



HELPING CHILDREN WHO HAVE
BEEN EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

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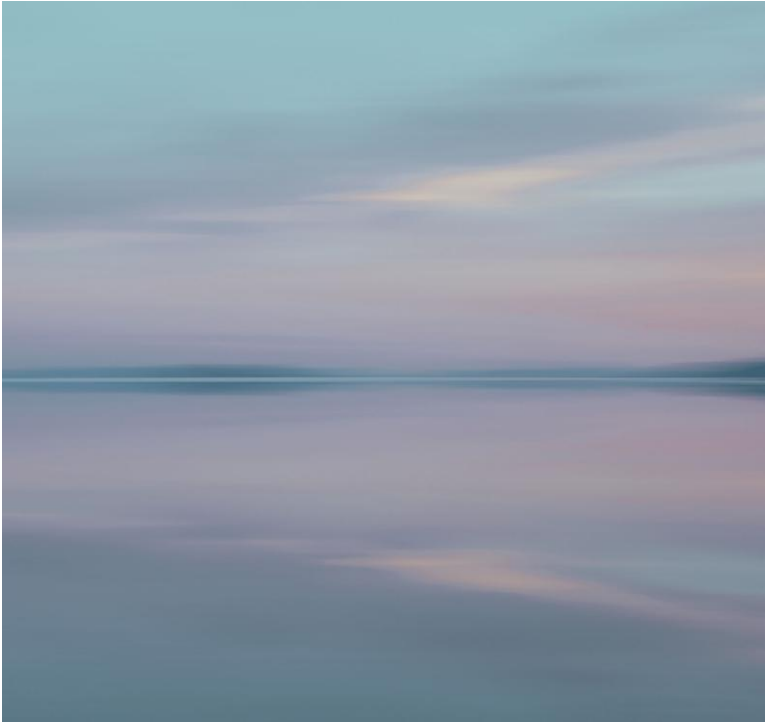
PRESENTATION GOALS

Increase workshop participants' abilities to understand and respond to:

- Dynamics of Domestic Violence (DV)
- Key stages and tasks of child development and how DV exposure can impact these
- Strategies to help youth

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DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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DEFINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DV (AKA: INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE/IPV)



Abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic (or familial or close) relationship. Intimate partner refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners.

(CDC/National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2024)

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Data from CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey in the United States

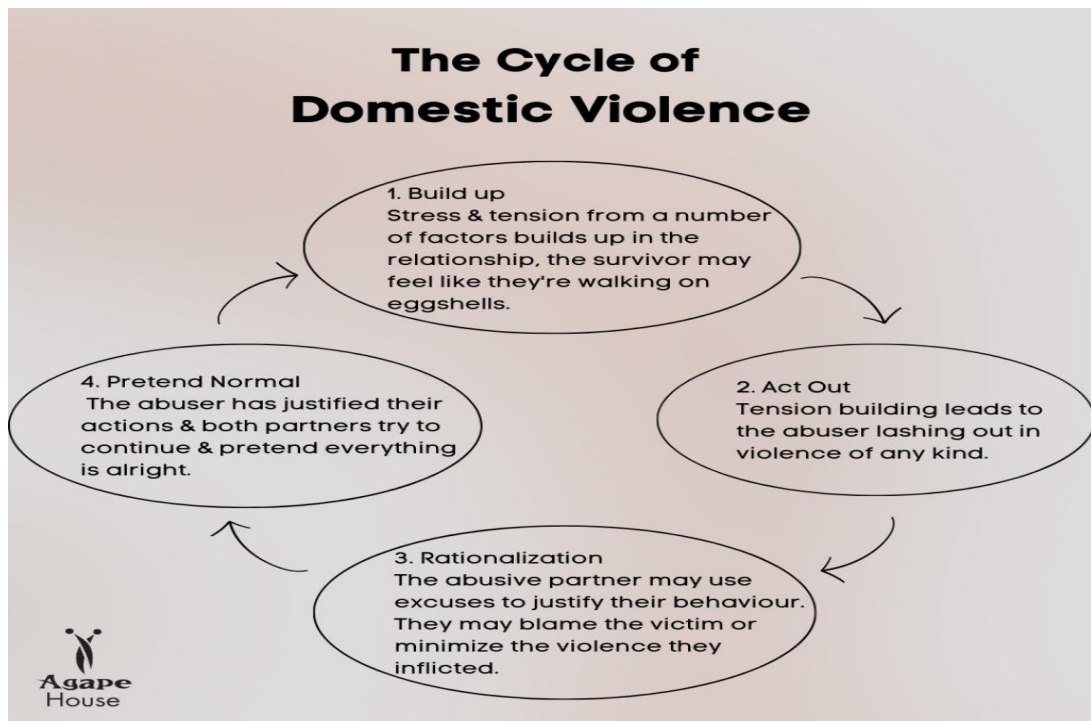
41% of women and 26% of men experienced at least one form of interpersonal partner violence during their lifetime.

Over 114 million people have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

In a literature review, members of the LGBTQIA community experience equal or higher rates of IPV.

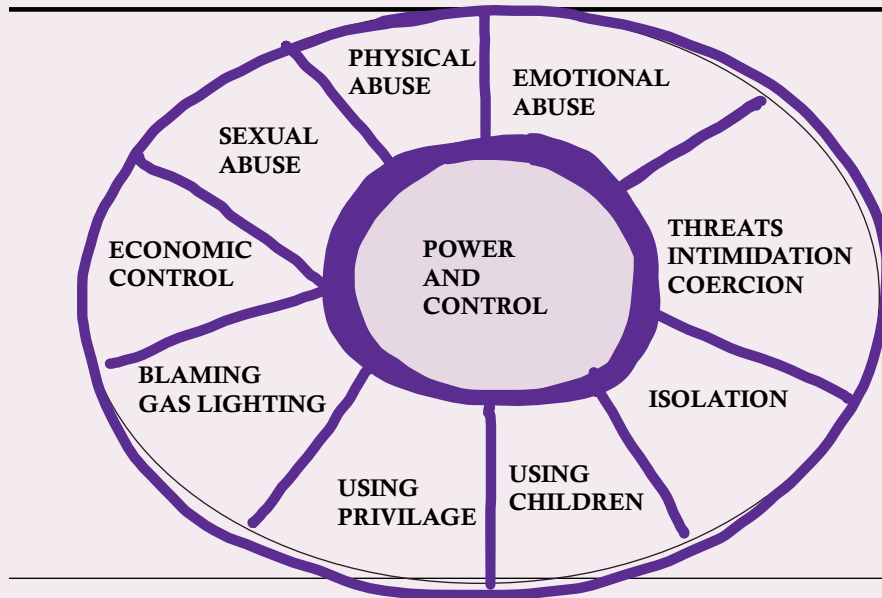
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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXPOSURE AND YOUTH

In a literature review, it was found that approx. 10 million children in the United States witness some form(s) of DV/IPV.

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TYPES OF DV/IPV EXPOSURE BY YOUTH



- Directly witnessing the violence, seeing & hearing
- Overhearing the violence
- Seeing the physical damage to the target of the violence or the physical environment
- Witnessing the emotional distress of the adult victim
- The offender shares with the child demeaning and/or threats towards the adult victim
- Exposure doesn't stop after parental separation

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KEY STAGES AND TASKS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND HOW DV EXPOSURE CAN IMPACT THESE



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CHILD DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES & IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON KEY DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

Margaret Blaustein & Kristine Kinniburgh, Treating Traumatic Stress In Children & Adolescents

Early Childhood (Infancy through Preschool)

- The foundation of development (Think of the house foundation)
- Understanding relationships (Basic, safe or unsafe, reliable or unreliable)
- Learning basic affect regulation (feelings matter, they work for you)
- Learning that connection and independence are good (It's safe to connect and safe to branch out)
- "I am worth caring for, I matter"
- Significant language and motor development

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; Kristine Buffington, MSW, LISW-S et. al. 2010+

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CHILD DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES & IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON KEY DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

MARGARET BLAUSTEIN & KRISTINE KINNIBURGH, TREATING TRAUMATIC STRESS IN CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS + BUFFINGTON 2025

Early Childhood (Infancy through Preschool) possible impact of trauma (& DV/IPV)

- Neglect and abuse teach that relationships are not reliable, and sometimes dangerous
- Child becomes hypervigilant
- Emotions are considered useless or dangerous
- Body and brain are interpreting danger, since it is before language, children may not understand their responses to perceived danger in the future
- Lags in language, cognitive, social, and motor development
- Love=violece
- Can mimic abusive behaviors

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; Kristine Buffington, MSW, LISW-S et. al. 2010+

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National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; Kristine Buffington, MSW, L

CHILD DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES & IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON KEY DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

MARGARET BLAUSTEIN & KRISTINE KINNIBURGH, TREATING TRAUMATIC STRESS IN CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

Elementary School/Middle Childhood-Normative Development

- More interest and connections with other youth and other adults outside their families
- A strong interest in industry and accomplishments
- Learning to feel competent
- Gradually developing abstract thinking
- More development of positive self esteem if successful with peers and academics or other activities

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MARGARET BLAUSTEIN & KRISTINE KINNIBURGH, TREATING TRAUMATIC STRESS IN CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS + BUFFINGTON, 2025

Elementary School/Middle Childhood as possibly Impacted by Trauma

- Increasing impairments in many domains of functioning: cognitively, socially, emotionally, physically
- Difficulties in school performance (learning, self-regulation, relationships)
- Negative self concept increases as experience failure
- Rigid concepts of safety and danger and relationships
- Increasing awareness and reactions to rejection
- Higher risk of being bullied or bully
- Guilt about not being able to protect the targeted parent

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; Kristine Buffington, MSW, LISW-S et. al. 2010+

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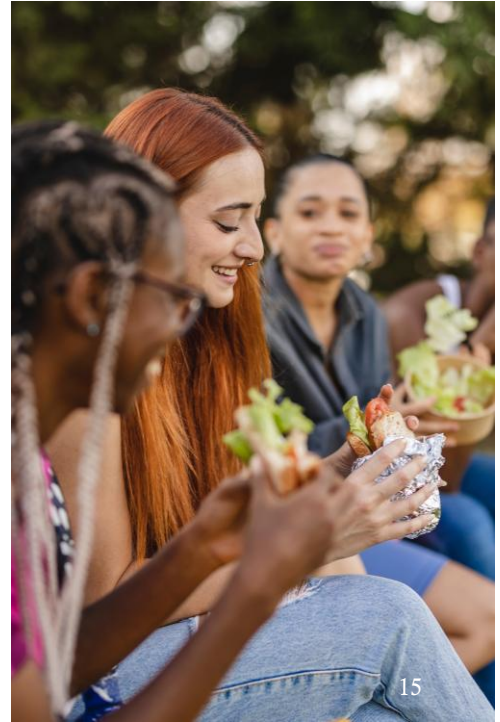
CHILD DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES & IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON KEY DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

MARGARET BLAUSTEIN & KRISTINE KINNIBURGH, TREATING TRAUMATIC STRESS IN CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

Adolescent Normal Development

- Developing an identity and understanding of self
- Looking to peers for acceptance and connections
- Experimentation and taking risks
- Making connections between past, present, and future
- Body image, sexual image, and self-concept
- Seeking independence but needing a safety net
- Self-absorbed

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; Kristine Buffington, MSW, LISW-S et. al. 2010+



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MARGARET BLAUSTEIN & KRISTINE KINNIBURGH, TREATING TRAUMATIC STRESS IN CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

**Adolescent
Development as
possibly Impacted
by Trauma**

Increasingly
experience disparity
in development and
abilities

Increase in risky
behaviors or overly
restricted

May still have
primitive coping
behaviors

Further negative
self-concept

Less able to
conceive of a
successful future

Vulnerable to
negative peers or
exploitive
relationships

Increase risk of
substance abuse and
rejecting authority
and rules

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; Kristine Buffington, MSW, LISW-S et. al. 2010+

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National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; Kristine Buffington, MSW, LISW-S et. al. 2010+

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Young Adult Normal Development

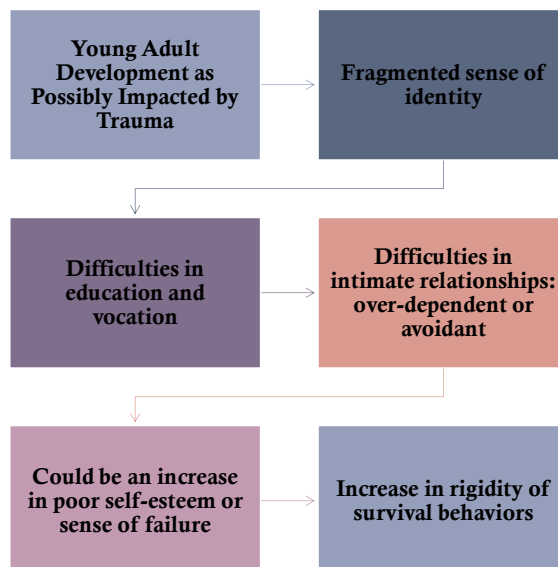
- Increased development of identity
- A sense of direction, and beginning to experience some accomplishment with education and vocation
- Able to function independently but also using support systems
- Possible commitment to relationship with a partner, may consider becoming a parent
- Enhanced ability for abstract thinking

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CHILD DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES & IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON KEY DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

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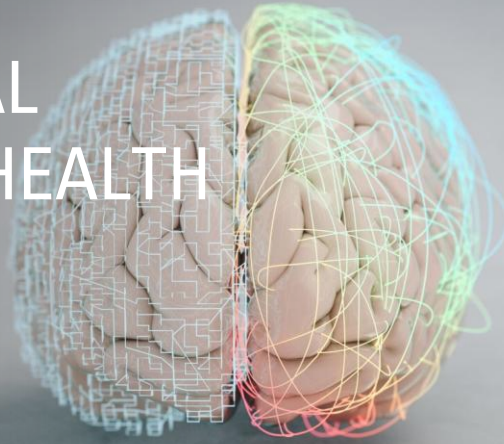


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POTENTIAL MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT



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POTENTIAL MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT



- Potential Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Suicidal ideations or attempts
- Substance use problems
- Oppositional Defiant symptoms
- Dissociation
- Emotional Withdrawal/Numbness
- Anger disorders
- Fire setting
- Self Harm
- Losing or lost their sense of humanity

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STRATEGIES FOR CASA AND OTHER GUARDIANS AD LITEM TO HELP YOUTH

Buffington, 2025



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Understand...

- That the youth may love both parents/caregivers or be fearful
- Youth could be angry at the abuser, or the victim, or both
- Youth may fear if they are separated from the parent, they won't be able to protect that parent

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UNDERSTAND THAT YOUTH EXPOSED TO DV MAY FEEL OR BELIEVE...

- It's their fault that the DV is happening
- Believe they have failed because they could not stop or prevent the DV
- Feel powerless
- This is what love is
- Life will always turn out to be terrible
- Hurt others before they hurt you



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YOU CAN HELP BY Understanding sometimes the victimized parent presents more emotionally unstable than the violent parent



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WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Focus on emotional and physical safety
 - Create an environment and relationship where the youth can share with you
 - Be nonjudgmental
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HELPING YOUTH EXPOSED TO DV

Help expand the youth's support system both formal and informal



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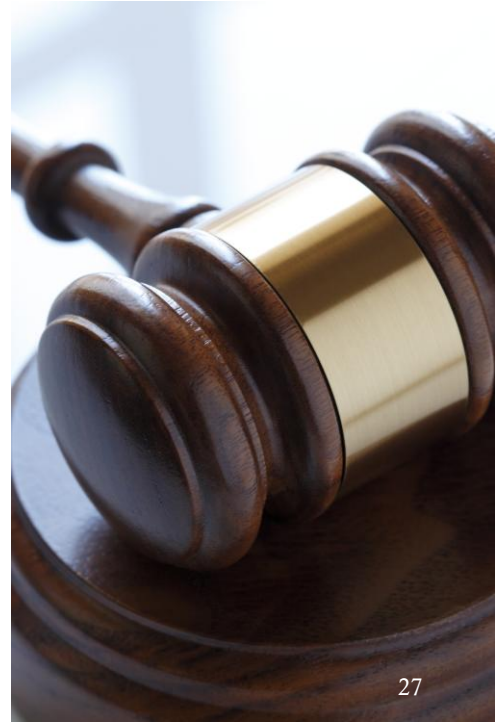
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HELPING YOUTH EXPOSED TO DV

Make recommendations to the court that follow best practices such as those established by the National Center of Juvenile & Family Court Judges:

- Accessing professionals with the scope of practice to evaluate domestic violence
- Ensuring that custody and visitation recommendations and implementation provide safety for the youth and the targeted parent
- Marriage counseling and anger management are not helpful and can be dangerous

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HOW YOU CAN HELP

Advocate for system responses that provide safety and resources for both the youth and the targeted caregiver

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HELPING YOUTH EXPOSED TO DV

Advocate for trauma-informed
mental health services

- Gathering a trauma history
- Trauma-informed assessment
- Evidence-based trauma therapies



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HELPING YOUTH EXPOSED TO DV

Advocate for trauma-
informed and supportive
services in school

- Saving a child's
education is life-saving
- Be influenced by the
Handle with Care
Program



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RESILIENCY



- The ability of a human being to survive adversity and sometimes to also thrive
- It is not about special gene
- It can be about the person's qualities and strengths but it grows in a person thru support, safety, and celebrating who that person is.

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RESILIENCY

- Show people they matter
- Diligently create opportunities for their success
- Hear their stories
- Treat them with dignity
- Show them their voice matters
- Give them some choice



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10 STEPS TO DIGNITY (DONNA HICKS, 2011)

Acceptance of Identity

Inclusion: make others feel as if they belong; they play an important role

Safety: Put people at ease, show them its good and ok to be who they are and safe to disagree, show them their safety matters



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TEN STEPS TO DIGNITY (DONNA HICKS, 2011)

Acknowledgement: Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating

Recognition: Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, & help, be generous with praise and gratitude

Fairness: Treat people justly with equality in an even-handed way according to agreed upon laws and rules. People feel their dignity is honored when you treat them without prejudice or discrimination.



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TEN STEP TO DIGNITY (DONNA HICKS, 2011)

Benefit of the Doubt: Treat people as they are trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity

Understanding: Believe that what others think matters; give them the chance to explain and express their points of view; listen to understand

Independence: Encourage people to act on their own so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility,

Accountability: Take responsibility for your actions; if you have violated the dignity of another person apologize; make a commitment to change your hurtful behaviors



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LESSONS FROM MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING: THEORIES OF CHANGE



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WHO LIKES CHANGE?



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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PEOPLE CHANGING?

- People change because they want to
- People can want to change part of the way
- People change if they believe they can
- People change if they believe that what they are going to get is better than what they have.

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CELEBRATE...



Microsoft PowerPoint design

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SELF CARE STRATEGIES

Photo: Buffington 2024

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GETTING THE ANTS OUT OF OUR HEADS

ANTS: Automatic Negative Thoughts

1. All or nothing thinking
2. Always thinking
3. Focusing on the negative
4. Negative fortune telling
5. Mind reading
6. Guilt Beatings
7. Labels
8. Blame

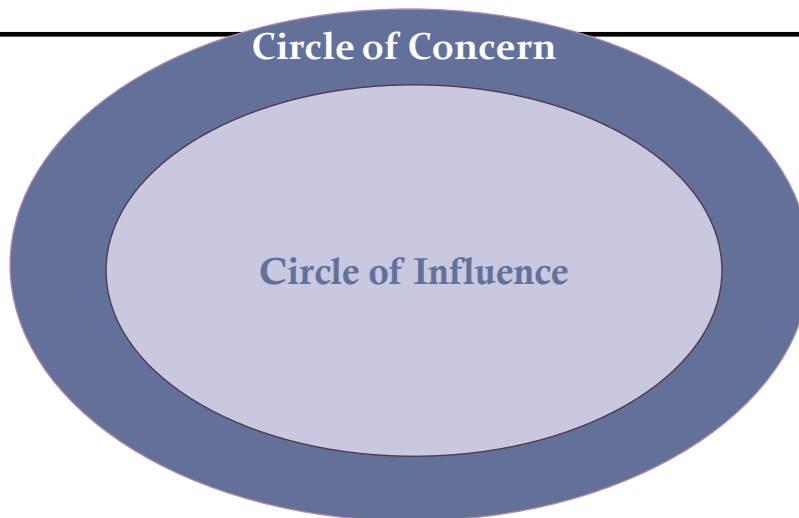


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Circle of Concern



STEVEN COVEY: SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

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PLEASE REMEMBER...

We are just a moment of time in the lives and journeys of the children and families that we serve...But if in the moment of time, we treat our clients with respect, honor, and as expert partners in our work together, we have given them a beautiful gift. And if we are open to it, we too can share in the joy and peace of that gift...

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THANK YOU