by asking group members if they believe that respect is an important value that should be

Upcoming Trainings

April 28-29, 2011 Two-Day Advanced Group Skills Training



Join us for our two-day Advanced Group Skills training, which will take place April 28-29, 2011. This training is primarily designed for people who have experience leading abuser education groups. We prefer that attendees have previously been trained in the Emerge model, but attendees who have been trained in another similar model such as Duluth are welcome as well. At this training, participants will grapple with the complexities of group leadership, learn new skills and interventions, and tackle cutting edge issues in the overall field of abuser education.

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taught to children. All program participants to whom we asked this question so far have agreed that respect is an important value. The next question is whether or not children learn respect mostly from admonishments from their partners, such as "You should respect your mother", or from observing interactions between parents. Almost all the fathers respond that respect is mostly learned from observation. The group leaders then explain that there are dozens of everyday signs of respect and disrespect that children observe in interactions between parents. These include physical behavior, as well as verbal and nonverbal communication. The group leaders then highlight the following behaviors by the father that as signs of respect for the mother:

- 1) Supporting the mother's decisions about the children, e.g. when is bedtime, what is permitted and not permitted.
- 2) Listening to the mother
- 3) Asking her questions
- 4) Respecting her boundaries (including privacy, space, time)
- 5) Being influenced by her interests and opinions
- 6) Thanking her and appreciating her contributions

The group leaders describe each behavior in terms of how it is typically observed (or not observed) by children, and how that behavior (or its absence) typically influences children. For instance, children notice how often one parent listens to the other, even if they don't comment on this. When a father does not demonstrate good listening, children are more likely to learn and emulate poor listening to their parents, other adults, and peers. Poor listening often impedes social development. On the other hand, good listening is an important social and cognitive skill.

After each aspect of respect is described, each group member is then asked to rate himself, on a 0-2 point scale, in terms of how often he demonstrates that behavior to his children in his interactions with their mother. Pertaining to listening, for instance, '0' means that the children rarely see him listening to the mother, '1' means that they sometimes witness this, and '2' means that they frequently see it. Each man is then asked where he gave himself '0's and '1's, and further, to say how he might set a better example with his children in terms of modeling this particular aspect of respect. Though one might think that abusive men would inflate their grades, and there is evidence that many do, it is surprising how often program participants assign themselves low grades in these particular behaviors. We think that one key reason for such honesty is that most of the men have already participated in the Abuser Education Program at

Upcoming Trainings (cont'd)

May 11-13, 2011 Introductory Counseling Abusers Training

This course is intended for anyone working with families affected by domestic violence. Past participants include batterer intervention program group leaders, supervisors and administrators, social workers, victim advocates, correctional staff, psychologists, violence prevention educators, substance abuse counselors, healthcare workers, probation and police officers, clergy, military personnel, and program managers.

Participants will learn the Emerge curriculum and how it compares to other models. The training is structured to be highly interactive, including several participant role plays. This interactive structure allows participants to acquire and practice skills to be used in leading groups. For participants who work with victims and don't intend to lead groups, this training will help to inform them about what happens in abuser education groups. The course meets BIP group leader training requirements in Massachusetts and in many other states. Over the past 6 years, over 1,000 people from 45 states and 15 nations have taken this course.

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Emerge or elsewhere, where they have already been asked to self-identify disrespectful, controlling and abusive behaviors. It also appears that some abusive men are less defensive and more honest about their disrespectful behavior when asked to consider them through their children's perspective, compared to asking them to simply consider their partner's perspective. This may reflect that in their earlier stages of the change process, many abusive men appear to be more motivated by their children than their partners. This may be because they recognize a greater responsibility to their children, particularly in cases where their relationship with the children's mother has ended. Regardless of the reasons, we've found that asking abusive men to consider their children's perspective to be a strong motivator when we ask them to critically examine their treatment of their partners and ex-partners.

We recognize that there are many more elements of respect in intimate relationships that we have not addressed here. The "Setting a Better Example" exercise is not intended as an exhaustive list of these behaviors, but rather as a sampling of key indicators of respect, especially those that might be discerned by children. The exercise is primarily intended to identify important elements of respect and empathy, and to point out that children learn these values and skills mostly by observing mundane, seemingly invisible, interactions between their parents. Recognizing the importance of this helps to establish a higher standard for how we judge the parenting of men with histories of domestic violence.

David Adams

Sincerely,

David Adams

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