

Domestic Violence Session 2

Brandi Black Thacker: Hello, everyone. My name is Brandi Black Thacker. And I'm the director of T&TA in collaboration for the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. It's my honor to welcome you to the second session in a series of five webinars that we're co-hosting with our friends and colleagues at Futures Without Violence. This one is focused on supporting healing for families who have experienced domestic violence. We're so glad you are here. To get started today, I'd like to review where we've been and where we're going in this series of five sessions. The first session was on an introduction to addressing domestic violence in Head Start programs. And in this session, we're going to zoom in our focus on what you see at number two here, supporting healing for families who have experienced domestic violence. In our next conversation, we'll focus on partnering with parents to prevent and respond to domestic violence. In the fourth one, we'll look together at partnering with parents who have used violence in intimate relationships. And we'll round out the whole series with the fifth and final conversation around building collaborative relationships with community partners. I have one more duty before I turn over the microphone to one of my most favorite folks. You guys tuned in to session one, you already got to meet Mie. But if you haven't, you're going to love spending time with her in this content. Everybody meet Mie Fukuda from our partner organization at Futures Without Violence. Take it away, Mie.

Mie Fukuda: Thank you, Brandi. This webinar session will focus on resilience building information as well as strategies that you and adult family members can use to support the healing of children who have experienced domestic violence. But learning objectives for this session are to identify daily practices that support positive family relationships and promote children's healing, describe family-centered approaches that support holistic healing in children, and prioritizing safety as a key component for supporting families experiencing domestic violence. Most of the session will be information sharing with a couple of videos that are embedded. However, there are a couple of writing exercises, so please prepare writing materials like a pen and a piece of paper or a journal, if there's a journal that you like to use for this. And so, you can pause this webinar right now in order to grab those materials. And I'll also say that if you prefer to type into your computer for the writing exercises instead of writing them down on a piece of paper, you can do that as well.

So we'll start the session with a short journaling exercise. I invite you to think of a time during your childhood when an adult supported you to feel safe, empowered, or inspired. And if you can't identify a specific person or a time when someone supported you to feel these ways, I invite you to think about what your child self would have liked and needed from an adult in order to feel safe, empowered, and inspired. So now just take a few minutes or maybe a minute to think about what specifically this adult person did to make you feel good about yourself. For example, what words did they use when they spoke to you? Was it something about their behaviors? Was it other actions that they took to make you feel these ways? So, I'm going to ask that you take a moment to think about these questions and another minute or so to write down your thoughts into your journal. Or like I said before, if you prefer, you can type into your

computer as well. So please pause the webinar for the minutes that you need in order to do this. And then once you're finished with your writing, you can resume the webinar again.

All right, welcome back. I hope that the writing exercise brought you some nurturing memories and thoughts. We started the session with this exercise because we wanted to bring you into the perspective of a child since we'll be talking about children and how adults can support them through hard times and some big emotions. Adults, such as yourselves and adult family members, can be powerful supports to children and the relationship between adults and children can be the strong foundation a child needs in order to heal from trauma or hard event. We share the definition of resilience in session one, and we bring it up as a reminder that children and adults are resilient. And so, as a recap, resilience, the definition we're using for resilience is that it's the human capacity to face, overcome, and be strengthened by adversity.

Similarly, in session one, we covered how domestic violence can impact children and that not all children are impacted in the same way. And even though individual variability in children has something to do with this, it is definitely not the full picture. The science and our own experiences tell us that context matters, specifically, the experiences, conditions, and systems that children are exposed to. They all have the potential to either buffer the impacts of adversity and trauma or to accentuate its impacts. And even though we know about the harmful impacts domestic violence can have on children, the story definitely doesn't have to end there. Children can heal, and we have a big role in creating the context in which healing can happen.

So now we'll watch a video that speaks more to resilience by the FrameWorks Institute.

[Video begins]

[Music]

Narrator: You can think of child development as a scale that has two sides. A child scale is placed in a community and has spaces on either side where experiences and environmental influences stack up over the course of development. One side gets stacked with negative factors like stress, violence, and neglect, while the other side gets loaded with positive factors like supportive relationships, skill-building opportunities, and community resources.

In the same way that the weight on a teeter-totter affects the direction it tips, the factors that a child is exposed to affect how they turn out, the outcomes of their development. But the way the scale tips and the outcomes a child experiences are also a function of the position of the scale's fulcrum, which is like the genetic makeup of the child. The position of the fulcrum affects how the scale responds to factors that get stacked on either side and how easily it tips. We know that fulcrum starts in different places for different children, and that this genetic starting point is an important factor in how a child responds to experiences and how they turn out. We also know that the position of the fulcrum isn't fixed; it's a sliding set point.

Over time, the things that load and tip the scale can actually shift the position of the fulcrum. There are points in human development when this fulcrum is easier to shift. During these shiftable periods, our biology can be changed, making us more or less able to withstand negative weight that gets stacked on a scale. One of these shiftable periods is early childhood and another is adolescence. That's why it's so important to make sure that children have positive experiences, especially early on and to continue positive support throughout development.

By providing positive experiences during these sensitive periods of development and offloading negative weight, we can shift the fulcrum making children more able to bear the weight of negative experiences later on, making them more resilient. So, resilience isn't just about individual children; it's about the environments and experiences that get stacked on their resilience scale. Resilient societies are those that figure out how to stack more positives than negatives onto the children that will become workers and citizens.

[Video ends]

Mie: So, let's talk about some of the video that we just watched – the key takeaways. So, one of them is that resilience isn't just about individual children or individual people. Although it might be tempting to think about resilience as being something that some people have, and others don't. We know that, actually, all people and children have resilience. It's just a matter of having the right supports, experiences, and environments that allow for resilience to be built up over time.

The video also talked about the factors that can tip the scale, the resiliency scale, in a positive way. The positive factors that were referenced in the video or what we also call protective factors. So you might have been a part of discussions or heard, you know, the debate regarding the importance of nature versus nurture when it comes to resilience, which is basically about how much of a role a person's specific traits and attributes have on their ability to heal from a traumatic event and be resilient versus the conditions and environments they grow up and live in. We now know from the science that it's actually about both nature and nurture and that is the same when we talk about protective factors. So protective factors include how, on one level, individuals heal from the trauma and DV and its effects on us biologically, psychologically, and socially.

And on another level, what we as providers working in organizations and systems can do to reverse the negative effects of trauma and encourage, amplify, advance and sustain the healing process of individuals. There are concrete steps we can take to design policy, programs, and practices that can help support and strengthen individual attributes and create the environments and conditions that promote healthy development, foster recovery, support healing, and ensure well-being and thriving, which is what we ultimately want for everybody and all families. So, we have an infographic that organizes the different types of protective factors that can promote resiliency. This is one way you can represent protective factors visually. But essentially, the visual represents, sort of, an ecosystem of wellness and growth. This graphic is available on our Promising Futures website that's on the graphic itself and is

available as downloadable files. The files that we offer can be used in PowerPoint slides. We also have poster size downloadable files and professional print-ready or non-bleed files as well.

At some point, most people face and experience adversity or trauma. And as we've discussed, everybody responds differently to these types of experiences. The way that trauma affects people is influenced by multiple factors, including the characteristics of the adult or child. So, for example, the age of the child; the younger the child, the more vulnerable they are to the impacts of adversity and trauma because of how fast their brains are developing. And then, you also have the characteristics of the person's family and community. So, for example, if the child and family have a strong connection to their community, this could help reduce the impacts of hard experiences on an individual. It's also important to consider characteristics of the trauma itself, so, for example, how frequent and severe the traumatic events are. In the case of domestic violence, because of its cyclical nature, it's usually a more chronic and prolonged type of event instead of a one-time event, like a car accident. So, all of these variables will influence how someone is affected by adversity and trauma.

So why should we focus on promoting protective factors and resiliency? Well, it's because we know that focusing on strengths actually works. Protective factors have a – actually, have a stronger influence than specific risk factors do on outcomes for children and families. And I think it's really fitting because the Head Start programs that you work in are already thinking about, you know, how to design programs and practices that essentially promote protective factors for children and families. I think it's worth noting that promoting protective factors is not a separate kind of work. It's actually parallel work to promoting healthy development for children and for families. So, it's definitely something that you're already doing in Head Start programs, and it's part of the Head Start framework and approach. One of the strongest protective factors that support children's healing and resilience-building is having relationships with caring, consistent, and unconditionally loving adults in their lives. This, again, probably doesn't seem like, you know, new news since this is one of the pillars of the Head Start approach. But one of the ways Head Start programs can support children is by supporting the parent-child relationship. And, of course, any relationship children have with other adult family members as well.

So let's transition to talking about some simple but powerful ways that you and caring adults in children's lives, such as family members can use to support children who are experiencing domestic violence. These strategies that I'll share, again, can be used by adult family members or other caring adults as well. Futures Without Violence came up with our five healing gestures as part of a different campaign – it's Changing Minds initiative. And these gestures come out of the same body of research and science that we've been talking about so far around resiliency and protective factors that help to promote children's healing, specifically for children experiencing domestic violence. These are more specific, concrete things that you and adult family members can practice with children to create positive interpersonal interactions that help cultivate positive experiences for children and support their healthy development. So, the five gestures are: One, comfort children by staying calm and patient. Two, listen to children by showing an interest in their passions. Three, inspire children by sharing new ideas. Four,

collaborate with them by asking for their opinions and building on them. And lastly, celebrate children with a compliment and applauding their efforts.

We're going to do a writing exercise now based on the five healing gestures. So please take a minute to think about concrete and specific ways that you have, in the past, actioned out these gestures. So, for example, how have you, in the past, comforted a child? So, what specific things did you say to them or perhaps it was a nonverbal way that you offered comfort? The point of this exercise is to get as specific as possible because we know there are so many ways you can action out or demonstrate these gestures. And so, it's really nice to kind of write down specific ways and see how many ways you have in the past actioned out these gestures. And if you haven't had the opportunity to actually demonstrate the gestures with a child, or perhaps it's some of them out of the five, you can think about ways that you've seen others demonstrate the gestures or maybe even some ideas that you have and had a chance to try out yet that you think might kind of fit really well with the gestures. So please pause the webinar here for a minute or two while you think about your examples and take the time to write them down or, again, you can type them into your computer if that's the way that you've been writing down answers to the prompts so far.

Futures Without Violence and the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement partnered to create a brochure that expands on the five gestures that we just talked about. It's titled, "12 Ways Parents Can Help Young Children Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence Heal." In order to get the brochure, you can contact us – Futures Without Violence – or the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. And we actually have some hard copies as well that you can order. And I'll actually go over some of the website information where you can access this resource as well as other resources that we cover in the webinar series at the end of the session. I also want to share the "Behavior Has Meaning: Resources" series that was developed by the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning because it invites program staff and families to be inquisitive of children's behaviors and explore what children might be communicating through their behaviors. These are great resources to pair with the brochure and the gestures activity that we did as foundational information on child development and ways that you can respond to children.

In our previous session, so session one, we talked about how stress in of itself is not all bad, right? It's part of the human experience. And we talked about how positive stress is actually important for our development and growth. And now what we're referencing in terms of trauma is what we call toxic stress, which is when... which happens when our stress response system is activated in a way that our bodies are not equipped to handle. So, for a long time, prolonged periods of time, and repeatedly. Some additional considerations I'd like to leave you with is that with support from your program and children's families, most children returned to their baseline functioning after experiencing a traumatic event. However, some children may need more support that would entail a warm referral to a trauma-trained counselor or clinician. I know this is part of the Head Start approach as well. But I just wanted to emphasize that if you

believe a child's needs that extra kind of support, please partner with the child's family to explore options and to make connections with additional services and assessments.

Strategies that promote mindfulness is also powerful for children and families. Mindfulness is the act of noticing and being aware of our thoughts, feelings, surroundings without judgment, and it helps to calm our minds. Many mindfulness strategies that we encourage using with children are based on the same mindfulness strategies that also help adults. We encourage you and programs to consider ways you can build mindfulness practice and skills for parents and staff as well.

Since children do very well with routine, here are some ways that you can build in mindfulness exercises throughout the day. So, for example, for families, you can take deep breaths with your children before leaving the house in the morning. On your way to your next destination, like for example, if you're dropping children off at school or the Head Start programs, you can practice relaxing parts of your bodies together. So, perhaps doing a scan of your body and relaxing your body as you do the scan. At nighttime, you can take a stuffed animal and put it on your child's stomach and ask them to take deep belly breaths that move the stuffed animal up and down. And what this does is it encourages deep inhalation and exhalation that helps calm the body.

And so before we end, I want to share Sesame Street's Big Bird's Comfy-Cozy Nest video with you. This video features Alan and Big Bird. And Alan supports Big Bird through some hard emotions in this video. And so, as you watch, I encourage you to think about the gestures we just talked about and think about how... or identify how Alan is acting them out or demonstrating the gestures with Big Bird. So, let's watch.

[Video begins]

[Big Bird sighs]

Alan Muraoka: Hi, Big Bird. Hey, Big Bird, you okay? How are you feeling?

Big Bird: Oh, not too good, Alan. I've got all these feelings, you know.

Alan: Are they big feelings?

Big Bird: Yeah.

Alan: Like sad or angry?

Big Bird: Yeah.

Alan: Or confused?

Big Bird: Yes.

Alan: Anxious?

Big Bird: Yes, it's all those feelings, and they're all mixed together, and – and I don't know what to do.

Alan: I understand. These big feelings are okay, especially when hard things happen.

Big Bird: Oh.

Alan: Big Bird, do you know what I like to do to feel calm? I go to my safe place.

Big Bird: Your safe place?

Alan: That's right. It is a place in my imagination where I go to feel peaceful.

Big Bird: Peaceful? Well, that sounds nice, Alan.

Alan: Oh, it is. Hey, would you like to imagine your safe place, Big Bird?

Big Bird: Yeah, I would. But I don't know how.

Alan: All right, just use your imagination. All right, you want to try?

Big Bird: Okay.

Alan: Okay, good. First, we're going to breathe deep, all right? Inhale, and let it out slowly. Good. Now picture yourself in a place where you feel calm and comfortable, all right? It can look any way you wanted to. [Music] What are you imagining?

Big Bird: I'm in my nest. Well, that's where I feel safest.

Alan: Good. Now what would you like to have with you in your nest?

Big Bird: Oh, I'd have my favorite bear, Radar.

Alan: Good. What else do you see?

Big Bird: Well, it's a beautiful day and the warm sun feels good on my feathers.

Alan: Nice. Do you hear anything?

Big Bird: Oh, a little birdie singing a happy song. And I hear a soft breeze.

Alan: Do you smell anything?

Big Bird: Oh yeah, birdseed cookies fresh out of my Granny Bird's oven.

Alan: Oh. Tell me about your Granny Bird.

Big Bird: Oh, I love her a lot. She's sweet, and she's caring, and she made my favorite blanket. Oh, just thinking of Granny Bird always makes me happy.

Alan: Big Bird, how are you feeling now?

Big Bird: Well, I feel safe and much calmer inside. Thank you, Alan. That really helped.

Alan: I'm glad. And you know, you can visit your safe place any time you need to. It's always there for you. And guess what?

Big Bird: What?

Alan: So am I.

Big Bird: Oh.

[Video ends]

Mie: Sesame Street Communities has a trauma-specific webpage with resources that all support nurturing adult-child relationships. So, you can find the video that we just watched on this webpage, as well as a whole bunch of other resources, and all of the resources that are offered here are also offered in Spanish including the videos as well.

To wrap up our session today, let's go over some key takeaways. Families and children are resilient, and resilience is built over time through the promotion of protective factors. One of the most powerful protective factors for children experiencing DV are stable, committed, nurturing relationships with supportive adults and family members. You can support healing by comforting, listening, inspiring, collaborating, and celebrating children.

For more information and resources on domestic violence prevention and response, there's a page on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center that includes the resources we covered in this webinar series and additional information as well. Please visit the website by clicking on the link in the slide.

Thank you so much for viewing this webinar session and for your interest in learning more about domestic violence and ways you can support families and children in Head Start programs who are experiencing domestic violence.