

Domestic Violence and the Child Welfare Professional: Tips on Decision-Making



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Tip Sheet #4

The Domestic Violence and the Child Welfare Professional series supports caseworkers in responding to families experiencing domestic violence and child maltreatment. The series includes six tip sheets that provide core practice considerations. This tip sheet—the fourth in the series—supplies guidelines for casework decision-making. The tips in this series are based on a compilation of research and promising practices.

Decision-Making: The Path to Safety and Well-Being

When child welfare agencies receive a report of child maltreatment, immediate safety concerns dictate investigative decisions (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014). When domestic violence is involved, a caseworker's response is determined by three key factors (Deboard-Lucas, Wasserman, Groves, & Bain-Merritt, 2013; Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2014):

- Danger/level of threat of domestic violence to children
- Presence of child abuse or neglect
- Whether a family will continue to receive child welfare services

Child welfare professionals use these factors to establish the path casework decisions will take, but no single formula or approach is appropriate or effective. Casework decisions require tailored services specific to each family's unique situation (Children's Bureau, 2015). The guidelines provided below aim to aid caseworkers in making decisions that bridge the gap between child welfare and domestic violence services.

While the tips reflect research and practice knowledge from the field, caseworkers are advised to follow agency policies and protocols and the guidance of their supervisors in conducting casework.



Tips for Decision-Making

1. Substantiate findings of abuse or neglect as a result of domestic violence only on the perpetrator of domestic violence, child maltreatment, or related allegations.
2. File court petitions that demonstrate the active role the perpetrator takes in harming the children.
3. Refrain from filing petitions on survivors when it's not legally required. If it is legally required, try to demonstrate the survivor's protective efforts in the petition, and clearly state why the perpetrator remains too dangerous despite these efforts.
4. Ensure plans for perpetrators are behavior focused and specific.
5. Never make a survivor responsible for removing a perpetrator from the home, but ensure they are aware that the child welfare worker will talk to the perpetrator about leaving.
6. Remove children from the home only when a perpetrator poses a threat to the children. If the children are considered safe, don't remove them from the home due to disagreement with the survivor's choice.
7. Consider legal interventions that allow children to remain in the survivor's care as long as their safety isn't threatened. A court intervention may be needed to encourage the perpetrator's behavioral change and/or service attendance.
8. Ensure that children have regular visits with the survivor if courts remove them from the survivor's custody. Regular visits benefit the emotional well-being of children and the survivor. Support regular visits to the perpetrator if children are emotionally and physically safe. Ask about routine and consistent supports for children. Stability is critical for children exposed to domestic violence.
9. Reunite children with the survivor if the environment is safe. Don't delay reunification due to a perpetrator's lack of compliance.

References

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