



National Resource Center  
on Domestic Violence



**ACE-DV**

A project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

# The Voices and Experiences of Adult Children Exposed to Domestic Violence (ACE-DV)

*Lessons to Advance Global Efforts to End Gender-Based Violence*

**Casey Keene**

4<sup>th</sup> World Conference of Women's Shelters  
Kaohsiung, Taiwan | November 6, 2019



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# The ACE-DV Leadership Forum



Established to amplify the voices and experiences of Adult Children Exposed to Domestic Violence (ACE-DV) to enhance our work to end domestic violence.

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# Sharing Your Story, Impacting Change

Your story can inspire action, hope, strength, and unity.

While your voice is unique, and your message is critical, **what gives your story the most value is you.** By bringing your whole self to this work, you are demonstrating bravery, power, and strength.

You are a catalyst for change.



# Stories of adult children exposed to domestic violence can:



Paint a picture about the complex and multifaceted experience of living with a batterer



Reflect on key opportunities for intervention and support



Share a path to resilience, noting the assets and strengths gained along the way



## From the Front of the Room

Sharing Your Childhood Story of Domestic Violence

## ACE-DV Speakers Initiative Goals:

Identify the unique considerations and strategies for sharing our stories in **impactful, meaningful ways**

Create learning opportunities and tools to help **build the capacity** of ACE-DV identified survivor speakers

Maintain a **national Speakers Bureau** of ACE-DV identified survivor speakers who can help bring voice to this unique experience

Developed by:



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ACE-DV

# Webinar Series

1. Sharing Your Childhood Story Domestic Violence
2. Valuing Your Story
3. Navigating Challenges in Storytelling with Audiences
4. Speaking to Our Relationships With Those Who Abuse



Your decision to  
share your story,  
in whatever venue and with whomever,

is personal &  
a true gift

to those who receive it.

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# What are the themes of your story?

- What factor(s) helped to foster your resilience?
- What helped you to deem someone a trusted adult?
- What systems did you interact with on your journey?
- Were there specific trauma outcomes for you or your family that are particularly powerful?
- What are the most important lessons for you?



# Themes from Our Stories




Trauma is a  
common human  
experience



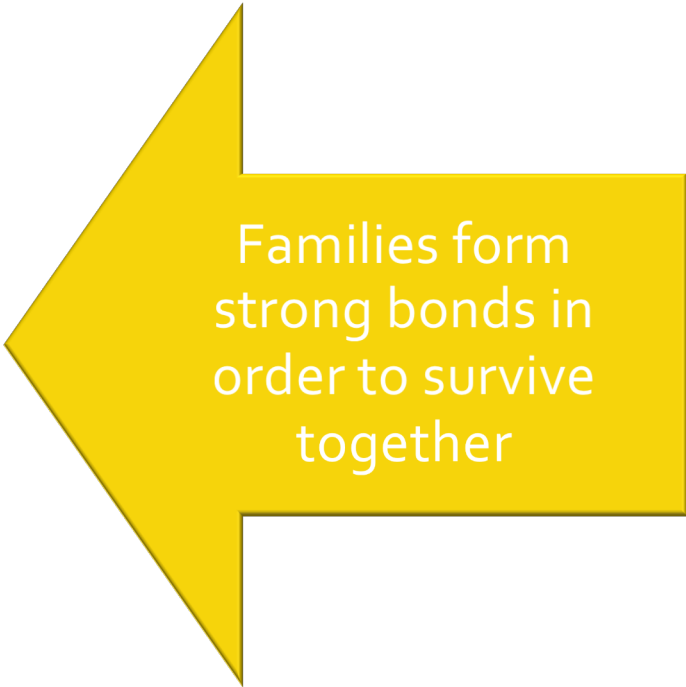
Most ACE-DV  
heal and thrive



# Themes from Our Stories

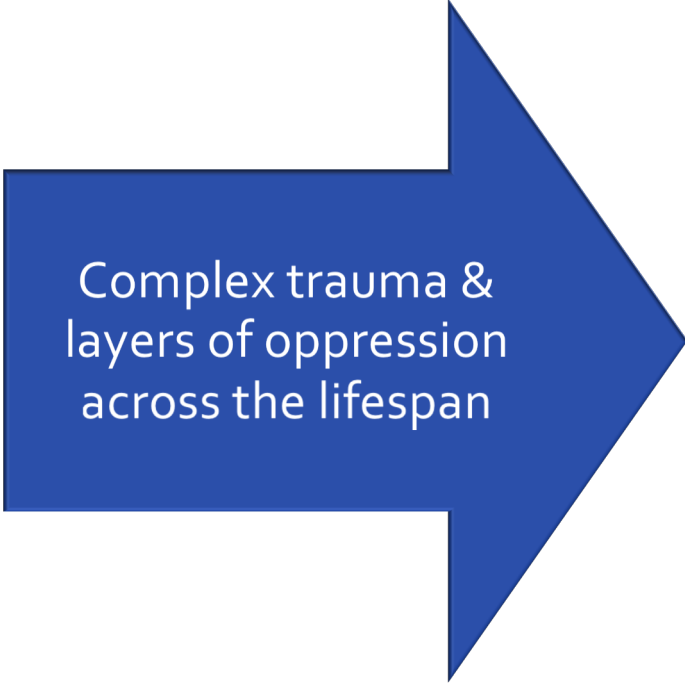


Different  
impacts/outcomes,  
even in the same  
family system




Families form  
strong bonds in  
order to survive  
together

# Themes from Our Stories



Complex trauma &  
layers of oppression  
across the lifespan

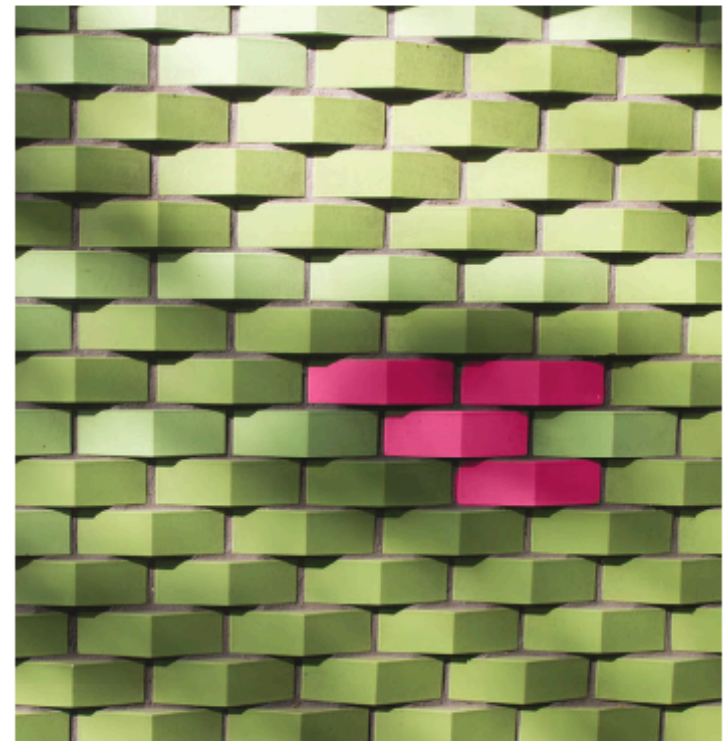


Our experiences offer  
points of growth and  
specialized  
adaptations

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## Speaking your truth can bring a greater understanding to the experiences of children exposed to domestic violence.

1. **Children exposed to domestic violence can heal and thrive.** Your story is much more than a tale of adversity.
2. **Each of us should be allowed and encouraged to name our own experience.** Reclaiming ownership over your narrative is an important step in incorporating this part of you into your whole self.
3. **There is a difference between loving a person who abuses and condoning their behavior.** Your story can emphasize that people who choose to abuse are human.
4. **Violence is learned and reinforced by societal norms, yet accountability and commitment to change can create a new path.** Your story may help your audience to envision a world free of violence and abuse.
5. **Non-abusive parents are faced with limited and complex choices.** Your story can demonstrate the power and strength of survival, shedding light on the importance of family bonds in navigating abuse.
6. **Our unique experiences bring added value to the movement.** By sharing your experiences, you can enhance and transform individual, organizational, community, and systemic approaches to intervention and prevention.



## Core Beliefs

1. Children exposed to domestic violence can heal and thrive.

## Core Beliefs

2. Each of us should be allowed and encouraged to name our own experience.

*While trauma is self-defined, the experience does not define you.*



## Core Beliefs

3. There is a difference between loving an abusive person and condoning their behavior.

*If we are to offer helpful and effective means of accountability and change, we must understand that people who choose to abuse are human.*

## Core Beliefs

4. Violence is learned and reinforced by societal norms, yet accountability and commitment to change can create a new path.

## Core Beliefs

5. Our non-abusive parent was faced with limited and complex choices.

## Core Beliefs

6. Our unique experiences bring added value to the movement.

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# Post-traumatic growth

*What did you gain?*

- ▣ Deficit model is incomplete
- ▣ ACEs develop specialized skills for adaptation
- ▣ “See through the darkness to leverage what it gives us.”

*(Bruce Ellis, University of Arizona)*

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*"Doña Ester was one person in my life who really helped me without even knowing that she helped me."*



Olga



*“Through having us notice our surroundings, and having us carry ourselves on trails through the forest, and be together, and laugh together, and maybe even sing the same song – those things grounded us in our bodies and connected us to each other and made us feel like we had people when maybe other parts of our life were a little bit chaotic... She was bringing wholeness to us that I think maybe she recognized we weren’t getting from other places.”*

Jonathan

*"In a Christian religion, 'faith without works is dead,' so she really had to do some work within herself. I'm just amazed that she was able to pull love and kindness out of herself when I didn't see that much being poured into her... That is really where my admiration comes from, because she got it from somewhere, and I don't know where."*



Annika



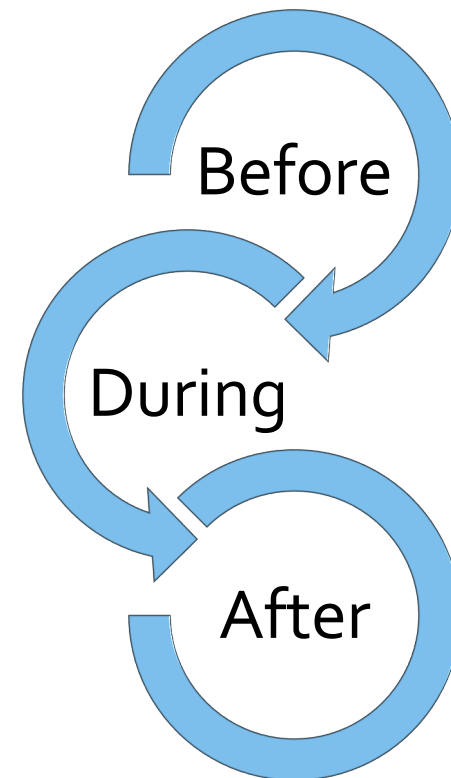
*"Giving has its rewards, in the sense that when we give, it should be unconditional. And she gave unconditionally. It cost her, and she sacrificed so much to give, and the reward that I believe she got was really about seeing people happy and seeing people enjoy life... She gave of herself that way, and that's one of the biggest lessons I've learned."*

William

# Attending to your wellness

*It is critical that you listen to your body and respond with kindness, patience, and care.*

- Identify and express needs
- Invite supportive people to play key roles
- Allow space for healing and reflection
- Practice self care





# Resilience is a *process*



**The healing process isn't about becoming who you might have been had you not experienced trauma. It's about integrating the wisdom you have gained from this experience into your life. (*Psychology Today*)**







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# Bringing our Whole Selves

We believe that we can foster healthier individuals, families, and communities when we look to the **strengths, skills, and assets** we gain by **incorporating our experiences of trauma** into our whole selves.

Your voice is **POWERFUL.**  
Your story **MEANINGFUL.**  
**Your Story Matters.**

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# National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

## Connect with us!

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence ([www.nrcdv.org](http://www.nrcdv.org)) provides a wide range of free, comprehensive, and individualized technical assistance, training, and specialized resource materials. Access our publications online at [VAWnet.org](http://VAWnet.org).



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