

# Domestic Abuse Training for CalWORKs Staff



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# Preface

## Background

National welfare reform legislation, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (Public Law 104-193), was signed into law on August 22, 1996. PRWORA established the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program that changed welfare from entitlement to a time-limited program. TANF is a block grant program with a focus on helping recipients move from welfare to work.

The federal legislation included a Family Violence Option (FVO), which gave states a vehicle for addressing domestic abuse as a barrier to the self-sufficiency of TANF clients. The FVO allows states to identify victims of domestic abuse, waive program requirements and develop service strategies to assist victims and help them move toward self-sufficiency.

California's welfare reform legislation, Assembly Bill 1542 (Chapter 270, Statutes of 1997), included family violence option. The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program required the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to convene a Domestic Violence Task Force that included representatives of the state Department of Health Services, the state Department of Mental Health, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning, the County Welfare Directors Association of California, the California State Association of Counties, statewide domestic violence prevention groups, local domestic violence prevention advocates, district attorney domestic violence units, county departments of social services and service providers. The CalWORKs program went into effect in January, 1998.

CalWORKs required that CDSS, in consultation with the Domestic Violence Task Force, develop protocols to identify and assist CalWORKs applicants and recipients who are past or present victims of domestic abuse to obtain employment and become self-sufficient. Regulations reflecting the work of CDSS and the task force were issued February 17, 2000, in All County Information Notice I-11-00.

CDSS and the task force also identified training standards for staff serving CalWORKs clients. The following curriculum reflects those standards.

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## **About the curriculum**

The curriculum brings together current knowledge regarding domestic abuse and case management with public assistance clients. It builds on participants' existing knowledge in these areas, providing opportunities to process and integrate new information and practice new skills.

Content is based on training conducted by The Center for Human Services of University Extension at UC Davis. The Center's experience in domestic abuse instruction includes training county CalWORKs and child welfare staff.

The curriculum is intended for use by county agency trainers, local domestic abuse service providers or other trainers selected by county social service agencies.

The curriculum is organized in sections. The introduction offers legislative background and an overview of CalWORKs protocols for domestic abuse. The next two sections cover the dynamics of abuse and implications of CalWORKs for victims of abuse, including the ways domestic abuse interferes with employment. Next come two sections that focus on case management, "Effective intervention in a CalWORKs setting" and "Risk assessment, safety planning and legal issues." Because the effectiveness of interventions depends in part on workers feeling safe in dealing with domestic abuse, a separate section is devoted to this topic. This is followed by sections addressing the

special concerns and needs of specific populations: children, disabled clients, adolescents and immigrants. The final section focuses on community resources and outlines a process for assembling and conducting a panel discussion with representatives from local service providers.

CalWORKs provides the mandate and funding to deal with problems in the client population long recognized by social service professionals as barriers to self-sufficiency and healthy families. The opportunity to address client domestic abuse, substance abuse and mental health issues has been welcomed by many in the field. This curriculum is intended as one of many tools county social service agencies can use in the effort to meet client needs and foster self-sufficiency. The curriculum will be revised after it has been in use for one year. In fiscal year 2002-2003 the input received from local trainers will be incorporated into the curriculum to ensure that this tool fully meets the needs of the field.

# Preparing for training

This training is designed to be conducted in 12 hours, including two hours for a panel representing local community resources.

The curriculum is intended for experienced trainers. Handouts and resources guide trainers through the content. Individuals who customarily train CalWORKs topics may want to bring in a co-trainer or agency resource (a CalWORKs domestic abuse specialist or social worker) while training on the subjects of dynamics, risk assessment and children. While the curriculum is self-explanatory, participant questions may extend into areas beyond the content of the curriculum and expertise of the trainer.

Activities such as introductions, ice breakers and energizers are at the option of the trainer. At county option a survivor's perspective can also be valuable.

The curriculum includes originals for pre- and post-tests, handouts and overheads. Use of a video clip in Section 7 is an option. Trainers will need easel stands and paper in the training room.

Information and handouts about local policies and procedures should be inserted as indicated in the following sections

- 1F County waiver criteria
- 4C Coordination with family support
- 4E Individual case assessment and monitoring
- 5C Safety planning
- 6B Safety planning for workers
- 9 Community resources

The language of the curriculum aims to be inclusive. Domestic abuse affects men and women, although victims remain predominately female. The terms "perpetrator," "abuser" and "batterer" are used although the latter generally refers to acts involving physical violence. Reflecting the work of the task force, the term "domestic abuse" is used in most instances. Terms such as "family violence" and "domestic violence" appear mainly in material cited from other sources.

The experience of trainers who have worked with CalWORKs staff on this topic points to one additional factor trainers should prepare for. Training about domestic abuse brings up issues for participants. You can expect questions during breaks or after training related to the experience of participants themselves or friends or family members. Some trainers arrange in advance for a domestic abuse specialist to be

available for individual questions and counseling following the training. Preparing for and handling participant issues offers trainers an opportunity to model the empathic response and effective referral practices the training aims to teach.