Best Practice Guidelines for Working with Youth Who Engage in Relationship Abuse

WHY: The work of generating these Best Practice Guidelines was initiated by Stand Up Colorado, a project of Violence Free Colorado, in partnership with the Colorado Domestic Violence Offender and Sex Offender Management Boards. The Guidelines were developed by a multidisciplinary group of committed professionals who recognized the gap in services for treatment of youth who use abusive, harmful, and/or illegal behaviors in the context of relationships.

Intervention in and prevention of intimate partner violence, domestic violence, or alternatively relationship abuse in youth is critical at the early stages of adolescent development, both to stop immediate harm and to stem the progression of violence.

Youth who engage in relationship abuse in their dating relationships during adolescence do not fall under the criminal definition of domestic violence[1] because domestic violence is codified in Title 18 of Colorado Revised Statutes pertaining to adults. There are limited interventions and treatment options for these youth in Colorado. Unlike adult domestic violence offenders, there is no mandate for someone to be approved through the Colorado Domestic Violence Offender Management Board (DVOMB) to work with youth who commit abusive, harmful, and/or illegal acts toward a dating partner, and there are no guidelines for treatment of this population.

As a result, these Guidelines are designed to offer best practices and recommendations to Providers offering evaluation and treatment services to youth who engage in relationship abuse. The goal of the Guidelines is to create capacity and resources for these youth to receive services at any point in time by a statewide network of qualified evaluation and treatment service Providers. Our intention is that with the support of these Guidelines, additional professionals will be able and willing to do the important work of providing treatment to these youth, thereby increasing the availability of services to this population and decreasing the occurrence of youth relationship violence.

Community and survivor safety, as well as the prosocial development of youth who engage in relationship abuse, are the primary goals of these Guidelines. It is intended that the safe treatment and supervision of youth will help promote these goals before the normalization of relationship abuse follows them into young adulthood.

WHAT: The Best Practices include:

1) Guiding Principles
2) Legal Considerations
3) Case Management and Multi-Disciplinary Coordination
4) Evaluation and Treatment Service Guidelines for Mental Health Professionals
5) Appendices with various resources

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[1] 18-6-800.3 (1), C.R.S. "Domestic violence" means an act or threatened act of violence upon a person with whom the actor is or has been involved in an intimate relationship. "Domestic violence" also includes any other crime against a person, or against property, including an animal, or any municipal ordinance violation against a person, or against property, including an animal, when used as a method of coercion, control, punishment, intimidation, or revenge directed against a person with whom the actor is or has been involved in an intimate relationship.

FOR WHOM: These Guidelines apply to licensed, registered, or certified professionals who *choose* to provide services to youth who engage in abusive, harmful, or illegal acts. They should also guide the responses of the education system, criminal justice system, survivor advocacy, clinical interventions, and human services.

It is important for professionals to understand and respect the limitations of their practice and the advanced expertise required to properly serve youth, as per C.R.S § 12-43-202(1), which states "Notwithstanding any other provision of this article, no licensee, registrant, or certificate holder is authorized to practice outside of or beyond his or her area of training, experience, or competence."

Use of these Guidelines is not mandated. They do however offer best practices and recommendations to any treatment provider working with youth who engage in relationship abuse. As such, evaluation, assessment, treatment, and monitoring services for youth who engage in relationship abuse should adhere to the Guiding Principles to the extent possible and follow current practices that are grounded in research.

These Guidelines have application for youth ages 10 to 17, or young adults ages 18 to 20, and individuals under the jurisdiction of a juvenile court regardless of age, who are engaging in relationship abuse either as adjudicated or non-adjudicated youth. For those individuals who are convicted of domestic violence as an adult, ages 18-25, refer to the DVOMB Young Adult Appendix K.
https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/dcj/DCJ%20External%20Website/DVOMB/DVOMB%20Standards.pdf

There are two ways that a youth who engages in relationship abuse may be identified and referred for services:

1. After an adjudication or a deferred adjudication has been entered and a referral to probation, parole, or out-of-home placement has been made, the youth should be referred to a Provider who uses these Guidelines and the formation of a multidisciplinary team (MDT), should be convened as soon as possible to manage the youth during the term of supervision. This process may also occur at the pre-trial stage.

2. Outside of the legal system, in response to an identified need by professionals due to a referral by family/caregivers, school, sports, youth groups, etc., the youth should be referred to a Provider who uses these Guidelines and an MDT should be formed with the available professionals who are involved with the youth, if applicable. These members may be more limited, but the Provider should seek their involvement to the extent possible.

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