




# Peer Exchange Guide: Family Justice Centers

The U.S. Department of Justice defines *domestic violence* as a “pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner.”<sup>1</sup> Physical and sexual violence, threats, emotional or psychological abuse, and economic abuse are all forms of domestic violence. In the United States, an average of 20 people are physically abused by intimate partners every minute, resulting in more than 10 million abuse victims annually.<sup>2</sup> Domestic violence affects people of every race, age, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, and nationality, while often creating collateral victims as well (e.g., children, other family members, friends, coworkers).


## FAMILY JUSTICE CENTERS Example Services




**Legal Services**—Legal Counsel, Case Management, Vertical Prosecution, Immigration Consultation, Restraining Orders




**Safety Planning**—Financial Assessment/Planning, Shelter Placement, Transitional Living Assistance, Education Assessment and Planning



**Medical Exams**—For both parents and child if necessary



**Counseling**—Individual, Support Groups, Child Assessment Center



**Criminal Investigation**—Access to officers experienced with domestic violence cases reduces the likelihood that victims will feel victimized

Family justice centers are identified as a best practice in the field of domestic violence intervention and prevention services.<sup>3</sup> Family justice centers are designed to better meet the needs of survivors and their children by bringing services together under one roof. These centers integrate local partners such as police departments, district and city attorneys, child and family services, victim advocates, community organizations, and volunteers and colocate them in one establishment to provide cost-effective services to victims while reducing the amount of times and places victims have to share their stories. Family justice centers may provide a safe place for victims, increase awareness and understanding of domestic violence in the community, help prevent future domestic violence, enhance authorities’ ability to investigate and prosecute offenders, and build on the successes of the resident agencies. Family justice centers also help break the intergenerational cycle of violence, ultimately resulting in a less violent society overall and increasing public safety. The positive outcomes of family justice centers include reduced homicides, increased victim safety, increased empowerment for victims, reduced fear and anxiety for victims and their children, reduced recantation and minimization by victims, increased efficiency in collaborative services to victims among service providers, increased prosecution of offenders, and dramatically increased community support for services to victims and their children through the family justice center model.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to serving victims of domestic violence, some family justice centers also serve victims of sexual assault, elder abuse, child abuse, and/or human trafficking.

# Family Justice Centers

Agencies interested in learning more about family justice centers may find a peer learning opportunity to visit established family justice centers helpful. Below is a sample guide that includes suggested agenda topics, sample objectives, potential outcomes, and additional resources.

## Sample Agenda Items

- Tour a family justice center to understand the breadth of services provided and the resources required to enable them.
- Meet with center leadership to discuss planning, logistics, funding, implementation considerations, commitment required to create the center, what it takes to sustain, and lessons learned.
- Meet with center staff to discuss daily operations, coordination and roles of local partner agencies, staff learning development, and how staff are trained and their needs (demand for a larger or more specifically trained staff, for multilingual staff, etc.).
- Meet with community and local partners, including law enforcement, prosecution, victim advocates, volunteers, and sponsor organizations, to address coordination, partnerships, and effective strategies for community buy-in.

## Sample Objectives

- Learn about family justice centers and why they are effective.
- Focus on problem solving, hurdles for community buy-in, and development of a family justice center.
- Learn about the range of programs and services provided at the centers and why they are necessary.
- Learn about who would be served by the centers and who would benefit.
- Increase awareness and understanding of domestic violence.

## Potential Outcomes

- Establish a family justice center or learn strategies to improve an existing center.
- Modify existing practices or implement new practices based on lessons learned.
- Increase community engagement and engage local partners.
- Improve interagency communication.
- Increase victim safety.
- Increase prosecution of offenders.

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## Additional Resources

- U.S. Department of Justice – Family Justice Center Initiative Best Practices
- Family Justice Center Alliance
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey – 2010 Summary Report
- BJS Nonfatal Domestic Violence, 2003–2012 Special Report
- <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence>



## Footnotes

- 1 <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence>
- 2 <http://ncadv.org/files/National%20Statistics%20Domestic%20Violence%20NCADV.pdf>
- 3 [https://www.justice.gov/archive/ovw/docs/family\\_justice\\_center\\_overview\\_12\\_07.pdf](https://www.justice.gov/archive/ovw/docs/family_justice_center_overview_12_07.pdf)
- 4 [https://www.justice.gov/archive/ovw/docs/family\\_justice\\_center\\_overview\\_12\\_07.pdf](https://www.justice.gov/archive/ovw/docs/family_justice_center_overview_12_07.pdf)