

**Write It Out:**  
*Using Words and Art to Strengthen and  
Heal Family Bonds*

Vermont  
Network  
Against Domestic  
& Sexual Violence

PO Box 405, Montpelier, VT 05601  
(802) 223-1302/ [www.vtnetwork.org](http://www.vtnetwork.org)

# **Write It Out:** *Using Words and Art to Strengthen and Heal Family Bonds*

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**Authors:**

Sandy Hart – Advocacy Program at Umbrella, St. Johnsbury, VT

Andrea Jones – AWARE, Hardwick, VT

Jailyn Maynard – Circle, Barre, VT

Allyson Scanlon – Clarina Howard Nichols Center – Morrisville, VT

Amy Torchia – Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Savannah Williams – Advocacy Program at Umbrella, Newport, VT

Pamela Wilson - Circle, Barre, VT

Special thanks to: Linda Douglas MLADC, Med, Trauma Specialist  
New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

*Many of these activities have been handed down through generations of Advocates without documentation and their origins are unknown to us. Our intention is to give credit where credit is due and we respectfully request any knowledge of origins be forwarded to the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence for citation purposes.*



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# Introduction

## Purpose

Domestic and sexual violence absolutely takes a toll on those who witness and experience it. Mother, child, and sibling bonds can be compromised by domestic and sexual violence in a variety of ways. A mother's parenting is often undermined by an abusive partner and her children are taught to disrespect her. Children are usually aware of physical, emotional and sexual abuse directed at their mothers, are confused about where responsibility for the violence lies and are concerned about

Experts have concluded that the most important protective resource to enable a child to cope with exposure to violence is a strong relationship with a competent, caring, positive adult, most often a parent.

(Groves & Zukerman-1997)

their own wellbeing. Children regularly experience unpredictable environments where attachment opportunities with parents, siblings, and extended family are diluted. Some children also experience emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect.

We know that kids and families heal when provided effective guidance, support, and safe environments in which to heal. We also know that repairing the damage done to the bond between children and caregivers is paramount.

Experts have concluded that the most important protective resource to enable a child to cope with exposure to violence is a strong relationship with a competent, caring, positive adult, most often a parent. (Groves & Zukerman-1997)

The intention of this manual is to provide some of that support. All activities within this manual have been designed by youth advocates specifically to create opportunities for kids and caregivers to safely spend time together expressing ideas and feelings, listening fully to one another, telling stories from their own experiences, and sharing their dreams for the future.

## Safety

The art and writing activities in *Write It Out* are meant to encourage expression between mothers and children in voluntary and safe environments. They are intended to help family members express their feelings while doing projects together or sharing individual work.

***All participants get to choose if and how they participate in activities and if and how they share their creations.***

Although these activities are not intended as a therapeutic intervention, they are inherently therapeutic in nature and could bring up strong emotions and memories for participants. Advocates should always be ready for this and can help create safety ahead of time for participants.

### Ways to Help Create Safe Spaces for Participants

- **Allow individuals to make decisions about how they participate:** whether participants do the activities alone or with other family members, which materials they choose, if and how they share their art or writing, etc.
- **Remind family members that sometimes art and writing can bring up strong emotions and memories for people.**
- **Let authors and artists know that they can stop at any time.** You can even come up with a safety word which means 'stop' (like 'end' or 'banana').
- **Ask ahead of time what helps individuals cope when they have a strong emotional reaction to something (like a story or a movie).** From whom do they seek support? What do participants do to feel better? If something is really hard, do participants have a therapist or counselor to support them?

#### **Paper Stoplight**

There is a paper stoplight in Appendix B of this manual. This tool provides a tangible way for writers and artists to indicate if they want to 'stop', are 'getting worried' or want to 'keep going' with an activity or sharing time.

Decide ahead of time what you will do if someone feels overwhelmed or like they want to stop. Include in this decision how to know if they are feeling better and/or who to connect them with for more support.

- **Maintain solid and accessible referrals for crisis and longer term mental health services.**
- **Provide art and writing materials along with *permission* for participants to get messy and experiment.**
- **Discuss safety planning:** Advocates can check in with families to decide if a 'safety plan' regarding writing and art projects is needed. If there are complicated visitation situations, for instance, families may agree to keep their art and writing at one home only and not share with the other parent.

## **Ways to Support Children's and Mothers' Emotional Safety**

In the context of storytelling or artwork, children may express strong, confusing, or conflicting emotions about their parents. For instance, children may express anger or ambivalence toward their non-offending parents or love and support toward abusive parents. Children may find expressive projects a safe time to explore feelings for their other parent or family members. Children might also describe experiences or tell stories from perspectives that are very different from their parents'. These kinds of expressions can sometimes be hard for parents to hear and digest.

### **Things to consider:**

- **Be ready to create safe sharing opportunities by referring to the *Sharing Structures* section of this manual.** This will help prepare parents to better hear and respond to difficult topics as well as give artists and writers control over if and how they share their work.
- **Support parents to hear and respect a diversity of feelings from their children.** Advocates can provide extra support for parents by intentionally setting aside additional private time with parents both before and after activities. Processing heavy or difficult conversations should happen as soon as possible after they happen. Advocates can arrange follow up phone calls if necessary.



### **Support parents by helping them:**

- Anticipate and talk through difficult topics that may arise in children's projects.
  - Practice reflective listening.
  - Pledge not to argue or defend themselves while children are sharing or when families are working together on projects.
  - Process difficult or heavy conversations with another adult.
- **Support parents in not sharing with their children potentially traumatizing or detailed information about violence.** There may be times when parents want to address difficult situations in safe ways with their children through use of these expressive projects. Advocates can help parents think about what and how much information to offer to achieve a balance that validates what happened yet doesn't offer additional detailed or traumatic information.

## **Safe Endings**

Have a simple calming closing activity to end your activity times. These are especially useful if an activity has been 'high energy' or brought up strong feelings for participants. It should be your goal to create an environment where the transition from the activity to whatever is coming next is easy for both children and mothers when you are done. It is also important that every participant feel both physically and emotionally secure at the close of the activity. See Appendix C of this manual for a list of ending activity ideas.

## **The Advocate's Role and Self Care**

Advocates can serve in many roles as they engage families in art and writing activities. Which role you choose will be determined by each particular family's structure and issues, who is participating, their ages, and your own personal boundaries.

### **Possible Roles and Responsibilities That Advocates May Assume**

- Help create safety and facilitate writing or art making activities.
- Help facilitate and support participants' sharing.

- Act as a witness.
- Help children write (they may tell you a story and you may offer to write it down).
- Allow time and space for moms to write and create.
- Help writers and artists process their experiences.
- Model for parents and children appropriate supervision and enthusiastic participation.

## **Taking Care of Yourself**

Facilitating expressive work with children and families can also bring up strong feelings and memories for advocates. It is important to take care of yourself by identifying who you can talk to at your program when things get heavy and by accessing support for yourself in your personal life.

**Before facilitating any of the activities in this manual with families, you may want to seek supervision and be clear about the following:**

- Your comfort zone with doing expressive work.
- What you anticipate might come up for you as you do some of these activities with families.
- What personal boundaries you will have for participating in and sharing projects.
- Your mandated reporting status and how that might affect your work.

*A Readiness Self-Assessment for Advocates* is included in Appendix D of this manual. The purpose of this self-assessment is to help advocates identify personal areas of strength, challenge and growth as you consider facilitating writing and art activities with families who have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence.

## **Thinking Ahead**

### **May not be Typical**

If you are just starting to incorporate expressive arts activities into your work with families, keep in mind that you may feel a little outside of your comfort zone. Adults, children and families may also be a little apprehensive about participating in something new. You, as the advocate, can assist participants in feeling at ease by

assuring that these activities are not mandatory and are designed to be enjoyable and safe for everyone. There are no grades and no wrong answers. Encourage participants to let go of feeling like they have to impress anyone or be pressured into adhering to the original activity or plan for the day. Setting up an appealing workspace and watching others work may entice reluctant participants to join in the activity.

Ask the participants what they need to be comfortable. They may have some ideas about what times during the day would be best for them.

**Here are some sample questions:**

- Are the children more energetic before or after lunch? Or after naptime?
- Are there favorite television shows that they would resent missing, especially the children?
- Would older children or teens enjoy the opportunity to write or make art with the adult while younger children nap?

When choosing possible activities, it is important to think about ages and interests of each family member as well as their current life situation.

- (If you are doing the activities in the context of a home visit) Would a visit in the late afternoon give you an opportunity to work with the children while the caregiver gets dinner ready?

**Setting the Stage**

Decide together which activity to do. You can create a “menu” of activities that may benefit all the participants. When choosing possible activities, in addition to time and materials considerations, it is important to think about ages and interests of each family member as well as their current life situation. For instance, families that are living in more crisis situations may respond best to light one-time activities that focus on the ‘here and now’ instead of more involved ‘dreaming’ or visioning activities. It is a good idea to have at least two activities of varying emotional intensity from which to choose.

As you begin, survey the mood and energy level in the room. Select an activity that will keep up with participants’ energy level and tolerance for difficult topics.

Your ability to be flexible and attuned to the participants' needs is essential for the successful development of your work together.

Ideally, writing exercises happen in a space free from other distractions. You can set an example by shutting your phone off or to vibrate, turning the television and video games off and expressing genuine delight at the opportunity to work with the participants. If participants are unfamiliar with an entirely quiet space or seem too anxious or distracted by background noise, consider bringing some instrumental or “soft” music to play.

## **Literacy Skills**

If you sense that a participant is worried about their writing, grammar, spelling or penmanship, ask how they are feeling about it. Some may not care so much about spelling and “correctness” while others will want a finished product to be perfect. Follow their lead on this and try not to impose your own standards about quality. If it makes sense, offer yourself as a scribe. Let them know that you can look up words to help with spelling or find synonyms and definitions. You can also offer take notes or transcribe as they narrate. It is a good idea to have a thesaurus and dictionary available. Participants may have an expressive vocabulary that outpaces their writing skills. Help them capture all the important details of their story/activity. Young children can illustrate their stories or help others do so.

## **Create Spaces**

The writing and art activities included in this manual are designed to be used in many settings and environments such as:

- Advocacy Program Offices
- Schools
- Shelters
- Support Groups
- Home Visits
- Indoors/Outdoors

Before you begin, try to look at the space in which the activities will take place. Pay attention to:

- Confidentiality – who else is using the space?
- Background noise or distractions
- Tables
- Sitting arrangements
- Bathroom facilities
- Sink
- Refrigeration – if needed
- Weather

## **Choice of Materials**

Show respect for the family and their efforts by offering clean, appealing art and writing tools in a variety of colors and textures. Can you integrate letter stamps, stickers or photographs into the work to make them more personalized and beautiful? Does a white pen on black paper provide an engaging alternative to writing on “regular” paper? Consider what kinds of writing implements children will find enjoyable and satisfying. A young child, for instance, may find that markers make a pleasing mark with little pressure, unlike graphite pencils or crayons which require more pressure, or that fatter markers or crayons are easier to hold than thin ones. Anxious, perfectionist or easily frustrated people may benefit from a medium that is easily erasable. When home visiting, always consider how you will be able to quickly clean up the family’s home if materials are used in ‘unintended’ manners. Consult websites like [discountschoolsupply.com](http://discountschoolsupply.com) or [nationalschoolsupply.com](http://nationalschoolsupply.com) for guidance on which materials are most affordable, washable and non-toxic. A sample material list is included in Appendix E of this manual.

## **Why Bother, Everything Gets Ruined Anyway...**

Children may be reluctant to put time and effort into long-term projects if they have seen treasured objects destroyed or left behind. If it is possible that the family may have to flee their living situation quickly again, consider making a color copy or taking a digital photograph of their work. This can be given to a friend or family member to store, or can be kept at your agency, in case the family must quickly leave again. Children or families who, in frustration or rage, have destroyed beloved objects may also benefit from having a quality image of their work stored elsewhere.

## **Consider Participant's Experience and Relationship to the Expressive Arts**

When describing and choosing projects, consider the person's past experiences and their relationship with art-making, writing and interviewing. A participant who has experienced forensic interviews related to family abuse may be appropriately suspicious of your requests to write about or draw their family. A participant whose abusive parent has required absolute adherence to proper grammar, cleanliness, or order may have difficulty relaxing into expressive arts activities. Children, parents and families also respond to messes very differently. Being messy can be a trigger (can bring up a traumatic memory) and a parent or child may be reluctant or anxious about making a mess as a result. Alternately, families may delight in finally experiencing the joys of glue sticks, finger paint or messy penmanship.

### **Things to consider:**

- Be explicitly clear about your motives and intentions surrounding each activity, so that the person does not fear that their writing will be 'used against' them or their family.
- Make sure you have enough extra smocks, play clothes or cleaning supplies available so that any new exploration can happen in a supportive, joyful manner.
- Have a plan for cleaning up messes which includes offering your help, perhaps a 'clean up game' and a predictable process.
- Assure participants that you are not judging or grading their work.
- If the person has experienced recent trauma, distress or disruptions to family life, consider choosing an activity for a slightly younger developmental stage. An activity that is less challenging may allow the participant to be more playful, show off their skills mastery and produce less anxiety than an activity they find taxing.

### **A Simple Snack**

With parent's permission and if resources allow, provide a simple snack of cheese, crackers and fresh fruit, or a treat such as cookies and juice for participants. Providing healthy choices can give them new and different food experiences. Make sure you ask the participants beforehand if they have any allergies. Providing food

might also help keep participants engaged and energized throughout the writing activity. If you are working with children and adults together, see if you can find a playful way to include food that facilitates eye contact and affectionate touch. For example, maybe mom can hold the juice box for her child to sip or pop a grape in the child's mouth while he or she is working.

## **Additional Considerations When Home Visiting**

When doing expressive arts activities in a family's home, advocates must consider how to keep children, materials and the family home safe and clean. Remember that the goal of these activities is to facilitate positive interactions, not create stress for moms or embarrassment about marker on the carpet! Try to anticipate how your supplies could be "misappropriated." Make sure that all materials are washable, non-toxic and in containers that can be snapped tightly closed. Remove any important documents or items from the area before you begin. A tin of glitter may produce lovely results; it also makes one big glittery mess if dumped out by a gleeful toddler!

If there are young children in the home, consider activities that everyone can do together safely. Inquire before your visit where the family would be most comfortable working. A colorful vinyl tablecloth can be spread over the floor or clipped to a table with large binder clips to keep rugs and surfaces clean. If children have a tendency to isolate themselves from one another, this specially designated space (or "magic carpet" or "art studio") can also have the advantage of keeping them in close, snuggly proximity to each other. Bringing a tablecloth or mat along to home visits is also beneficial if a household has multiple pets and animal hair or pests are an issue. Snapping bins are also helpful in households where fleas, bedbugs or rodents have been problematic.

## **Sharing Structures**

By doing this writing work together, kids and families can heal from trauma and the bond between parents and children can be strengthened and repaired. Providing effective guidance and support, especially for the sharing aspect of writing together, is very important. Sharing the work that is created can be as important as the creating itself. Sharing can be very powerful but it can also be very scary and traumatizing. Sharing writing with each other can be hard because it can

bring up difficult memories, create hard conversations and sometimes people may hear or learn things that they really wish they hadn't heard or learned. But most importantly, expressing thoughts, ideas and memories – even the hard ones – is critical to healing. Sharing with a trusted and loved person can be one of the most transformative aspects of this work. It is the ultimate goal that families will share their work, even if just in bits and pieces at first, with each other.

At the beginning of the project, explain to participants that sharing at the end will be a part of the process but it is important to remind both children and adults that all sharing is voluntary and confidential, and that the authors/illustrators get to be in charge of how, when and with whom sharing happens. Sometimes, participants may find that once they are finished, they do not want to share at all. In these times, it is important to support safety, reassure both the writer and the listener that that is okay and perhaps create a plan for another time, a partial share or a conversation for what else might be needed to make sharing feel safe in the future.

Before any sharing begins, the advocate should try to foster an environment of safety and respect. This can mean starting a conversation about what everyone needs in order to feel safe while sharing and also offering ideas for different sharing structures that might be helpful. Participants should agree, no matter the structure they choose, that if someone welcomes comments that they NOT be focused on grammar or form. This will prevent siblings or parents from being critical in order to deflect from emotions. The advocate should pay attention to participants' affect and be ready to intervene should someone begin to feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Advocates should keep in mind that listening to others share can also be traumatizing, stressful or upsetting to those listening. They should be watching for signs that someone is being triggered – pay attention to body language and take a break when necessary.

Sharing with a trusted and loved person can be one of the most transformative aspects of this work. It is the ultimate goal that families will share their work, even if just in bits and pieces at first, with each other.



The advocate should also model respect by listening, not interrupting, saying thank you and respecting any boundaries that are set by either the group or the person sharing. Advocates might choose to stay involved in the sharing, just be a facilitator or they can step out of the room entirely. The key to sharing is safety – what is safe for the sharer, what is safe for the listeners and what is safe for the advocate? Ideally, the parents and children doing the work should be able to decide what role they want/need the advocate to have.

### **Some Possible Structures for Sharing**

- Let the person who is sharing describe ahead of time how he/she would like the listeners to respond. For example, “After I finish, I would like a hug (or a silly dance, or a moment of silence, or a high five, or anything you want to do).”
- The listeners can make notes about any words or phrases that particularly strike or move them and then read them to the author when the sharing is finished. This allows the author to learn how her/his writing has affected others. For example, in a story about the sea, the listener might note phrases such as, “crashing waves,” “cool blueness of the water” or “feeling of immense peace and tranquility” – whatever stands out.
- Try responding “From Your Head” and “From Your Heart” after someone shares writing or artwork. “From Your Head” means sharing something the piece makes you think about, wonder about or something you have a connection to in some way. “From Your Heart” means sharing some way the piece made you feel. Maybe the author/illustrator gets to choose whether the listener responds from the Head or the Heart or both.

## *16 Trauma Informed, Evidenced Based Recommendations for Advocates Working with Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence*

Here is a quick list of trauma-informed ways to help ensure that your work with families helps to build resilience and competence in children and parents. More detailed recommendations are included in Appendix F of this manual.

1. Understand that children of all ages, from infancy through adolescence, are vulnerable to the adverse impact of IPV exposure.
2. Establish a respectful and trusting relationship with the child's mother.
3. Let mothers and children know that it is OK to talk about what has happened *if the child would like to engage in this type of discussion.*
4. Tell children that violence is not their fault; if children say that the violence is their fault or that they should have stopped it, tell them directly that they are not responsible for violence and it is not their job to intervene (or coach their mothers to do so).
5. Foster children's self esteem by showing and telling them that they are lovable, competent and important.
6. Help children know what to expect.
7. Model and encourage good friendship skills.
8. Use emotion words to help children understand how others might feel during disagreements.
9. Recognize that when children are disruptive, they are generally feeling out of control and may not have the ability to use other strategies to express themselves.
10. Incorporate the family's culture into interventions, and support mothers and children to explore the values, norms, and cultural meanings that impact their choices and give them strength.
11. Actively teach and model alternatives to violence.
12. Involve mothers in conversations with their children about the children's views of abuse.
13. Discuss child development with mothers.
14. Help mothers teach their children how to label their emotions.
15. Address mothers parenting stress.
16. Work with mothers to help them extend both their own and their child's social support network.

(Renee DeBoard-Lucas, Kate Wasserman, Betsy McAlister Groves, Megan Bair-Merritt)

## Participant Reflection Sheet

Appendix A of this manual contains a *Participant Reflection Sheet* which seeks to capture participants' experiences of the activities. It is designed for use by people of all ages and can be used after each activity. If children or adults can't or would rather not write, advocates can offer to record their responses for them.

### **This tool can be used in a variety of ways:**

- To provide feedback to activities and offer ways to improve upon them.
- As a tool for processing the content of an activity safely with individuals or with families:
  - Especially if an activity has brought about strong emotions or difficult conversations, the reflection sheet can be used to allow each person the opportunity to share or talk about his or her feelings about the activity in a facilitated way.
  - Advocates can encourage each participant to fill out a sheet (helping those who need or request it).
  - After each person has completed their sheet, the advocate can ask for participants to share only what they wish.
  - Advocates can create safety for sharing reflections by guiding listeners to *only listen, no verbal responses allowed*.
  - Advocates can indicate that it is time for the next person to share by saying 'Thank you'.

## *Write It Out* Manual Format and Key

The activities in *Write It Out* are divided into three sections. The first section includes writing prompts and journaling activities which can last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour. The second section includes writing and art activities that can be done in one sitting. The final section includes longer more extended writing and art activities that might span several sessions.

Each activity includes a brief description, materials and time needed, and instructions. In addition, there are 'extensions' to many activities which describe ways to adapt and extend the project.

Under the title of each activity, you will also find the letters C, A and/or T. These indicate who would be appropriate to participate in the activity.

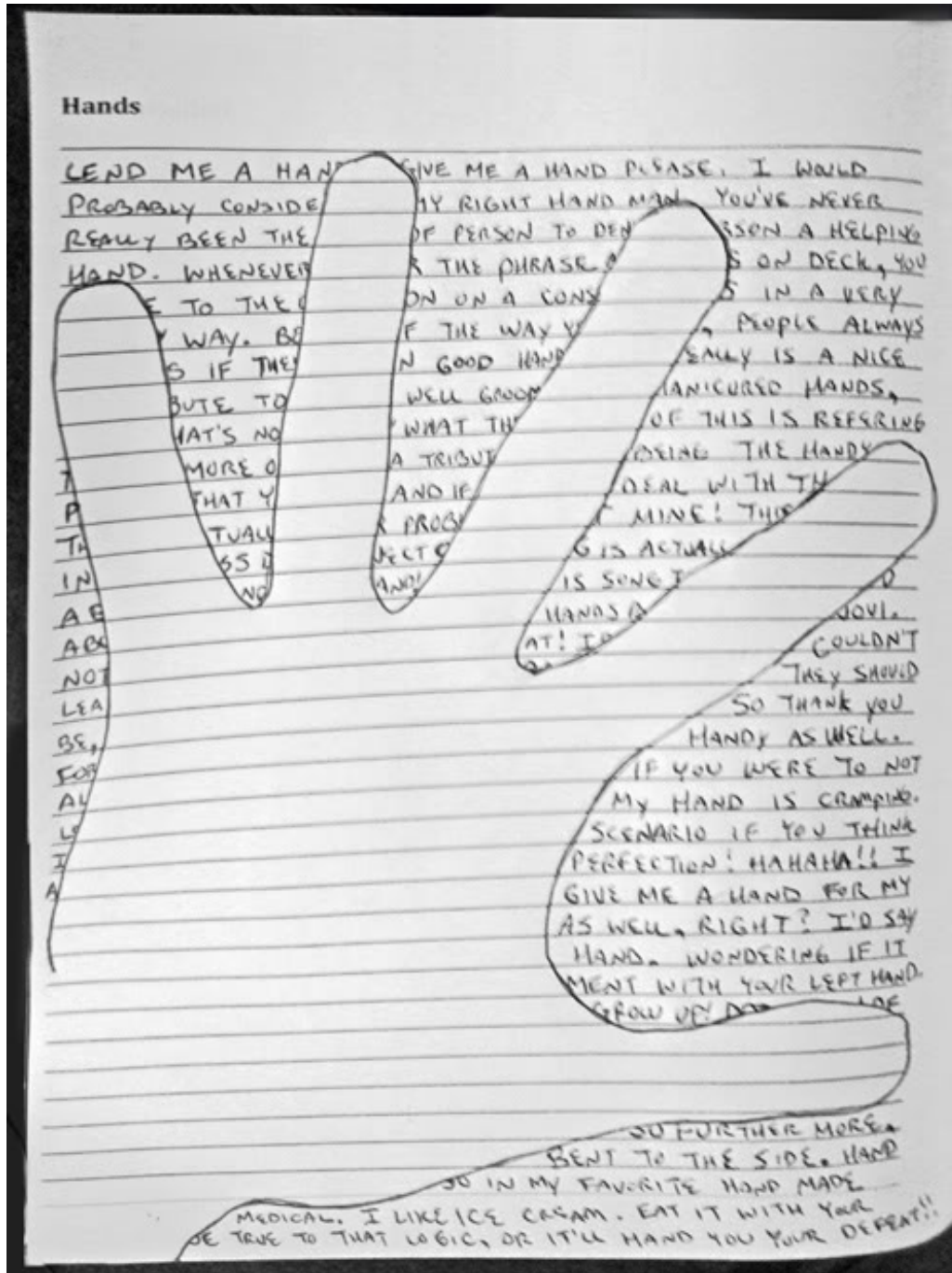
**Key:**

C = Children

A= Adults

T= Together

# Writing Activities



# Writing Prompts/ Journaling

## 5 Ways Writing Prompt

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity description:

These short writing prompts will help the writing flow begin. Choose one or many to jump start the writing process.

### Materials needed:

Something to write with, paper

### Time needed:

15 minutes – 1 hour

### Instructions:

- ∂ Read prompt to mom and/or children then give them a few minutes to respond before moving on to the next prompt.
- ∂ Use as many or as few as appropriate for the group.
- ∂ Leave time for sharing at the end if possible.

### Prompts:

- Five ways I can tell I am good at something are:
- Five ways I can tell I am comfortable:
- Five ways I can tell I regret doing something:
- Five ways I can tell I am afraid:
- Five ways I can tell I am losing control:
- Five ways I can tell I am upset:
- Five ways I can tell I am sad:
- Five ways I can tell I am mad:
- Five ways I can tell I am in love:
- Five ways I can tell I am loved:

- Five ways I can tell I need a break:
- Five ways I can tell I need to ask for help:
- Five ways I can tell I am special:
- Five ways I can tell I am beautiful:
- Five ways I can share myself with others:

## If I Ran the Family

(Who: T)

### Activity description:

Reading the book If I Ran the Family (by Lee Kaiser Johnson and Sue Kaiser Johnson) explores how each person would do things if they were the person totally in charge of the family. How would things be different? What would stay the same?

### Materials needed:

- If I Ran the Family by Lee and Sue Kaiser Johnson
- Something to write with, paper
- Art supplies for drawing instead of writing

### Time needed:

30 minutes

### Instructions:

- ∂ Grown-ups read the book If I Ran the Family with the child. Pay attention to anything that stands out that reminds each of his/her own family. What looks very different? What things look like fun? Or like something the child or grown-up would like to have in the family?
- ∂ After reading the book, grown-ups and kids can either draw or write what each would do if they were in charge? What would the family eat? Where would the family live? What would happen at bedtime? What rules would be the same and which would change? Who would be part of the family?



## Journaling

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity description:

Journal writing is an easy way to express thoughts and feelings as well as to stretch creativity.

### Materials needed:

- Something to write with, paper or notebook/journal
- Optional decorating materials: stickers, glue sticks, magazines to cut up, scissors, markers, glitter glue, personal photographs, anything else wanted to decorate journal

### Time needed:

5 minutes to 1 hour

### Instructions:

∂ Use any of the following prompts to think and write. Keep writing all together in one place or notebook. Grown-ups might consider sharing a journal with the child so both can share writing with each other. Grown-ups and kids might try writing each prompt together.

### Extensions:

- ∂ Try using a timer and seeing how much each can write within a set time (1-3 minutes).
- ∂ Try using plain paper or a spiral or composition notebook. Everyone can spend some time decorating the cover of their journals to make it personal and pretty.
- ∂ Grown-ups can make a journal for the child with each prompt already written on the top of each page.

∂ Leave a blank page next to each entry for illustrating or making collages to go with the writing.

### **Journal Prompts:**

- Write about a time you were really happy (or sad, or angry or scared or excited)
- What or who are you thankful for in your life? Why?
- If you could forget one memory that hurts or upsets you, what would it be? How would your life be different if you forgot it?
- Write about a time when you felt really proud of something you accomplished? How did others react to your accomplishment?
- Describe something you love to do more than anything else in the world. Why do you love it so much?
- Write letters to different people in your life (you don't have to send them). People who support you, who have hurt you, members of your family, yourself, yourself in the future.
- Describe an adult in your life that has made you feel special or important. What did this person do to make you feel special?
- Tell the story of your birth. (Children write what you know of the story – parents write your memory)
- What is the scariest thing that ever happened to you? How did you feel and how did you get through it?
- I remember..... (Or, I don't remember....)
- What is your most memorable dream or nightmare? How did you feel when you woke up?
- If you were describing yourself to a stranger, what would you say to them about yourself?
- What is the nicest thing you have ever done for someone else?
- Describe your favorite room in the house where you live.
- Describe your favorite room in the house where you used to live (or lived when you were a child).
- Describe a place where you feel or have felt safe. Use all of your five senses to describe it.

- Write about your all-time favorite place. (It doesn't even have to be real). Use all your five senses to describe it. (You can even draw it). Why is this place your favorite?
- Describe a time when you were very brave.
- I show others that I love them by....
- For parents: Think of yourself at the age that your child(ren) is/are now. Describe what you were like, what you did, what you thought and felt, what were your favorite things? How are you and your child(ren) similar or different?
- I stop myself from feeling good when..... because.....
- What kind of parent do you want to be?
- What makes you unique? (Different from everyone else)
- What are the things that are important to you right now?
- What brings color/joy/vibrancy to your life?
- If you had a magic wand, what would you want your life to look like?
- Describe gifts you would like to give to people. What are they? To whom do you want to give them? Why?
- What are your wishes for kids? What are your wishes for your mom or dad?

## When Sophie Gets Angry

(Who: T)

### Activity description:

Reading the book When Sophie Gets Angry. Really. Really Angry (by Molly Bang), can help families talk about how people express emotions – particularly anger. How does the grown-up express his or her anger as a parent? How does the child express his/her anger? How do other people in the family circle express anger?

### Materials needed:

- When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry by Molly Bang
- Something to write with, paper
- Art supplies for drawing instead of writing

### Time needed:

30 minutes

### Instructions:

- ∂ Grown-ups read the book When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry... with the child. Grown-ups and children can talk about the things that make each of them angry. Grown-ups and kids can ask each other what it looks like when the other person is angry. How does one feel when the other is really, really angry? Talk about how anger feels in the body and where each person feels it. Grown-ups and kids can try to remember any times when they felt really, really angry. What did each do?
- ∂ After reading the book, either draw or write what each does or how their body feels when they are angry. What helps someone deal with the anger? Are there safe ways to express anger? What are they?

## Where Would You Go?

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity Description:

This activity is a great way for children, adults and families to imagine what it would be like to go on a grand adventure real or imaginary. The best part is participants do not have to worry about their age, time, or money!

### Materials Needed:

Paper and something to write with

### Time Needed:

20 minutes to 1 hour.

### Instructions:

∂ Using the prompts below ask the participant(s) to think about what adventure they would like to have and write about it

### Prompts:

- Where would you go?
- How would you get there?
- Who would you bring with you?
- What will happen?
- How long will you be gone?
- How is the weather?
- What will you wear?
- Where or what would you eat?

### Extensions:

Write it together!

# One-Time Writing /Art Projects

## A Day in My Life

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity Description:

Children, adults, or families create timelines that illustrate 'a day in my life'.

### Materials Needed:

Pens, colored pencils, markers, colored paper, long sheets of newsprint, crayons, scissors, stickers, photos (if available), tape or glue stick

### Time Needed:

30 minutes to 1 hour

### Instructions:

- ∂ Participants write or draw a timeline of what *a day in their life* looks like or what they would LIKE it to look like.
- ∂ These can be timelines with drawings or words.
- ∂ Use the prompts below to help think about what participants might include in their timelines.

### Prompts:

- What time do you wake up?
- Do you eat breakfast?
- When do you get dress?
- What do you do in the morning?
- What time do you eat lunch?
- What do you do in the afternoon?
- Do you take a nap?

- What time do you eat dinner?
- Do you take a bath or a shower?
- What time do you go to bed?

**Extensions:**

- ∂ What about a timeline for a week?
- ∂ Write or draw about your family rituals, holidays, and celebrations along a year's timeline.
- ∂ Combine different family member's timelines into one.

## All About Me ~Collage

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity Description:

This activity gives children, adults and families the chance to reflect on who they are, what they enjoy and what they aspire to be. This activity also builds self-esteem in both children and adults by opening their eyes to who they are and what is meaningful to them personally. Sharing this kind of creation with others can instill a sense of pride and uniqueness.

### Materials needed:

A variety of different types of magazines, poster board, glue, and scissors

### Time needed:

1 hour

### Instructions:

- ∂ Spread out the magazines and catalogs in the center of the workspace.
- ∂ Set out the glue and scissors.
- ∂ Encourage everyone to look through and cut out pictures, phrases, words and symbols that represent their personal interests and strengths, along with their hopes and dreams for the future. These will be glued onto the poster board to form a collage.
- ∂ Talking to others about one's own strengths and aspirations can be an empowering experience.
- ∂ Once the collages are complete they will be proudly displayed and talked about by their creators.

### Extensions:

- ∂ Display the collages over a period of time to allow for additional thoughts and discussions (What else could be included? What is something new to add?, etc.)
- ∂ Use cardstock or construction paper for smaller collages. Encourage the use of the back of the collage as well, if needed.
- ∂ Below are additional suggested collage themes:
  - All About my Family
  - What kind of mom do you want to be?
  - What's important to you right now?



- What brings color/vibrancy to your life?
- If you had a magic wand, what would you want your life to look like?
- Gifts you would like to give to people. What gift would you like to give whom?
- What are your wishes for your kids?

## Bedtime Beads\*

(Who: T)

### Activity description:

*Bedtime Beads* are a string of beads that kids can make with the help of their parent. Parents can make them too! Once the beads are completed, they can be carried with the child to school, to visitation with the non-custodial parent, etc. and/or used as a bedtime ritual at home. For many children, the transition to bedtime is particularly difficult, and if this becomes part of the family routine, it can help ease this transition to sleep. In creating *Bedtime Beads*, artists alternate a large bead which they decorate with positive images with smaller beads which are meant for 'deep breaths'. During transitions or bedtime, children can move down the beads thinking of positive things and taking deep breaths. In addition to being a fun art project, this activity teaches relaxation skills, increases positive thoughts about self, and creates a space for parents and children to talk together about positive powerful parts of their lives.

### Materials needed:

- Large and small wooden beads
- For homemade beads: polymer clay (Sculpey/Fimo) **or** air dry clay (Model Magic) and bamboo skewers to make holes
- Paints, permanent markers or small stickers and string

### Time needed:

1 hour or less

### Instructions:

- ∂ Ask participants to choose several small beads and several large beads.
- ∂ Or, participants can make their own beads using polymer (baked) clay or air dry clay making holes with a bamboo skewer
- ∂ On the large beads, participants are asked to think of positive things in their lives then decorate their bead with markers, stickers, paint, etc.

- ∂ When deciding how to decorate, parents can help their children think about positive images (e.g. people, places, objects, animals, such as family pet, beach); inspirational words (e.g. love, hope, gratitude); and images that represent positive memories (e.g. family trip, kicking a winning goal in soccer, etc.) to include.
- ∂ Younger children may also need some assistance from their parent in making the image(s) that they select.
- ∂ After the large beads are done, artists can string their beads in a pattern alternating large beads (positive images) with small beads (breath beads) onto a string and tie knots at either end or into a necklace.

\* Activity designed by Natalie Caufield (MSW, RSW) and adapted from Liana Lowenstein's book "Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents and Families"

## Book of Dreams

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity Description:

This is a nice activity for children, adults and families to write about and maybe share their 'sleep time' dreams.

### Materials Needed:

Pens, pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, unlined paper, colored paper, stickers, or photographs (if available)

### Time Needed:

30 minutes to 1 hour

### Instructions:

∂ Allow time, space and materials for participants to write down their 'sleep time' dreams.

### Extensions:

- ∂ Participants write about dreams that they have for themselves or their family.
- ∂ Participants make a 'dream journal' to record their 'sleep time' dreams or write down their dreams for their future.

## Favorite Days

(Who: C, A, T)

### **Activity Description:**

There are some days that are more fantastic than other days. Participants can have fun writing or creating pages for their favorite days.

### **Materials Needed:**

Pens, colored pencils, markers, colored paper, crayons, scissors, stickers, pictures if available, tape or glue stick

### **Time Needed:**

30 minutes to 1 hour

### **Instructions:**

∂ Participants create artwork about their favorite day. Create a page of your favorite day. It can be from the past or an imagined day in the future.

### **Extensions:**

∂ Participants can illustrate and write a book of their favorite days.

## Found Poetry

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity description:

Finding poetry in other literature is a unique activity that can take the pressure off participants to create prose from scratch.

### Materials needed:

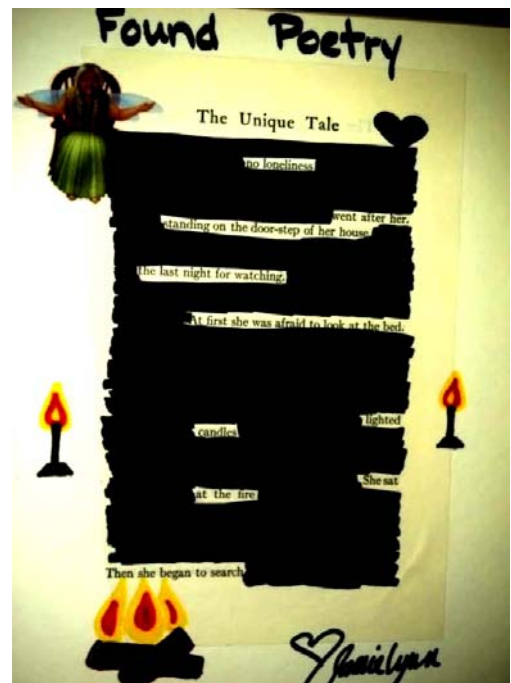
- Books that can be torn up.
- Pencils, glue, paint, embellishments (glitter, stickers, markers, etc.)

### Time needed:

30-45 minutes

### Instructions:

- ∂ Cut a whole page out of a book.
- ∂ Circle with a pencil the words / phrases you want to use to create your poem.
- ∂ Paint the rest of the page so that the only words showing are the ones you circled.
- ∂ Use the embellishments to connect the words / phrases to create your poem.



## Healing My Heart

(Who: C, A, T)

### **Activity description:**

Participants will recognize what has or could hurt them and then have the opportunity to take a look at the things that have or could heal them.

### **Materials needed:**

Card stock, scissors, markers, Band-Aids or safety pins

### **Time needed:**

30 minutes

### **Instructions:**

- ∂ Cut out a heart from the cardstock.
- ∂ On one side of the heart write or draw what has broken or could break your heart.
- ∂ Cut the heart into pieces.
- ∂ Turn the pieces over and write or draw what has healed or could heal your heart.
- ∂ Using the Band-Aids or safety pins mend it back together.

# Hidden Journaling

(Who: C, A, T)

## Activity description:

With so many negative messages we all receive every day from a variety of places, it is important for people to be able to look past them and recognize the positive messages that they are receiving. With this project participants will literally write over the negative with the positive.

## Materials needed:

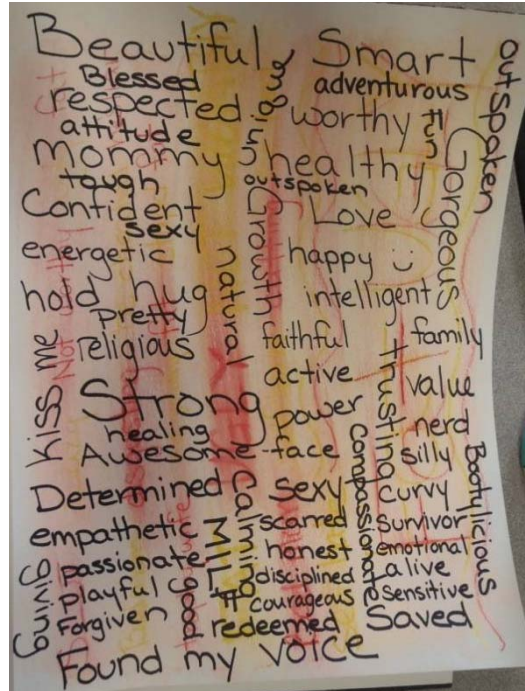
Watercolor paper, permanent markers, water color pencils, paper towels and cups of water

## Time needed:

15-30 minutes

## Instructions:

- ∂ Using the watercolor pencils draw or write the negative words, messages, or actions that have impacted your life - try to fill the page with different colors.
- ∂ Using the paper towels dipped in water - smudge the writing and drawing so that they create a blended background.
- ∂ Using the permanent markers write or draw the positive words, messages, or actions that have impacted your life. Try to cover the whole page and make sure any words in the background are covered.





## Me and My World – What I Deserve

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity description:

*Me and My World* explores the relationships and the surroundings in which one lives. In this activity, children, adults and families will think about the world that surrounds them (their world) including relationships with their family, friends, teachers, etc. and create a piece of art that illustrates this world.

### Materials needed:

- Photo of the person creating their world, glue, scissors, large pieces of paper or poster boards (cut in half), different types of magazines and old catalogs
- Crayons or markers

### Time needed:

1 hour

### Instructions:

- ∂ Glue the photo of the artist in the center of the paper.
- ∂ Ask participants to think about the world that surrounds them (their world) including relationships with their family, friends, teachers, etc.
- ∂ After identifying the positive pieces from their existing world, encourage artists to think of additional pieces to replace what they would like to change. For instance, if a person is experiencing bullying, they could take that piece away and fill it with something they deserve such as a particular friend or friends. If there is fighting at home, removing that piece and adding in a picture of a house and drawing hearts around it is a great way of expressing what they feel they deserve.
- ∂ Keeping in mind what they identified as their 'world', ask each person to cut out pictures and/or draw what they want their world to look and feel like.
- ∂ Artists can also paste or draw items that they feel they deserve and what they feel their world should be like.

**Extensions:**

- ∂ Artists can extend their current world into the future by adding in positive elements that they hope and dream for in their future. For instance, if someone wants to become a veterinarian, they could draw a college diploma and a picture of an animal as part of their “future” world.

## My Body Can...

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity description:

Recognizing how much our bodies do for us is difficult for many people. This activity helps people take a step back and look at what their body can do for them. It can help people learn to love and appreciate their bodies.

### Materials needed:

Unlined paper, pencils, colored pencils

### Time needed:

Approximately 30-45 minutes

### Instructions:

- ∂ Ask each participant to draw their body as they see it – it can be as vague or as detailed as they like.
- ∂ Ask them first: *What does your body do for you?* Then ask participants to write their answer down near the body part that corresponds to it (for example, next to head – *my brain lets me think*; or next to chest – *my heart lets me love*)



### Extensions:

- ∂ Using a large roll of newsprint, family members can take turns lying on paper and tracing each other. *This option should only be done with grown-ups and children who feel comfortable lying on the paper and being traced.*

## My Special Family

(Who: C, A, T)

### **Activity Description:**

This activity is great for children, adults and families to describe how special a family member is to them.

### **Materials Needed:**

Pens, colored pencils, markers, colored paper, crayons, scissors, stickers, pictures (if available), tape or glue stick.

### **Time Needed:**

30 minutes to 1 hour.

### **Instructions:**

∂ Participants each create a page of writing, artwork, collage, etc. for a family member who is special to them.

### **Extensions:**

- ∂ Create pages for other family members or even for the whole family.
- ∂ Make pages into a book about the members of your family.

# Superhero

(Who: C, A, T)

## Activity Description:

This is an exciting activity where children, adults and families imagine what types of superheroes they would be!

## Materials Needed:

Pens, pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, unlined paper, colored paper, stickers and/or photos (if available)

## Time needed:

30 minutes to 1 hour

## Instructions:

∂ Start by talking about or writing answers to the prompts below

## Prompts:

- What is your superhero name?
- What colors do you wear?
- What does your suit look like?
- Do you have a cape?
- What is your superhero logo?
- What are your special powers and/or gifts?
  - Can you fly?
  - Can you see in the dark?
  - Can you read minds?
  - What else?

## Extensions:

- ∂ Draw a picture of yourself as a superhero.
- ∂ Write and illustrate a story about your superhero self.

- ∂ Make a superhero for each person in your family and write stories about the family (like in *The Incredibles*).
- ∂ Write a story about a certain problem or challenge that your superhero family faces and how they get through it.

## Thankful Trees

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity description:

This project helps participants express their gratitude, love, and respect for each other. Each person makes a leaf for the others to put on their tree.

### Prep work:

Copy the tree handout and the leaves handout or have materials available for making trees and leaves.

### Materials needed:

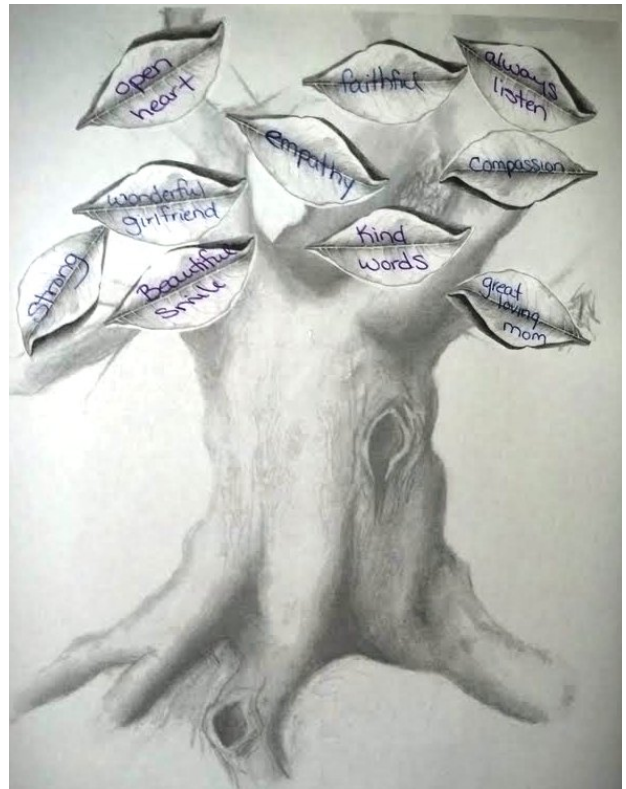
Scissors, glue sticks, markers for each participant, tree and leaf making materials: material, big paper, construction paper, felt, Velcro, etc.

### Time needed:

Approximately 30-45 minutes

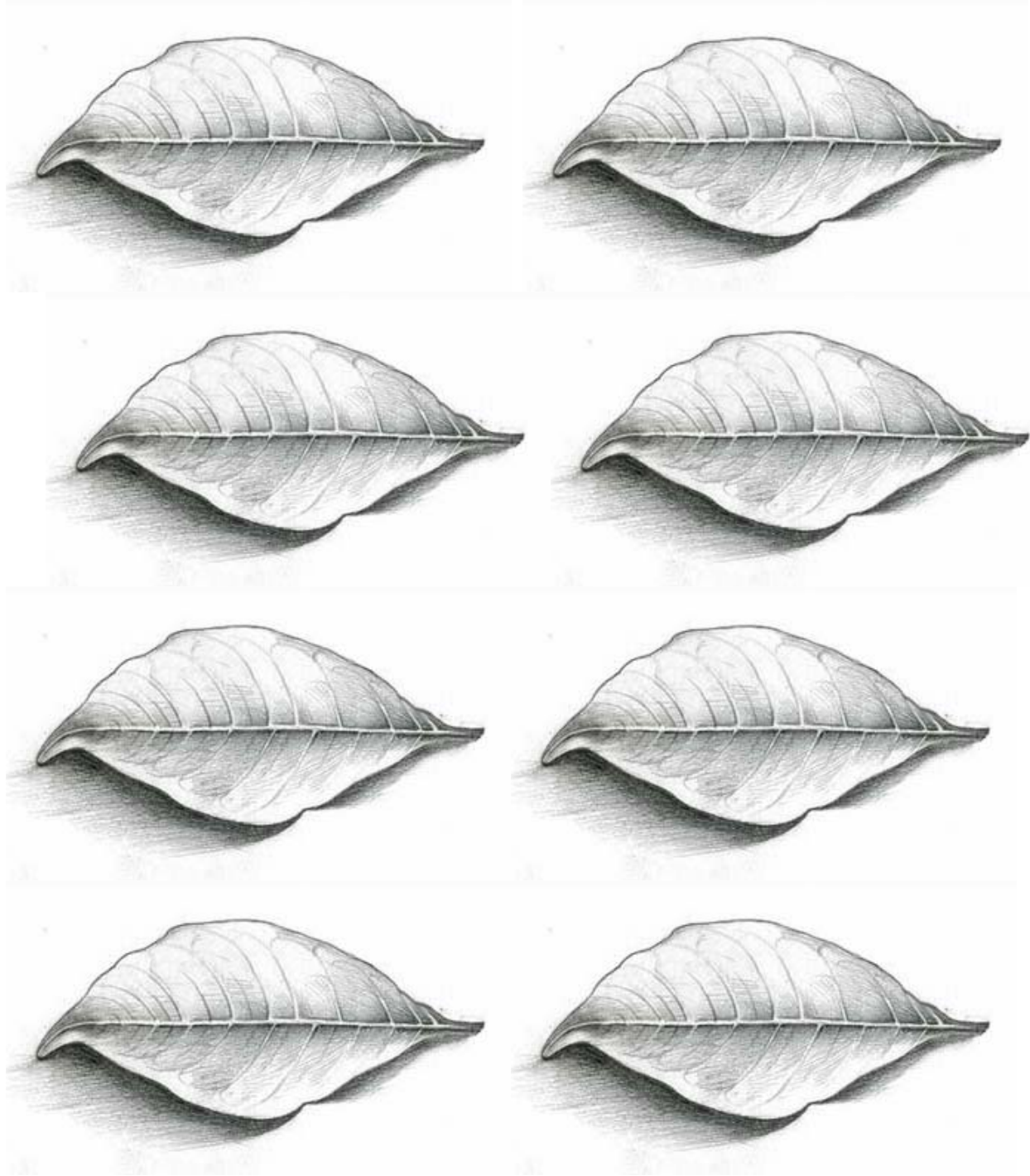
### Instructions:

- ∂ Hand out a tree to each person and leaves (enough for each person to give a leaf to each of the other participants). **OR**
- ∂ Each person makes his/her own tree and leaves out of whatever materials are available.
- ∂ Each person should write something they appreciate about each of the other people on a leaf.
- ∂ Cut out the leaves and give each person their leaf. Each person should have a leaf from each of the other participants.
- ∂ Glue them on the tree.
- ∂ Decorate or color as desired.









# Extended Writing /Art Projects

## A Story about You

**(Who: A)**

### **Activity description:**

How often do children ask to hear stories about when they were little? This activity can provide grown-ups a way to write stories down for children and create a book to read to them and even give to them as a gift later.

### **Materials needed:**

Paper, something to write with, illustration materials, family photos if wanted, card stock for making a cover, book binder

### **Time needed:**

Depending on the story and the writer, this could take 1 to several hours.

### **Instructions:**

∂ Grow-ups identify a story that they'd like to tell a child in their lives. This story should be about the child when he or she was a baby or young child. Writers can use the list below for ideas or think of a different story to tell. Writers can illustrate or add family photos to their story and then bind their story.

### ***A Story about You ideas:***

- The child's birth story
- Story of the child's name
- A certain time period in the child's life:
  - Where they lived and with whom? Pets? What they did? What happened? Funny things the child said or did?
- What the child was like as a baby, toddler, little one
- Things you do/did together (birthdays, trips, etc.)

- An event or challenge that happened in your family (maybe about domestic violence, separation, divorce, child abuse, moving, shelter, etc.).
  - What part of this would you like them to know?
  - How was it resolved, what is happening now, what you hope the future will be regarding this challenge?

## Altered Books

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity description:

Altered book artists can change any pre-existing book (hardcover books work best). This activity allows for ongoing, flowing creativity with no boundaries. Artists can alter any or all of the pages in a book by adding in or taking away any words, phrases or sentences. The book can be altered further by adding decorations and any other personal touches.

*Altered Books* is a fantastic activity for a parent to do with a quiet, or less expressive preteen or teen because it is a safe project that is fun, expressive, and without rules. In addition to providing an opportunity for families to spend time together, this project can further serve as an effective way to open the doors of communication.

### Materials needed:

- Hardcover book (look for a book that is no longer being used. Libraries or churches often have book sales of older, used books that could be purchased very inexpensively. What a great way to recycle!)
- Paints, pens, pencils, markers, glue, scrap paper, magazines, newspapers, stickers, photographs, scrap book embellishments.
- Personal items that mean something to you (drawn pictures, letters, comics, etc).
- Take a walk outside and collect items from nature.
- Anything else that is decorative (ribbon, flowers, lace, etc).

### Time needed:

Altered books can be an ongoing project, depending on the thickness of the book and the amount of time an individual chooses to put into it.

### Instructions:

- ∂ Participants each choose a hardcover book with pages that are uncoated (not glossy). Participants decide what materials they would like to use to alter their books.

- ∂ Beginning with the covers, artists redecorate their books to *make them their own*. Artists can keep the current title or make up a new one.
- ∂ Artists can add artistic touches by simply cutting out pages, blacking out or highlighting particular words, phrases or images.
- ∂ Participants can cover pages with collages, drawings or photographs. They can add decorations like stickers, ribbons, or embellishments to further alter their books.
- ∂ Pages can be altered in layers: Paint a color over one whole page one day and leave the book open to dry. When it's dry, add words, glue photographs or pictures cut out of a magazine.
- ∂ If artists want to include three-dimensional or thick objects, cut some existing pages out of the book to allow extra room within the altered book. This will ensure that the book will close properly.
- ∂ While making *Altered Books*, if a participant decides he or she doesn't like a page that she or he has created, it can simply be cut or ripped out!

**Extensions:**

- ∂ *Altered Books* typically take more than one session to complete. Schedule another time to work on them or encourage everyone to take their book home and work on them when time allows. This serves a great “boredom buster” during school vacations, down time at home, etc.
- ∂ Parents and children can each create a book, swap them, and then do a page in each other's book.

## Animal Family Story

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity description:

It can be fun for children or families to write a fictitious family story using favorite animals as characters. This activity is guided by a list of questions to help them identify their characters, environment, a family challenge and how they handled it, and dreams.

### Materials needed:

Paper, art supplies for illustrating, book binder, and list of questions.

### Time needed:

30 minutes – several hours

### Instructions:

∂ Invite child, mother, or family to write and illustrate a story about an animal family. They can start to develop their story by answering the guiding questions and then use their answers to help write the story. Writers can illustrate and bind their story.

### Extensions:

- ∂ Mother could write this book for her infant or young child using family structures and issues which are present in their family. This would be a way for a mother to tell her child about a specific time in their lives.
- ∂ Children could write this book without much in the way of guidance to see what *family challenge* they decide to write about, how they feel about it and what they would like to see happen.
- ∂ Mothers and children could write this story together and address a current or past *family challenge* about which it would be helpful to talk together.

### Story guiding questions:

- Who are the characters in the family?

- Where do they live?
- What do they do together?
- What is one challenge that they are facing?
  - How do the children feel about this?
  - How do the parents/adults feel about this?
- What do they do about the challenge?
- How are the characters feeling now?
- Describe the dreams that the children have for themselves and their lives.
- Describe the dreams that the parents/adults have for themselves and their lives.
- Describe a strong thing about this family.

## I Am an Author, I am an Illustrator

(Who: T)

### Activity description:

This 2-3 session group activity is an easy, creative way for a group to write a story together. It encourages both listening and working as a team. The end product is a recorded story that is then bound and illustrated by each participant. Everyone gets their own illustrated copy of the group story!

### Materials needed:

Tape recorder, sample of what the book will look like (if available), book binding machine and materials, art supplies for illustrating (crayons, markers, colored pencils)

### Time needed:

Two or three sessions, about 1 hour each, depending on the number of authors and their ages

### Instructions:

#### Session I: Creating the story

- ∂ Begin by talking about each person's favorite book. Talk about the joy of reading, writing and illustrating a story. Announce to everyone that they can be an author and an illustrator too!
- ∂ Tell the group that they are going to write a story as a team. Show the group the tape recorder (handheld works best) and explain that they will be passing it around and each telling a few sentences of a story into the recorder.
- ∂ **Let them know or decide together the guidelines:**
  - Team work requires patience and tolerance for other people's offerings.
  - If it makes sense, agree that no violence, weapons or bullying are allowed in the story.
- ∂ **Telling the story:**
  - Decide who will start the story with one or two sentences.



- As the recorder is passed around, each person chooses one or two sentences to add that are similar to, or make sense with the previous person's contribution.
  - This continues until everyone has had a chance to participate.
  - An adult can keep the story on track and decide when and how to begin the process of winding up the story and bringing it to its end.
- ∂ Once the story is complete, play it back in its entirety.
- ∂ As a group, decide on a title for the story.
- ∂ As a group, decide what picture will be on the front cover.

### **Extensions for telling the story:**

- ∂ Preselect or decide together a subject that is relevant to the family such as a family issue or problem, pets, or family event.
- ∂ Suggest to families that telling a story this way as a fun way to end the day. Replace reading a story at bed time with creating your own story (orally only) before bedtime. Adults will be able to guide the story to a conclusion when needed.

### **Advocate's work in between the two sessions:**

#### **Creating bound books ready for illustration:**

- ∂ On 8 ½ x 11 paper, place a thick line across the page about half way down (The top half will be for the illustrating). On the bottom of each page, type (in very large, easy-to-read font) two or three sentences of the story. The book will end up being several pages long. In order to keep the story easy to read, it is important to put only a few sentences on each page.
- ∂ Make a copy of the transcribed story for each group member.
- ∂ *Make the cover:*
- Find clip art that reflects the picture on which the group decided.
  - Type the title on the same page to make the book's cover.
  - Near the bottom type: "Author: *the name of a group member*" and "Illustrated By: *the name of a group member*."
  - On the bottom of the cover: type the month and year the book was created.
  - Laminate the front and back cover.
  - Using a book binding machine, or other method, bind front cover, typed pages and back cover together.

## **Session I: Illustrating the story**

- ∂ Pass out the story books to each participant.
- ∂ Explain that everyone will be his or her own illustrator.
- ∂ Reread the story together.
- ∂ Using a variety of art materials, instruct each participant to draw pictures on each page that relates to the text below.
- ∂ Illustrators should each work at her/his own pace.
- ∂ Reread pages and make suggestions as needed to encourage illustration and avoid overwhelming the illustrators.

### **Extensions for illustrating the story:**

- ∂ Allow individual writers to pick their 'pen names' and illustrator names.
- ∂ If there are confidentiality concerns, use initials, first names or nicknames.

# I'm Special Book

(Who: C, A, T)

## Activity Description:

This do-it-yourself book is a great way for participants to create an all-about-me book to highlight what is special about them.

## Materials needed:

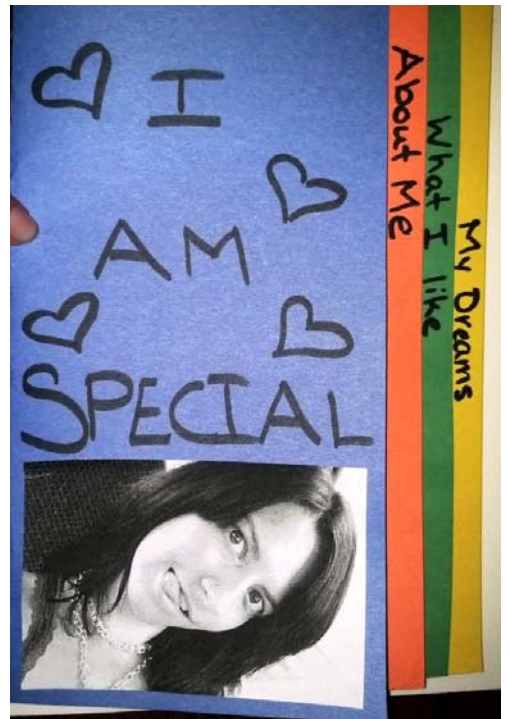
Construction paper, markers, scissors, magazines, glue, stickers, ribbon, hole-punch

## Time needed:

30 minutes to 2 hours

## Instructions:

- ∂ Fold a 9 x 12 piece of construction paper in half; cut ¼" off right side.
- ∂ Fold a 9 x 12 piece of construction paper in half; cut ½" off right side.
- ∂ Fold a 9 x 12 piece of construction paper in half; cut ¾" off right side.
- ∂ Fold a 9 x 12 piece of construction paper in half; cut 1" off right side.
- ∂ Assemble the book so that it has colorful, index-like pages.
- ∂ Punch holes and bind with ribbon.
- ∂ Decorate the pages to highlight what is special about and to you.



## Mapping the Future

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity Description:

This activity is a great way for children or families to keep in mind that struggles are temporary. The goal is to bring adults and children closer together by re-directing their thoughts towards shared hopes, dreams, and brighter days! However, kids can enjoy this activity alone as well.

### Prep work:

There is not much prep work required for this activity; children and adults need only put their thinking caps on and concentrate on positive things they would like to see unfold in their future!

### Materials Needed:

Paper (preferably a large spool that can be rolled out), art supplies for illustrating/decorating, laminating machine if available, positive thoughts, hopes, and dreams 😊

### Time Needed:

45 minutes to several hours

This activity is ideally designed to promote a lot of thinking and in-depth imagining. Depending on whether one person is working on it alone, or a family is collaborating, some may complete it within 45 minutes to an hour while others may want to work on it over the course of a few days.

### Instructions:

- 1 Prompt child, adult, or family to think about the future through which they would like to journey. Provide participant(s) with list of possible future event prompts they can use to get started. They can then use their imagination to design a map to their future! When possible, map can be laminated for lasting quality.

## **Extensions:**

- ∂ Moms and kids could complete a map together, as a way of expressing how they would like to see their shared future unfold. When done together, this activity can be an excellent bond-strengthening experience. As mom (or other adult caregiver) and child move further into the future, they can speculate on major life experiences and how they will advance through them together. (For example, when a child reaches the point on their map where they imagine they might get married.)
- ∂ A child could create a map in which he/she imagines what the future of their mother or other caregiver will look like. They can imagine exciting, positive events that they would like to see happen for their important person, and draw out these events in bright and colorful ways. When they are finished, they can even “present” their map and describe all the hopes and dreams they have imagined for this person’s future.
- ∂ In the same way, an adult caregiver could create a map for their child. He or she also could “present” the finished product to the child and explain in detail all the bright events, hopes, and dreams they would like to see unfold in the child’s future.

## **Future Prompts**

***Participants can certainly add their own events/ideas as they think of more. Keep in mind that some of these suggestions may no longer be appropriate depending upon the age of the child and/or adult if they only want to explore the future. Maps can also include happy experiences that happened in the past if they wish. Adults and kids can make their maps totally unique, choosing not to include things on this list and substituting their own ideas, or using all of the suggestions. Also, maps can include things as specific as “this fall we are going pumpkin picking together” and describing what that might look like, or as general as “attending my first prom.” Invite participants to get as creative and detailed as possible if they would like, or to be as vague as they would like if they want to keep their map more private. Remind adults and kids that their future has yet to happen, so they can be as creative and adventurous as their imaginations will let them. Stay positive!***

- Going to school for the first time
- Going to high school
- Going to college
- Milestone Birthdays
- Graduations
- Proms
- Getting a drivers' license
- Earning a trophy
- Getting a job
- Getting married
- Having children
- Exciting vacations
- Family gatherings
- Holidays
- Winning the lottery

## My Dreams, My Home

(Who: C, A, T)

### Activity description:

When children and adults are encouraged to use their imagination to think and dream about their world and what they want it to look like, their creativity shines. This activity encourages individuals and families to imagine and draw their 'dream home'. It reminds participants of the importance of dreams and how visualizing dreams creates a sense of self-determination and hope.

### Materials needed:

Large white paper, markers, colored pencils, water color paints, crayons, etc.

### Time needed:

1-2 hours

### Instructions:

- ∂ Give each artist some paper, markers, and other materials necessary to design his/her dream home.
- ∂ Encourage the artists to draw plans of a dream house that they can visit whenever they need to. Younger children can describe the floor plan while the adult draws it on the paper. Then, the child can fill in the details.
- ∂ Use the following questions to help guide the artists as they draw.

### The outside:

- What would your dream home be like?
- Where would your dream home be located?
- What does it look like on the outside?
- What color will your dream home be?
- What surrounds your dream home? Trees? Other houses? A lake or ocean?

### The inside:

- Name and describe the rooms in your home?

- Do you have your own room? What kind of furniture do you have? Decorate it!
- Are there any unusual or super-powered parts to your house? (For instance, a swing, a pool, a glass floor with fish swimming underneath, an elevator, a loft, a tree growing in the middle, secret doors or staircases, etc.)

**Other things:**

- Who will live in your dream home?
- Would you have any pets?

**Extensions:**

- ∂ Families design and draw a dream house together. This would encourage cooperation and decision making as part of the exercise.
- ∂ Family members each design rooms or elements (one room per piece of paper) that are then taped together to create a large house floor plan.
- ∂ Build a 3 dimensional house or room using cardboard. Decorate it with scraps of fabric, doll furniture or cardboard furniture.
- ∂ Write a story that goes with your dream home.



## Additional Writing Project Resources

### ***Making a Hero Book: a Guide for Facilitators***

Morgan, J. 2009. REPSSI (Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children)

Ref Type: Manual

Ref ID: 3166

Abstract: The process of making a hero book involves leading groups of children through a series of autobiographical storytelling and art exercises. By doing this, the children find solutions to the personal and social challenges they face. The process also helps to encourage the community to respond to these challenges in an active way. Basically, a Hero Book is a document, and a process, in which a child, youth, or adult is invited to be the author, illustrator, main character, and editor of a book that is designed to help them set goals, and give them power over a specific challenge or obstacle in their life.

Notes: boxes//curricula: youth exposed to domestic violence

### ***Talking To My Mum***

Humphreys, C, R K Thiara, A Skamballis, A Mullender. 2006. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Ref Type: Manual

Ref ID: 3235

Abstract: This is a picture workbook for workers, mothers and children affected by domestic abuse. The activities in this workbook were created with the help of mothers, workers and children to develop and build on the communication between them. This workbook was particularly developed for younger children (ages 5 to 8 years). Another workbook, Talking about Domestic Abuse, is available for older children, young people and their mothers. Activities are photocopiable.

Network Library Location: boxes//curricula: youth exposed to domestic violence

### ***Talking About Domestic Abuse***

Humphreys, C., R. K. Thiara, A. Skamballis, and A. Mullender. 2006. Jessica Kingsley Publisher.

Ref ID: 3228

Abstract: This is a colorful photo activity workbook to develop communication between mothers and young people. The activities have been developed with the help of battered women and their children in shelter. Advocates at the shelters, outreach services and community-based programs working with battered women and their children have also guided the thinking about activities that were helpful and about what was needed.

Network Library Location: boxes//curricula: youth exposed to domestic violence

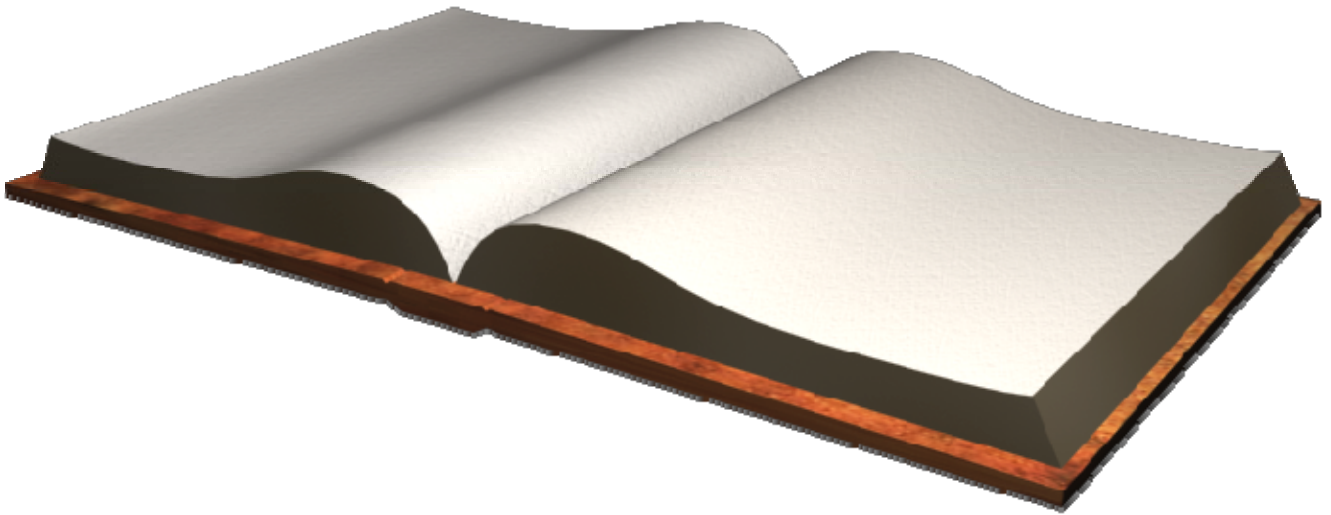
## **The Raye Foundation**

### ***The Write to Heal Workshop***

The Raye Foundation empowers survivors and co-survivors of sexual and domestic violence to discover a self-healing journey through writing. The foundation's Write to Heal project teaches journaling exercises for self-discovery in their healing evolution.

Network Library Location: boxes//curricula: D & SV

# Appendixes



Write It Out  
Participant Reflection Sheet

What we did:

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How it made me feel (pick and draw as many as you'd like):



angry



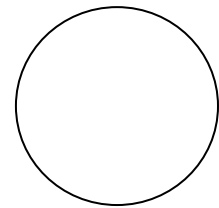
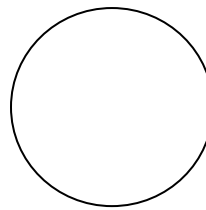
better



happy



silly



thoughtful



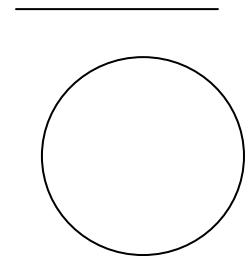
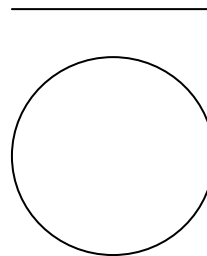
confused



listened to



worried



curious



sick



scared



bored



What I liked:

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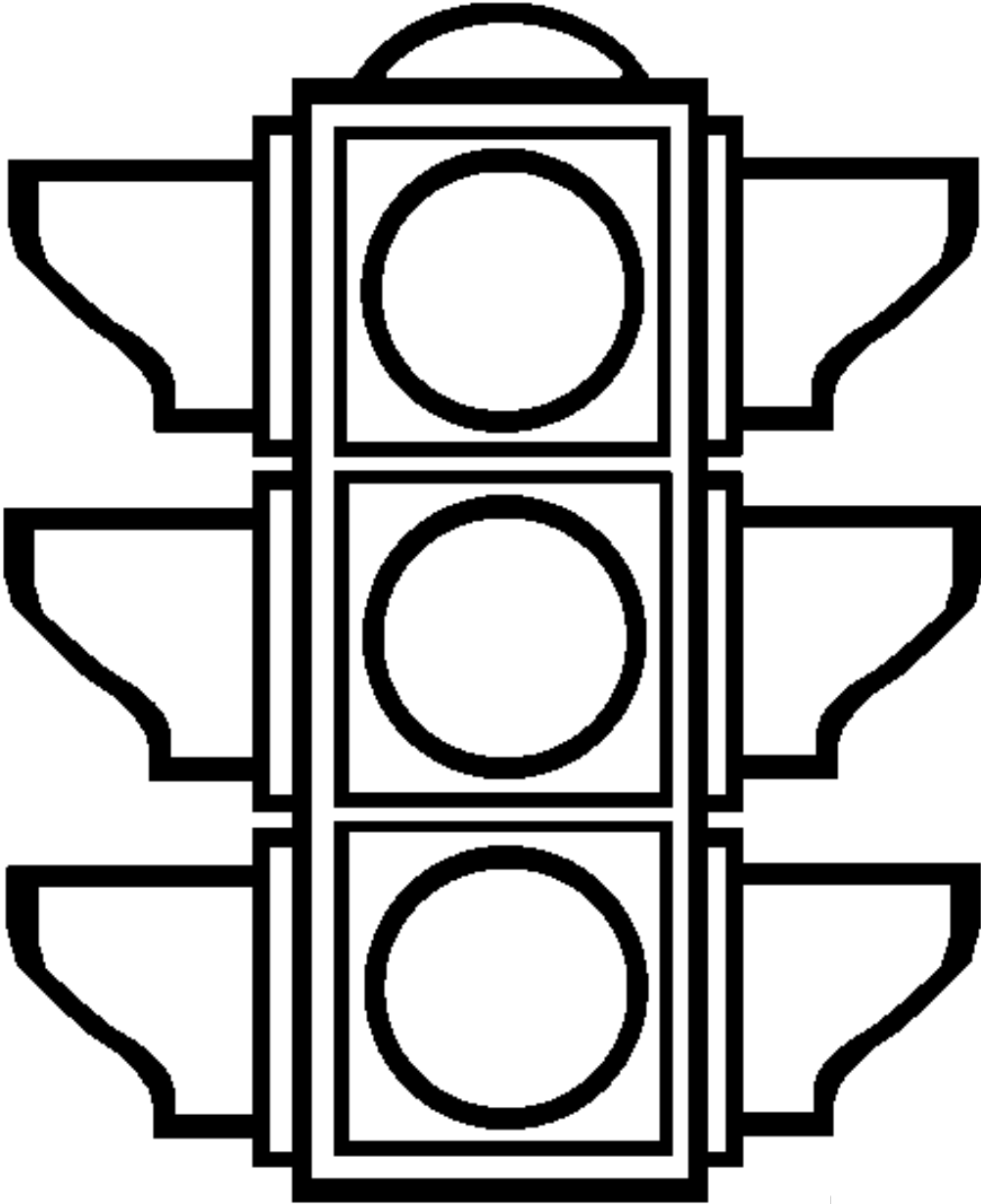
How it could be better:

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Appendix B



## Using Stoplight

- Make copies of this stoplight or laminate one for reuse.
- During an activity or sharing session, put this in the middle of the table.
- Have red, green, and yellow crayons available for participants **OR** cut red, green, and yellow clear plastic or paper circles and have them available for participants.
- Ask participants to color or place colored circles on the stop light if they want to 'stop' the activity (red), are 'getting worried' and want to pause (yellow), or 'keep going' (green) to continue with the activity or sharing.
- You can also use this at the conclusion of an activity to assess whether participants want to move on to another activity.

Adapted from: Humphreys, Catherine. *Talking to My Mum: A Picture Workbook for Workers, Mothers and Children Affected by Domestic Abuse*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2006. Print.

## Endings

**I. Breathe Together:** Doing a breathing activity even just a few times helps calm down the central nervous system. Participants can choose to close their eyes or not.

- Imagine holding a flower in one hand and a candle or bubble wand in the other. Imagine breathing in the scent of the flower with a big breath in. Then, blow out the candle or blow into the bubble wand with a big exhale. Encourage participants to really inhale and imagine the scent of the flower and to blow strong enough to make a bubble or candle completely out! (livestrong.com)
- Lay on the floor with a small stuffed animal on our bellies. Breathing in makes the bear go up the mountain and exhaling brings the bear down the mountain.

### II. Circle Endings:

- Using a ball or talking stick, pass around the object taking turns saying one or two words about what we liked about the activity and didn't like about the activity. This may identify up any remaining feelings or issues that might be addressed before ending.
- Connect by using a ball of yarn or string: As people finish sharing, they hold onto a piece of the string and throw the yarn ball to another person across the circle. As each person receives the ball, they share, hold the string and throw the ball when they are done. By the time everyone shares, each person becomes connected. To end, each person can cut a length of yarn and make a bracelet for themselves or another person in the group. Or, if you are in a group room, each person can tape their piece of yarn to the floor to create a big yarn design on the floor.

**III. Music:** Calm music affects people by slowing down brain waves, breathing, and heart rates. Calm music activates a relaxation response.

- Listen to a calming song while cleaning up and doing your ending
- Choose a calming or significant song to sing together – maybe a song that the family sings together regularly or particularly loves.

#### **IV. Tree Grounding Visualization:**

- Ask participants to lay, sit down or stand in one place with closed eyes (if comfortable) and imagine themselves each as a large tree. Ask person to breathe deeply and feel the roots deeply implanted into the earth. Have them send new roots deeply into the ground. Then direct participants to feel the strong trunk, and finally, picture the leaves stretching into the sunlight. (livestrong.com)

#### **V. Progressive Relaxations:**

##### **A. Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

([http://stress.lovetoknow.com/Top\\_Ten\\_Relaxation\\_Techniques\\_Children](http://stress.lovetoknow.com/Top_Ten_Relaxation_Techniques_Children))

Progressive muscle relaxation offers a wonderful way to relieve stress. This is accomplished by tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in your body.

- Face - Ask your child to scrunch up her nose and forehead like she smells something stinky, and then have her relax her face. Repeat three times.
- Jaws - Ask your child to clench her jaws together tightly like she's a dog hanging on to a bone, and then have her release that imaginary bone and let her jaw go completely loose. Repeat three times.
- Arms and shoulders - Ask your child to stretch her arms out in front of her, and then raise them above her head and stretch as high as she can. Have her drop her arms and let them hang loose. Repeat three times.
- Hands and arms - Ask your child to imagine squeezing an orange as hard as she can with one hand, and then dropping that orange on the floor and letting her arm and hand go limp. Repeat three times, and then switch to the other arm.
- Stomach - Have your child lie on her back and clench her stomach muscles as hard as she can for just a moment. Have her release them and relax. Repeat three times, and then have her do the same technique while standing up.
- Legs and feet - Have your child stand and press her toes against the floor as though she is digging them into sand at the beach. Have her alternately press them and spread them enough to feel it in her legs, and then have her relax. Repeat three times.



## **B. Progressive Relaxation Jingle**

(<http://kidsrelaxation.com/?cat=21>)

*Pull your hands into very tight fists  
Ahh, let them go with a swish, swish, swish  
Squeeze tight, tight, tight with all your might  
Now just relax and make them light  
Curl your toes into a ball  
Now let them go, release them all  
Squeeze tight, tight, tight with all your might  
Now just relax and make them light*

## **VI. Parting Blessing**

*From my heart to the sun  
From my heart to the earth  
From my heart to everyone  
(hold hands and squeeze)*

## **VII. Opening or Closing Poem**

### **Say:**

*Here is the earth*

*Here is the sky*

*Here are my family/friends/loved ones  
And here am I*

### **Motions:**

Bend down and pound, tap, or pat the earth

Reach up and stretch, wiggling your fingers

Reach out and hold or squeeze hands  
Hands to heart

## Readiness Self-Assessment for Advocates using Write it Out: *Using Words and Art to Strengthen and Heal Family Bonds*

The purpose of this self-assessment is to help you identify your personal areas of strength, challenge and growth as you consider facilitating the activities in this manual with families who have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence. Where you identify challenges, you may wish to seek support and professional development opportunities. You may also decide to repeat the survey every six months to allow you to compare your responses and observe changes and shifts resulting from your gained experience. You can check in on how the work is impacting you personally.

### Identifying and Managing Your Own Confidence/Skills

1. I feel the most comfortable working with children who are \_\_\_\_ years old.
2. I feel the most discomfort with children who are \_\_\_\_ years old.
3. My experience/professional training has prepared me to work with the following populations:
4. I feel relatively well equipped to provide support and advocacy for:

	Need more training					I feel well prepared				
<b>Elders/Grandparents</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Adults</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Teenagers</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Preteen/tweens</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Grade school age children</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Preschoolers</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Toddlers</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Infants/Newborns</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Parents and children together</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Siblings</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**5. I am comfortable helping children and youth talk about their feelings**

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**6. I am comfortable talking with parents about their concerns about their children**

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**7. I am comfortable talking with parent about their parenting questions and concerns**

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**8. I enjoy doing writing and art activities with children and youth**

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**9. I am comfortable doing writing and art activities with families together**

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**10. I am comfortable helping families talk about the violence that happened in their lives**

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Identifying and Managing Your Own Stuff/Triggers**

The questions below are designed to help you recognize how your experiences as a child may influence your work with children and families. Simply writing about and being aware of your childhood experiences can help you understand if a particular family situation or activity may resonate or be difficult for you.

**1. What age are your most vivid positive memories from?**

- 2. What activities do you recall as instrumental to retaining your sense of hope, joy and connection with your family and others?**
  
- 3. What other children or adults in your life were instrumental in helping you retain a belief in your own goodness and strengths?**
  
- 4. What contributed to your own healing and/or feelings of safety in the world?**
  
- 5. At what age are your most negative or difficult memories from?**
  
- 6. What activities do you recall as important to your own sense of safety or self-soothing?**
  
- 7. What did you need from other adults in your life (relatives, teachers, advocates, coaches, etc?)**
  
- 8. Are there any elements of parent/child interactions or home environments that might make you feel personally triggered or cause you to feel uncomfortable with a mother's parenting? (Ex: poor hygiene, teasing between siblings, seeing children called demeaning names, chaotic household environment, rigid schedule or rules, inflexible expectations of children, required visitation, siblings ganging up on mom, spanking, moving a lot, etc.)**

## Sample Materials List

### **Art Supplies:**

- Calligraphy pens
- Water color pencils
- German crayons – fat
- Washable markers (fat and thin)
- Colored pencils (erasable)
- Oil Pastels (Cray-pas)
- Caran D’Ache Watercolor Crayons
- Paints – tempera or washable acrylic
- Charcoal pencils/sharpeners
- Art erasers
- Stickers
- Glue Sticks
- Glitter glue
- Scrapbook Embellishments
- Scissors (child, lefty, adult)
- Large and small wooden beads
- Air dry clay (Model Magic)

- Polymer Clay (Sculpey/Fimo)
- Bamboo skewers
- String for beads (embroidery thread)
- Lanyard/Gimp materials
- Clay/play dough
- Construction paper
- Copier paper and card stock
- Egg timer

### **Other things:**

- Smocks
- Newspaper
- Hole punch
- Yarn balls
- Needles for stringing beads
- Cups for paint water
- Large roll paper (often available at newspapers)

### **Book binding machines and materials:**

- [www.mybinding.com](http://www.mybinding.com)

### **General Traveling/Home Visiting Supplies:**

- Baby Wipes
- Table cloth (plastic)
- Transportable plastic container with handle that you can carry with one hand

### **Books listed in manual: (all available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))**

- [When Sophie Gets Angry...Really Really Angry....](#) by Molly Bang
- [If I Ran The Family](#) by Lee Kaiser Johnson and Sue Kaiser Johnson
- [Talking to my Mum](#)  
by Cathy Humphreys, Ravi K. Thiara, Agnes Skamballis, Audrey Mullender
- [Talking about Domestic Abuse](#)  
by Cathy Humphreys, Ravi K. Thiara, Agnes Skamballis, Audrey Mullender

## 16 Trauma-Informed, Evidence-Based Recommendations for Advocates Working with Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence



Written By:

Renee DeBoard-Lucas, Kate Wasserman, Betsy McAlister Groves, Megan Bair-Merritt

Edited By: Lonna Davis  
Contributions By: Ruby White Starr



[www.futureswithoutviolence.org](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org)  
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## Acknowledgements

On behalf of Futures Without Violence, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the people who made this document possible. What started with a simple phone call from Ann Brickson at the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence quickly turned into a very user friendly tool for advocates who are working with mothers and children. With that, I'd like to thank Ann for asking the right questions and Dr. Megan Bair-Merritt, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Co-Director of the Academic Pediatrics Fellowship at Johns Hopkins for agreeing to lead a great team to create this document. Thanks to Renee DeBoard-Lucas and Kate Wasserman for digging into the literature and finding the evidence to develop the 16 recommendations, and to Betsy McAlister Groves for her thoughtful guidance and review. Lastly, I want to thank Marylouise Kelly and Shawndell Dawson from the Family Violence Prevention and Services Division of the Administration for Children and Families for their on-going support and leadership.

Sincerely,

Lonna Davis  
Director of Children & Youth Programs  
Futures Without Violence

## Background

This paper was developed as part of the ***Promising Futures: Best Practices for Serving Children, Youth, and Parents Experiencing Domestic Violence*** website. This website was launched in October of 2012 and was developed by Futures Without Violence, formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund. This capacity building website was designed to help domestic violence advocates enhance their programming for children and their abused parents. If advocates are just starting to think about how their program's policies could better reflect an equal commitment to domestic violence survivors and children, or they have been delivering holistic services for all family members for years, the Promising Futures website has information and tools that can help to advance program practice. Additional resources and information related to the recommendations found in this paper can also be found on the website.

[www.promisingfutureswithoutviolence.org](http://www.promisingfutureswithoutviolence.org)

The development of this paper was supported by Grant Number 90EV0401 from the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Introduction

Futures Without Violence, formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund commissioned a review of evidence-based, therapeutic intervention programs for children exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) to offer a set of concise and practical recommendations for program staff and advocates working in the field of domestic violence. The recommendations are part of an effort to foster a cycle of learning between research and practice that honors both the importance of evidence-based approaches and wisdom that emanates from implementation.

It has been well documented that exposure to IPV is a potent traumatic stressor for children, often adversely affecting their physical and emotional health. However, caring adults can help children heal and thrive. The recommendations that follow were created to help guide IPV advocates in their daily work with mothers and families. The recommendations are drawn from a review of core components of evidence-based therapeutic intervention models for children exposed to IPV including Child Parent Psychotherapy, Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and the Kid's Club. Information about these evidence based models and other research on services for children and youth can be found on the *Promising Futures: Best Practices for Serving Children, Youth, and Parents Experiencing Domestic Violence* website (<http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/>)

There are several ways these recommendations may be useful. Advocates may use them to assess areas in which they already excel, and determine the areas in which they would like to further develop. Program staff may wish to adapt the focus on a single child or family to work with a group of children. For example, recommendation #14 focuses on supporting mothers to help their child express and label emotions. Advocates working individually with children or leading support group activities also can apply this to their work with a group of children, encouraging them all to express their feelings and label their emotions as they engage in the group activity.

## Recommendations

The primary aim of the recommended approaches is to build resilience and competence in children and parents. Children are affected in many different ways by exposure to IPV, and some children are affected more than others. Effective ways to build resilience in children usually begins with focusing on their parents. Strategies such as increasing parenting effectiveness, assisting them in addressing mental health issues, and supporting parents to live in safe and supportive environments are closely connected to children's well-being. (Graham-Bermann, Gruber, Howell & Girz, 2009). Helping children to contribute to their family or community in positive ways; identifying and nurturing areas of competence, skill or talent; connecting them with adults who can mentor or support them are also important elements of building resilience.



**1) Understand that children of all ages, from infancy through adolescence, are vulnerable to the adverse impact of IPV exposure.**

Growing evidence in the fields of neuroendocrinology and developmental science has established that violence exposure can be detrimental to children of **all** ages (Garner, 2012). Although many people assume that infants and young toddlers will not remember or do not understand, and thus will not be damaged by IPV exposure, memories of this experience are imprinted on the brain and profoundly affect neurodevelopment for children of all ages. Thus, infants and very young children can be affected negatively from exposure that may be more difficult to identify.

**2) Establish a respectful and trusting relationship with the child's mother.**

Many mothers who are victims of IPV feel deeply ashamed and guilty about what has happened to their children. They expect to be judged as an inadequate parent. Efforts by mothers to protect their children may be difficult to understand or assess. Their protective actions may be invisible to observers, difficult to understand, or may look like poor parenting. In addition, many mothers may be reluctant to explain themselves to outsiders, fearing that the abuser will retaliate or that others will misunderstand their behavior and take action against them. Let mothers know that you understand her predicament and ask her what she has done to keep her children safe and to be a caring and protective parent. Take advantage of every opportunity to partner with the parent to enable her to better understand and respond to her children, and to regain a sense of competence as a parent (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2005). (<http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/what-do-kids-need/guiding-principle/making-the-case-paradigm-shift/>)

**3) Let mothers and children know that it is OK to talk about what has happened *if the child would like to engage in this type of discussion.***

In homes with IPV, many mothers avoid discussing IPV-related events and emotions around their children, in an effort to shield them from the trauma. Research suggests that many children, though not all, want to talk about their experiences with IPV. Mothers may need sensitive support in deciding how to talk to their children and guidance in reading children's cues for their readiness to talk. They may need assistance describing what they have experienced as well as having a safe place to talk (McGee, 2000). These discussions can be a powerful way to help children heal. Also, remember that a child's age and developmental stage will impact how s/he tells the story. Recognize that younger children may tell their story through play and drawings rather than through one-on-one conversation.

- 4) **Tell children that violence is not their fault; if children say that the violence is their fault or that they should have stopped it, tell them directly that they are not responsible for violence and that it is not their job to intervene (or coach their mothers to do so).**

It is developmentally appropriate for children, particularly young children, to view the world “egocentrically”, inferring that they are the direct cause of the events around them. This perspective can be particularly detrimental when children are exposed to violence in their homes, leading to significant guilt and self-blame. Specifically, children who blame themselves for violence have more problems with behavior and mood than those are told that it is not their fault (Grych et al., 2000; Grych & Fincham, 1993).

- 5) **Foster children’s self-esteem by showing and telling them that they are lovable, competent and important.**

Encourage mothers to provide physical comfort (hugging, cuddling) to children, following the child’s lead. Being responsive to children’s signs of emotional distress and providing emotional comfort is a way to practice positive parenting and also reduces child adjustment problems (Lieberman et al., 2005; Runyon, Deblinger, & Steer, 2010). Children who live with violence need frequent reminders that they are lovable, competent and important (from *The Child Witness to Violence Project* website: <http://www.childwitnessstoviolence.org/>). Help children identify activities that they enjoy and with which they feel successful. Developing self-esteem and personal skills is tied to resilience in children (Luthar et al., 2000).

- 6) **Help children know what to expect.**

Establish a structured and predictable environment for children. This can be provided by having a regular schedule (i.e. regular meal times and bedtimes), clear, consistent expectations (“it is against the rules to hit or hurt anyone”) and regular routines (bed-time routines, reading a book together, check-in time). This helps children feel secure in their environment because they have an idea of what is expected of them and what will happen next. Even small efforts to help children know what to expect is important, such as letting them know when there is a change in staff or encouraging mothers to let them know if she is going out and what time she will return. It is also helpful to work with mothers to plan a routine and structure when they transition out of the shelter (Sytsma, Kelley, Wymer, 2001). (<http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/what-do-kids-need/>)

- 7) **Model and encourage good friendship skills.**

By demonstrating appropriate and positive social interactions and providing direct instructions on how to treat their peers with respect and kindness, adults can teach children how to be better friends. Children who have good friend networks are more resilient and have higher self-esteem (Bolger, Patterson, & Kupersmidt, 1998). Similarly, children who

have been exposed to IPV have fewer behavior problems if they feel accepted by their peers (Criss et al., 2002).

**8) Use emotion words to help children understand how others might feel during disagreements.**

Children exposed to IPV often need assistance in describing and identifying both positive and negative emotional states. For example, model statements like 'It looks like Tom feels sad that you didn't share with him;' or 'We do not hit. It hurts when you hit'. This helps children develop perspective taking skills and allows children to understand that their actions can hurt others (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

**9) Recognize that when children are disruptive, they are generally feeling out of control and may not have the ability to use other strategies to express themselves.**

Children who grow up in violent homes may be hyper vigilant, anxious and unsure of whether their environment is safe. In addition, they may have difficulties controlling their behavior and emotions. When children appear "out of control," approach them using a calm and respectful tone. Avoid shaming or humiliating children with reprimands. A calm and supportive approach helps children regulate their emotions. It also helps them learn that their environment is safe and that they can trust the adults around them, establishing the foundation for teaching alternative, pro-social strategies for expressing emotions (Hodas, 2006).

**10) Incorporate the family's culture into interventions, and support mothers and children to explore the values, norms, and cultural meanings that impact their choices and give them strength.**

Culture is a central part of identity that is guided by the values and norms that drive people. Culture affects the way people form networks and the importance assigned to them. Work with the culture, not against it, to mobilize parents to access resources, strengthen mother and child bonds, and identify a broader culturally relevant network of support. Talk to children and mothers about their cultural and religious beliefs and how these may or may not affect their experience with violence and access to support and healing. Cultural factors can be strong predictors of strength and resilience between mothers and children. The religious beliefs and community perceptions of conflict that surround a child as they are growing up can shape perceptions of, and reactions to, violence (Fosco, DeBoard, & Grych, 2007). Similarly, cultural pride and traditions can serve as a tremendous source of strength and resilience within families. (<http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/program-readiness/programpractices/cultural-considerations/>)

Culturally Specific Resource Centers:

Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence (<http://www.apiidv.org/>)

Casa de Esperanza: National Latino@ Network of Healthy Families and Communities  
(<http://www.casadeesperanza.org/national-latino-network/>)

National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (<http://www.niwrc.org/>)

Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (<http://www.dvinstitute.org/>)

### **11) Actively teach and model alternatives to violence.**

Help children learn conflict resolution skills and non-violent ways of playing. If you see children arguing, help them by teaching problem solving skills and how to take someone else's point of view. Research has shown that aggressive children tend to process disagreements by quickly attributing hostile intent to others' actions and evaluating aggression in a positive way. This generates aggressive rather than peaceful solutions (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Problem solving and skills to adopt perspective are linked with better outcomes for children (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten et al., 1999) and may help them view aggression as a less attractive way to handle conflict.

### **12) Involve mothers in conversations with their children about the children's views of the abuse.**

Children, particularly if they are young, often have mixed feelings about the abusive parent. They may fear him, but also love him and miss him. These contradictory feelings are hard for children and for their mothers. Supporting the mother to understand the perspective of the child is important, while also helping her to name the abuser's reactions as wrong and hurtful. Discussing children's perceptions of the acceptability of violence is also important because children who think violence is okay are more likely to be aggressive themselves (Huesman & Guerra, 1997). These discussions, as well as other discussions about what has happened in the child's life, are most effective when facilitated with their mothers. Interventions such as The Kids Club Program show that when mothers participate with their children in therapy, children have better outcomes. Specifically, children are able to identify feelings and thoughts about witnessing violence, change thoughts about social and gender roles, and develop coping skills (Graham-Bermann & Hughes, 2003; Graham-Bermann, Lynch, Banyard, DeVoe, & Halabu, 2007)

### **13) Discuss child development with mothers.**

Mothers in homes with IPV often report significant rates of parenting stress, and frequently describe inappropriate expectations for their young children's behavior. One good resource for basic information about child development is *Bright Futures* (<http://www.brightfutures.org/>), which has information on development within the context of the child's age and exposure history. For example, a two year old child that says 'no' is not trying to be disrespectful or hurt the mother emotionally; he is learning autonomy and control in a developmentally appropriate way. Child-Parent Psychotherapy is an evidence based treatment that helps parents understand children's behavior/changes at various stages of development. Sharing information between

practitioners and parents has been shown to improve positive parenting and reduce child adjustment problems (Lieberman et al., 2005; Runyon, Deblinger, & Steer, 2010).

**14) Help mothers teach their children how to label their emotions.**

Discuss the use of emotion words with mothers to describe their child's sadness, anger, happiness and worry. For example, a mother might say 'Johnny, you're balling up your fists. I wonder if you're angry;' or 'Crystal, you're looking down at the ground and are talking so softly. Are you feeling worried?' When mothers help their children recognize and cope with strong emotions, children gain a sense of mastery over them. This helps the child develop the skills to manage their behavior and mood. (Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2006).

**15) Address mothers parenting stress.**

Remind moms that they are the most important person in their child's life and that taking care of themselves is good for them and for their child. Support moms to manage their stress and their child's behavior. When mothers learn effective parenting strategies, are able to discuss parenting issues, and are empowered to talk to their children about IPV, their children have fewer behavior problems (Graham-Bermann et al., 2007). Child Parent Psychotherapy provides direct support to parents focusing on the strong links between maternal health and well-being and child well being. Project Support is another intervention that has shown that enhancing parenting skills helps reduce child behavior problems (Jouriles et al., 2001). (<http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/what-do-kids-need/supporting-parenting/>)

**16) Work with mothers to help them extend both their own and their child's social support network.**

Discuss social supports with mothers including friends, family and community members, and talk to mothers about mentoring programs (such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters), community centers and aftercare programs, camps, sports teams and other extra curricula activities. Having access to supportive and pro-social outlets contributes to resilience in children and parents and helps them develop supportive relationships in the community (DuBois, Felner, Brand, Adan, & Evan, 1992; DuBois, Felner, Meares, & Krier, 1994; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

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