



PEACE FOR CANADIAN CHILDREN & YOUTH:
A ROADMAP

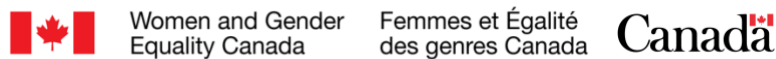
Supporting children and youth in Canadian
women's shelters and transition houses

January 2022



Prevention
Education
Advocacy
Counselling
Empowerment

PEACE for Canadian Children & Youth: Training and Peer Mentorship for Women's Shelters in Northern, Rural and Remote Communities to Build Specialized Supports for Children & Youth Survivors and Witnesses of Gender-Based Violence.



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Information found in PEACE Canadian Children & Youth was drawn from the following resources developed by the BC Society of Transition Houses, available online in English:

PEACE Program Toolkit

<https://bcsth.ca/publications/peace-toolkit/>

PEACE Program Policy and Template Guide

<https://bcsth.ca/publications/peace-program-policy-template-and-guide/>

PEACE Use of Technology Program Template Guide

<https://bcsth.ca/publications/peace-program-use-of-technology-policy-template-guide/>





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INTRODUCTION

THE PEACE FOR CANADIAN CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROJECT

The Road Map is part of the *PEACE for Canadian Children & Youth* project carried out by the BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) and Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) to provide training and mentorship based on British Columbia's *Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment (PEACE)* program to shelter workers in northern, rural and remote areas across Canada. The project focus is on enhancing the capacity of women's shelters to offer specialized supports for vulnerable children and youth who have witnessed and/or experienced gender-based violence.

Content in the Road Map is drawn from PEACE program resources developed by the BCSTH, keeping in mind what might be most useful for frontline workers in women's shelters or transition houses, as we share the foundational values and approaches that are at the very heart of the PEACE program in British Columbia.

This project is made possible with funding from the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada as part of their **Safe Kids Initiative**.

THE BC SOCIETY OF TRANSITION HOUSES

The BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) <https://www.bcsth.ca/> is a member-based, provincial umbrella organization that, through leadership, support and collaboration, enhances the continuum of services and strategies to respond to, prevent and end violence against all women, children and youth. BCSTH provides support to Transition, Second and Third Stage Houses, Safe Homes and PEACE and VIP programs in British Columbia through training, advocacy, research and resources.



WOMEN'S SHELTERS CANADA

Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) <https://www.endvaw.ca/> brings together 14 provincial and territorial shelter organizations and supports the over 550 shelters and transition houses across the country for women and children fleeing violence. WSC works as a unified voice to collaborate, educate, and innovate for systemic change that ends violence against women. Shelters support women and children fleeing violence. WSC supports the shelters.

THE PEACE ROAD MAP FOR SHELTER WORKERS

This Road Map has been developed as a resource for frontline workers in women's shelters and transition houses who are participating in the PEACE for Canadian Children and Youth training. It shares information about how the PEACE approach supports vulnerable children and youth who have experienced gender-based violence and outlines the resources and mentorship available to assist project participants in professional growth.

UPHOLDING DIGNITY

This Road Map will share the foundations at the heart of the PEACE program with you: its core values and approaches. The essence of the PEACE approach is to uphold the dignity of mothers and their children while shining a light on the many resourceful and creative ways that they resist and respond to the violence in their lives.

Recognizing that people always resist violence, the PEACE approach encourages workers to help mothers, children and youth become aware of their own acts of resistance, highlight their responses to violence and harm and build on that foundation.

We hope the information and resources in the PEACE Road Map will assist frontline workers in women's shelters and transition houses to:

- Support the needs of children and youth
- Uphold the dignity of mothers/caregivers
- Develop a network of peer support
- Know you are enough in the work you do



OVERVIEW OF ROAD MAP CONTENTS

The information and resources in this Road Map are drawn from PEACE materials developed by the BC Society of Transition Houses, which are informed by the program's roots in British Columbia's transition house movement and the knowledge and wisdom of PEACE counsellors.

It includes information related to your work in a women's shelter or transition house, including:

- Key PEACE fundamentals
- Guiding approaches to working with children and youth with experiences of violence in the home
- Putting the PEACE approach into practice in a shelter or transition house
- PEACE resources and mentorship

HOW TO USE THIS ROAD MAP

How you use this Road Map is up to you. There is no need to follow it from start to finish or in any particular order. It is provided as an additional resource that echoes information about key PEACE concepts and fundamentals that will be shared through the virtual training. It also outlines the resources and mentorship the *PEACE for Canadian Children and Youth* project offers for professional growth.

We have tried to organize things so you can easily find the information that interests you and go straight to it. But who knows, you may just find something else along the way...

NOTES ON LANGUAGE

Women: Please note our use of the term “women” refers to and is inclusive of all self-identified women. BCSTH recognizes that while gender-based violence has significant impacts on cis-gender women and girls in Canada, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and gender non-conforming people are disproportionately impacted by experiences of violence.

Child, Children, Youth: Our use of the terms “child” or “children” refers to people between the ages of 3–9 and “youth” refers to people between the ages of 10–18.



Mother/Non-Offending Caregiver: Most children and youth who come into shelter will have seen, heard, and/or be aware of violence perpetrated against their mother. In this Road Map, we use the language mother and non-offending caregiver interchangeably, to refer to the non-offending mother or another caregiver, such as a grandparent or foster parent.

Gender-Based Violence: The terms violence against women, woman abuse, and gender-based violence may all be used in this Road Map. We consider these terms to be interchangeable because they all reflect the historical and persistent unequal power relations between men and women. Gender-based violence in any form is a violation of human rights and can cause physical, psychological, sexual, and economic harm or suffering.

Shelter/Transition House: Across Canada, the terms used to describe Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters vary greatly. They are referred to as transition houses, safe homes, women’s shelters, family violence shelters, VAW emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, healing lodges, or first stage shelters. In this Road Map, you will find the terms shelter and transition house used most often and used interchangeably.



INTRODUCTION TO PEACE

Prevention
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BACKGROUND

The ***Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment (PEACE)*** program in British Columbia supports children and youth who have witnessed and/or experienced domestic violence through a psycho-educational approach. Originally known as *Children Who Witness Abuse (CWWA)*, the program was created by BC transition houses in 1992 to provide dedicated counselling supports to children and youth that they could access after leaving the transition house.

British Columbia's PEACE program includes:

- Free community-based support programs for children and youth between the ages of 3–18
- Information-sharing and support to non-offending parents and caregivers
- Violence prevention activities and presentations in schools

PEACE programs in BC are typically run by anti-violence organizations that also provide transition house and other support services for survivors of gender-based violence and abuse.

PEACE programs recognize that children and youth living in families where violence in the home occurs may witness acts of violence or may overhear or witness the aftermath of violence.



Goals of the PEACE program in BC are to:

- Support children and youth to feel safe, respected, valued, and heard
- Support mothers/caregivers to feel respected, empowered, confident, and effective
- Support children, youth, and parents to develop healthy and respectful ways of connecting with one another
- Reduce isolation and let children and youth know that they are not alone
- Acknowledge existing safety skills and strategies and expand upon them
- Explore non-violent ways of resolving conflict
- Support emotional health and self-esteem
- View emotions and responses not as pathological, but rather as a natural response to traumatic events
- Provide psycho-education and support to help children and youth identify and manage their emotions
- Explore healthy ways of expressing anger and promote the separation of anger and violence
- Foster hope by reminding children and youth of their abilities, and how they have used strategies and resistance in the past to respond to adversity
- Offer reassurance that the child's and youth's responses are natural under the circumstances
- Provide outreach in schools, focused on violence prevention
- Develop understanding of violence against women and girls
- Support mothers/caregivers in their understanding and honouring of their responses

THE PEACE APPROACH FOR SHELTERS AND TRANSITION HOUSES

Born from the needs of children that were witnessed by transition house workers, the very essence of the PEACE approach is to uphold the dignity of mothers and their children while shining a light on the many resourceful and creative ways that they resist and respond to the violence in their lives.

While the PEACE program in BC was structured to work with children after they leave the transition house, many of its guiding principles and approaches are highly relevant to the work that goes on in shelters and transition houses every day – places where workers constantly respond to the immediate needs of the women, children and youth who are staying there while at the same time doing the important work of acknowledging and bearing witness to their experiences of violence and abuse.



Some of the ways the PEACE approach supports children and youth include:

- Providing a safe and supportive place
- Providing emotional support
- Acknowledging resistance and resilience
- Teaching skills, such as grounding skills and safety planning
- Sharing family stories
- Listening and witnessing



THE PEACE APPROACH

SOME PEACE FUNDAMENTALS

YOU ARE ENOUGH PART 1

In your work supporting children and youth, it can often feel like there is *so much* to know. The tendency can be to think we don't know enough – that we will never have enough knowledge or tools — this can leave us feeling overwhelmed.

This is normal. Don't worry!

This work has many challenges. Remembering these guiding principles can help:

- **Build relationships:** Connecting with the children, youth and families you serve is one of the most important things you can do. Take the time to acknowledge when and how you do this. It is important.
- **Create “safe enough” spaces:** Safety is experienced along a continuum and we can never know the experience of another. By offering accountability, honesty, integrity, predictability, and approachability, we step towards another in the spirit of safety. This is invaluable.
- **Uphold the dignity of those you serve:** Violence and abuse are violations of an individual's dignity. We can be part of supporting someone to restore their dignity by some simple dignifying practices—always asking permission; not rushing or pushing another; being mindful of how you speak and debrief about your work.
- **Ask yourself, and acknowledge, the ways you counteract violence and abuse with dignity:** Be mindful of your thoughts and feelings, to be “present.”

Don't underestimate the power of knowing *how you are*. Being able to notice your own emotions, judgments, biases, and responses to another, is ongoing and important work. When we notice how we are, we can then find ways to support ourselves—and ultimately, be of support to the children, youth, and families we serve.

Breathe. You are enough.



YOUR COMFORT ZONE

It's important for all workers to work within their comfort zone. Some of the mothers, children and youth staying at the shelter or transition house will likely have needs that are beyond the scope of what workers in the transition house can and should provide in the house environment.

This can be challenging, especially when there are limited resources in the community and few, if any, places to refer people for service.

Feminist counselling guidelines tell us that it is important for each worker to have personal awareness about what is comfortable in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities, and to consciously work within that range.

Sometimes you may receive information that needs to be acted upon, like a disclosure of sexual abuse. In that kind of situation, sharing the information with your supervisor or staff team will help you and the organization respond appropriately, as well as help you get any support you may need.

GROUNDING AND PRESENT

As a frontline worker, staying grounded and being present for others in a busy shelter can be really hard to do. Frontline workers are juggling any number and variety of tasks as they work to meet the needs of house residents. At the same time, workers also carry the demands of their lives away from work.

Finding your own ways to resource yourself as you go through a busy day, even something simple like a minute or two of conscious breathing, can help you reset, get grounded and be present.

LISTENING AND WITNESSING

Through knowing and supporting both moms and children, shelter and transition house workers are well placed to play a particularly beneficial role. Listening and witnessing is one of the most important things a worker can bring to their support of a mother, child or youth.

Everyone responds to being listened to with close attention and without interruptions, comments or attempts at fixing or solving. The very act of listening can encourage people of all ages to share the stories they need to share as part of their healing.

Listening without judgement is a deeply respectful process that can build connection, create safety and help restore a person's dignity.



RESISTING BURNOUT

Ethical or Spiritual Pain

Compassion stress, compassion fatigue, or burnout are ways to describe the stress of working with people who have experienced violence, injustice, and suffering. It is experienced as physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion. Unlike vicarious trauma, it does not involve a traumatic event.

In their daily work, anti-violence workers regularly bear witness to the injustice and violence committed towards children, youth, and women. Burnout is bigger than any one worker – it is framed by broad societal contexts that workers regularly come up against.

Bringing hope to a seemingly hopeless situation can be challenging. In this sense, Vancouver-based consultant, activist and clinical supervisor Vikki Reynolds <https://vikkireynolds.ca/> refers to burnout as “ethical or spiritual pain” that results when workers are unable to act in line with their ethics or in ways that feel respectful.

The Bigger Picture

Burnout is often placed on the shoulders of people individually. It may be interpreted as a sign the worker needs to deal with some personal issue that has been triggered or needs better self-care practices or perhaps because the worker heard a particularly terrible story or worked with an especially “difficult” person. This does not take into account the larger patterns and frameworks we all live and work within – “the bigger picture”.

Another way to look at burnout is to see it as being related to a worker’s ethics coming up against larger barriers, for example:

- When a worker acts against her own ethics, such as not challenging another worker who is woman-blaming or victim-blaming
- When a worker is limited in what support they can provide, for example, when the shelter is full, so you are unable to admit any more people
- When workplace practices and policies are disrespectful of people receiving services or are not reflective of their realities
- When funding gets cut, limiting available resources and the accessibility of services
- When someone receiving support services shares experiences about unjust and harmful treatment by larger systems like the justice system



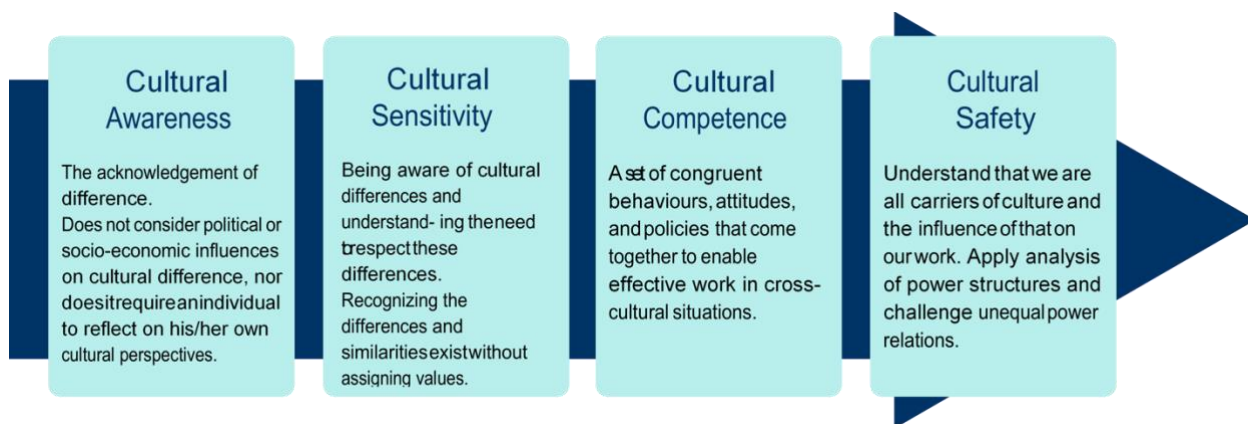
These examples show how the ethical or spiritual pain experienced by a worker is not only about witnessing individual stories of injustice and suffering, it is also about feeling powerless against the larger patterns of injustice and harm that exist within and across our communities and systems – such things form a long list, including things like lack of safe and affordable housing, the impacts of colonization, institutional racism, racist or poor responses by police, healthcare workers or other critical responders, limited legal aid, and an absence of consequences for offenders.

CULTURAL SAFETY

The concept of cultural safety recognizes that we need to be aware of and challenge unequal power relations at all levels: individual, family, community, and society. Creating cultural safety is based on respectful engagement in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people can feel safe.

Vital to cultural safety is the concept of Cultural Humility, a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic conditioned biases, and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a life-long learner when it comes to understanding another’s experience.

In the PEACE model, a cultural safety approach is brought to working with all children and youth receiving support. Cultures can vary widely and it’s important to not make assumptions either about the child or youth we are supporting, or about their culture or community. Culturally responsive approaches exist on a continuum that ranges from cultural awareness to cultural safety.





CONTINUUM OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE APPROACHES

Cultural safety is defined as “an environment that is safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity and truly listening.”

Cultural safety requires workers to be intuitive, curious, and responsive to each child and youth and caregiver, and to critically examine and equalize power relations in every interaction.

Culturally safe practices include:

- Understanding that we are all carriers of culture, and the influence of that on our work
- Awareness of our own values, assumptions, and beliefs
- Applying analysis of power structures, and challenging unequal power relations
- Recognizing and respecting differences between nations and peoples
- Treating each person receiving support as an individual with their own experiences and context
- Determining success by a child’s or youth’s perception of whether the interaction and support is culturally safe
- Not categorizing or labeling individuals
- Asking instead of assuming how someone identifies
- Communicating in an open, respectful, and non-judgmental way
- Placing the onus on our agency and ourselves to create safety, instead of requiring the person receiving support to adapt to one style or structure of support
- Ensuring that actions do not “diminish, demean, or disempower the cultural identity and well-being of an individual.”
- Hiring staff that represent commitment to cultural diversity and awareness
- Collaborating with other agencies to enhance your program’s ability to provide culturally safe services

Additional information in this section has been adapted from:

- *BC Society of Transition Houses (2021). Cedar Blankets: Building Wraparound Supports and Reducing Barriers for Indigenous Women and Children to Transition Houses and Safe Homes.*
- *Antoine, A., Mason, R., Mason, R., Palahicky, S. & Rodriguez de France, C. (2018). Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers. Victoria, BC: BC campus. Retrieved from <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationcurriculumdevelopers/>*



GUIDING APPROACHES

Even though families may not be in the shelter or transition house for very long, you can always:

- Let children and youth know they have a right to be safe
- Let children and youth know they are not to blame for the violence
- Shine a light on what mothers, children and youth have already done to keep themselves safe
- Acknowledge the mother's choice of bringing the family into shelter to keep them all safe
- Uphold the dignity of the mother
- Honour the mother and child bond
- Listen

In the PEACE model, there are several main approaches that guide working with children and youth with experiences of violence, and with their mothers. These approaches are connected and complement each other. They are:

- Response-based
- Child- and youth-centred
- Feminist and intersectional
- Strengths-based
- Violence- and trauma-informed
- Anti-oppressive

The following pages offer some information about each of these approaches.



RESPONSE-BASED APPROACH

A response-based approach <https://www.responsebasedpractice.com/> shines a light on the many resourceful and creative ways that children, youth, and their mothers have resisted the violence and kept themselves safe.

Recognizing and acknowledging the experiences of violence that are shared is often one of the first things that happens when mothers and their children come into shelter, since asking questions that will help workers keep the family safe is usually part of the intake process.

What will likely also come to light are some of the ways family members responded to their experiences of violence and things they did to keep themselves and each other safe in a variety of situations.

Resistance as a sign of wellness

Children and youth who experience violence become skilled at assessing for safety and risk, as well as intervening in the violence to influence the outcome and ultimately maximize safety. As children and youth grow, their understanding of violence, and their responses to experiences of violence, will change.

Some of the many ways a child or youth may respond to, and actively resist, violence include:

- Running away
- Hiding
- Making themselves invisible
- Protecting siblings or their mother
- Crying
- Yelling
- Becoming silent
- Refereeing
- Trying to negotiate with a violent father
- Experiencing despair and distrust
- Seeking outside help



Response-based practices include:

- Shifting the focus from how a person has been affected, to the ways in which they responded to the violence
- Seeing resistance as a sign of wellness, a resourceful and natural response to violence
- Highlighting the wisdom and resourcefulness of acts of resistance
- Disrupting victim blaming
- Working as allies
- Restoring dignity



CHILD - AND YOUTH-CENTRED

A child- and youth-centred approach recognizes that children and youth have particular needs and experiences that need to be addressed, and that these needs and experiences vary based on developmental stage and age.

Some characteristics of child- and youth-centred practices are:

- Providing emotional and practical support
- Recognizing that each child or youth needs to have their experience understood within their individual context
- Supporting children and youth to make sense of their experiences
- Giving voice to children and youth
- Seeing children and youth as their own social agents, with their own issues and concerns
- Questioning any practice or policy that disempowers children
- Encouraging inclusiveness
- Fostering supportiveness and safety
- Making things fun

Witnessing is the first step to creating relationship

Recognizing and acknowledging each child or youth's unique experience includes recognizing the factors in their lives that may create protection and safety or risk.

The alienating and disconnecting experience of violence and abuse requires connected relationships for healing. A worker's capacity to bring full attention and awareness to the experience of a child or youth can help in their healing process. Witnessing is the first step to creating relationship.

PEACE rights of children and youth

The PEACE approach says that children and youth have the right to:

- Know they are not responsible for the abuse
- Know they will receive safe and supportive services
- Be treated with respect and compassion
- Be met where they are at
- Privacy and confidentiality of information
- Physical, psychological, and emotional safety



Adolescence

Looking specifically at a youth-centred approach, a positive youth development perspective understands that adolescence is a period characterised by tremendous growth and potential.

The development of empowering and respectful relationships with youth needs to take into account things like cultural identity and family circumstances and values.

Encouraging youth in actively finding their own solutions to the issues and challenges they face can be a positive influence on their healing and growth.



FEMINIST AND INTERSECTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The PEACE model is informed by the grassroots history of transition houses and embodies the same feminist principles of gender inequality – recognizing women and girls as the primary victims of gender-based violence. Feminism acknowledges the role of patriarchy in privileging men, maintaining the oppression of women and girls and condoning gender-based violence.

In 1989, the American civil rights activist and leading scholar of critical race theory Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UtQ2o> to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect” with one another and overlap. This intersectional framework challenged traditional feminism to take its understanding of gender equality further, to recognize that individuals have multiple aspects to their identities that shape their lives.

A woman may experience various forms of discrimination (for example, racism, classism, misogyny, colonialism) at any one time, which intersect to compound and further marginalize her and put her at increased risk of violence.

An intersectional feminist framework includes applying a critical lens to these interconnected systems of power that influence a woman’s ability to access resources – such as social or economic status, ability, citizenship/ nationality, class, education, ethnicity, experience of colonization, gender, geographic location, health, occupation, refugee/immigrant status, religion, and sexuality. The framework also promotes ways to disrupt these systems of power that marginalize and disempower women and girls.

Intersectional feminist practices:

- Acknowledge gender inequality
- Recognize that feminism means different things to different people
- Acknowledge the diversity and intersectionality of children’s and women’s identities and experiences
- Value each woman, child, and youth as the expert of their own experiences
- Place priority on emotional and physical safety
- Place responsibility of abuse on the perpetrator
- Validate each woman’s, child’s, and youth’s experience
- Provide non-judgmental, non-labeling services
- Respect self-determination
- Foster self-empowerment



- View behaviours as responses to experiences of abuse, not symptoms or pathologies
- Understand violence as a systemic issue not an individual problem
- Acknowledge resistance to violence
- Nurture an individual's sense of self
- Ensure that any program activities and resources portray a wide range of experiences and identities, so that children, youth, and women can see themselves and their experiences reflected
- Acknowledge and seek to reduce the power differential between the worker and women, children, and youth
- Build a woman's, child's, and youth's support and safety network



STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

The PEACE approach works from a strengths-based perspective, meaning that workers support children and youth and non-offending parents to identify their strengths: naming and celebrating them.

Strengths-based support focuses on the child or youth's emotional and behavioural skills, competencies, and characteristics that can:

- create a sense of personal accomplishment
- contribute to satisfying relationships with family members, peers, and adults
- enhance abilities to deal with stress and adversity
- promote personal, social, and academic development

Strengths-based practices see children and youth as having natural responses to their experiences of violence, rather than deficits or pathologies that need to be treated. A strength-based approach asks, “What happened to this child?” instead of “What is wrong with this child?”

Strengths-based practices:

- Engage in activities and dialogue that highlight and enhance existing skills and strengths
- Honour and illuminate the ways the child or youth has resisted the violence
- Avoid the use of stigmatizing and blaming language
- Help foster self-esteem
- Teach new skills and strategies to help with coping and minimizing impacts
- Foster hope by reminding children and youth of their abilities, and how they have used strategies and resistance in the past
- Offer reassurance that the child's or youth's reactions are natural responses to what has happened to them



VIOLENCE- AND TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Trauma is often understood as an individual experience and response to an overwhelmingly negative event. For children, youth, and women who are living in a context of violence, these experiences, and responses to it, are ongoing: trauma is one of the many possible effects of experiencing personal acts of violence as well as colonial acts of violence and cultural violence, which have impacts on whole communities.

A violence- and trauma-informed approach also acknowledges gender-based violence as a structural and systemic issue that requires structural and systemic solutions.

Violence- and trauma-informed practices include:

- Creating emotionally and physically safe environments
- Fostering a sense of choice, collaboration, and connection to build trust
- Ensuring control remains in the hands of the person receiving support as much as possible and that explicit consent is obtained
- Focusing on minimizing the potential for service to cause further harm by triggering or re-traumatizing
- Being attuned to the social and economic impacts of violence, in addition to physical and mental health impacts
- Understanding that emotional, mental, physical and behavioural issues arise as a result of abuse – they are not an inherent deficit in the woman, child, or youth, but a natural response to their experiences of violence



ANTI-OPPRESSIVE FRAMEWORK

Anti-oppression refers to the strategies, theories, and actions that challenge socially and historically built inequalities and injustices that are ingrained in our systems and institutions, by policies and practices that allow certain groups to dominate other groups.

Anti-oppressive practices include:

- Inviting workers and agencies to reflect on their own power and privilege, and how this may be perceived and experienced by the children, youth, and women they support
- Workers being attuned to, and actively countering, any power imbalances between people receiving support and themselves
- Ensuring that services are inclusive and accessible to all women, children, and youth
- Not making assumptions about who the children and youth are, and about what is important to them
- Fostering choice, control, agency, and autonomy



IN PRACTICE

A lot of information was shared in the previous section about approaches and frameworks that guide the PEACE approach to working with children and youth with experiences of violence, and with their mothers.

This section will give a few examples of what these approaches look like when put into practice in a shelter or transition house environment.

In this section:

- Supporting Mothers
- Safety Planning
- Supporting Children and Youth

SUPPORTING MOTHERS

Some guiding principles for workers

- We support the wisdom, dignity and integrity of all mothers
- We acknowledge mothers are the experts of their child
- We ask mothers what they need
- We are aware of our own biases and judgements about parenting
- We shine a light on mom's successes and dignity and do so in the presence of the children

Supporting mothers in a strengths-based way provides encouragement, affirms choices and shines a light on all the incredible things a mother has done, and continues to do, to keep her family safe.

Families and Workers Under One Roof

Transition house settings bring workers and families in close contact. Workers may see and hear difficult moments between mothers and their children. Families have come into shelter because they need a safe place to be, and all family members are coping with all sorts of feelings and practical realities as they try to get through each day and sort out next steps. At this incredibly stressful and difficult time, a mother is also trying to parent with what may feel like an audience of shelter workers, along with other residents of the house, watching.



Noticing beautiful moments and any and all the positives you see between mothers and their children can be extremely powerful. Letting moms and children know their feelings and reactions are normal is also incredibly helpful. Looking to mothers for direction and asking what they need is a simple way to provide practical support and uphold their dignity at the same time.

Is a child upset? Does mom need a break? Would child minding for a few moments be of help? Mothers know their child best. If you ask, the mother will let you know what would be useful in that moment.

Honouring Resistance

By recognizing and naming the many ways mothers, children and youth resist violence, workers can shine a light for them on their own wisdom, creativity and resourcefulness. Highlighting resistance can disrupt victim blaming – helping mothers, children and youth feel and know that the violence is not their fault. This is another pathway to restoring dignity.

A response-based approach stands firm on interrupting victim blaming. The following four statements can help workers stand in solidarity with mothers and children and youth who have experienced violence:

Violence is unilateral: This means, something one person does to another – it is never mutual.

Resistance is ever-present: Resistance is always there in the face of violence, though sometimes we need to look for it, name it and shine a light on it. We may need to assist children, youth, and their mothers to see and be aware of their own resistance because people often minimize their efforts – especially if they see themselves as being unable to stop it.

Violence is deliberate: Dominant ideas about violence can bring up expressions like “He just lost it,” “I saw red,” or “She pushed my buttons,” all part of the idea that violence is an out-of-control experience. This is not true. Violence is very much a deliberate choice. Understanding that another person is making choices about their behaviour demands accountability, and this also interrupts victim blaming.

Violence is social: Violence involves at least two people and occurs on the level of social action. Understanding violence and abuse is incomplete without knowing and naming the resistance to it. Standing in solidarity, and holding these statements to be true, is powerful ally work.



Listening and Witnessing

Through knowing and supporting both moms and children, shelter and transition house workers are well placed to play a particularly beneficial role. Listening and witnessing is one of the most important things a worker can bring to their support of a mother, child or youth.

Everyone responds to being listened to with close attention and without interruptions, comments or attempts at fixing or solving.

Listening without judgement is a deeply respectful process that can build connection, create safety and help restore a person's dignity.

SAFETY PLANNING

Resistance is ever present

Women, children and youth who live with someone who uses violence are safety planning all the time. Listening and acknowledging information the child, youth or mother shares about their situation, and recognizing the many things they already do to keep themselves safe, is a central practice of safety planning.

It can be a powerful experience for people receiving support to have a worker affirm and validate how much skill and creativity it takes to navigate violence in their home and to keep themselves safe. When we ask about safety, and what children, youth, and their mothers are already doing to keep safe, we learn so much about their lives, ability to be creative, and their resistance to violence.

You can discuss with the mother/non-offending parent what kind of safety planning steps are already in place. This could include protection orders, probation orders, peace bonds, and court orders that describe parenting arrangements and who is authorized to pick up the child or youth from childcare or any other activity.

Things to consider:

- The safety of children and youth with experiences of violence is always connected with the safety of their mother. Helping mothers enhance their safety also enhances the safety of their children.
- The younger the child, the more imperative is the involvement of the caregiver



- Safety plans will vary depending on the risk and safety factors present, and the community resources available
- Smaller communities present challenges around lots of people knowing each other, sometimes being related, and often a lack of confidentiality
- Make sure any directions you give to a child or youth about making emergency service calls reflect the reality of their community and region. For example, if 9-1-1 is not available in that area, provide the local police/RCMP number.
- Consider whether the child or youth is being used to keep the non-offending parent in the violent relationship
- Safety planning is complex and often challenging. Consulting with a trusted peer, your team or supervisor can be valuable.
- Caregivers, such as foster parents or other guardians, may have unique responses and issues that need consideration when safety planning with a child or youth. Do what you can to help caregivers understand any relevant orders, guardianship, or parenting rights and responsibilities, and how these relate to the safety plan – both for themselves, and for the child or youth they are caring for.

Safety planning at different ages:

- The younger the child, the more imperative is the involvement of the caregiver. Depending on the age of the child or youth, safety plans may be developed in collaboration with the mother. Safety plans may also be completed with a child or youth on their own, particularly in the case of a mature minor; in circumstances like that, full participation of the mother might not be relevant or desired by the youth.
- Keep the discussion simple and use repetition, especially with younger children.
- Do not label anyone as bad. Focus on the behaviour of the offending parent as not being okay. Reaffirm with the child or youth that it is okay to love the person, but not their violent behaviour.
- Young children sometimes worry about others knowing about the violence, and about who will “get into trouble,” so talk about how making their own safety plan is a good way to keep them safe.
- Suggest to the mother, when appropriate, to give copies of documents such as court orders and protection orders to care providers and others who may require it, such as teachers and coaches.



Safety planning with ages 3-5:

- At this young age, the conversation around safety and safety planning is most commonly done in collaboration with the mother.
- At this developmental stage, safety planning is often more of an introduction to safety, rather than a detailed plan.

Safety planning with ages 6-8:

- Discuss the importance of staying away from the violence inside the home and that leaving home by themselves during the fighting is unsafe.
- Use words based on the child's level of understanding and contextualize this in an age-appropriate way, e.g. "When (x) happens, and you feel (x), what do you do, who do you tell?"

Safety planning with ages 9-11:

- Discuss the importance of staying away from the violence inside the home and that leaving home by themselves during the fighting is unsafe.
- Create a support map with contact numbers, address, or identifying landmarks of where they live. Talk with the child, and the mother if needed, about where they can safely keep their support map.

Safety planning with ages 12-14:

- Discuss the importance of staying away from the violence inside the home.
- Make a list of trusted people the youth know they could talk to about their feelings and safety. Youth should be clear about who they can turn to if they are in an unsafe situation, and if they need help.

Safety planning with ages 15-18:

- Older youth often have a greater ability to keep themselves safe in comparison to younger children, but they may need help with identifying their own resources and developing a realistic safety plan for themselves.
- At this age, males especially may feel they can protect their mother by intervening in the violence in some way. While respecting their feelings about this, encourage youth to consider their own safety.



- Make a list of trusted people the youth know they could talk to about their feelings and safety. Safety plans for youth often include peers, community resources, and specific agencies and help lines (e.g. crisis lines, child and youth mental health services).

Source: Adapted from *Safety Planning with Children and Youth: A Toolkit for Working with Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence*. (2011). Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/vs-info-for-professionals/training/child-youth-safety-Toolkit.pdf>

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUTH

We want to make clear and affirm that your presence and ability to acknowledge the experiences of children and youth can have a profoundly positive impact on their healing. Much, in fact, can be communicated in a short amount of time in order to: uplift, honour and send a message of care and concern. It is a powerful experience to really be seen and this is possible by bringing your full attention to the child or youth's experience.

As with all our work, it is important to be mindful of our bias, thoughts, feelings and cultural assumptions when working with families. Be curious about your own experience and notice what might get in your way of being fully present for the child, youth and caregiver you are supporting.

In your interactions with young people, think of the ways you might communicate the following statements and sentiments:

- *"We are so glad your mom brought you here. What a smart idea it was to come!"*
- *"What has happened in your home is not your fault. It is never a kid's fault when someone chooses to behave in unsafe or hurtful ways."*
- *"Your mom wants you to be safe."*
- *"We can help kids think of things to do when someone is acting in unsafe ways at home. How does it sound to sit down together with your mom, like a team, and come up with some safety ideas together?"*



Supporting Children and Youth Workbook: Ideas and Activities

For ideas and activity work sheets that can help you connect with children and youth staying at the shelter, please check out the Supporting Children and Youth Workbook that comes with this Road Map

Containment

When working with children and youth experiencing violence, situations may arise when a child or youth discloses and discusses a traumatic experience that you may not feel prepared or equipped to support. This might happen in an inappropriate environment for disclosure (for example, in a group setting). You might notice the child/youth getting very distressed when talking about their experience.

When this happens, do not shame the child or youth for their disclosure. They need to know that their story and experience is important, and that it is important to talk about it. Ensure that the child or youth feels safe and supported, and then refocus the discussion.

Suggestions of what to say to help containment include:

- *“Let’s talk about how you make yourself feel better in those moments. What helps you feel better when you have those feelings?”*
- *“This is a really important story and I want to make sure I can really pay attention when you tell me.”*
- *“I think this is too much for us to talk about right now. Can you and I finish this conversation after our group?”*
- *“This is a really important story you are telling. Why don’t you and I go to another more private space and talk about this more?”*



- *“Imagine your story on film. Fast-forward through the parts that are too difficult to remember right now. Turn it off if it becomes too much. Turn it on again when and if you feel ready.”*
- *“Put all the feelings that are difficult in a container. Put a lock on the container. Only you can access it. You are in control of when you want to talk about those feelings. Pick a time when it is safe and someone you trust is there to help you with the feelings.”*

When a Child or Youth is Suicidal

Working with children and youth that are having suicidal thoughts or intentions is a very distressing situation. Our hearts are touched when someone young feels so alone and hopeless and we can often worry about saying and doing “the right thing” in the moment.

Resources for youth struggling with suicidal thoughts may be few and far between in rural, remote and northern communities. There may be no programs specific to supporting the mental well being of young people in your area and/or the wait times may be long for the minimal services offered. This context can add to the distress and overwhelm a shelter worker may feel when a youth discloses to you.

Not all children and youth are at the same risk of suicide. Those who are at greatest risk are: older youth; males; Indigenous children and youth; children and youth who identify as two spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, plus (2SLGBTQQA+); and children and youth in care.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH
(10 to 19 years)

- Suicide 2nd leading cause of death
- Males account for 41% of 10–14 year old suicides, increasing to 70% of 15–19 year olds
- Self-harm hospitalizations 72% females

Youth who have been in government care were significantly more likely to have either considered suicide or to have attempted suicide one or more times in the past year, compared to youth who were never in care.

It is important to know that your response can make a positive difference. Keeping in mind some simple guiding principles can support you should someone disclose their intention to harm themselves.

Source: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/health-canada/migration/healthy-canadians/publications/healthy-living-vie-saine/suicide-canada-infographic/alt/infographic-infographique-eng.pdf>



Guiding Principles to Responding

Acknowledge the disclosure

First, let them know how glad you are that they have told someone. Find your own words to express how valuable their sharing is and that you want to be able to get them some help.

Be honest

We all have a duty to report instances of intention to harm and you must share this information with the young person. They have a right to know that you will be speaking to other people about what they have shared.

Follow protocol

Your shelter will have developed a protocol regarding disclosures of suicidal thoughts or intentions. Make sure you know what it is

Do not make promises that you cannot keep.

We sometimes have no idea how certain agencies or government ministries will respond and we have no control over that response. Avoid making statements that will guarantee anything to the young person.

Get support for yourself.

Disclosures of self-harm should not be held by one person alone. Seek consult from your supervisor or a peer if a supervisor is unavailable. Having support yourself will help you to offer a better response.

Maintain your commitment to support them.

Let them know you will do your best to find them the appropriate help and support.



Know who your 'go-to' services are in your area.

Whether the referral is to mental health services, a hospital emergency room, a crisis line or a medical doctor – know who in your area should be contacted.

Contact a call centre in Canada near you:

<https://suicideprevention.ca>

The Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868

Warning Signs

Often youth may not make a direct plea for help but will instead send out various signals of distress. Some warning signs may include:

- Talking or joking about suicide or dying
- Preparing for death, such as giving away significant possessions, making a will, writing a suicide note, clearing up loose ends
- A previous suicide attempt; the suicide of someone important
- Being persistently depressed or down for more than a couple of weeks; protracted anxiety or agitation; extreme mood swings/bipolarity; outbursts of rage, grief, violence.
- Isolation, withdrawal from previously enjoyed relationships and activities
- Lethargy, lack of interest, low energy, insomnia, or over-sleeping
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Uncharacteristic high-risk activity, impulsive behaviours
- Expressions of hopelessness, helplessness, purposelessness
- Low self-esteem, low self-worth, self-contempt, anger toward self
- Significant loss(es), such as important relationship, health, identity, economic security, freedom

These warning signs may not be as visible to a shelter worker as to a parent. Make sure you and other shelter staff are aware if a caregiver is concerned about their child's suicidal thoughts.



When a Child or Youth is Self-Harming

It is important to distinguish between thoughts of suicide and what is known as ‘self-harm’ – as these behaviours are not the same things.

Children and youth cope with difficult thoughts, feelings, and experiences in different ways; some cope by injuring themselves on purpose, most common during the teenage years among females and children who have experienced stressful or traumatic experiences, such as violence. Most children and youth who self-harm have no intention of ending their life. It is not a mental illness, but may mean that this young person needs additional support.

There are many reasons for self-harming:

- To cope with depression or anxiety
- To cope with loss, trauma, violence, or other difficult situations
- To “punish” themselves
- To turn emotional pain into physical pain
- Getting relief from painful or distressing feelings
- To counter feelings of emptiness or numbness
- To feel euphoria
- To regain control of their bodies
- Communicating pain or distress to others
- To simply feel better

Common ways that youth harm themselves:

- Cutting themselves
- Scratching themselves
- Burning their skin
- Taking too much medication, but not enough to kill themselves (“minor overdosing”)
- Hitting one’s head

If a child or youth staying in your shelter talks with you about self-harming, be sure not to judge or shame them for these behaviours. Seek consultation with an experienced peer or supervisor. If you feel comfortable, discuss what the young person feels may be triggering them to self-harm, and introduce other alternate coping strategies. Referral to child and youth mental health services may be appropriate if such services are available in your area.



RESOURCES AND MENTORSHIP

FREE ACCESS TO BCSTH SELF-DIRECTED ONLINE COURSES

Here is a short guide to access free online courses from BCSTH:

1. Click the link below to access the training bundle:

ENGLISH: <https://bcsth.thinkific.com/bundles/peace-for-canadian-children-and-youth>

FRENCH: <https://bcsth.thinkific.com/bundles/peace-pour-les-enfants-et-les-jeunes>

2. Click “Enroll Free” and log into your existing Thinkific account, or enter your information to create a new account.
3. Click through to finalize your registration.
4. If you run into any issues or would like support with registration, please contact training@bcsth.ca.

Follow this link to enroll for free in the PEACE for Canadian Children and Youth Training Bundle:

<https://bcsth.thinkific.com/bundles/peace-for-canadian-children-and-youth>

FOUNDATIONS IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



Created specifically for frontline workers in women’s shelters and transition houses, this course may also be of interest to anyone working in the field of gender-based violence. Recommended as a good starting place before taking other BCSTH online courses.

In this self-directed online course, we will provide an overview of violence against women

in Canada, including how our society thinks about violence, and how violence against women is a reflection of women’s inequity.



The BCSTH believes that violence against women both reflects and perpetuates women’s inequity and that women face other sources of oppression in addition to sexism. For many women, their experiences of violence can be made still more difficult by the other forms of personal and systemic oppression they experience. We believe that applying women-centered principles not only helps women and their children, but also leads to the systemic change we seek. In this self-directed online course, we will provide an overview of violence against women in Canada, including how our society thinks about violence, and how violence against women is a reflection of women’s inequity.

PEACE 1: INTRODUCTION TO WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE



Specifically designed for PEACE Counsellors in British Columbia, this course shares information that may also be useful for other workers providing direct service delivery to children and youth who have experienced violence and abuse.

This course focuses on learning how to work from a feminist and child-centered perspective. Participants learn important background on child and youth development, and how a child or youth’s development may be affected by exposure to violence. PEACE 1 looks at two specific areas of child and youth development that are particularly relevant: attachment and resilience. It discusses how to work with children and youth who come from minority or marginalized backgrounds, and how to foster community awareness and advocacy on behalf of these children and youth, and their families.

Recommended pre-requisite: Foundations in Violence Against Women



PEACE 2: SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



Specifically designed for PEACE Counsellors in British Columbia, this course shares information that may also be useful for other workers providing direct service delivery to children and youth who have experienced violence and abuse.

PEACE 2 teaches how to design and run a PEACE program; how to work with mothers and with other professional service providers; and how to ensure support for PEACE counsellors. This course is also useful to others supporting children and youth who are experiencing violence.

Recommended pre-requisites:

- Foundations in Violence Against Women
- Introduction to Working with Children and Youth Experiencing Violence (PEACE 1)

VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE (VIP) PROGRAM



A complement to the PEACE program in British Columbia, VIP is an educational program delivered in BC schools by PEACE counsellors to create awareness about gender-based violence.

Violence is Preventable (VIP) offers an overview of violence prevention in the context of gender-based violence in Canada, including our society's thoughts about children and youth's experiences of violence against their mothers, and how prevention activities can help. Rooted in BCSTH's belief in feminist principles, this training provides reasons and ways to talk about violence prevention that are child centered and developmentally appropriate.

Recommended pre-requisites:

- Foundations in Violence Against Women
- Introduction to Working with Children and Youth Experiencing Violence (PEACE 1)
- Supporting Children and Youth Experiencing Violence Against Women (PEACE 2)



VIP Background

BCSTH developed the Violence Is Preventable Program (VIP) in 2004 for children and youth ages 6–18. In British Columbia, the Violence is Preventable (VIP) program is a comprehensive provincial strategy linking BC schools with PEACE programs. The aim of VIP Programs is to break the silence on violence against women and girls, and to provide safe spaces for students to speak up about violence in their home and schools.

VIP offers free educational prevention presentations to educators, caregivers and students. It also links school-aged children and youth to PEACE counselling services and other programs that support children and youth with experiences of violence.

VIP presentations are delivered in schools by PEACE counsellors as time and resources allow.

Interested in Developing a VIP Program?

While there is a great deal of useful content in the VIP online course available to you <https://bcsth.thinkific.com/bundles/peace-for-canadian-children-and-youth> and the VIP Facilitator's Guide <https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/VIP-Facilitators-Guide-2020-Final.pdf>, it's important to note that British Columbia's Violence is Preventable (VIP) program has been integrated with curriculum standards of the BC Ministry of Education. For that reason, BCSTH recommends approaching the development of any new VIP programs in a similar way and consider linking it to the educational standards in your province or territory.

If you are interested in getting more information about developing a VIP program in your province or territory, please email BC Society of Transition Houses at info@bcsth.ca.



PEACE MENTORSHIP

Participating in a mentorship group that will give you the opportunity to connect with peers in your training cohort will begin after the PEACE training has been completed and last for 12 or 18 months. Each Mentorship Group will have the support of a PEACE Mentor who is an experienced PEACE counsellor.

The PEACE Mentor will be the point person who helps your group build a community of practice and peer support as mentor group members learn from each other by sharing their knowledge and practices. Together, your group will create a Group Mentorship Plan that clearly identifies steps you want to take to reach specific shared goals.

WHAT IS A MENTOR?

A mentor is an experienced and trusted advisor who can help others along a path of development and growth. PEACE Mentors can offer guidance, support and encouragement to their group as they share their own knowledge and experience.

PEACE mentors will...

- Offer guidance, support and encouragement
- Draw on the expertise and knowledge of everyone in the group
- Help the group identify specific shared goals and clear actions steps
- Schedule regular virtual check-ins with the group
- Share resources that could be helpful to group members
- Respect boundaries
- Bring curiosity and goodwill to the process

PEACE mentors will not...

- Provide 24/7 crisis support, debriefing or clinical supervision
- Have all the answers



WHAT IS A MENTEE?

Members of the mentorship group, also known as mentees, are interested in professional development and growth and have the opportunity to benefit from the guidance and support of a mentor who shares their knowledge and experience.

Mentees will...

- Be interested in developing or enhancing skills and knowledge
- Be open to sharing their knowledge, work practices and experiences
- Work with the group to identify shared goals and action steps
- Participate in regular virtual check-ins with the group
- Share resources that could be helpful to group members
- Respect boundaries
- Bring curiosity and goodwill to the process



PATHWAYS TO PEACE

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Some of the ways the PEACE approach supports children and youth:

- Providing a safe and supportive place
- Providing emotional support
- Acknowledging resistance and resilience
- Teaching skills, such as grounding skills and safety planning
- Sharing family stories
- Listening and witnessing

Remember these guiding principles:

- Build relationships
- Create “safe enough” spaces
- Uphold the dignity of those you serve
- Ask yourself, and acknowledge, the ways you counteract violence and abuse with dignity

Don't underestimate the power of knowing *how you are*:

- Work within your comfort zone
- Stay grounded and be present
- Listen without judgement

Even though families may not be in the shelter or transition house for very long, you can always:

- Let children and youth know they have a right to be safe
- Let children and youth know they are not to blame for the violence
- Shine a light on what mothers, children and youth have already done to keep themselves safe
- Acknowledge the mother's choice of bringing the family into shelter to keep them all safe
- Uphold the dignity of the mother
- Honour the mother and child bond
- Listen



YOU ARE ENOUGH PART 2

Remember what we talked about earlier?

In your work supporting children and youth, it can often feel like there is *so much* to know. The tendency can be to think we don't know enough – that we will never have enough knowledge or tools – this can leave us feeling overwhelmed.

And then what did we say?

This is normal. Don't worry!

Experiencing Overwhelm

It is easy and very natural to feel overwhelmed by witnessing the barriers families face and the barriers that we, as workers face when trying to provide help and supports.

You are enough because listening, witnessing and making a connection to someone who has experienced violence is so meaningful. The quality of response and connection a survivor encounters makes a significant difference in helping them move forward.

Listening without judgement is a deeply respectful process that can build connection, create safety and help restore a person's dignity. Letting kids know they are not alone and they are not to blame for the violence can be life changing.

A Common Purpose

A sense of isolation can also fuel the feeling we're not enough, but connecting with others – our work teams, peers, trainers or PEACE mentorship groups – reminds us we are all connected by a vision and practice of work that is larger than any one of us. Just reading this Road Map is an act of connecting to a larger community of practice. This shared sense of a common purpose and web of support can help ease the feeling of isolation many workers experience at one time or another.

We hope the PEACE approaches and guiding principles shared in this Road Map may help and sustain you in your work with mothers, children and youth who have experienced violence.



Most of all, we want all women's shelter and transition house workers to know:

*Your work is important.
You are doing an incredible job.
You are enough.*

