



- Early Childhood Centers as creative and safe spaces!

Parenting and domestic violence

Learning Outcomes

To understand that development is a dynamic process shaped by historical and current interactions between child, family and environment.

Definition of domestic violence

England

The Government's definition is underpinned by the United Nations (UN) Declaration (1993) on the elimination of violence against women to guide our work across all government departments:

'Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

This is the first time that government has agreed to work to a single definition and we will specifically include girls in our approach.... However, we recognise that men and boys can be victims of violence and that it can affect whole families, including children. Our work will include them.'

(Home Office 2010, p5)

Domestic violence can include

- Threats of physical violence even though no actual physical force occurs.
- Physical violence (such as shoving, hitting, kicking, head-butting, burning, choking).
- Being forced to have sex.
- Mental/emotional/psychological cruelty such as name calling, isolation from family and friends, deprivation of family income, being prevented from leaving the home, damage to pets or other personal items.

Domestic violence can include

- Using and abusing children in various ways to frighten or force compliance.
- Forced marriage.
- Female genital mutilation and so-called honour-based violence.
- Elder abuse when committed within the family or by an intimate partner.

Scale of the problem

- 26% of children and young people experience physical violence against them, almost a decade later 25.3% of 18-24 year olds reported severe maltreatment with approximately 10% to 50% of women have been physically abused by an intimate male partner.
- 11.5% experiencing severe physical violence during childhood (NSPCC 2011).
- UK statistics indicate that one in four women is likely to suffer domestic violence (Wales).

Underlying determinants

Possibly

Parental substance misuse

Neglect in childhood

Mental illness

Social capital and support

Domestic violence in childhood

Poverty

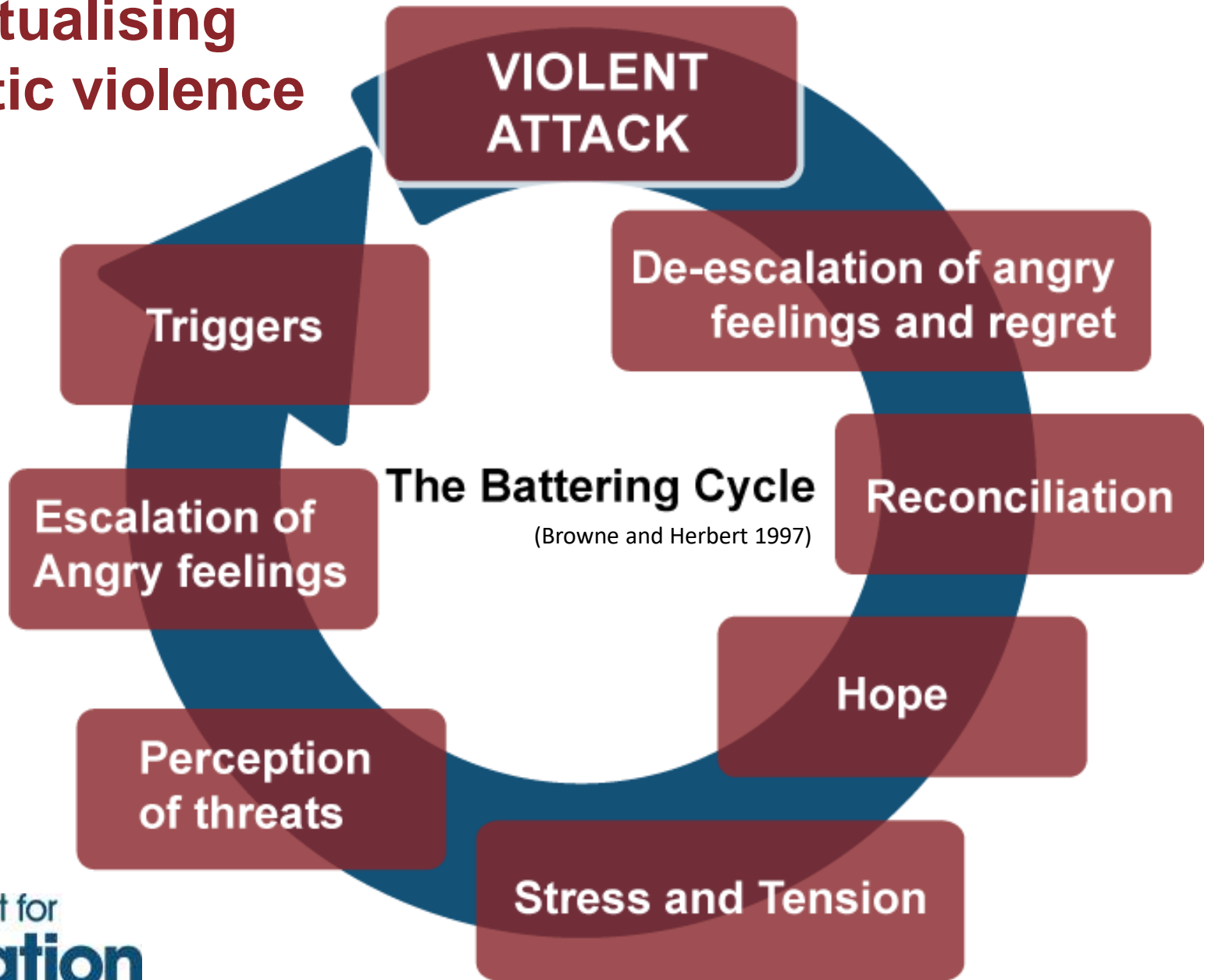
Divorce does not necessarily protect children

Survey of 130 abused mothers (148 children)

Of those families where the child was ordered by courts to have contact with an estranged parent: 36% neglected during contact; 62% emotionally harmed.

(Radford and Hester 2006)

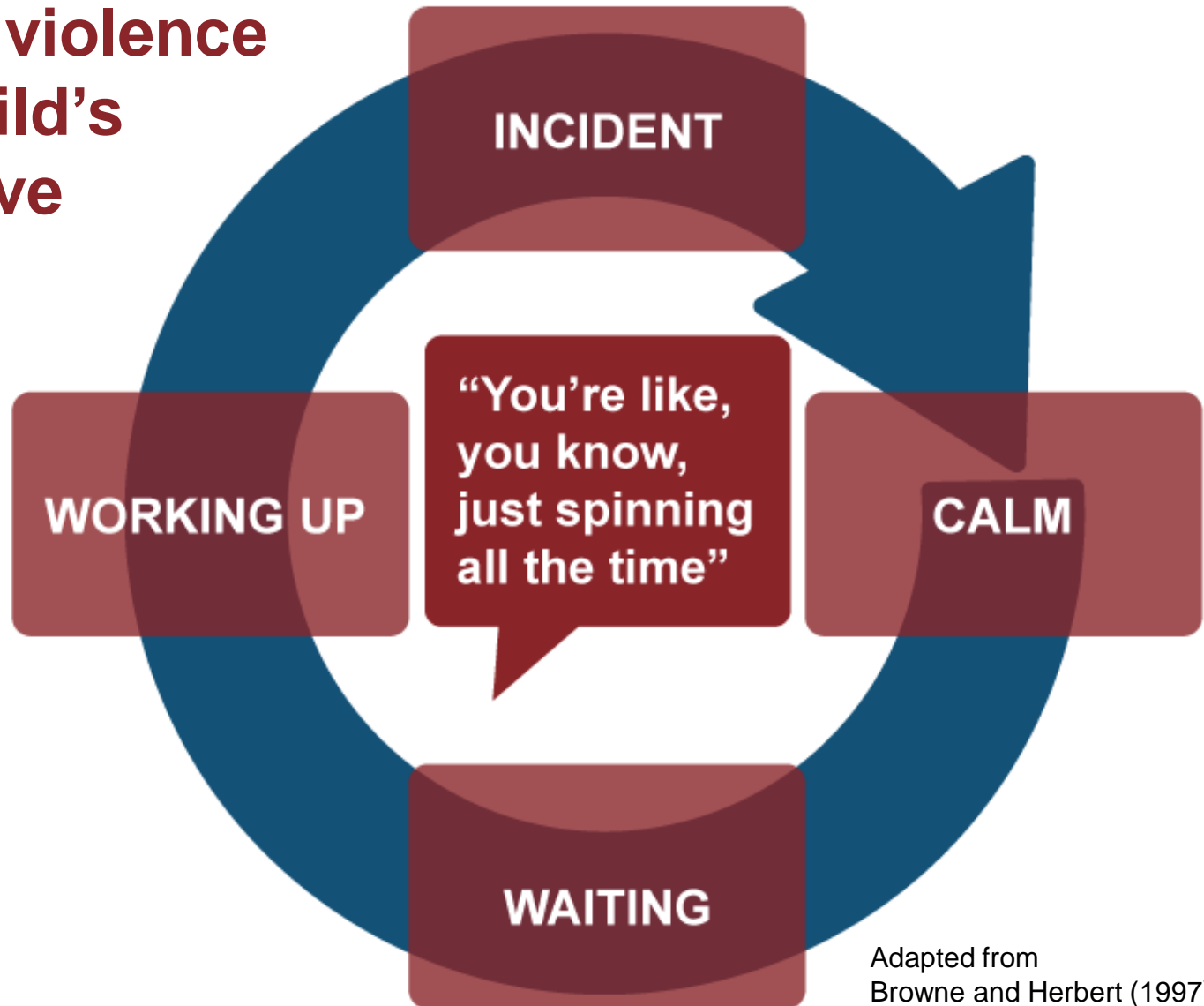
Contextualising domestic violence



Domestic violence can have significant impact of parenting capacity:

- Lack of emotional warmth.
- Parents can be emotionally unavailable.
- Inconsistent and unpredictable care environment.
- Pre-occupation with the intimate relationship.
- Increased levels of irritability, hostility, rejection and aggression.
- Increased risk of parental mental health and parental substance misuse.
- Physical exhaustion and low self esteem often overwhelms the mother's capacity to parent effectively.
- Increased likelihood of anxiety and social isolation.

Contextualising domestic violence from a child's perspective



Children who live in households where their mothers are abused by partners or ex-partners are significantly affected and experience considerable distress

- Clear and irrefutable link between presence of domestic violence and child maltreatment.
- There is an impact on parenting abilities.
- Jeopardises a child's developmental progress and personal abilities, contributing to cycles of adversity.
- Disrupts broader family functioning and the home environment.

Children may:

- be in same room when the incident is taking place;
- hear events as they unfold from another room;
- witness physical damage to an adult or property following an incident;
- be hurt accidentally while trying to intervene;
- be used as a pawn to bargain or threaten with, particularly post separation;
- become the direct subject of abuse, which may be physical, sexual, or emotional or a combination of these.

And the effects on children:

- disruptive behaviour; difficulties at school
- sleep disturbances
- bed wetting and nightmares
- guilt, confusion, sadness, self blame
- depression, resentment, anger
- physical injury
- sense of loss
- children as carers
- post-traumatic stress disorder.

Impact of domestic violence on children

Early brain development

Domestic violence poses a serious risk to the unborn foetus as violence may increase the risk of premature birth, low birth weight, foetal injury and in the worst case death.

Possible impairment of brain development because a child responds to a violent environment by becoming hypersensitive to external stimuli, hyper vigilant and being in a persistent stress-response state.

Attachment processes

A child's healthy attachment development is dependent on his or her needs being met consistently by a sensitive and consistent caregiver. The existence of violence, aggression and hostility within the family situation can cause serious disruption to this process.

Physical effects

- Increased risk of physical injury, physical neglect, failure to thrive and ill health due to increased levels of stress and anxiety.
- Impact on brain development.
- Development of fine and gross motor skills may be impeded due to parents' reduced levels of providing safety and stimulation.
- Developmental delay.

Behavioural development

- Increased risk of behavioural difficulties including lower levels of tolerance and increased aggression.
- Increased difficulties building and sustaining relationships and poor peer relationships.
- Compulsive care giving including for the parent victim and other siblings.
- Withdrawal or engagement in attention seeking behaviour.
- Increased risk taking behaviours, including substance, misuse during adolescence.