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Chapter 10

TAKING CHILDREN'S
RESISTANCE SERIOUSLYA Response-Based Approach to
Children Experiencing Violence

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CHAPTER FOCUS

This chapter is about children's resistance to violence and adversity. Children have most often been cast as passive "witnesses" to violence when, in fact, they tend to take active roles in relation to violent situations. Their responses to violence provide a wealth of information about their values, beliefs and relationships to family members. Child welfare practitioners' understanding of children's responses to violence can help greatly in attempts to promote healing, recovery and well-being. It is important for practitioners to ascertain accurate accounts of child interaction during episodes of violence: looking at the sequence of events and a child's responses to them can help greatly in planning therapeutic interventions. This type of information gathering is preferable to applying broad psychological theories of child behaviour onto specific cases, particularly with Métis, First Nations, Inuit and children from minority cultures in Canada.

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Why is it important to look at children's actions and responses to violence?
2. What is response-based practice?
3. Why is response-based practice a viable method for counselling children and adults who have experienced oppression and/or mistreatment?

4. What philosophies and practices provide the foundation for response-based practice?
5. Why is it important to attend to human dignity in the helping professions?

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND VIOLENCE

In current conversations about violence in families, children are typically referred to as being “impacted” or “affected” by violence rather than as being engaged actors in a social interaction (Edleson, Nguyen and Kimball 2011; Richards and Wade 2010). Despite being spirited beings interested in advancing their will and influencing the situations in which they find themselves, they are discussed as “witnesses” or as “exposed to violence” (Fantuzzo and Lindquist 1989; Jaffe et al. 1990). Other accounts suggest the contrary: that domestic/family violence is not something that children watch passively from a distance; these accounts maintain that their responses have been largely overlooked in research, theory and practice.

In fact, children often try to maximize safety for themselves, their siblings and for the non-violent parent. For example, children have provided us with accounts of hiding, calling 911, trying to negotiate with the violent parent and engaging the help of other adults. One child told of enacting a pre-existing safety plan which involved taking younger siblings to a safe space in a local store where the police were then called. Viewing children as active participants in violent episodes has been studied extensively by Scandinavian researchers Överlien and Hydén (2009: 480–81). They comment:

In line with the “new social studies of childhood” (Hutchby 2005; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998; James and Prout 1990), we argue that children need to be taken seriously as social agents and as active constructors of their own social worlds. This means that we are interested in the child's own actions/absence of actions during the violent episode, their interpretations of the violence and what meaning these interpretations have in their lives.

This is particularly important given that many victims of violence experience self-blame and carry the feeling that they did not do enough to stop the violence. While self-blame is understandable, given the high levels of social blame towards victims, if we, as practitioners, understand their responses to violence as strategic acts of resistance (Richardson and Wade 2010; Ullman 2010), we can help undo the effects of self-blame. Self-blame is a byproduct of passivity discourses in the helping professions. If we see the victim as an “affected object,” we are unlikely to

see the child as interactive and responsive. Response-based practice (which studies responses to violence as indicators of resistance to violence and other forms of oppression) can guide our inquiry, shining the light on the child's preferences, values, situational intelligence and hopes for a better future.

A Swedish film entitled *Jag Sa Jag Hade En Mardröm/I Said I Had a Nightmare* (Ernst 2006) documents children's strategies for trying to deal with violent fathers who were hurting their mothers. When asked about their responses by their counsellor, the children in the film felt proud of the ways they tried to do helpful things. One little boy tells about going into his parents' bedroom and telling them that he had a nightmare, at which point the violence stopped and the parents turned their attention to the child. By noticing what children do, we are not suggesting that children should act in a certain way or should try to intervene in adult violence. Rather, we think it is important to acknowledge what they already know and do within specific contexts.

Contextually, it is important to consider that there are many social factors, such as colonialism, patriarchy and social prejudice, which affect the welfare of certain populations of children and their families. Colonialism is a causal factor in situations of poverty and impoverization, as well as economic marginalization and oppression in the world of work. Discrimination and oppression have been based on class, race, gender, able-bodiedism, sexual orientation and other such qualities that deviate from mainstream norms (Crenshaw 1995; Reynolds 2014, 2008; Richardson and Wade 2008). We need to consider these forms of discrimination and oppression in looking at violence and its normalization. In Canada, where, currently, over 3,000 Indigenous women have been murdered or are missing, there exists a culture of relative impunity to violence, as evidenced by the fact that there has been no adequate state response to this situation (APTN News 2014). While one-third of women in general experience sexualized assault, fewer than 1 percent of perpetrator charges will end with sentencing (Buchwald, Fletcher and Roth 2004; Reynolds 2014a). This creates a society where those choosing to use violence against women, and against children in settings where they are vulnerable, such as foster homes or institutions, know that they will likely get away with it.

Context Is Important for Developing a Solid Analysis of a Child's Actions.

Considering a child's context, as well as applying a situational analysis, is an interactional, active view that is more aligned with the study of social interaction (e.g., Goffman 1963) and the systemic studies in the field of family therapy (Carr 2009; McGoldrick and Hardy 2008). We argue that “coping with violence” is not equivalent to “responding to violence.” The much quoted definition of coping talks about how to “manage specific external and/or internal demands” (Lazarus and Folkman 1984: 141). Similarly, recent discourses on resilience do not acknowledge that

resistance is ubiquitous. We believe that a child is doing much more than merely coping when he/she is assessing safety, making decisions on appropriate action based on context and predicting what will happen afterwards to guide decision making. In life and death situations, a child may be attempting to ensure the best outcome for a mother and siblings, as well as her/himself, both during and after violence. When practitioners attach a label of "risk" to individual children, using such terms as "child at risk" or "risky child," they fail to accurately describe a child's social conditions (Burman 1994). For example, a child may experience paternal violence in the home but, when this violence comes to the attention of authorities, the child may have to negotiate interactions with child protection workers, doctors, lawyers, family, friends and school teachers, both alongside, and separate from, his mother. That child may not feel supported during this process. If that child is now distracted in class, forgets their lunch, has little interest in play-dates and is short-tempered, these symptoms of living with violence will likely be recast as individual negative attributes for which they may experience punitive responses and perhaps receive a mental health diagnosis.

Children respond to, and actively resist, violence. Some of the ways that children respond when they are subjected to violence include running away, hiding, making themselves invisible, protecting siblings or their mother, crying, yelling, becoming silent, trying to negotiate with a violent father and, of course, experiencing despair and distrust. Children who deal with violence often become astute at analyzing context and particular situations in order to assess both safety and risk. However, despite this activity, children are still often referred to in the psychological literature as passive or "witnesses" of violence. This is unfortunate, since children's responses provide the basis for guiding interventions to assist their recovery from violence. This model of attending to children's responses to violence in order to help them recover is based on psychological, violence-recovery and developmental research, as well as some children's literature. Children's ability to resist oppression has been observed historically: as Knight comments, "history is one of our greatest teachers about resistance and the innate human capacity to defend dignity" (Ullman and Knight 2006).

Children who experience violence in their homes experience it with all their senses. They hear it, see it and experience the aftermath (Edleson 1999; McGee 1997; Överlien and Hydén 2009). Current research now shows, unequivocally, that children intervene in domestic violence, typically in order to influence the outcome. Their intent is often to maximize safety: they are less likely to be merely witnessing events but are actually playing an active part in directing the outcome, depending upon their age and actions. Richardson and Bonnah show this to be the case in their response-based research on children: they demonstrate that this understanding is critical in helping them recover from violence-related incidents (Richardson 2009; Richardson and Wade 2010; Bonnah 2008).

A RESPONSE-BASED VIEW OF CHILDREN

Recognition of children as victims of domestic violence emerged when attention was drawn to the rights of children after the United Nations 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention spawned international interest in the concept of children's participation rights and is considered a significant influence on "the sociology of childhood" (Mayall 1994; Qvortrup 1993) — a discourse concerning childhood and children that became a focus of research that emerged in the late 1980s across a range of disciplines (Morris, Hegarty and Humphreys 2012). The notion of rights presupposes that children are spirited, agentive and deserving of recognition for their place in society as actors and not merely as wards of adults (parents, guardians or the state). The existence of child protection services also indicates that society believes that children are worthy of having rights, as does the movement towards more inclusion of the perspectives of children in legal decision making.

Children are active, interactive, spirited beings who engage with the world and respond to violence and mistreatment. Our earlier work in relation to the medicine wheel of responses (Richardson 2006) provides examples of how any response that comes from inside the person, such as sadness, despair, longing or hope, are "responses to" something, not "effects of" or "symptoms of" decontextualized events. Much of the developmental literature on children has been focused on "benign world" understandings; this literature does not explore children's responses to adversity and violence (Richardson and Wade 2008; Pacini-Ketchebaw and Berikoff 2008). Developmental psychology has produced a wide variety of accepted measurements describing what children do, should do, and what they will do next. In contrast to learning about children through observation and interaction, developmental models take an individualist perspective that lends itself more to focusing on the adequacy of mothering than on the development of the child (Burman 1994). However, there are other realms outside psychology where children are recognized for the spirited beings that they are. In addition to learning about children through observation, we have a window into their activity and imagination through children's literature, where the characters are often thinly disguised representations of the authors themselves, or aspects of their experiences, commitments, loves and fears.

The story of the late Seletze Delmar Johnnie has been documented in a film on the residential internment of children on Kuper Island (Campbell and Welsh 1997). As a young boy taken from his family and held captive by the state, Delmar longed to be home with his family. He shares an account where he decided to escape from his island prison. He went into the ocean and found a log upon which he would ride to the mainland of Vancouver Island, where his parents lived. He

made it home safely, only to be taken back to the institution the next day by an Indian agent. The escape was quite an accomplishment; other children had perished in the past on such escapes. Even though he was captured and returned, he recounted that this act of resistance provided him enough delight to sustain him for the duration of his captivity. The joy found in such acts of resistance does not stop the violence but it can restore a sense of dignity that is so important for the prisoner. Similarly, Métis educator Jeannine Carrière (personal communication, April 24, 2010) shared a story about an abusive situation in a religious school when she was a child in Manitoba.

Jeannine reported that her group of Métis classmates were subjected to racism and degradation on a daily basis on the part of a nun that was her teacher. One day, after making a comment about Métis children being stupid, the class devised a plan to cause some grief for the abusive teacher. Someone made and activated a “stink bomb,” which filled the room with a putrid smell. While the teacher began to cough, complain and panic, the students sat at their desks with complete quiet and aplomb, pretending that they were not noticing that anything was different. They sat and did their work quietly until the teacher ran out of the room in a panic. While the children could not take on directly the structural violence of the colonial school system, they recovered some of their dignity in the collective achievement of “sticking it to the man.”

When listening to the accounts of former child survivors of residential internment in Canada, many light-hearted stories of resistance can be witnessed in the face of great oppression and suffering (see, for example, TRC n.d.). What this means in terms of response-based practice is that stories of dignity, resistance and aplomb can become the main account that is explored in the therapeutic interview, not merely the story of violence and pain. What a person does in the face of oppression, in the face of suffering, points to what they believe, what they long for, what they value and love. This praxis forms the foundation of response-based practice.

A different kind of story about children and structural violence, written by Wilhelm Grimm and illustrated by Maurice Sendak, is about a girl named Mili (Grimm and Sendak 1988). In this account, Mili’s mother has sent her deep into the forest to save her from a terrible war. Mili befriends an old man who takes care of her and makes sure she is safe. This story offers an example of how children advance their own security by showing love or friendliness to adults, particularly mothers or primary caregivers, who then are more inclined to care for them (Kikuchi and Noriuchi 2008). As illustrated in this case, such bonds of love deepen the caring

gestures of the adult, who then provides protection. In this tale, Sendak provides a compelling example of how adults and children have worked together, with the help of others and the natural world, to find refuge from adult violence. There is a spiritual backdrop to the account of Mili, which resonates with many cultures who have resisted purely secular views of the world. The tale is also about seeking safety from war: it is important to acknowledge that there are enormous numbers of children in the world who are familiar with the challenges posed by violence and adult militarism. War can in fact be seen as oppression of children across time and in various societies (Richardson and Romano 2014).

Swedish author Astrid Lindgren was a woman whose writings emerged from her longing to live with her young child. As a young writer for a Swedish newspaper, she became pregnant by a man thirty years her senior. She was uninterested in marriage; as there was much stigma attached to single parenthood at the time, she had her baby in Denmark in the only hospital that didn’t ask for the name of the father. There, her son Lars was placed in foster care. While she tried to visit him as often as possible, the long days of missing her child created a treasury of responses to the situation that would make their way into Swedish children’s literature. In her writing, she invented the character of a young boy who created a magical world in his imagination: this world offered him what Lars would have been denied in real life (Floris Books n.d.). By focusing on the use of the child’s imagination, games, play and adventure to overcome loneliness, Lindgren created stories that soothed many adults and children struggling with difficulties in their own lives. Such examples of responses to adversity are found throughout children’s books; they have nothing to do with symptoms or illness. In fact, the process of writing itself, in the aftermath of child adversity, constitutes a deliberate honouring of the spirit, action and life force within the child. A celebration of resistance, achieved with imagination, creativity and humour, is in itself an antidote to children’s suffering. Astrid Lindgren said, “If I have managed to brighten up even one gloomy child — then I’m satisfied.”

Ignacio Martin-Baró, a Jesuit priest and Salvadoran psychologist, studied closely the impact that the civil war was having on Salvadoran children. Because he felt (1990) that the concept of psychological trauma was unhelpful in explaining the suffering of the population, he created the term “psychosocial trauma.” This term connects the structural violence and the experience of the self in ongoing dehumanizing relationships. It offers more contextual meaning to the experience of children facing structural violence, such as colonialism and invasion, than does the term “psychological trauma.” Martin-Baró’s important work ended abruptly when he was murdered along with other Jesuit scholars at the University of Central America in El Salvador.

There has been some academic acknowledgement of the oppression of children

and the efforts to capture their resistance in literature. In "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature," Nodelman writes:

Child psychology and children's literature can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with childhood — dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, child psychology and children's literature as an adult style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over childhood. (Nodelman 1992).

Nodelman cautions us, adults and writers, to not speak for children when they are capable of speaking for themselves. Nodelman applies the principles of orientalism to the way children are often treated in the adult world, as if they are incapable of speaking. In terms of children's rights and the response-based perspective, this means that we can bring forth the voice of the child in legal and therapeutic contexts to make sure we are not replicating system dominance upon them. It means that we must seek to provide decolonizing opportunities in our work to end child oppression and adult-centrism; we must work to create spaces where children's voices can be heard. This includes ensuring that mechanisms are in place to hear the voices of children in all government-run programming that is in place to educate, protect and provide care for young people. The following narrative passage, along with other accounts described throughout this chapter, is based on an aggregation of our clinical experiences, used to demonstrate our ideas.

Seventeen-year-old Justin had grown up in foster homes, group homes, and the juvenile justice system. At the time that I met him, I was a senior administrator for a social service agency providing a twenty-four-hour staffed resource for him. I knew Justin quite well, because his behaviour was so challenging that it was difficult to maintain staff to work with him for longer than a few weeks at a time, and they would often call in the middle of the night, saying, "How soon can you get here, because I'm leaving."

It was a morning following one of these nights, and I was making Justin breakfast. As we ate pancakes, I said, "I don't think I'm doing a very good job for you. I keep hiring people ... and they're good people, but they don't seem to be the right ones for you, because I seem to be here a lot lately."

Justin didn't break a stride in eating. He simply stated, "You're right. You're doing a terrible job."

As we made eye contact and shared a brief smile, I knew that I had an invitation to continue.

"Here's the thing, Justin. I have another interview for a new staff

member tomorrow, and I think that I must be asking the wrong kind of questions. Do you have any idea what I should be asking?"

Justin didn't even hesitate. Immediately, he responded with, "You should ask them what they will do when a kid gets mad. Like ... how are they going to stop themselves from getting mad back?"

I only paused for a second while I stared at Justin, and then I said, "Hang on ... I need to get a piece of paper and a pen."

I quickly wrote down his question with a #1 beside it and then looked up at him expectantly and said, "What else?"

Again, without hesitation he responded, "You should ask them what they are going to do when they want a kid to do something, and the kid doesn't want to do it. How are they going to try and make him?"

Again, I wrote his question word for word and looked at him with my pen poised beside #3. Then, in a quiet voice, he said, "How long are they going to stick around?"

At that point, Justin got up from the table with his plate and I knew we had reached the end of his interview questions.

"Justin, I can ask your questions. But I've interviewed many people and I know that some are really good at interviews. I might not be able to tell the difference between someone who really means what they're saying and someone who doesn't. But you ... I have a feeling that you would be able to tell the difference in a second. Would you consider being on the interview panel with me and one other person? The final decision about who we hire will be yours."

Justin looked me in the eye.

"Yes."

Although Justin didn't typically shower regularly or wear clean clothes, he arrived at the office at 8:45 the following morning, showered and wearing clothes that had clearly been washed. I didn't say a word about his early arrival or his appearance, but simply explained the interview process to him, which he appeared to fully concentrate on. We were interviewing an Aboriginal man who had experience working with youth. We went through our standard questions first, while Justin observed: it was a less than impressive interview. In fact, Ben wouldn't have passed. Once we had concluded, I said, "Justin just has a few questions for you." With more professionalism than I could have imagined, Justin leaned forward, looked Ben straight in the eye, and said, "Ben ... what will you do when a kid gets mad, and how will you stop yourself from getting mad back?"

This was the beginning of a twenty-minute conversation between Ben and Justin about mutual respect, during which I'm sure that neither of

them was aware of anyone else in the room. Justin's two remaining questions prompted similar dialogue; the entire interview lasted for nearly two hours. As it concluded, I asked Ben if he would mind waiting in the lobby for a few minutes.

As the door closed behind him, Justin turned to me with a broad grin and said, "That's my man."

I asked him how he knew, and he said, "Didn't you see the look in his eye? He's so kind, and he meant everything he said. He won't hurt me."

I agreed with him, and said, "OK Justin, go offer him the job then."

"What?"

"Yup. You picked him. You go hire him."

Justin walked out to the waiting room, extended his hand for a hand-shake, and said, "Ben, I'd like to offer you a job working for me."

Ben stood up with tears in his eyes, and shook Justin's hand. "I accept."

Bringing forth the voice of a child has to be more than a token gesture. If we take the rights of children seriously and believe that what they know and what they say is important, then we will develop the structural mechanisms to include them in the important aspects of decision making and safety planning, as much as possible.

BACKGROUND TO A RESPONSE-BASED APPROACH

Response-based ideas arose from direct service with people who had endured violence and mistreatment, including Indigenous women and men who were violated in the so-called residential schools (Coates and Wade 2003; Richardson and Nelson 2007; Wade 1997, 2000, 2007). Response-based practitioners pay attention to the ways that victims invariably resist violence and other forms of oppression, overtly or covertly, depending on the circumstances (Coates and Wade 2012, 2003; Todd and Wade 1994; Wade 1997, 2000; Bonnah 2008). Engaging clients in conversations that elucidate and honour their resistance can be helpful in addressing a wide variety of concerns (Kelly 1988; Richardson 2005; Todd and Wade 1994; Wade 1997, 2000). Adopting this approach required a significant shift in theory and practice, however. Certain responses are actually tactics of resistance, not effects or impacts of an event or events. Focusing on victims' responses allowed us to better identify and construct accounts of their resistance. Accounts of resistance provide a basis in fact for contesting accounts of pathology and passivity, which are typically used by child welfare practitioners to blame victims. Child welfare practice must avoid blaming victims, particularly because such a practice replicates dominance, such as colonialism and the various forms of structural violence that have already caused such great disruption for families in Canada.

UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF CHILDREN

A response-based study of community-based and familial interaction with children clearly shows that children are orientated to dignity, protection of self and loved ones, and that they strive for balance in their relationships and life at home. Young children are attuned to fairness and justice in adult decisions and learning environments; they seek to have their perspectives heard. They are purposeful in their actions in relation to their goals and aspirations, whether immediate or longer-term. Children seek connection and want adults to listen to them with full attention.

Nelson Mandela, in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, shared the following story, which illustrates his orientation to preserving dignity:

I learned my lesson one day from an unruly donkey. We had been taking turns climbing up and down its back and, when my chance came, I jumped on and the donkey bolted into a nearby thorn bush. It bent its head, trying to unseat me, which it did, but not before the thorns had pricked and scratched my face, embarrassing me in front of my friends. Like the people of the East, Africans have a highly developed sense of dignity, or what the Chinese call "face." I had lost face among my friends. Even though it was a donkey that unseated me, I learned that to humiliate another person is to make him suffer an unnecessarily cruel fate. Even as a boy, I defeated my opponents without dishonoring them. (Mandala 1995: 10)

There is something poignant about a child's orientation to dignity. Many victims of violence have stated they made particular commitments about how they would be in the world after experiencing the degradation of violence. And, it is clear that those harmed by violence appreciate receiving positive social responses, such as kindness, swift effective services and being believed, after disclosing violence (Richardson and Wade 2008).

Almqvist and Broberg (1999) have illustrated the importance for well-being of positive social responses after experiencing earlier violence. They write:

Refugee children's adaptation is the result of a complex process involving several interacting risk and protective factors. For many refugee children, current life circumstances in receiving host countries, such as peer relationships and exposure to bullying, are of equal or greater importance than previous exposure to organized violence. (Almqvist and Broberg 1999: 723)

Positive social responses are related to dignity and often to the justice and acceptance found in the social world. As an organizing principle for human service work, dignity is often found in the literature of human rights and end-of-life care

but is absent from psychological theories or developmental models. Dignity relates to spirit, sovereignty, the ability to choose and to self-govern. It relates to allotting someone the maximum personal freedom within the bounds of their needs for care. We can attend to the dignity of the person across the lifespan, paying attention to the needs of the person at particular moments in their life trajectory.

Within an Indigenous perspective, dignity relates to respect and refraining from telling other people what to do (Brant 1999). It is a holistic concept involving the mind/intellect, the body, feelings/emotions, and spirit. In various non-western cultures and spiritual traditions, paying attention to the heart as the centre of love is prioritized over attention to the brain, which is currently popular in the psychological fields. At the centre of response-based practice lies the understanding that, when dignity is affronted, it constitutes a humiliation that must be rectified, preferably in the same context/situation where the affront took place. As colonialism is possibly the greatest humiliation of an entire people, human service work in Canada can never ignore this gross humiliation of Indigenous people by the Canadian government, churches and by helping professionals (Richardson and Wade 2010).

Children who are affronted, humiliated, singled out or publicly reprimanded tend to respond with overwhelming emotion. A temper tantrum can be seen as a form of civil disobedience, with the child refusing to participate in the adult's plan or pace. Children are often acutely aware of negative social responses to them and their mothers in public places; this awareness often creates stress for the child as they participate in the social world. Stores (corporate capitalism) tempt small children with sweets, sugar and inedible products, both through placing them at eye-level in stores and through advertising. Many children do not have the social power to negotiate these forces; humiliated parents are often pressured to capitulate to capitalism or leave a store quickly when a distressed child makes other adults uncomfortable. Because children often feel disconnected from practices that make no sense, they respond to them with the entirety of their being.

CHILDREN'S RESISTANCE TO VIOLENCE

As discussed earlier, there are many ways that children respond to and resist violence. Often responses that appear to be passive and acquiescent (or would be interpreted as such by conventional child welfare practitioners) actually constitute acts of resistance textured by a child's resources and view of the world. Kayla, who is now an adult working in the field of human services, exemplifies that resistance:

Kayla was only six years old, but she described clearly knowing "what to do." There was danger in her house, and her "first job" was to find her younger sister and tuck her safely under the bed with some toys to keep

her distracted. Kayla intentionally found toys that made a lot of noise, so that her sister wouldn't hear the sounds coming from the rest of the house. Then, bravely, Kayla headed straight for the danger. She describes this as her "second job." It wasn't the first time she saw her dad choking her mom right there in the kitchen, and screaming in her face. Kayla stood in the doorway and started to sing her favorite song from a children's television show that she knew could save her mom. Her dad let go of her mom's throat and crumbled into a heap on the floor. Kayla took her crying mom's hand and led her to the bedroom with her sister. Subsequently, on a referral form for counselling, Kayla was listed as a "child who witnessed violence." (Bonnah 2012, in conversation with Kayla)

Children like Kayla understand fully how to choose the best of the poor alternatives that are available to them, when they live with a violent person. Their assessment skills rival those of the most skilled therapists in terms of understanding risk, and knowing what to do. When Simon's parents start "fighting about something," Simon "closes his ears." When the therapists ask him to explain what that means, he says, "I try not to care" (Överlien and Hydén 2009). Trying to distance oneself from the violence by trying not to hear, for example, is a common strategy used by children who have experienced domestic violence (Lee, Kotch and Box 2004; Ornduff and Monahan 1999). Turning on loud music could also be a way for Simon to distance himself from the violence. Such coping by avoidance is, in fact, one of the most common ways for people to deal with stress (Folkman and Lazarus 1991).

Eva and Elsa can be described as choosing a problem-focused strategy: in spite of being extremely scared, they tried to find a safe place for their mother, usually with the neighbours. Worrying about the mother and finding ways to help her to be safe were also common strategies used by the children in the study of Mullender et al. (2002). McGee (2000) states that one strategy, used by the fifty-four children in her study, was to intervene physically between the mother and the father; another was to find ways to protect their mother, their siblings and themselves. Using their own physical presence to stop the violence was a strategy also noted by Hester and Radford (1996) in their qualitative research on children and domestic violence. Understanding the relationship between a child's behaviour and their own situational analysis is imperative. This is demonstrated in the following account from our clinical experience:

A young man, Regan (aged seventeen) came to see me. He had clearly waited so long for the day to arrive, took several buses to get here. He told me, "I've attempted suicide one hundred and seventeen times." I asked

him what it is that makes him want to live so much?" At that point, his face lit up with a grin, and he swung his legs off the couch, leaning forward to look at me even more closely. "You're looking at the product of joint custody gone bad. All my life, my parents have been fucking with me ... one week here and one week there ... I wasn't even allowed to take my own clothes back and forth, and they fought over me all the time. They would each literally grab one of my arms and pull. I've never wanted to die. The suicide attempts have been my way of fucking with them."

When children have a sense of injustice; they will resist. When they feel powerless in decisions that affect their lives; they will resist. When youth feel that their dignity is threatened; they will do something to preserve it (Bonnah 2008). Once the construct of *depression* is reformulated as *oppression*, the corresponding behaviours can be viewed as understandable acts of resistance rather than symptoms of illness. Regan went on to describe his suicide attempts as his way of asking, and then shouting "Stop!" As his attempts became more and more lethal and the oppression that he experienced continued, Regan decided that his risk of dying had become too high. Resisting his circumstances had proven to be ineffective in changing them, and therefore he decided to find another way to survive. This led to his decision to work full-time hours while completing grade twelve, and move into an apartment on his own. Regan was seeking counselling because now, on his terms, he wanted his parents back in his life. He loved them.

The European cultures that gave us the prison camps called residential schools and the other mechanisms of colonial domination also gave us the "talking cure" and the human service professions. Naturally, then, the discourses of colonialism and the helping professions would reflect common lines of thought and action. This is arguably most evident where the problem of violence is concerned. Many of the linguistic devices that make up colonial discourse such as stereotypical images, euphemisms, passive and agentless grammatical forms, mutualizing terms (which blame victim as well as perpetrator) and deterministic metaphors appear widely in the discourses of the legal and human service professions, and serve similar functions to each other (Coates and Wade 2007). For example, colonial discourse is at work when the institutions of Indigenous child internment are referred to as "residential schools." This term conceals the fact of the *Indian Act*, that children were forcibly removed from parents, forbidden to leave the schools, virtually starved, and terribly and consistently abused (Fournier and Crey 1998; Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2009). In colonial child welfare settings, the victim of violence is often held responsible for the violence, while the perpetrator is "disappeared" from the analysis (Strega 2009). Similarly, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology to residential school survivors does not highlight the fact of

violent perpetration or Indigenous resistance, blaming the buildings themselves for the genocidal violence: "For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities" (Prime Minister of Canada 2008). The examples by Strega and Harper are referred to as passive and agentless constructions. The truth of who did what to whom is omitted and/or obscured.

Victims are frequently represented as passive individuals who invite or unconsciously desire the violence they endure. In a survey of women who were victims of sexualized assault, Sarah Ullman (2010) gathered the following statements:

- My father and mother said that the way I dressed and the friends I chose provoked the incident. They blamed me for the first two months after the incident.
- [An acquaintance] mentioned that I should have never been talking to him and I should have fought harder — that I should have known what he wanted.
- The woman detective said, "Why did you have him in your apartment if you weren't going to have sex with him?" (Ullman 2010: 63)

Our dominant language continues to portray perpetrators as ill-fated individuals who are compelled to violate others by forces they do not understand and cannot control. Metaphors related to steam locomotion or eruptions are commonly found in media and the helping discourses. This refusal to blame perpetrators is done through language such as "he just lost it!" "he was drunk," "it was a crime of passion," or "he was abused as a child." These kinds of deterministic terms minimize responsibility and are found throughout the media, child protection files, courtrooms and psychological assessments. The kind of portrayal they describe does not highlight the fact that people make choices in context, that some survivors of childhood violence use violence and some do not, and that people can change. Such language may contain the message that victims do not have the right to hold the perpetrator responsible for the violence.

Another form of obfuscation occurs when unilateral acts of violence, from genocide to rape to wife or child assault, are portrayed as mutual acts for which the victims are substantially to blame (Coates 1997). These misrepresentations promote a host of negative social responses to victims, especially those who already face multiple forms of oppression (Andrews and Brewin 1990; Andrews, Brewin and Rose 2003; Justice Institute of B.C. 2002). These negative social responses could include being blamed for the violence, being asked what one was wearing, being subjected to racism in professional services and having one's acts of resistance recast as symptoms of a psychological illness, for example. Rather than stopping the violence, institutions often normalize attacks, sending women, bully victims

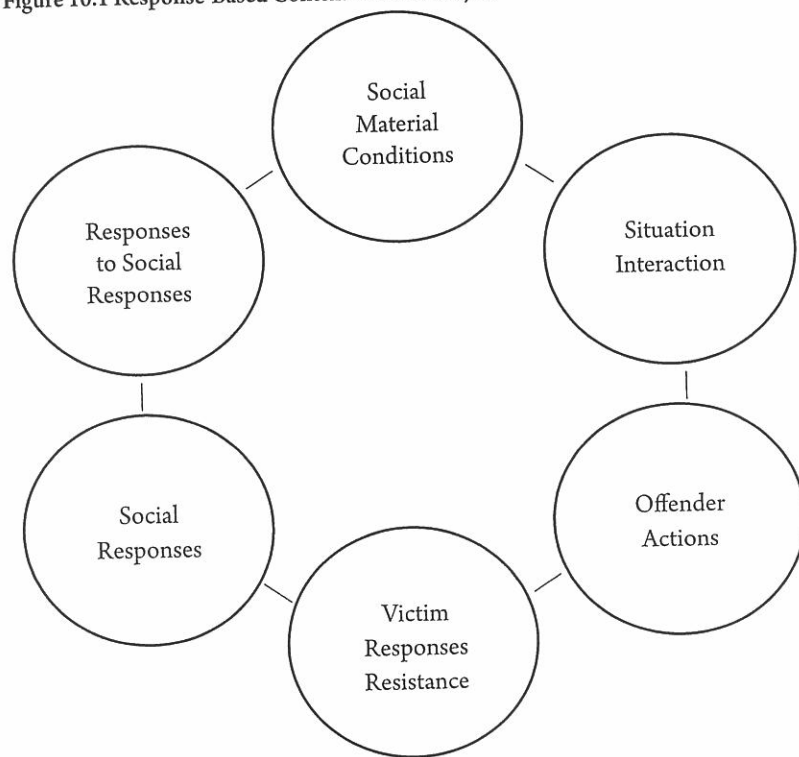
and harassment victims to assertiveness or self-defence training courses, as if the problem was their fault.

If responsibility for a violent act is mutualized, a negative social response to the victim will automatically follow:

- I had someone tell me it was somewhat my fault; that all the warning signs were there, but that I was too stupid at the time to notice them. (teenage White victim of romantic partner rape)
- [They said] I can't believe you did that. Didn't you know something like that would happen? That's what happens when girls drink. You set yourself up. (twenty-year-old Black rape survivor reporting on her family and romantic partner's responses). (Ullman 2010: 67)

When the behaviour of children does not align with the expectations of adults, similar negative social responses can be observed. These expectations are largely

Figure 10.1 Response-Based Contextualized Analysis



Source: Wade (2012)

formed from developmental psychology, which adopts a linear view to indicate "normal" maturation and growth, social and personality development, moral development, language and cognition and psychobiology. These models share the assumption of individual responsibility for development in a social world, aiming to predict "what the child is, does and what it will do next" (Burman 2008: 6). Absent from consideration is the context within which a child is responding, the social responses they receive, and their cultural, historical and political circumstances. "Childhood" becomes a subjective and ideological idea that is rooted in developmental psychology, and often preceded by the words "normal" or "healthy" as a way of making deficits show up as possible causative factors in violent incidents. When young people respond to and resist violence or oppression, their actions defy the predictability of "child development" models. Their physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual responses cannot be categorized as normal or abnormal; rather, under careful scrutiny, they become understandable. Frequently, what they do and think is not "child-like" at all; in the absence of any other explanation, they are often described as children with "old souls." Due to the serious nature of the task, managing violent situations often draws on a child's spiritual strength and orientation. When we explore the child's actions in context, we get an increased sense of the intelligence, aplomb and wherewithal behind their responses.

The Response-Based Contextualized Analysis (Figure 10.1) was developed by the authors in collaboration with Allen Wade and L. Coates as an assessment tool, documentation instrument and interview guide. When considering how to assist a child in the context of the helping professions, it's important to pay attention to these influences: the social material conditions, the situation interaction, offender actions, victim responses and resistance, the social responses and the responses to the social responses. We will demonstrate this framework through the presentation of a case study below.

POSITIVE SOCIAL RESPONSES TO CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE

The social responses that children receive when they disclose violence are important and directly relevant for their well-being. A positive social response is a quick and effective response that stops the violence, makes the child safe, does not devastate the family and restores the child's faith in adult/authority figures. This type of social response shows the child that they matter, and that the world can be good. Researchers (Andrews, Brewin and Rose 2003; Andrews and Brewin 1990) have documented that people who disclose violence often receive a negative social response from family, friends and professionals. Negative social responses are linked to long-term suffering, mental health diagnoses, depression and suicidal

ideation; they are experienced more frequently by women than men. As helpers, we can orchestrate positive social responses to children who disclose violence, through intentional collaboration and shared theoretical orientations to violence, both for interventions with victims and with perpetrators.

It is important that we, as workers, take care of our own emotional well-being or "spiritual pain" caused by the lack of social justice in our communities. Creating teams for mutual support and witnessing each other's struggles promotes sustainability in the work. It is the stories of resistance and the responses to social injustice that energize us with their inspiration and insights into the human spirit. Children demonstrate great courage in dealing with situations that we would normally expect to be well beyond their years. Male intimate partner violence is often directed at the bond between the mother and child. Statistics show that the majority of violence in families is male to female and that women are more likely to be killed, hospitalized and seriously injured or to be diagnosed with a mental illness after experiencing spousal violence. Women are also more likely to be sexually assaulted by their partners, along with being physically assaulted. According to METRAC Sexual Assault Statistic Sheet (2002)

- 30 to 40 percent of children who witness the violence/abuse towards their mom experience direct violence/abuse themselves.
- Children and youth accounted for 61 percent of sexualized assault cases reported to a subset of ninety-four police departments.
- The rate of sexualized assault for girls and women with developmental disabilities is four times the national average (Razack 1994).
- Over half of the women in British Columbia have experienced physical or sexualized violence since the age of sixteen. That is more than one million women in British Columbia.

CULTURAL SAFETY FOR CHILDREN

As a society, we recognize increasingly that children have specific needs related to their situation and development. As a group, children have things in common that provide us with a ground from which to theorize about them. Although the notion of "childhood" is a recent cultural construction from an adult perspective (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Kessler 1991; Burman 1994), we generally acknowledge that there are things we can do to improve the condition of children on the planet. The term "cultural safety"¹ may be a helpful construct in considering the (small "c") culture of children and the relatively few child-friendly spaces in society. There is a critical lack of attention to free and accessible social spaces designed specifically for children and their caregivers (Cunningham and Jones 1999).

Overlooking the needs of children on a societal level is one symptom of the

"adulthood" that exists today. Canada has chosen to not fully implement the United Nations Rights of the Child, which makes it easier to violate the rights of children in Canada. It is important to develop an analysis that transcends adult perspectives on social, political, legal and human service issues. There are unhelpful things we do that distract from the real issues and tend to separate children out from their parents. Canadian child protection legislation has the concept of "failure to protect" deeply embedded within it, which essentially places an expectation on non-offending caregivers to "predict and recognize the risks to the child and prevent and react accordingly." We would argue that it is not the duty of victims of violence to stop violence; it is a job of the whole of society, including the male perpetrators (Krane, Strega and Carlton 2013: 11).

In child welfare settings, mothers who have been battered by their partners tend to be blamed, and their children are often removed from them (Richardson and Wade 2010; Strega et al. 2013; Strega 2009). In court cases, children's views are not consistently considered, although babies as young as six months are seen showing preference for one parent over the other (Thomas 2014). We talk about "child poverty" as if the child should have arrived with money of their own, outside of the economy of the parents. There is a paradoxical view that we should save children because they are seen as being "more worthy" than their ("dysfunctional") parents, while we simultaneously apply deterministic "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" psychological theories.

Poor or Indigenous/minority parents tend to be stigmatized (Goffman 1963; Strega et al. 2011). In child welfare settings, this pro-child/anti-adult position gives rise to a "save the children" approach that separates children from the greater needs of the family. Child welfare systems often apply a "sinking boat" approach, metaphorically letting parents drown, while the child is separated from them and left to navigate the world more or less alone, or with a series of temporary caregivers along the way (Dallaire 2014).² We know from our research that, once children are moved into the foster system, they commonly report feeling virtually "unclaimed" and "unloved" by any adult in their lives (Bonnah 2008; Clark and Bonnah 2012). In such a case, could a child's expression of wanting to be cared for by a non-violent parent contribute to an enhanced outcome for that child? Children's experiences are often misrepresented through language in ways that remove blame from a violent perpetrator (Coates and Wade 2007; Wade 2014).

At the same time, we use language to misrepresent other kinds of activities by casting children as willing participants in adult-generated violence. The term "child prostitution," although used frequently, is both legally and practically impossible as children cannot offer consent (Criminal Code of Canada 2015) and do not have sex to sell; "child soldiering" represents killing by children as a career choice rather than an inevitability in the face of their kidnapping, coercion and serious threats

against them and their loved ones. Part of the goal of response-based practice is to prompt accurate language use, which upholds the rights and dignity of children and those harmed by violence.

BEING AN ALLY TO CHILDREN

Finally, in our work as social workers and therapists, we can be allies to children. We can align with their pre-existing abilities, resistance and desire for happiness. We can strive to work anti-oppressively: this means becoming more attuned to the various forms of oppression against children and youth in our society. It means learning about the prison camps that contained Indigenous children and robbed them of their freedom, so that we do not replicate similar practices in the context of education, child welfare or mental health services. Community activist and therapist Vikki Reynolds (2008) has articulated a helpful process for "walking alongside," which she describes in her article "The Role of Allies in Anti-Violence Work." We can integrate an analysis of the oppression of children into such models, and honour their experience of responding to violence as evidence of their capacity to act, care and reflect as spirited beings. We can take children's resistance seriously, not as symptoms of mental illness, but rather as clear signs of mental wellness.

NOTES

1. The term "cultural safety," which was developed in the Aotearoan Maori nursing community, serves as an antidote to Eurocentric or structurally racist policies (Papps and Ramsden 1996; Anderson et al. 2003).
2. Rachele Dallaire (2014) wrote her master's thesis on Indigenous girls' experience of sexualized abuse while in the care of child welfare. She states that in some cases children are knowingly put into homes with sexual perpetrators because other homes are not available.

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Chapter 11

INDIGENOUS FAMILIES

Substance Use and Child Welfare

Charlotte Loppie and Bernie Pauly

CHAPTER FOCUS

In attempting to support Indigenous families confronting problematic substance use and subsequent involvement with the child welfare system, child welfare practitioners must first understand what drives entrance into, momentum of and departure from this cycle of trauma. In this chapter we discuss a model of the social determinants of Indigenous health: we use a tree metaphor that is helpful for understanding substance use within Indigenous families involved with child welfare. Root determinants such as the colonial disruption of Indigenous families have shaped and perpetuated cultural oppression and intergenerational trauma; these factors can and do lead to unhealthy coping in the form of drug and alcohol use. It is widely acknowledged that social dislocation and historical trauma, as a consequence of colonization, contribute to and create the conditions for drug and alcohol use.

QUESTIONS THIS CHAPTER ADDRESSES

1. What are the key concepts of culturally safe child welfare practices that support Indigenous family wellness?
 2. What role do social determinants play for Indigenous families struggling with problematic substance use?
 3. How can trauma-informed, culturally safe practice address the needs of Indigenous families who are struggling with problematic substance use and are involved in child welfare?
 4. How can the tree metaphor help us understand the role of colonialism in the lives of Indigenous families involved in child welfare?
 5. How does poverty influence Indigenous family well-being?
-