



Issue: Policy and service issues surrounding male children over the age of 12 whose mothers have requested shelter from domestic violence programs.

Position Statement:

An effective response to domestic violence requires that all persons who have experienced domestic violence in Virginia have access to the safety and support services they need, including shelter. While adolescent male children over the age of twelve present a unique set of service needs, including privacy issues, they do not necessarily present a unique threat to the safety and security of shelter residents and staff. Domestic violence programs should have policies and practices in place to, regardless of age or gender, to address privacy concerns, screen for potentially abusive individuals prior to admitting families to shelter, or at the time of intake; and to respond to behavioral concerns and safety threats from any current shelter resident.

Shelters may determine that an individual or family create a risk to other shelter residents. In these circumstances, domestic violence programs must have “back up” options to make alternative arrangements for emergency housing/shelter and safety planning.

Rationale:

Policies that discriminate on the basis of age and gender are not consistent with the mission of the Action Alliance. Male children over the age of twelve clearly present a unique set of service needs, but they do not necessarily present a unique threat to the safety and security of shelter residents and staff. While the research on domestic violence tells us that battering behaviors can be “passed down” from father to son, the more significant finding is that often it is not. Male teenagers can choose nonviolence. They can be capable of healthy, respectful relationships. Domestic violence programs can provide a source of support and encouragement for those choices, and at the same time model clear consequences that serve to protect all of us.

Safety concerns about sheltering adolescent males can be addressed in several ways. Shelter workers can and should be trained to screen for potentially abusive individuals of any age or gender prior to admitting families to shelter, or at the time of intake. Risk indicators such as a history of violent behaviors, a history of having been sexually

abused, or a history of ignoring consequences can be taken into account when developing a safety plan that includes an adolescent male. Shelter workers need to have working conditions that allow them the time and the secure space to conduct lengthy face-to-face interviews with adolescents, as well as others coming into shelter.

For these reasons, the Action Alliance affirms that an effective response to domestic violence requires that all persons who have experienced domestic violence have access to the safety and support services they need. Domestic violence programs should have policies and practices in place to, regardless of age or gender, to address privacy concerns, screen for potentially abusive individuals; and to respond to behavioral concerns and safety threats from any current shelter resident.

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