Exercise

Language and Meaning
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Language and Meaning Exercise

Purpose:
- To demonstrate that there are a range of words associated with violence and that people attribute different meanings to the same concept
- To demonstrate that a collaborative process can assist people to understand other people’s meanings and perspectives
- To highlight the importance of the language used when it will inform decisions in the area of family violence.

Materials Required:
- Sheet of writing paper and a pen for each participant.

Process:
1. Tell participants that this is a language exercise and that there are no right or wrong answers. They are going to be given the words Family Violence and asked to write down the four words that come to mind for them in relation to this phrase. They are not being asked to define the term but rather to choose words that they think of in relation to it. They should not consult with anyone just write down their own four words on their piece of paper.
2. When they have done this, ask them to join with another person. So now there are two people with eight words between them. Ask the pairs to discuss their eight words and decide which four they will keep (the four that feel right). Prune out the other four.
3. When each pair has four words ask them to join with another pair. Now there are four people with eight words between them. Ask the four people to discuss which four words they will keep and which four they will prune out.
4. So now, each group of four people has four words.
5. When this is done, as a whole group ask whether they have any comments about the process e.g. How did they decide and how did that feel? Did they have favourite words?
6. Collect each group’s words on the whiteboard. Discuss the range of words that have been produced. Ask how these different words might influence someone’s judgement if they appeared in a written report, in relation to a family violence case.

Key elements to draw out of the discussion:

- Ensuring good information is presented to the courts is one of the most vital factors in terms of safety outcomes for victims and children experiencing family violence.

- ‘Insiders’ such as court reporters are in a powerful position to ‘translate’ important events and concepts into court language.