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Parenting in the
Context of
Coercive Control

PROTECTING DELAWARE'S CHILDREN CONFERENCE
MARCH 2015



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Learning Objectives

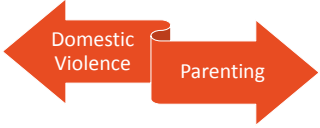
Recognize potential post-separation parenting and co-parenting implications of coercive controlling abuse

Employ a context-based approach to evaluate parenting and co-parenting by abusive and abused parents and their effects on children

Develop parenting recommendations that account for the parenting and co-parenting implications of coercive controlling abuse

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The Problem



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Common Parenting Challenges for Abusers

Physical or Sexual Abuse
 Emotional Abuse
 Economic Abuse
 Using the Child as a Tool
 Denying Impact of Abuse
 Ignoring Child's Needs
 Undermining Parenting
 Relentless Harassment

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Physical or Sexual Abuse

Decisions and behaviors that directly harm the child's physical safety, security and wellbeing

Examples:

- Hitting, punching, slapping or pushing the child
- Using excessive or coercive discipline
- Forcing the other parent to abuse the child
- Sexually exploiting or grooming a child
- Using the child in pornography or sex trafficking

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Emotional Abuse

Wide-ranging decisions or behaviors that directly or indirectly harm the child's emotional safety, security, development or wellbeing

Examples:

- Rejecting the child or denigrating child's feelings
- Embarrassing, humiliating or shaming the child
- Creating a chaotic or unpredictable home life
- Fluctuating involvement with the child

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Economic Abuse

Decisions to or behaviors that unnecessarily harm the child's economic stability or security

Examples:

- Refusing to provide available financial support
- Interfering with the other parent's employment
- Denying the other parent access to resources
- Destroying the other parent's credit
- Trading money or support for time with the child

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Using Child as a Tool of Abuse

Decisions to or behaviors that employ the child to manipulate, control, threaten or harm the other parent

Examples:

- Using the child to monitor the other parent
- Pitting the child against the other parent
- Encouraging child to disrespect the other parent
- Threatening to take child from the other parent

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Denying Impact of Abuse

Decisions or behaviors that fail to acknowledge and repair the damage resulting from one's own abuse

Examples:

- Being intolerant of criticism for abuse
- Justifying abuse or blaming others for abuse
- Demanding respect in the face of abuse
- Refusing to apologize for abuse
- Interfering with other parent's treatment efforts

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Ignoring Child's Separate Needs

Beliefs that the child's interests, needs and perceptions are either:

- Indistinguishable from one or the other parent's
- Attributable to the other parent

Examples:

- Elevating one's own needs above the child's needs
- Believing child's needs are identical to one's own
- Believing that the other parent and child are conspiring

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Undermining the Other Parent

Decisions to or behaviors that either:

- Disrupt or harm the child's relationship with the other parent
- Interfere with the other parent's ability to parent or exercise parental authority

Examples:

- Refusing to enforce established rules
- Withholding information about the child
- Disrupting the child's schedule or routine
- Using a new partner to replace the other parent

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Relentless Harassment

Decisions to or behaviors that disrupt the everyday life of, and create persistent instability, insecurity or unpredictability for the child and/or the other parent, usually under the guise of some seemingly legitimate principle (like safety, equality, fairness, duty, or parental concern)

Examples:

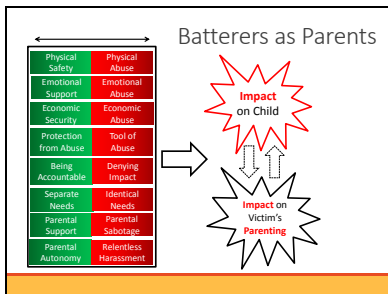
- Persistently making false reports to authorities
- Engaging in harassing litigation

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Parenting Charts

- Parenting by Abusers
- Child's Experience of Abuse
- Child's Reactions to Abuse
- Impact of Abuse on Child
- Impact on Victim's Parenting
- Impact on Co-Parenting

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Common Ways Children Experience Abuse

- Exposure during pregnancy
- Direct intervention
- Direct harm
- Direct participation
- Direct observation
- Indirect observation
- Retreat from abuse
- Witness initial effects
- Experience aftermath

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Exposure During Pregnancy

The developing fetus experiences abuse *in utero*

Examples:

- Kicking or punching a pregnant partner
- Sexually assaulting a pregnant partner
- Attempting to induce a miscarriage
- Depriving a pregnant partner of sleep
- Denying or interfering with prenatal care

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Direct Intervention to Stop Abuse

The child takes affirmative steps to make the abuse end

Examples:

- Pleading with the abuser to stop
- Calling for help
- Pulling the abuser off the victim
- Physically assaulting the abuser
- Attempting to distract the abuser

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Direct Harm from Abuse

The child suffers verbal, physical or emotional harm during the course of abuse

Examples:

- The abuser intentionally injures the child
- The child gets caught in the crossfire
- The abuser blames the child for the abuse
- The abuser punishes the child for intervening
- The abuser tells the child, "you're next"

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Direct Participation in Abuse

The child joins in the abuse of the victim parent, through force, coercion, identification with the abuser, or self-preservation

Examples:

- The abuser uses the child to spy on the victim
- The child joins the abuser in taunting the victim
- The abuser orders the child to abuse the victim
- The abuser rewards the child for participating

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Direct Observation of Abuse

The child is an eyewitness to the abuse

Examples:

- The child watches an assault of one parent by the other
- The child is present to hear pleas for help or screams
- The child witnesses the abuser's degradation of the victim

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Indirect Observation of Abuse

The child hears but does not see the abuse

Examples:

- The child hears threats or screams
- The child hears pleas for help or mercy
- The child hears gunfire
- The child hears breaking furniture or windows
- The child hears blows to the victim's head or o body

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Retreat from Abuse

The child takes cover from abuse

Examples:

- Running away from home
- Locking himself or herself in the closet
- Hiding under the bed
- Tuning out the world or pretending like nothing's wrong
- Misusing alcohol and/or drugs

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Witnessing the Initial Effects of Abuse

The child observes the immediate effects of abuse

Examples:

- Blood, bruises, and other injuries
- Police officers and first responders
- Ambulances and emergency vehicles
- A parent being arrested or restrained
- Intense emotions or traumatic responses

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Experiencing the Aftermath

The child faces life altering change as a result of the abuse

Examples:

- Parental anxiety and/or depression
- Separation from the abuser
- Reorganization of family structures
- Breakdown in trust and/or confidence in parents
- Economic instability


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Children's Experience

- Exposure during pregnancy
- Direct intervention in abuse
- Direct harm from abuse
- Participation in abuse
- Direct observation of abuse
- Active avoidance of abuse
- Observation of effects of abuse
- Exposure to aftermath of abuse
- Hear about abuse from others
- Seemingly unaware of abuse

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How Might Child React?

- Fear•Anxiety•Trauma•Doom•Confusion•Distrust•Insecurity•Anger•Guilt•Shame•Complicity•Vengeance•Moodiness•Rage•Abandonment•Betrayal•Fatigue•Protectiveness•Hopelessness...

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Impact of Abuse on the Child

- Developmental problems
- Behavioral problems
- Emotional problems
- Cognitive problems
- Relationship problems
- Health problems
- Economic Problems

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Developmental Problems

Over- or under-stimulation of neural connections and pathways during infancy that can lead to lifelong challenges

Examples:

- Failure to meet physical or emotional milestones
- Maladaptive stress responses
- Poor sleep and awake functioning
- Emotional detachment or poor engagement

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Behavioral Problems

Outward conduct or actions that create difficulties for the child

Examples:

- Self harm (cutting, attempted suicide, drug use)
- Delinquency or criminal behavior
- Running away or defiance of authority
- Truancy
- Physical aggression and/or bullying

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Emotional Problems

Internal, often unconscious behaviors that cause a child to have difficulty coping

Examples:

- Nightmares or sleep disruptions
- Distraction or inability to focus
- Anxiety or restlessness
- Re-living violence through play
- Fear of being alone or difficulty separating from parents


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Cognitive Problems

Difficulties with thinking, learning, concentrating, or processing information

Examples:

- Poor skill development
- Poor verbal abilities
- Underachievement at school
- Poor or distorted memory
- Distraction or inability to focus




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Relationship Problems

Interpersonal interactions that create difficulties for the child

Examples:

- Inappropriate social responses to others
- Ambivalent attachment with caregivers
- Lack of empathy
- Bullying or peer victimization
- Diminished ability to trust others




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Health Problems

Physical manifestations that affect the child's general wellbeing

Examples:

- Headaches or chronic fatigue
- Asthma
- Intestinal problems
- Eating disorders
- Allergies or autoimmune deficiencies



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Economic Problems

Damage or harm to the child's economic stability or security

Examples:

- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Social Isolation
- Increased responsibility to work outside the home
- Increased responsibilities at home

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No Obvious Problems

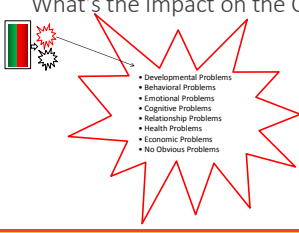
Some children, particularly adolescents and older children, may cope by re-directing their energies towards outside or adult activities or interests

Examples:

- Academic achievement
- Engagement in extra-curricular activities
- Assumption of parental responsibilities

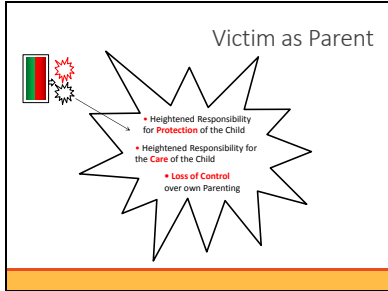
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What's the Impact on the Child?

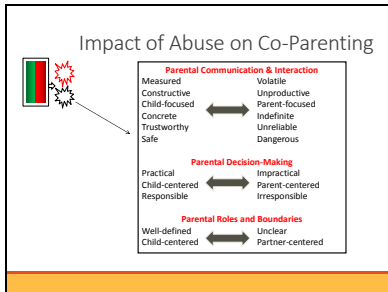


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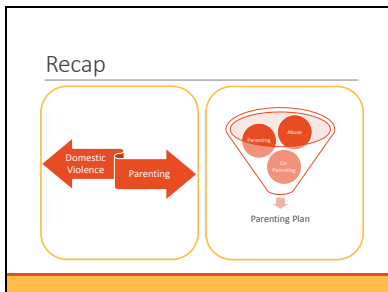
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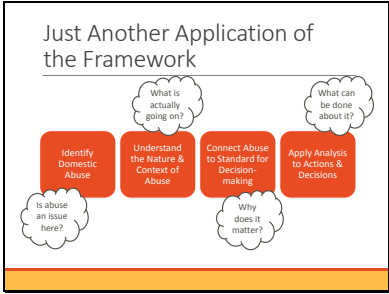
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Comments and Questions

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