

Dignity Driven Practice - Recognising Resistance Practice Tips

What is Dignity Driven Practice?

Dignity driven practice focuses on building an understanding of children, young people (child) and their family's acts of resistance against violence, oppression, suffering or harm. It identifies strengths and protective factors which can be used to work with a family to achieve positive change and safety.

Seeing Children's Resistance

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.

Children do more than just 'experience' or 'cope' with violence, pain or control, they interact and actively respond to try to make sure there are good outcomes for them, their parents and their siblings.

Here are some common acts of resistance from children:

Hiding.	Physically intervening or distracting the perpetrator to stop them hurting someone else.	
Staying quiet during the assault to avoid others coming to help and being hurt.	Avoiding the perpetrator, leaving the room as they enter.	
Refusing to go places with the perpetrator.	Refusing to be in photos with the perpetrator.	Being sarcastic.
Refusing to show affection, for example a child refusing to kiss the perpetrator goodnight.	Sleeping fully clothed to resist sexual abuse.	
Keeping secrets from the perpetrator.	'Acting tough' and refusing to show emotional vulnerability.	Calling the police/ talking to others about the abuse.
Doing the opposite of what the perpetrator wants them to do - such as staying in contact with friends or family members.	Hiding and/or stealing food	
Refusing to cover up bruises from abuse.	Challenging words that suggest they are jointly responsible for the abuse, such as "we didn't argue, he hit me".	
Using drugs to 'number' emotional and physical pain.	Dissociation.	Stealing items to hide poverty - clothing or Christmas gifts.
Imagining a better life for themselves.	Doing nice things or saying nice things about a perpetrator to keep them calm.	
A child may take their siblings away from the violence to protect them.		

(Bonnah and Richardson, 2015)

Adults Resistance to Violence or Oppression

Overt acts of resistance (acts that you can see):

- violent resistance, including hitting, kicking, scratching, screaming, swearing and calling the person using violence names
- refusal and non-compliance
- leaving the house when violence escalates
- ending a relationship with violent partners and taking legal action

Hidden acts of resistance- examples of actions you might not see

Sexual abuse and violence

Acts of resistance	Reflections
Sally stays quiet and does not try to stop Mick from sexually abusing her.	Sally is worried that Mick will sexually abuse her younger sister Katie. Is Sally enduring Mick's violence to protect Katie?
Kaylee goes to a different place in her head when John is sexually assaulting her. She often thinks how much she hates John. Kaylee feels flat, tired and lacks energy.	Kaylee has no control over John's abuse. Is she using the power she does have over her thoughts, feelings and behaviour to preserve her dignity?

Mental health

Acts of resistance	Reflections
Elsie has had depression for the past 10 years. She has suicidal thoughts and is disconnected from her children and other family members. She only gets professional help when things get really bad	How can I consider Elsie's depression in the context of her isolation, experiences of childhood abuse and the negative social responses she receives from families and professionals?

Reluctance to work with services

Acts of resistance	Reflections
Terry and Bron agree to all the case plan tasks. When the caseworker checks in with them she finds that they have not done any of the tasks.	I'm wondering whether Terry and Bron have learned to just agree with bureaucrats and not ask any questions. It's possible they didn't understand why they had to do the tasks but they were scared that if they argued back that they would have Terry Jnr taken away.
Sean responds angrily when caseworkers visit the home. He either refuses to talk to them or screams and yells until they leave.	Sean has had experiences of the DCJ that has led to feelings and experiences of oppression, stigma and shame. It's possible Sean is resisting this happening again. He is holding onto his dignity in the only way he thinks he can.

Drug or alcohol use

Acts of resistance	Reflections
Tony has been addicted to ice for seven years. He does a good job of caring for the kids sometimes but a lot of the time he is absent in their lives.	Tony has suffered a lot in his life. That pain must be hard to bear. He tells me he started using ice to have fun and escape reality. It's possible he now feels a lot of shame about using which makes him want to escape even more. He told me his kids are better off without him so he stays away.
Neville and June drink alcohol every day to the point where they are unable to take care of their children.	Neville and June are suffering from the pain of relentless racism, colonisation and disconnection from their culture. Is it possible they are drinking to numb this pain?

Neglect

Acts of resistance	Reflections
Barry screams for hours and it makes Sophie anxious and angry. Sophie brings her four-month-old son, Troy, into bed with her to sleep. She takes Valium to help her sleep.	Sophie is calming her son down the best way she knows. She wants to cope with parenting. I'm curious about whether Valium helps to silence the distress she feels.

Domestic and family violence

Acts of resistance	Reflections
Jane crawls into a ball when Peter is assaulting her. She covers her face with her hands.	Jane is protecting her body from injury in the best way she can.
Rhiannon refuses to leave the house when Jack is violent. She resists the caseworker's attempts to support her to seek legal orders or take steps to leave the relationship.	Is Rhiannon is afraid that Jack's violence will escalate if she leaves the home? Is she worried about looking after the kids on her own? Is she worried for the children when she is not there to care for them? Rhiannon has told me she loves Jack; it's possible she is hoping his violence will stop soon.

Watch

Drs Allan Wade and Linda Coates explain different elements of response based practice in this series of videos [Elements of Response Based Practice](#)

Talking About Experiences of Violence or Oppression

Talking to children about resistance

Discover the child's resistance and help them make sense of their experiences:

- What did you do when [use child's words] ...?
- You said you were really scared. What did you do when you were feeling scared?
- What were you showing or trying not to show on your face?
- You said you hid because you were scared. Where did you hide?
- Help the child make sense of their experiences
- It's so hard for a kid to try to stop their dad from hurting their mum. You must have been really strong to get dad to play soccer with you when you could tell he was getting angry with mum. Is there anything else you did?

Asking parents about social and historical context

Can you tell me a bit about your family history and what life was like for you growing up?

What kind of role did your mother and father have

- in your family?
- in your community?

Was this similar to how other families in your community worked? What was different?
What was it like growing up in your family or community as a?

- female
- male
- Aboriginal child
- child from a different culture
- person with disability
- child in care.

What do you think about that now? What has been tough? What was good?

Asking a Person About The Experience of Violence or Oppression

Use the person's own words to describe violence or oppression when speaking with them. For example, if a man tells you his father 'bashed' him as a child, use that word too.

Can you give me a sense of what happened?

What happened next?

What kind of expression did you have on your face?

What went through your mind when?
How did you respond when ...?
What did they do when you ...?

Giving Positive Social Responses to The Person's Acts of Resistance

Use their words. For example, where a child says they 'go hide under the blankets' when their mother gets aggressive, ask 'How did you know to go hide under the blankets?'.
How did you know to (act of resistance) ...?

Can you tell the violence is coming before it happens? How do you know this?
It sounds as though you were:

- resisting (his violence)
- trying to stop (the sexual assault)
- trying to reduce (the impact on the children]

What do you think about that?

Where does that resistance come from?

Ask about responses

Use their words. For example, when a parent says the police 'harass' them, use that same word when speaking with them, such as 'What does it mean to you when the police harass you?'

What kind of responses have you had from:

- professionals
- police
- doctors
- counsellors.

What kind of responses have you had from family and friends? How have these responses helped (or not helped)?

- What did other people do that was helpful?
- Who helps you feel strong and valued?
- Who else knows that you have spent all this time trying to keep yourself and your children safe? Who else knows you know how to do this?
- How did you manage to find a way to care for yourself and your kids despite other people's [poor behaviour or poor responses]?

Talking to Men About Their Use of Violence

Ask about their social material context

- Can you tell me more about what it was like growing up in your family?

- Who was in charge of disciplining you as a child and what was that like?
- I'm wondering what you remember about your parent's relationship. What did this look like?
- If there was violence or abuse, what did you do when this happened? What did it mean for how you felt about your parents?
- Who made you feel safe or let you know that this was not ok?

Ask about his use of violence

- I know it might be difficult and shameful to talk about what happened last night but in order to understand how this family works, what you hope for and what your worried about, I need to know what happened when you [describe the act of violence]?
- What was going through your mind just before you [describe the act of violence]?
- What was going through your mind just after you [describe the act of violence]?

Ask about responses to his violence

- When you (describe the act of violence) what did the kids/your partner do?
- When the kids/your partner (describe the act of resistance) what did you do?

Ask about social responses to his violence

- What did the [police, your family, your community] say or do when you [describe the act of violence]?

Watch

Dr Michael Flood talks getting men involved

Dr Michael Flood is a masculinities and gender studies expert. This lecture talks about new ways to get men and boys involved in [Preventing Men's Violence Towards Women](#).

Summary

Dignity driven practice asks caseworkers to identify acts of resistance and to support families to view themselves as being strong and adaptive in the face of suffering. It asks caseworkers to think about the use of language; consider power dynamics and to give a child and/or their family every opportunity to fully participate and make decisions about their lives.