

CORE TENETS OF RESPONSE-BASED PRACTICE

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CORE
TENETS

INTERACTION

1	Humans are best understood as social actors: Individuals respond to one other continuously and orient to one another as social actors with the capacity to choose and respond.
2	Dignity is central to individual and collective well-being: Social interaction is organized largely around dignity. Even small affronts can be met with intense responses. Violence is an affront to dignity, but not all affronts to dignity entail violence.
3	Violence is social and unilateral: Violence is <i>social</i> in that it is committed in specific interactions that involve at least two people. Violence is <i>unilateral</i> in that it entails actions by one person or group against the will and well-being of another person or group
4	Violence is, with rare exceptions, deliberate: Perpetrators anticipate and work to suppress victims' resistance. Even so-called "explosive" or "out of control" acts of violence involve deliberate action.
5	Resistance is ever-present: Individuals respond to and resist violence and other forms of injustice. Resistance can be open and direct or subtle and disguised depending on the situation.
6	Social responses are crucial: Victims and offenders are constantly mindful of actual and possible social network and institutional responses. The quality of social responses in cases of violence is closely tied to victim responses, offender strategies, and outcomes in the short and long term.
7	Details of social interaction in context: "A sense of the unique, specific and concrete circumstances of any situation is the first indispensable step to solving the problems posed by that situation" (David Trimble, 1998). Close analysis of social interaction in social-material context is the essential starting point for effective intervention.

LANGUAGE

8	Fitting Words to Deeds: There are no neutral descriptions. Where there is violence, the question of "which words are fitted to which deeds" is crucial (Danet, 1980, p. 189).
9	Misrepresentation: Verbal deception is central to most forms of violence. This can be <i>strategic</i> (e.g., perpetrators obscure their actions), <i>tactical</i> (e.g., victims conceal their resistance), <i>inadvertent</i> (e.g., professionals use misleading terms), or <i>systemic</i> (e.g., authorities promote ongoing distortions).
10	Four Operations of Language: Language can be used to (a) conceal or reveal violence, (b) obscure or clarify perpetrator responsibility, (c) conceal or elucidate victim responses and resistance, (d) blame and pathologize, or contest the blaming and pathologizing of victims.

INTERVIEWING FOR SOCIAL RESPONSES

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Actual and Possible Social Responses are a Constant Concern

Actual and possible social responses are a constant concern for victims and offenders in cases of interpersonal violence, including children. Research and practice experience show that the quality of responses by social network and institutional actors is strongly correlated with the level of victim distress in the short and long term and the likelihood of victim disclosure in future. Once a person receives a negative social response, they become much less likely to disclose again in future.

The manner in which the victim responds to the offender in specific instances of violence hinges in part on the victim's view of actual and possible social responses. For example, if the victim is isolated and knows no one will be able to step in to help, open defiance may be the least viable form of resistance. Rather, they may resist covertly to "get through" the assault and work for safety and autonomy "behind the scenes", secretly, to avoid even more extreme violence.

Covert resistance can be the most viable (e.g., least life-threatening, safest for children) form of resistance over long periods of time, depending on social responses, related structural conditions (e.g., poverty, racism, immigration status), and the strategies used by the offender. Ongoing covert resistance is less an indication of the victim's "personality" or "awareness" or lack of "readiness" than it is a recognition of the realities at work in the situation.

Perpetrators are often able to use social and structural conditions to further control and restrict the options available to the victim. For example, the immigration status of the victim can mean they do not have full legal options. Racism in society and among authorities can mean racialized women are less likely to be believed and helped. Uninformed about the dynamics of interpersonal violence, family law systems often disregard or minimize violence.

As well, many perpetrators are quite able to create the impression they are positive and well-adjusted, good fathers, great colleagues, and so on. And many perpetrators work in socially valued professions – medicine, policing, law, finance, education – and are able to use their social credibility to cast doubt on any claims made by the victim and children.

Consequently, to obtain meaningful assistance, many women are forced to first take serious risks and put themselves and their children in danger of even more severe violence (Chung, 2019). For instance, many professionals take the view that the woman ought to leave their abusive partner, or must leave, before they will be worthy of direct help – despite the fact that leaving is often the point of greatest risk of more serious violence, including murder. Further, the perpetrator often changes strategies and continues to use violence for long periods after separation.

Social responses – how social network and institutional actors respond to the situation - are therefore a key part of the "fact pattern" in specific cases, not an "after the fact" consideration. To comprehend and acknowledge the victim's "situational" and "private" logic – how the victim interprets and responds in situ to the offender before, during and after assaults and other forms of abuse – it is necessary to ask specific questions to learn about social responses. This is an enquiry into a context of complex relationships and institutional practices.

It is also an enquiry, which, if conducted skillfully, can show the professional is sensitive to the complex realities the victim is facing or has faced along the way. This enquiry tends to foster a greater sense of

safety because, by showing they are open to talking about how the system might have failed and even become part of the problem, the professional can display their primary alignment with the victim, not the systems in which the professional and their colleagues work.

Just as victims respond to and resist violence, victims also respond to positive and negative social responses. These responses evince agency, capacity, “situational logic”, personal concerns, competency, love of others, morally motivated distress, fear and desperation, indignant despair, longing for justice, social skill, tactical awareness, and so on. In standard mental health systems that adhere to the DSM system of diagnosis, which lacks any meaningful analysis of violence and social injustice, many of these responses will be recast as symptoms of disorders when removed from context and put in biomedical terms. The role of social responses is often minimized or left unexplored while the victim is recast as a person with mental health issues who is, “let’s face it”, the real problem.

As well, the intensity and long-lasting quality of some forms of distress is often attributed strictly to what is called “trauma”. Indeed, many forms of violence are now referred to as “trauma”, a practice that shifts the focus from perpetrator actions to the mind-body of the victim. (Perpetrators commit violence, not “trauma”). When this occurs, important information that could help understand the “problem” or “symptom” – and put it into context – is lost. This is called “decontextualizing”.

Social network and institutional responses can be intensely debilitating and the source of great suffering. For example, if you report you were sexually assaulted and you are not believed and cast aside, you learn that authorities cannot be trusted and will only harm you further.

At the same time, social network and institutional responses can be enormously helpful in the short and long term. For example, if a person reports they were sexually assaulted and they are taken seriously, offered appropriate supports, kept up to date in the investigation, able to share their responses and resistance, asked about their hopes and aspirations, and helped in caring for their loved ones, the chances are good that they will recover more fully and more quickly and become more likely to contact authorities again, in future, if needs be.

Following are examples of useful questions that can be modified for each person, to be only as relevant and when safe. It is important to develop accounts of actual and possible social responses AND to develop accounts of the victim’s responses to both positive and negative social responses over time. We work to position the victim as a responding subject, a social actor/agent, who responds to actual and possible social responses.

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS TO USE IN INTERVIEWS

Who knows about the situation? Who knows about your partner’s violence? Who knows about your partner’s yelling and such?

Phrase the question tactfully to avoid terms that may be uncomfortable, but “name” the facts.

How do they know? Did you decide to tell them? How did you decide? How did you decide to tell your sister and not your brother? How much information did you give them?

Phrase the question to acknowledge the decision by your client to tell or not tell, or to tell partly.

Were you at all worried about how they would respond, what they might do or say, when you told them? How did you know you should be worried? Had you tried to say something before? Had you seen them respond to someone else, like your brother or sister?

Phrase the question to acknowledge their legitimate concern over negative social responses.

Do the authorities know? How did they find out? Were the police involved? How did it go with the child protection worker?

Phrase the question to ensure you are not suggesting the authorities should know.

So, when you told your sister, how did she respond? Like, what did she say? What did the police have to say? Did they attend your house? Who interviewed you? What kinds of questions did they ask?

Phrase the question to learn how social network and institutional actors responded to your client and family. Get details about the social situation in which social responses were provided.

How did that go? Did they listen to you? Did they believe you? Did anyone talk with your kids? How did your kids find that experience?

Try to learn which social responses your client found helpful or unhelpful. Try to learn exactly what it was about the social responses that was helpful or unhelpful.

With positive social responses, ask: **Okay, so, what was that like for you, to feel really heard? What difference has it made to you, to be listened to and supported? What difference has it made to your kids? Who else will notice that you are feeling heard and supported? How will your kids know you are feeling respected in this process?**

Positive responses can be a “difference that makes a difference” and be of great help.

With negative social responses, ask: **Okay, so when you could see that the counsellor (police officer, social worker, psychiatrist, doctor, teacher) was not really believing you, how did you respond - like right then, what did you do? What about later on, how did this experience influence you later on, in terms of who you would talk to and who not?**

So, you’ve been facing not only the violence by your partner, but blame – even from some of your friends and family: What has this been like for you? So, your friends have been great but the counselor seemed to think you make bad decisions - that sucks: How do you deal with the counsellor now? How do you respond when your counsellor is constantly suggesting you need to leave?

Phrase the questions to learn how the person managed the negative social response, expressed or concealed their thoughts/feelings, etc.

The point is to understand and acknowledge the role of social network and institutional responses in the responses of your client to the events in question, including the violence; their decision-making, how they view their situation, how they relate to authorities and family members, how they resist the violence, how this may figure into their aspirations and particular forms of distress.

It is important to remember that many victims of violence have faced a series of negative social responses from their social networks and various professionals. For many people, the systems set up to handle cases of violence are themselves unpredictable and fearsome, the cause of pain and endless complications. Many people will have every reason to think you will blame them, get charmed by the perpetrator, dispense advice, and judge them negatively when they do not do what you suggest.

Its also important to provide positive social responses to perpetrators; “positive” in the sense that, while you are clear and decisive about who is responsible, and in your view that the violence is wrong and must stop, you also do your best to uphold their dignity. We are all much more than the worst thing we have done. And few people choose to change when they are subjected to humiliation. Many perpetrators fear that when you will see them as a non-redeemable person.

DEEPER DIVE **INSIDE INSIGHT EXCHANGE**



Learn more about insights from lived experiences of violence and other adversities through the videos, narratives and resources hosted on www.insightexchange.net



Follow My Lead speaks from the voice of people with lived experience of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) who need the professionals and their social networks to be more prepared to respond effectively; more prepared to respond in ways that uphold dignity and build on safety.

Read the first edition of [Follow My Lead](#).

We welcome continued [feedback in order to improve future editions](#).

Read about the background and build up to [Follow My Lead](#).



My Safety Kit speaks in the voice of the reader who may be reflecting on their own relationships and (possible) experiences of domestic and family violence.

Read prototype 1.1 of [My Safety Kit](#)

Read the [feedback summary report](#) of Prototype 1.0

We welcome continued [feedback](#) in order to improve future editions.



Shared insights from lived experience:

The **Insight** component of Insight Exchange is grouped into projects or initiatives that shared the lived experience insights of others.

- [Voices of Resistance](#)
- [Voices of Insight](#)