The *Walking on Eggshells* Project

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*Walking on eggshells...*  
Child and adolescent violence in the family
Overview

• Project Background
• Resources
• SA law
• Challenges
• Professional considerations
• Where the rubber hits the road
Background

• A collaborative project
• Respectful relationships in the family through sustaining knowledge exchange about child and adolescent violence in the home.
  – Researchers
  – Practitioners working with
    • Families
    • Young people
    • Parents
• 2010 *Dark side of parenting* report identified a need

• Initially funded in 2011 by a grant from Flinders University

• Currently self funding through
  – Voluntary contributions
  – Sale of parent resources
  – Charge for professional development training
Parent Information Booklet

Walking on eggshells...
Child and adolescent violence in the family

A South Australian information and advice booklet for parents and carers.
The package

• Professional Development Information Package

• In conjunction with a professional training session.
Professional development package

• Framework for understanding child and adolescent violence in the home
• Australian and South Australian Context
• Risk and Protective Factors
• Service System in South Australia
• Case Studies and Strategies
• Some Counselling Approaches
• Support Groups and Agencies
Future of the project

• Continuing education
• Presentations to various groups
• Ongoing dialogue with multiple agencies
• Translating resources to suit diverse cultural and language groups
• Being alert to ongoing opportunities to engage professionals and the community
The Young Offenders Act (SA) 1993

• Covers illegal behaviour by young people aged 10 to 18
• Diversion for less serious offences where the offence is admitted: informal caution, formal caution, family conference
• More serious offences, recidivism or where offence denied: Court
Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse) Act SA 2009 enacted Dec 2012

- Broadened to include young people as perpetrators and/or victims of abuse
- Intervention orders can be issued for risk
- Conditions may be imposed
- Limits on contact may be imposed
- Too early yet to ascertain if this Act has been useful to address adolescent family violence
Challenges

• The problem is conceived of differently by different professionals
• Different philosophical and ideological approaches
• Different theoretical approaches
• Different ways of defining the problem
• Important to support all family members while being vigilant about safety
Our beliefs

• Influenced by our professional training and practice
• But also by our personal world views
  – Influenced by our values
  – Experiences
  – Successes and failures
Reflections for professionals

• What are my professional and personal views?
• What skills and experience can I contribute?
• How can I maintain an ethical stance and avoid my ‘stuff’ getting in the way?
• How can I engage meaningfully with children/adolescents and families?
• How can I engage and work with colleagues to ensure we are working toward the same goals for the child/adolescent and the family?
• How can I support colleagues working with the child/adolescent and the family?
• What collegiate support would help me in working with and understanding this issue?
Myth or Reality?
Numerous approaches

Physical safety first

- Behavioural vs therapeutic approaches
- Family / systems therapy
- Psychological / psychiatric diagnoses
- Age of child informs choice of therapeutic framework
- Medicalisation of the behaviour
Potentially useful therapies and approaches

- Strengths based approaches
- Narrative therapy
- Feminist framework
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
- Eddie Gallagher’s approach
- Non-Violent Resistance
- Systems Therapy - Alan Jenkins
General principles

• Violence is generally a purpose driven behaviour that brings significant rewards
• What is the context in which this behaviour occurs?
• It is difficult to look at violence without considering the dynamics of power, responsibility and entitlement
• Therapy should be aimed at assisting those who behave violently to take more responsibility
• The Jenkins’ Question: *Do our interventions increase or decrease responsibility?*
An holistic approach

• Working collaboratively
• Understanding the ‘bigger picture’
  – Considering the problem from diverse perspectives
    • The family including siblings and extended family
    • The parent
    • The young person
    • The community
Working with families

• Practices that encourage open and positive communication
• Encourage respectful relationships
• Build on parents’ strengths and recognise and celebrate strengths of children
• Encourage and enable young person’s communication skills
• Building pathways for young people to be successful
• Increase child’s awareness of choices and consequences
Working with parents

• You may be the first (and possibly the last) encounter the family has with an outside agency.
• Tell them that they are not alone living with this problem and that change is possible.
• Any professional interaction with the young person should support the notion that the parent is the ‘boss’ in the family.
• Encourage the parent(s) to seek help, even if the young person refuse to be part of it.
Working with parents

Unhelpful responses

- Telling them what to do
- Blaming them or implying it is their fault
- Criticising the way they are managing the situation
- Assuming a history of violence
- Undermining parenting skills
Working with young people

• Safety first
• Look for ‘windows of opportunity’
• Work collaboratively with others
• Support programs
• Encourage participation in positive activities
• Accommodation options
• Positive engagement without colluding
• Consequences
Reflections for professionals

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Important points to remember

• Interaction and intervention need to support the power/authority of the parents
• Be mindful not to inadvertently give power to the child over the parent
• Young people are responsible for their own behaviour
• It’s not about blame/shame
• Above all: Safety first
• Questions, clarification, comments??