

Domestic Violence Session 4

Brandi Black Thacker: Hi, everyone. This is Brandi Black Thacker, and I'm the Director of Training, Technical Assistance, and Collaboration for the National Center on Parent, Family, Community Engagement. We're so grateful you're with us for this series of five webinars that we're hosting in partnership with Futures Without Violence. And today, we're going to think together about partnering with parents who have used violence in intimate relationships.

Before we get into the content with Juan Carlos today, I'd like to go over, with you guys, where we've been and where we're going in this series. We started off this discussion with an introduction to addressing domestic violence. And then we turned our attention to the second session where we thought together about supporting healing for families who've experienced domestic violence. In the third one, we came together to think about partnering with parents to prevent and respond to domestic violence.

Today, as I mentioned, you're going to get the pleasure to hear from Juan Carlos on partnering with parents who have used violence in their intimate relationships. And we'll round out this series thinking about building collaborative relationships with our community partners. With that, I don't want to delay any more seconds. I'd like to turn over the microphone to my friend and colleague, Juan Carlos.

Juan Carlos Areán: Greetings. My name is Juan Carlos Areán. I'm a Program Director at Futures Without Violence. And for almost 30 years, I have been working with people who use violence, and I'm very happy to be sharing with you today some of what I have learned. Here are the learning objectives for this session. By the end of this session, you will be better able to focus on safety, accountability, and healing when working with parents who use violence in intimate relationships. You will be able to learn more about appropriate referrals and also explore parenthood as a potential motivator for change. For this session, you will need pen and paper for journaling and for idea generation exercises.

I would like to start with an exercise. On your own, please write down the answer to the following question: What are your fears, or fears of your coworkers, when you think about working with parents who use violence in intimate relationships? Take a couple of minutes to answer.

It is natural to have fears when thinking about working with people who use violence. I have been doing this for 30 years, and I still have fears. And, in fact, I think that it's healthy to have fears because there is danger and there is risk. Some of the common fears that people mention in trainings are that they will get hurt themselves or that they will make things worse for the family. There's many other fears that might come up.

So, who are we talking about when we talk about parents who use violence in intimate relationships? The first thing that is important to mention that this is not a clinical diagnosis. In other words, it's not a particular disorder, psychologically, which causes violence. There are

people with all kinds of psychological disorders, mild and severe, that don't use violence, right? A person can be bipolar, they can be a schizophrenic, they can suffer from depression, and other things. And those are not causes for violence. They can have that together with the violence, but those are not the causes. It is more helpful to think of a behavioral profile, meaning looking at the behaviors rather than some kind of diagnosis for the person. And this profile usually includes things like intimidation, right? Psychological and emotional abuse, exaggerated, intrusive, disproportionate entitlement. That's an interesting one.

As you probably know, most people who use violence, most parents and nonparents who use violence, are men. It can be women too, but the great majority are men. And this entitlement usually appears as masculine entitlement. Basically, an idea that... of superiority, that men are superior to women and have the right to control them in some way. And of course, physical and sexual violence. And please note that in this list, we put physical and sexual violence at the end because this is what we often think about when we think about domestic violence. But, as hopefully all of you know, domestic violence is more than that. And in fact, things like intimidation or psychological and emotional violence might be more common than physical and sexual violence, although they are all part of a package.

Sometimes, I have heard from survivors of violence that once the person used physical violence once, they didn't need to do it again. All they need to do is give them a look or say something, and that would send the message that it was time to basically do whatever that person wanted. Likewise, it's very difficult to know if a person uses violence just by how they present themselves to the rest of society, right? People who use violence can look many different ways, and often, they don't look outside their homes as violent people. How many times have you seen in the newspaper a case in which someone committed a terrible crime, maybe they killed their wife, their children, maybe they committed suicide? And the first thing that journalists go to the neighbor and say, "What do you think about this?" And the neighbor will say, "Oh, this person was so nice. It was so out of character." But the truth is that people who use violence usually are very different inside the home than outside the home. And outside, they can present in many different ways. Sometimes, yes, they can be defensive or aggressive or both. They can be challenging when you're working with them, but often they are charming and manipulative, and they will try to bring you to their side of things, right? They can also be superficially compliant, meaning that they say, "Yes, I will change." Or, "I will do this," but they don't really mean it or do it. And often, they can be avoidant. They can totally be very difficult to engage.

In terms of their parenting style, research shows that there are continued threats and violence after separation. It's very important to know this because sometimes we think that the solution is that the parents separate, and that's the end of the problem. But people who use violence often continue to use threats, to stalk the other parent, to send all kinds of threatening messages and, so on. So, it's very important to take that into consideration. Of course, you know this. There's actually hundreds of studies that show that the abusive behavior negatively affects the children in many, many different ways. Naturally, people who use violence are more controlling and abusive in their parenting. Even if they're not directly abusing, they tend to be

excessively disciplinary and authoritarian in their style. And sometimes they involve children in their violent events, sometimes on purpose. Sometimes they will start talking to the children about how terrible the other parent is and trying to – what some people call gaslighting, you know, which is this interesting concept of changing the reality, the lived reality of the person, and make the parent who is, in fact, the survivor look like they are the abuser. So that's actually quite common. And in general, they're good under observation, going back to what we were talking about presentation. If you see a parent picking up their kids and saying hi to you, and so on, that doesn't really tell you much information about how they are inside their household.

And in terms of the impact on families – I mentioned some of this – but it's important to emphasize, for instance, that people who use violence undermine the authority of the other parent, of the survivor, on purpose. This is part of the strategies that they use against their partners. So, they constantly are undermining their authority in front of the kids and making it very difficult for that person to be a good parent. They also interfere with the parenting, right, of the survivor. They might dismiss some of the discipline that that other parent is offering. And as I said before, they might talk to the children about how their mother is crazy, and look at what she's doing and all kinds of stories that they can make. They also can use the children as actual weapons. As I said before, they might ally them, align them with them against the other parent. And of course, then they create all kinds of divisions in the families. All of these are intentional strategies. It's not something that just happens by chance.

By now, you might be feeling, even more fear than at the beginning of the presentation, and you might be saying, "Why are they asking me to try to engage these people that do these terrible things?" And I can understand where you're coming from. However, there are some important considerations here. First of all, it's not all on you and your program. There are services and people and community members in your community that have been thinking about this for a long time, what we call community accountability. So, it's not something that you need to do on your own. And I will be giving you some ideas of referrals and where you can find support in a little bit.

It's totally normal, as I said at the beginning, to feel nervous about working with folks who use violence, especially if you haven't done it before, intentionally. Probably you have done it, but without knowing, right? And most importantly, it's very important to know that the great majority of parents who use violence are not highly dangerous. Often, we think about the people that we read in the newspapers that they, in fact, killed their family, killed their children, killed themselves. Those, even though they're enormous tragedies, and I don't want to minimize them in any way, are a very, very small percentage of the people who use violence. The truth is that research shows that many of these people are amenable to change if there are supports of both accountability and positive change in place.

And we think that it's critical to engage these parents because we will never end the problem of domestic violence if we only work with the survivors, whether adults or children. We also need to be working with the people who generate the violence if we want real change. And going back to who can support you in engaging people who use violence. Almost every community in

the United States has programs for people who use violence. They are usually referred as Battering Intervention Programs or Batterer's Intervention Programs. And this really is the preferred method for working with people who use violence. They work in groups, and they emphasize accountability, certainly. And many of them also support for change. You can try to reach out to folks for more training, for referrals, for consultations. I think they would be very happy to talk to you.

As important is – I like to mention that there are certain programs and interventions that should be avoided. At the top is couples counseling. Sometimes we feel like, "Oh, well, because this couple has problems, let's have a couples therapist see them." The truth is that a good couple's therapist, their job is to bring the ugliest truth about their relationship to the forefront, right? And when there's domestic violence, and when there's threats and intimidation and so on, first of all, that's not likely to happen. And second of all, if it happens, it could put the survivor, or the victim, at great, great risk. So, we have to avoid at all cost couples counseling.

There's also anger management, and we often, even in the media now, hear from usually comedies, interestingly enough, that they show men going to anger management. And anger management is great, but it's designed, basically, for people who have road rage or get in fights in bars and those kinds of things, and not so much for people that have domestic violence issues. What's the difference? Well, first of all, anger is not necessarily the cause of domestic violence. As we said before, it was entitlement. It was wanting to control someone else. And many times, people who use violence don't even get angry when they are doing some of their cruelest behaviors towards their partners. So really, the issue is not about anger, it's about control, it's about coercion and that's what needs to be addressed. That's why anger management is not a good referral.

And traditional psychotherapy, and we're talking about when I mean traditional is – it's important intervention for many of us, which is going back to our childhood and our childhood wounds, and see how they are manifesting in our present lives and getting on the way to what we want. But the research has shown that when we do that with people who use violence as a first intervention, they often use that against their partners. They might go back to their partners and say, "Oh, my therapist said that I'm the victim. I'm the one that grew up in an abusive household. And so, I'm right to say that I'm the victim, and you treat me so badly," and so on. The truth is that people who use violence will use almost anything at their disposal against their partners, and this could be one of the things. I'm not saying that therapy doesn't have a place for these people at some point in their healing process, but I would not recommend that as a leading strategy.

I would like now to do another exercise to balance the first one. It's very similar, but this time I would like you to write down the answer to the following question: What are the hopes you have for working effectively with parents who use violence in intimate relationships? Let's take a couple of minutes to write down the answers.

When I do this exercise in a training, some of the common answers are that they hope to break the cycle of violence that we know is passed from generation to generation, that they can

contribute the healing of all family members, that they can help children see that people make mistakes and they can change, and so on. And it's very important, I think, that we find a balance between our fears and our cautions in doing this work, which as I said, are very important, and also our hopes, our aspirations. Otherwise, I think it will be very difficult to be able to engage someone genuinely, to invite them to change their behavior. These are some of the reasons why we think we need to work with parents who use violence in their intimate relationships. First of all, they often have legal and illegal contact with their children, whether we like it or not, whether we think it's fair or not. There are very few judges I know that would be willing to cut all contact with children. They often have supervision. Sometimes, they have shared custody, so we need to make sure that those relationships and those visits can be safer than they are right now.

I also think that most people, including people who use violence, want to be good parents and have an ideal of parenthood that we can use, in fact, to invite them to reflect about the impact of their behavior on their children and hopefully open the door to motivate them to seek help and start the changing process, right? Change is not, of course, something that happens overnight. It's a process that requires a lot of work. But I think what we can do and what you all can do from your positions is the invitation for people to reflect and to change. We know that a lot of people who have suffered violence – victim, survivors, however you want to call them – do want their ex-partner to have contact with their children, if it can be done in a safe way. So again, we need to find a way to improve those relationships so that the children can be safe and healthy and benefit from this.

We know from research and from a lot of practice that it is much easier to help a person who uses violence to develop empathy towards their children than towards their partner for better or for worse, right? So again, that's a point of entry. Sometimes, for them to realize the impact of the violence on their children. For us, it might seem like it's obvious, but for many people who use violence, for most I would say, and for many survivors of violence, it might not be as obvious. So again, that invitation to realize the damage and to start developing empathy toward their children can be very powerful.

Continuing with the reasons why we should work with people who use violence in intimate relationships, we know, again, from research that the majority of them grew up in abusive households. So that the violence that they use is learned behavior – that does not justify it but helps us understand it, right? And sometimes, for these folks to realize, that they have the power to break a cycle that maybe has come from generations, from centuries, is an incredible realization. A very powerful realization that they can change the history of their ancestors as they move forward. As I said before, we know that by and large, domestic violence is a choice, and it's learned behavior. And the good news is because it's learned, it can be unlearned if people choose to do that.

We also know from a lot of research – and this is your area, and I'm sure you know about this – that positive involvement by parents can be very beneficial in the life of children. The opposite is true, as we said before, right? Negative involvement can be very detrimental. So, I think part

of our jobs is to do everything so that negative involvement becomes positive involvement. And that even if violence happened before, healing can happen, and change can happen. I believe that.

And finally, I believe, and this is something that often comes up in the exercise about hope, is that if we don't do anything about working with people who use violence, we will never solve the problem. We have to find ways in which we create opportunities for change and for healing for all family members. This is one of my favorite quotes by the great philosopher, bell hooks. And if you don't know bell hooks, I recommend that you go and look her up. She's absolutely amazing. So in this quote, she asks, "How do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing while at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?" And I like this quote a lot because it really encapsulates how I believe the work with people who use violence has to be done. That's why, at the beginning of this presentation, I went from fears and cautions, because there's danger and there's risk, to hopes because we need to have that possibility. So, it's all about creating a balance between this, what we called accountability, which for me is setting limits, natural consequences for one's bad behavior, right? But also, what she calls the remaining in touch with the humanity of the person because, under all of those terrible behaviors, there is a human being, right? And that doesn't justify their behaviors, but yet, leaving open this possibility of change for me is very, very important.

So, what I would like to do now is show you two role-plays I recorded with my colleague and friend. And the first two role-plays that I'm going to show actually show what happens if we lean too strongly in one way to do the work and, basically neglect the other one. The first one, I will just paint the scenario that I play a social worker that works at Head Start, and I'm pretty new at it. But prior to that, I was trained in battering intervention and worked there for a long time. I actually was trained by a very well-known program for its hard line and accountability with men who use violence. And I want to translate my skills of making sure that I keep the person accountable into my new job. This is a father of a child in the Head Start, and because there have been some concerns about his child, I want to talk to the father and interview him. So, go to the next slide, play the role-play. And then, after it finishes, I want you to write down a couple of critiques, a couple of ideas that you might have about what I did wrong in the role-play.

[Video begins]

Juan Carlos: Mr. Smith, it's good to see you, even if it's a by a screen here. How are you?

Smith: I'm doing all right. You know, things are crazy at work, so it's hard to get away and stuff. But, you know, I'm fine.

Juan Carlos: Okay. I appreciate you making the time. My name is Juan Carlos Areán. I'm a social worker at the Head Start program where your son attends. And I just wanted to talk to you because I have some concerns about little Johnny, if you don't mind.

Smith: Yeah, I mean –

Juan Carlos: Can you tell me a little bit

Smith: I mean –

Juan Carlos: What's happening at home? I don't know. I mean, I think things are fine. I don't know why... You know, I don't know necessarily why we have to have this call. I think things are all right. Like, I don't know. My girl sometimes gets on my nerves a bit and like we get into it like everybody does. And like...

Juan Carlos: Can I interrupt you? Can I interrupt you for a second? When you say my girl, who are you talking about? My wife. My wife, Linda, John's mom. We get... Juan Carlos : Oh, let... Yeah. So, I have met Linda before. So, Linda, she... How old is Linda?

Smith: Thirty-two.

Juan Carlos: Okay, 32. So she's not a girl, right? I mean, you're calling her my girl, but she's not a girl.

Smith: No, but that's just what I say. I mean, she doesn't care. She doesn't care.

Juan Carlos: Yeah, well, you know, I understand that, but I personally feel that that's where the problem starts, you know? And I'm talking to you like man to man here. When we talk about women and we call them girls, we are infantilizing them, right? We're treating them like they are less than we are. We are men, but she's a girl, right? So that kind of thinking and that kind of how we treat women, it's where the problems start off. I don't know if you are following me here.

Smith: I mean, I don't... You're the social worker. You have the degree, but like, I don't see the big deal, and I don't really understand what this has to do with Johnny. Like, I thought we were gonna talk about him. So...

Juan Carlos: Well, it's about Johnny because he is learning from you. And from what I hear right now, it feels to me that you have a pretty low opinion of your wife, like you think that she's inferior or something like that.

Smith: I didn't have a low opinion. I love her. She does a lot for this family. All I did was say "my girl," and, all of a sudden, you know, all of a sudden, you're busting on me here.

Juan Carlos: Well, I'm telling you that I see this as being part of the problem, and this is where the problem starts.

[Video ends]

So what did you think? When I do this role-play in person, people usually start rolling their eyes and shaking their head, and some start laughing. And when I asked them what I did wrong, they usually say everything. And when I asked them to be more specific then they mentioned that,

of course, I failed to establish a relationship that I was really too hard with him, that I interrupted him, that I didn't let him tell his story fully, and that I basically, totally lost him after a minute or two. And, of course, this is an exaggeration. But let me tell you that when I trained to work with people who use violence, there were some people that were training on this idea that you had to be really, really strict and hard with folks in order to hold them "accountable." And interestingly, one of the things that I learned early on was that I challenge when people call their partners "girl." So, we had a little fun with that in this role-play. And, of course, there are all kinds of cultural and other issues around that. So yeah, of course, I lost him.

So, then what I usually do in a training is I ask people, "Well, give me some advice. How can I improve?" And people usually say, "Well, you need to be friendlier, you need to establish a connection, you need to look at him in the eyes, you need to not interrupt and let him tell his story." And I said, "Well, okay. Give me one more chance. I will do it again." And then, same thing, you folks play the next video and then write down a couple of things, critiques of what I did wrong or if you thought I did something right, that too. Let's see.

[Video begins]

Hello, Mr. Smith. How are you today?

Smith: I'm doing all right. How are you doing?

Juan Carlos: I'm doing well. Thank you. I'm a social worker at the Head Start program where your son Johnny comes to. My name is Juan Carlos Areán, and I'm here... And thank you so much for your time, by the way. I know that you're a busy man, but I'm here because I have some concerns about some things that Johnny has been doing and has been saying in the program. So, I would like just to talk a little bit to you about it.

Smith: Yeah. Juan Carlos, you know me. Don't you recognize me?

Juan Carlos: You kind of look familiar.

Smith: It must be because we're on this video. You went to – You were buds with my brother Paul in school. You used to come over.

Juan Carlos: Oh!

Smith: I've grown a lot, all right? I got little more facial hair now, but I remember you and Paul hanging out.

Juan Carlos: Oh, so you're from that Smith family. I remember...

Smith: There's a million of them, right?

Juan Carlos: Yeah. Just like little Johnny. You were the little Johnny back then. Yes, oh my gosh. Paul Smith. We used to play basketball together.

Smith: That's right. That's right. I usually got the better of you all. But, you know, we don't need to go into that.

Juan Carlos: In your dreams, man. So how is Paul doing?

Smith: He's doing well, man. He's back in town. He's got a nice little family. We get to see him, you know, about once a week. Everybody's doing well. The whole family, you know, seems to be doing all right. Doing all right.

Juan Carlos: Good. Good. Your mother okay? I mean, she was such an amazing cook. That's what I remember when I came over. Yeah.

Smith: No joke. That's why I still go over there at least once a week. For dinner, right? Leftovers.

Juan Carlos: Wow. Well, say hello to them. And let me ask you – You had a sister, Sarah, right? Like very cute.

Smith: I did. Man, she's cute. Come on now. I know everybody was always hitting on her. Yeah, now she's doing – She just got divorced, so she's back...

Juan Carlos: Oh, interesting. Oh, that's very interesting. Yeah, I got divorced recently too. So, yeah...

Smith: You know, I think I can give her your number. [Laughing]

Juan Carlos: I would love that. Listen, this whole thing about Johnny. The truth is, you know, I needed just to check in with you and make sure everything is okay. But now, you know, I know you. I know you come from a good family. There's really – I don't think there's an issue here. So, it's so wonderful to see you again.

Smith: Yeah, no. Good to see you. Yeah, he's just, you know, he's a sensitive kid. And just, you know, that's just how he is. There's nothing going on. Nothing going on. We're good.

Juan Carlos: Don't worry about it. Thank you for your time.

Smith: Yeah, I know. Good talking to you.

[Video ends]

By the time we finish this role-play in the training, of course, people are laughing and again, shaking their head. And I asked them, "Well, what went wrong here?" You told me to be more relational, to connect with him. And, of course, everybody's like, "Oh, my God! All kinds of boundary violations. You basically are best friends with the guy, you forgot to even mention what the issues were." And, of course, comically, I'm trying to get the phone number of that sister who, you know, was pretty good looking back then. So again, this is obviously an exaggeration. But these role-plays, in some way, are an illustration of the pitfalls that are out

there if we go too much on the side of being hard on the person or too much on the side of being soft on them and do what we call in the field colluding with them, which of course can be very dangerous for the survivors.

In truth, the best way to work with the person who uses violence is finding a balance between that accountability side, setting limits, naming the violence, be very objective about it without being shameful, and also being supportive for change. And depending on the person, you might have to rely more on being more strict and setting limits and naming consequences, like, "If you continue with this, you will damage your children. You might lose your right to be with your children, so we don't want that, right?" And supporting the change, telling people that they can change, and that there's help out there for them. So, a key strategy is to approach those things in balance. Also, you know very well from your work about talking about the strengths and leading with strengths. So, it can be a very different conversation if we start talking to a parent by saying, "I see that you are a great parent, and I also see that there are things that you could improve. Can I help you with that? Because I want you to be the best parent that you can be, right?" So, putting the strengths at the front, and, as I'm sure you do with other topics, then talking about some of the things that might concern you.

We have also the issue of exploring cultural models. Sometimes, we feel like, "Well, because this person is Latino or because he is African-American or because he's white..." You know, we might project all kinds of ideas about that they behave because of the culture. But the truth is that every culture has models that are positive and that reject violence and models that are negative and condone violence, basically. So, an interesting question to ask is like, "Was there anyone in your culture, from your culture, who was different that was nurturing, that was non-violent? And what did that feel like when you were growing up? It might have been your father and if not, maybe an uncle or a priest or a teacher or someone else." So, it's kind of like the counter-story from the cultural point of view.

Another strategy that you have heard about when working with survivors and victims is this idea of using universal messages. So, talking about domestic violence with everybody and not singling out people that you might be more worried about. Once you know something about someone, yes, you can be more targeted about that. But you can tell your parents that because domestic violence is so pervasive and so damaging for the children that it is important that we talk to all the parents about that and then you can start asking some specific questions about that.

Two strategies that I want to emphasize in this training are building rapport and engaging the person as a parent. And I'll do that in the next two slides. Building rapport is a strategy that you know well from your work at Head Start. Recognizing the importance of parents in the lives of their children and how they can influence children positively or negatively, right? Seeing things from the child's perspective, I'm sure that you're very good at helping parents understand where the child is coming from and that includes seeing violence and conflict in the family. This idea that I mentioned before that most people desire to be good parents and are very open to positive, loving redirection in how to become better parents. So again, that's a very strong point

of entry, even with people who use violence. And especially if they are not directly abusive with the children, as I mentioned before, to help them understand the effects of their violence on their children. And to basically give them the hope that what we know: that things can change, that resilience can be built, even if there has been violent behavior before. That can be a very hopeful message for people.

And that leads us to the last one, which is that there's a lot of shame associated with using violence, of course, and also to be a survivor of violence. So, it is important to recognize that when we're talking to people about that, that they are scared, and they will not be vulnerable with us right away. That's why we need to build rapport. That's why we need to build relationship. Just think about maybe one shameful thing that you have done in your life. Would you share that easily with someone that you don't know? Probably not. I certainly would not. I would need to have trust and relationship, and know that that person will not harshly judge me. So, it's the same with the people that we work with. That doesn't mean that we justify their behavior. It just means that we lead with what we could call compassionate accountability. And we still are very clear that their behaviors are not okay and are damaging to their children.

And last but not least, my favorite strategy to work, especially with parents. A lot of my professional work has been about this, which is engaging them from the role as a parent. And from your work, you know very well how to do that, right? So, some of the strategies might be to help them make meaning of how a child looks at what happens in the home that could be both positive – right? – loving demonstration from the parents; or negative, violence or even conflict. Expressing concern about the children's behaviors and connecting that with what's going on in the family. I'm sure that you do that already, right? But also, there's the side of pride for the children. Everybody, including most parents who use violence, are proud of their children. So, leading with – asking the question, "So what do you love about your child? What are you proud of and what would you want to see happen in her life? What are your dreams for her or for him? Or, what are your own dreams as a parent? How do you see yourself as a parent?" And again, if you lead with the strengths, with the positive, then there might be an opening where you can start to talk to them about the fact that violence and conflict can be very damaging on the children. But also that can be changed, and it can be healed.

And finally, the idea of legacy. This might work better with older parents, but I think with some young parents also the idea of, like, you know, "How do you want your children to think about you when you're gone or when you're older, when they visit you, when you're an old man, and do you want them to help you? How do you want them to think about you? Because that's what you're building right now. You're building that future of how they will see you as an old person or once you're gone." And that can be a powerful thing to reflect about.

So, I would like to end with one more role-play, so that I don't leave you with bad practice only. This last role-play is actually a demonstration of how I personally believe you can engage a parent using a balance between accountability and support for change.

[Video begins]

Mr. Smith, good afternoon. This is Juan Carlos Areán. I'm a social worker at the Head Start program where Johnny, your son, attends. How are you today?

Smith: I'm doing all right. Work's crazy right now, and it's hard to get time off to come to these sorts of meetings, but you know, it's important.

Juan Carlos: I really, really appreciate you making time for this. It's important, and I know you really care about Johnny. And the reason for this call, I wanted to meet privately with you because I have some concerns. We have some concerns here in the program about Johnny, about some things that he has been doing. Some...

Smith: Has he been biting other kids?

Juan Carlos: Some things that he has... He has. Yes, he has been getting in trouble ...

Smith: I'm gonna talk to him about that.

Juan Carlos: ... hitting, and biting other kids. And, you know, he has got some, some toilet accidents. And, you know, some of that is normal for a kid his age. But what concerns us a little bit is that he has been making some drawings that seems to me, as a social worker, that's he's feeling a lot of anxiety. And also, the drawings show ... what I would say problems in the family. So, I don't know. I'm just curious to see where you are with all of this. Is anything happening at home right now?

Smith: I mean, nothing. I mean, nothing bad. Like, my wife and I get into it sometimes. And, you know, he's a sensitive kid, and he gets upset. And I know like the other morning, you know, we got in a big fight in the morning and, you know, then we dropped him off at school right after. He was in the car before. He seemed upset, but I don't know. It didn't seem like that big a deal. I mean, he shouldn't be doing those sorts of drawings, though. You know, I got to talk to him about that.

Juan Carlos: Well, you know, I'm not talking to you so that you say something to him, necessarily. It's healthy for him to express himself with the drawings and so on. It's more – If you don't mind, could I ask you a couple of questions about when you said that your wife and you were fighting, can you tell me a little bit about what that looks like? What that looked like that day? I know which day you're talking about because Johnny was very upset that day. So, what happened?

Smith: You know, with everything that's going on, hours are cut back at work. So, money's tight. You know, I'm Italian. I come from a big Italian family. We raise our voices. We yell a lot. And just like, you know, she was sort of riding me about stuff, about work and being nervous about money coming in, and I just said, "Look, I'm doing everything I can, and stop stressing me out. Stop pressing it." And, I mean, I think I was just... I wasn't in really a good place right there and maybe I shouldn't respond to that way. But, like, I'm trying to provide for the family. Like, it's not that I'm not trying to get as many hours as I can, but things are crazy.

Juan Carlos: Yes. I know you're a great provider, a great father. I know Johnny loves you a lot. He talks a lot about you, and he really looks up to you, and I can see already. You know, when I talk about Johnny, you immediately get this smile and so I can – so tell me a little bit about how you see yourself as a father. What are you proud of?

Smith: I mean, I think I really try and spend time with him, like I know some people just buy the kids video games and sit them in front of the TV. Like we go out, we play around, we wrestle, we play catch, all that stuff. I make sure they're like... I make sure that I'm with him and, you know, getting on the floor, and building stuff with him, putting blocks together. So that, you know, he sees me around. My dad wasn't around as much as I am. And...

Juan Carlos: Yeah.

Smith: That's something that I wanted to change and that I think about a lot.

Juan Carlos: That's beautiful. Were you close to your dad?

Smith: Yeah, not as close as I wanted to be. Well, you know, I didn't get to see him that much. I loved him, but I just didn't see him that much.

Juan Carlos: Did you see ever... Did your parents fight a lot when you were little?

Smith: Yeah, my dad would sometimes really get into it with my mom. Sometimes he'd throw stuff. I mean, that scared the hell out of me as a little kid. I remember as a real little kid. And that would scare me, and I would just run to my room.

Juan Carlos: Yeah.

Smith: I think they loved each other, but like, they just, I guess they weren't communicating well. I don't know.

Juan Carlos: It's typically we throw things around. You don't mind if I ask you, was he ever physical otherwise, with your mom? Did he ever push her or hit her or anything like that?

Smith: This was when I was little. So, you know, I didn't always know what was going on and then they got divorced. My mom doesn't really talk about it. I wouldn't be surprised because, you know, when he got upset with us, sometimes, he'd get physical too. So, you know, that's...

Juan Carlos: I'm sorry. I'm sorry to hear that. I know that's really, really hard. And so, you know, you told me you were afraid of him as a kid. I'm sure that it was not a good feeling. What other feelings did you have when you saw him going after your mother? Let's just say.

Smith: I was angry. I mean, boy that made me angry, even as a little kid. It made me angry because I loved both of them. And I was really attached to my mom as well. She was around – the one that was around the most. So, it made me angry and made me scared. I didn't always want to be alone with him when I knew he might be, you know, upset about something.

Juan Carlos: Yeah. So that really created a barrier between you and your father, sounds like, huh?

Smith: Yeah. Yeah. No, it was hard. He could be hard to communicate with sometimes. And I don't want to be like with my son. Like, I don't want... I know he's just little now. But like, I know that it matters. You know, I try and give him hugs, give him kisses, and read to him and stuff, even though he can't read it himself... You know, I think that stuff matters. And he'll remember it a little bit when he gets older.

Juan Carlos: Absolutely. I mean, clearly, you're doing so many good things for your son, and that will make a difference, absolutely. And I don't know if you would mind, but, you know, I know clearly just from our conversation that you want to be the best father you could ever be. Would you mind if I just say something about what I said at the beginning, about my concerns? So, you just told me how you felt when you saw your father and your mother fighting, right? So, you can imagine that little Johnny feels the same things, right? And I know that at some point, we can go into getting defensive about it or saying or blaming someone else, but you know, you only have control over yourself, and I don't know all the situation. But I would like you to think a little bit about this. And I'm very happy to meet with you again about this, but think a little bit about this and maybe think about some of the behaviors that you could change to be the best absolute father that you can be, which is what we all want here. And I'm sure that's what your wife, Linda, wants too. And certainly, your son. And if you wish, I can also connect you with professionals. There's a program here in town that helps men, and women actually – but we're talking about you right now – men who might have some problem with anger that, you know, like you were mentioning might be sometimes scary to their kids and so on, and I would be more than happy to make a connection with. These are really good folks. And you're not alone in this, by the way. You're not alone in this.

Smith: Yeah, I'm open.

Juan Carlos: So... I mean, I don't have a lot of time, and I don't have a lot of money right now. So, if it's expensive, it's not necessarily something I could do. But I think, you know, when I had a kid, it's not like anybody handed me like an instruction book for them, or for my marriage, my wife would probably say. So, you know, I'm trying to figure it out. I'm trying to do the best I can. And I know there's stuff that I can learn. Right. Well, I honor that – how committed you are to Johnny's well-being and to be a good father, a good provider, and you are. And like everything else, we can improve. You know, my kids are now grown, and I'm still having to learn how to – how to get closer to them. So, I want to thank you for your time and your willingness to talk about this. So, I'll just leave you thinking about this a little bit. And what about if we meet next week at this time again, just for another half hour or so, and I can tell you more about the program and other resources that are out there. And they can work with you in terms of the money and the time. I'm sure they're pretty flexible.

Smith: Yeah, I can do that.

Juan Carlos Areán: Okay? Okay, Mr. Smith. Thank you so much, and its pleasure to meet you.

Smith: Same here.

Juan Carlos: Bye-bye.

[Video ends]

I hope this last demonstration gave you an idea of what we're talking about in terms of this approach. Even though, obviously, it's a little contrived to try to put a lot of content into a 10-minute demonstration. I like to finish with a couple of things. One is to mention that we should always remember about safety. Safety should be always at the forefront. We're asking you to do difficult work, but the most important thing is to use the maxim of doing no harm and planning well to make sure that we don't make things worse for the survivor. Never talk to both parents together about domestic violence, even if it comes up. When you're working with them in some way, you then can say, like, "Well, I would love to talk to you about this, but our protocol is that we do this separately. So, let's make appointments to do this at different times." And never use disclosures from the survivor or victim with the person who uses violence. Never go back and say, "Oh, well, your wife told me that you do this or that you do that," right? Because then we could be putting her, or him, at higher risk. So, let's always remember, safety first.

And I would like to end by emphasizing some of the key points we learned. Number one, parents who use violence in intimate relationships can be held accountable and be supported in their change at the same time. This type of engagement requires practice and planning. It's not an automatic kind of thing. And I would like to end again saying that safety should always be our top priority. Thank you very much.

Brandi Black: Oh, my goodness. Thank you, Juan Carlos. I told, you guys, you are in for a treat. I am always so excited to learn from Juan Carlos and his insight and what he brings into this conversation with his decades of experience. One last reminder for you guys: If you'd like more information about the resources that we've created for our Head Start communities across the country, visit us on ECLKC. Now, depending on where you live, you guys know how we do, it's ECLKC, ECLKC, or the E-C-L-K-C. It stands for Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. You can go over there and either go to the search function that you see on the screen before you, and just type the word domestic violence. And we'll take you to one of our landing pages that will lay out for you each of the resources that we've offered in support of this conversation, or you can just click the link that you see before you. We hope that's helpful.

Thank you all so much for joining us on this series, and we hope to see you for our fifth and final installment around community partnerships. Thanks again.