

Safe and Together™ Model

Evaluation Data Briefing

Introduction
Domestic violence is a challenging and prevalent issue for child welfare professionals. Collaboration with child welfare has sometimes been a challenge for domestic violence advocates. The Safe and Together™ model is a field tested promising best practice designed to improve competencies and cross system collaboration related to the intersection of domestic violence and child maltreatment. This child centered model, which is based on a set of assumptions, core principles and critical components, derives its name from the concept that children are best served when we can keep them safe and together with the non-offending parent (the domestic violence survivor). It provides a framework for partnering with domestic violence survivors and intervening with domestic violence perpetrators in order to enhance the safety and well-being of children.

The Safe and Together™ Model, which was developed by David Mandel & Associates LLC (DMA), has been implemented at the Statewide level in a number of different States including Colorado, Florida, Oregon, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Wisconsin & Ohio. Safe and Together™ model trainings have also been delivered abroad in the UK (Scotland and England) Australia, the Republic of Ireland and Singapore. The model has been supported and utilized by both child welfare agencies and domestic violence advocacy agencies.

Safe and Together™ Model Suite of Tools and Interventions training and technical assistance packages are designed to help child welfare systems become domestic violence-informed and are tailored to the needs and circumstances of individual sites including issues of sustainability and integration with local initiatives, statutes and resources. Some of our specialized packages have been focused on child welfare supervisors, legal staff, or domestic violence advocates. Other packages have focused on community collaboration. The packages vary in intensity and length with many of them being between 9 and 17 days. The model has been used to guide a network of Statewide domestic violence consultants in Connecticut as well as a trainer certification model that has been used as a cost effective way of bringing Safe and Together training into all 88 Ohio counties.

Evidence
The Safe and Together™ model continues to amass a growing body of data to support its positive impact on practice and outcomes for families.

Florida: David Mandel & Associates has been collaborating with both the Florida Coalition for Domestic Violence (FCADV) and the Florida Department of Children and Families for the past seven years. In the last few years, much of this work has focused on supporting FCADV funded co-located domestic violence advocates as part of their CPI Project. These advocates work closely with local DCF staff to provide expert
consultation and assistance on domestic violence cases. David Mandel & Associates role in supporting these collaborations involves training co-located advocates, the local DCF staff, Children’s Legal Services and others in the Safe and Together model. The training is supported with technical assistance and follow-up support and coaching for advocates and CPS staff.

Recently the CPI/Safe and Together project site in Northwest Florida reported strong results from this approach. From January 2012 through June 2012, domestic violence related removals represented 20.6% of removals in Bay and Gulf Counties. This was the first six months of the project when co-located advocates were hired and the staff was receiving Safe and Together Model training. During the next six months, from June 2012 to December 2012, the removal rate dropped to 13.6%. For the most recent six month period, January 2013 to June 2013, the removal rate dropped even more to 9.1%.

![Domestic Violence Removals as Percent of Overall Removals (Bay & Gulf Counties, FL)](image)

From July 2011 to June 2012 (which includes the benchmark period of Jan to June 2012), there were 172 verified domestic violence specific maltreatments (Family Violence Threatens Child or FVTC). 11 children in those cases had repeat maltreatments, which mean there were two separate verified reports for FVTC. These children represents five families/five reports of repeat maltreatment. From July 2012 to June 2013, there were 274 verified maltreatments of FVTC. This represents 6 children from four families/four reports of repeat maltreatments.
While this data is only correlative and data collection needs to continue, the increase in verified domestic violence maltreatments (by almost 60%) combined with a serious decrease in removals (over 50%) and a stable raw number of repeat maltreatments is exactly the kind of results we expect to come from improved child welfare practice and community collaboration in domestic violence cases where children are involved.

Local project staff believe these changes are a direct result of this project including the staffing of co-located advocates, implementation of the Safe and Together Model, and enhanced system collaboration between partners such as: FCADV, DCF, the Salvation Army Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Program, the Bay County Sheriff’s Office, and the State Attorney’s Office.

This data tracks similar data supplied by the Florida Department of Children and Families for the period when the Safe and Together model was implemented in the Jacksonville area. While not a formal CPI site, this training involved DCF staff, local domestic violence advocacy center staff, Children’s Legal Services and community partners. Over almost a three year period similar efforts in Florida DCF Circuit 4 produced an approximately 70% drop of neglect filings in domestic violence cases and an approximately 50% reduction in removals of children in domestic violence cases.

*Circuit 4 Domestic Violence Judicial Action/Out of Home Placement: October 2007-July 2010*
**Connecticut:** Since 2006 the Connecticut Department of Children and Families has used external domestic violence consultants, employed by community agencies and trained in the Safe and Together™ model, to help them identify, assess, and intervene effectively in cases involving domestic violence. Placed in every child welfare office, these consultants were highly utilized, becoming involved in over 15,000 unique cases over a five-year period.

Beyond the consultants, the Department offered specialized Safe and Together model training to supervisors. These supervisors were surveyed months after the training to determine the impact the training had on their practice. Training was provided at six area offices and the Training Academy, resulting in 88 supervisors trained. Out of those 88 supervisors, 41% responded to the survey. Over a third of those surveyed had been in the training longer than six months earlier. 66% of the respondents identified specific positive changes in their supervisory practice. 62% indicated positive change in their workers’ practice as a result of the training. 50% of the respondents indicated positive changes in outcomes for families. 69% of the respondents indicated continued positive or improved utilization of the Domestic Violence Consultants. There is also data on the model’s implication for cross system collaboration and supervisory practice.

**Colorado:** Funded by the Colorado Department of Human Services, David Mandel & Associates delivered a series of three day Safe and Together model trainings for a diverse audience that included large numbers of child welfare staff and domestic violence advocates. Of the 125 people who responded to a survey a few months after the survey, the response was consistent the Connecticut data survey data. 89% rated their experience of the training positive, very positive or excellent. 82% said that the training impacted their practice. 93% said they would recommend the training to a colleague.

**Ohio:** In Ohio, the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy (NCALP), the Healthpath Foundation of Ohio and ODJFS collaborated to conduct a third party evaluation of the Safe and Together trainings in Ohio including the certified trainer model being used to extend Safe and Together training to all 88 Ohio counties. The evaluators, Sheri Chaney Jones and Kenneth Steinman, organized the evaluation around “5 data collection activities: (1) an online pre/posttest survey of 837 CPS caseworkers and supervisors; (2) semi-structured interviews with 16 supervisors; (3) semi-structured interviews with 8 community stakeholders; (4) desk reviews of 191 CPS case files; and (5) review of written policies from 15 counties that had completed Safe and Together training.”

They collected data from 12 of the counties trained during 2013, as well as 12 Ohio counties that had participated in Safe and Together training during previous years, and 7 local CPS from AR counties that had not yet participated in the training.

The evaluation showed very positive results demonstrated important, clear and positive movement towards a more domestic violence-informed child welfare system.
Consistent with the Safe and Together model, there were changes in child welfare’s practice associated with the entire family (adult survivor, child survivor and perpetrator). The results not only demonstrate significant attitude changes (less victim blaming) towards adult domestic violence survivors, but strong changes in on-the-ground case practice. The desk reviews, interviews and surveys indicated that key child welfare practices such as screening and assessment for coercive control were improved. As a result of the training, child welfare became better at partnering with adult victims in order to assess victims’ protective capacities and efforts to keep children safe. Because the movement toward a domestic violence informed child welfare system requires enhancements in practice related to perpetrators, we were especially pleased with the changes related to case work with perpetrators. Social work staff reported that engagement and interviewing of perpetrators had become more valued. From a practice perspective, perhaps most importantly, the evaluation showed that the participants trained in Safe and Together were able to better assess and document the impact of perpetrators’ patterns of behavior on children.

Strong evidence that:
- CPS staff assign less blame to victims for staying in a violent relationship;
- CPS staff increase their concern about, and documentation of the effects of children witnessing domestic violence.

Mixed Evidence:
- CPS staff increase their understanding of coercive control;
- CPS staff enhance safety planning for victims and children;
- CPS staff increase perpetrators’ accountability.

Little evidence that:
- CPS agencies change written policies; and
- Community stakeholders become more receptive to Safe and Together policies and principles.