

# STOP BLAMING MOTHERS AND IGNORING FATHERS

How to transform the way we keep children safe from domestic violence.

WATCH AN ANIMATED CLIP



READ A SAMPLE



“Safe & Together stops the needless suffering of mothers and children every day and gives fathers opportunities to change.”  
- Emma Shaw, Practitioner, Family Violence Team Leader, Odyssey House, Australia

## MEET THE AUTHOR

### DAVID MANDEL

Founder and CEO, Safe & Together Institute

David Mandel is the founder and CEO of the Safe & Together Institute and creator of the Safe & Together™ Model. In a career spanning almost four decades and three continents, David has counseled men who have been violent to their partners and children; consulted at the highest level of child protection, family court, and other sectors; contributed to numerous research studies; and been an invited speaker and trainer across the globe. Through the Institute's growing network of hundreds of trainers, David's Safe & Together Model has improved the practice of thousands of professionals and impacted tens of thousands of children and families. David lives in rural Connecticut with his partner and collaborator, Ruth, their three children, and an assortment of much-loved pets. When not changing systems, David is a keen traveler and home chef.



“Safe & Together was the difference between keeping and losing my children.” - Jane, Victim-Survivor

## BOOK SYNOPSIS

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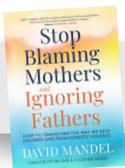
Imagine risking your life to keep your children safe only to be accused of “choosing him over her children.”

Domestic violence survivors all over the world share the experience of protecting their children, yet still being blamed for "choosing their partner over their children," "failing to protect," and "parental alienation." Unchecked, these accusations can become the justification for child separation from protective mothers. Harmful claims can thrive in environments where mothers are blamed for domestic violence's negative impacts on children and fathers' behavior remains ignored.

In this groundbreaking book written for professionals and survivors, David Mandel deconstructs the six key myths at the heart of mother blaming and father ignoring culture, demonstrating their flaws and limitations. Each step along the way, David uses the principles and tools of the Safe & Together Model to outline easy-to-implement solutions to these all-too-common problems. Supported by case studies and testimonials of practitioners and survivors, you will learn new ways to partner with survivors and intervene with domestic violence perpetrators as parents.

This book will show readers how to:

- Identify mother-blaming and father-ignoring in practices that harm children
- Unlock the power in the concept: "Domestic violence perpetration is a parenting choice."
- Create systems that are more ethical, efficient, safer, and effective in their responses to domestic violence
- Better intervene with perpetrators as parents
- Give protective mothers fuller credit for their efforts
- And finally, offer new ways to keep more children safe and together with their protective parent



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# BIOS FOR DAVID MANDEL

## Short Bio (100 words)

David Mandel knows from decades of working in domestic violence what change is required. He's committed to transforming systems and the practice of individuals to ensure that mothers are not blamed, and fathers are not ignored when it comes to domestic violence. People who have worked with David describe him as "approachable," a "first-class trainer," and say he's helped to "change their practice in ways that are life-changing for women and children, and the men who harm them." David and his partner Ruth live in rural Connecticut with their three children. Stop Blaming Mothers and Ignoring Fathers is his first book.

## Long Bio (150 words)

David Mandel is the founder and CEO of the Safe & Together Institute and creator of the Safe & Together™ Model. In a career spanning almost four decades and three continents, David has counseled men who have been violent to their partners and children; consulted at the highest level of child protection, family court, and other sectors; contributed to numerous research studies; and been an invited speaker and trainer across the globe. He speaks about domestic violence-informed systems change, partnering with domestic violence survivors, intervening with perpetrators as parents and how to end mother blaming and father ignoring. Through the Institute's growing network of hundreds of trainers, David's Safe & Together Model has improved the practice of thousands of professionals and impacted tens of thousands of families. David lives in rural Connecticut with his partner and collaborator, Ruth, and their three children. When not changing systems, David is a keen traveler and home chef.

## 150 Character Bio

David is a leader, speaker, trainer, course creator and author. He helps practitioners keep adult and child survivors where there is domestic violence - safe and together.

## DAVID'S SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

 LinkedIn: davidmandelassociates

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**“Equating domestic violence with physical violence can stop us from asking the right questions about change and accountability. When the focus is on physical violence, perpetrators are free to continue nonphysical forms of manipulation and coercion with impunity.”**  
- from The Myth of the Domestic Violence Incident

## KEYNOTE SPEAKING

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David is a sought-after speaker working in community, government, and academic settings. He speaks about working with men as parents, domestic violence-informed systems change, partnering with domestic violence survivors, intervening with perpetrators as parents and how to end mother blaming and father ignoring policy and practices.



BOOK DAVID AS A SPEAKER



LISTEN TO DAVID'S PODCAST



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### KEYNOTE TOPICS

“Why does she keep choosing him over her children?” How to stop blaming mothers, ignoring fathers and fix the way we keep children safe from domestic violence

The Four Pillars of “Failure to Protect” Culture

The Myth of the Child Witness

The Myth of Parental Alienation

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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- What was your motivation to write this book?
- Can you say more about the Six Myths you write about in the book?
- What are the most important messages for practitioners working in the domestic violence sector?
- You say, “Father's choices and behaviors matter to child, partner, and family functioning.” Please explain what you mean.
- What do you hope will be the impact of your book?
- You talk about how one of the keys to improving the response to domestic violence and children is the importance of addressing low expectations of men as parents. Can you say what this means and why it's so important?
- Can you say more about the importance of the phrase “domestic violence perpetration is parenting choice?”
- What did you learn about yourself as you wrote this book?
- You talk about mother-blaming and father-ignoring in your book; can you explain those concepts to those unfamiliar?
- For practitioners listening, what is the best advice you can give them to start implementing in their practice for helping someone in crisis today?
- How do you partner with domestic violence survivors?
- What do you say to anyone who says that the book ignores women's use of violence or violence in same-sex relationships?

# Q&A

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## **What was your motivation to write this book?**

My motivation was to accelerate the global change already being created by the Safe & Together Model's exponential growth. It felt like it was time to offer a deeper look into the thinking behind an approach being adopted in multiple countries. I wrote the book so it would be both an introduction to the Model for newcomers and also offer a deeper dive into the thinking behind the Model for more experienced Safe & Together Model practitioners. I also wanted to offer another resource to our existing library of resources like our podcast, Partnered with A Survivor, and our tools, like the Perpetrator Pattern Mapping Tool.



I wanted to write a book that a practitioner or a survivor could pick up and recognize themselves in the anecdotes, the testimonials, and the conversations that are shared throughout the book. I even included cartoons in order to make these self-reflections easier. It is my hope that this recognition will be a catalyst for change. In terms of survivors, I want them to see how influential their experiences have been in informing the work of the Safe & Together Institute. It was critically important to me that the voices of practitioners and survivors were represented in the book, as without them, Safe & Together would not exist.

## **Can you say more about the Six Myths you have written about in the book?**

Tackling the Six Myths is about fixing broken systems. Every day, child and adult domestic violence survivors and perpetrators turn to systems and professionals for help. Sometimes, they receive exactly the help they need. Other times, the system makes their situation worse. In the latter circumstance, we can see a pattern of failure shaped by outdated or incomplete concepts—ones that don't match up with the lived experience of families or the actual needs of practitioners. As I started writing, I found myself considering this problem through the lens of "myth" as defined in the Encyclopedia Britannica. This definition states that every myth presents itself as an authoritative, factual account, no matter how much the narrated events are at variance with ordinary experience. I wanted to write about how the playbook used by professionals and systems didn't match survivors' lived experience and, therefore, regardless of a professional's skill and desire to help, often fell flat or, in some cases, made things worse.

The Safe & Together Model was developed as a challenge, critique, and correction of these myths. In the book, I attempt to explain how to bring these myths back down to earth, out of

the realm of the authoritative professional voice, into better alignment with facts and the ordinary experience of adult and child survivors.

The six myths I explore in the book are:

- the myth of the child witness
- the myth of the domestic violence incident
- the myth of failure to protect
- the myth of perpetrator accountability
- the myth of parental alienation
- the myth of trauma-informed practice

These myths reflect some of the most powerful ideas that drive policy, law, and service delivery. They dominate the conversations of professionals with each other and with adult and child survivors. They shape how courts intervene with and create accountability for perpetrators. They present themselves as definitive when, really, they only capture a portion of the lived experience of families. Their dominance hobbles our ability to listen to the voices and experiences of children. They blind us to opportunities for partnering with survivors and cripple our capacities to intervene with perpetrators as parents. I see dismantling these myths - while saving the parts of those myths that are the most reflective of lived experiences - as essential to making systems more responsive to survivors and creating a useful roadmap for changing entrenched policy and practice.

### **What are the most important messages in the book for practitioners working in the domestic violence sector?**

You can change your practice without waiting for the rest of the system to change. And your change can be contagious. I've seen individual practitioners adopt the Model and make dramatic, meaningful changes in their practice—changes that save lives. I've also seen practitioners become champions for the Model and, through their advocacy, create system change far beyond their formal role. This book (and the Model) plus champions for change = the creation of the systems that survivors need and deserve.

### **Why is now the right time for this book?**

Because survivors need systems to change right now. Every day, children are being unfairly removed from their protective parents. In some of these cases, they are being ordered into contact with violent parents. Every unfair removal or unsafe court case harms children. This book is needed because we need change now.



### **What do you hope will be the impact of your book?**

That our systems will undergo a paradigm shift that will lead to increased safety for adult and child survivors. It is time that we tackle the gender-double standards that run through all these myths – and the systems associated with them— we need to expect more of men as parents and give mothers more credit for the work they do to keep them safe and well. The book offers the tools to make this paradigm shift across all the systems that families interact with.

### **How did your career prepare you to write this book?**

I spent almost 20 years working with violent, controlling men. Then, I carried that work over into systems. I watched how these systems failed to hold violent men accountable as parents. I watched as mothers, who were victims, were being blamed for what their partners did to their children. I first saw this in child protection systems but then became aware that similar ideas shaped practice in all our major systems responding to domestic violence. It became my mission to unwind this gender double standard to improve outcomes for families. This book, alongside the rest of the work of the Safe & Together Institute, is an attempt to advance that mission.

### **What did you learn about yourself as you wrote this book?**

That seeing yourself in comic book format is fun.

### **What do you say to anyone who says that the book ignores women's use of violence or violence in same-sex relationships?**

The same thing I say every time I present or train: both men and women can be violent and controlling. Same thing for non-binary people. Domestic violence is perpetrated by straight, trans, gay, and lesbian people - it does not discriminate as a social problem. The same can be said about child abuse and neglect. I would say that at the same time, we know, from research, things like men's violence toward women are different than women's violence toward men. It's more likely to cause injury. It's more likely to be associated with patterns of coercive control. It's the most common scenario that professionals will come in contact with. The dynamic of the abuse and the response of systems is also heavily shaped by gender double standards- low expectations of men as parents and much higher expectations of women as parents. So it was important to me, in this book, to respond to this particular dynamic, hence the title "Stop Blaming Mothers and Ignoring Fathers." In other places, the Safe & Together Institute talks about men as victims, violence in same-sex relationships, and other scenarios, as all domestic violence is a problem.



# WHY THIS BOOK? WHY NOW?

Children impacted by domestic violence perpetrators' behaviors is a massive global problem. And our helping systems are broken. Survivors need systems to change right now. Every day, children are being unfairly removed from their protective parents. In some of these cases, they are being ordered into contact with violent parents. Every unfair removal or unsafe court case harms children. Our system is also failing the perpetrators of violence by failing to offer a full range of responses to them as parents. This book is needed because we need change now.

“Time and again, I have seen experienced practitioners from the child protection and family violence sectors marvel at the changes that occur for the families they work with when they have a shared foundation for practice through the Safe & Together Model and training.”  
- from the Foreword by Professor Cathy Humphreys



How big is the problem? A recent national study of child maltreatment found that almost 40% of all Australia children were exposed to domestic violence.<sup>1</sup>



A 2018 report from the UK Office of the Children's Commissioner estimated that the prevalence rate of children aged zero through seventeen who lived in households in England with an adult where there is domestic violence plus substance misuse or mental health issues was 15.9 percent, or 1.88 million children.<sup>2</sup>



Child protection agencies regularly report that domestic violence is one of the top issues facing families, if not the most common one.



Domestic violence is one of the most common issues in custody and parenting time court decisions in many major regions of the globe.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.acms.au/>

<sup>2</sup> Children's Commissioner for England, "PreBudget Briefing 2018" accessed 20 February 2023, <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/pre-budget-briefing-autumn-2018/>

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## BOOK BLURBS & QUOTES

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“This book has a number of audiences. It’s for anyone who is interested in the intersection of domestic violence and children. It’s for practitioners like me, who are fierce advocates for adult and child domestic violence survivors and who are deeply passionate about system change. It’s for anyone who believes we need to stop ignoring fathers but without sacrificing the safety and well-being of women and children. Mostly, though, it’s for anyone who has been critical of the current systems’ response to domestic violence and who dreams of a time when those systems are better allies to adult and child survivors.”

- from the Preface

“Partnering was based on the assumption that survivors were almost always actively working to keep their children safe, and it was the role of the professional to identify these strengths, validate them, and collaboratively plan—as partners—with the survivors to improve their situation.” - from the Preface

“The idea is that if you stop ignoring the role, good or bad, that fathers’ behaviors play in families, you are better able to help mothers, children, and even fathers.” - from the Introduction.

“...a gender-neutral, sexual orientation-neutral, all victims matter approach does not equip us with the tools to challenge the structural dynamics of gender-based violence and the gender bias of our current systems’ dominant response to domestic violence and children—a response where the behaviors of fathers who choose coercive control are often ignored or minimized and the mothers, who are working hard to parent and protect in the context of those behaviors, are blamed.” – from the Introduction

“... many systems are bulging with professionals, working every day with families, who have little to no skills, knowledge, or confidence in engaging and intervening with fathers. From a practical point of view, their understanding of “family” often equals “mother and children.” - from Blaming Mothers, Ignoring Fathers

“Many of these myths started their lives as deservedly celebrated breakthroughs in hard-fought battles against domestic violence. Others, such as parental alienation, have been victim-blaming from their conception. But over time, these terms and concepts have become unexamined jargon, ideas, and terms that are often used by frontline professionals without critical reflection. They have become the “truth,” often crowding out survivors’ realities. They reflect dominant paradigms and cultural power dynamics.”

- from Challenging Professional Myths About Domestic Violence

“Deconstructing the myth of the child witness is not intended to minimize the significance of seeing or hearing acts of violence perpetrated by one parent against another, a sibling, or another family member. In fact, the goal is exactly the opposite—to give us the language and framework to better articulate the full ranges of harms experienced by children and more tightly tie them back to the person choosing coercive control.” - from The Myth of the Child Witness

## MEDIA INQUIRIES

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## BOOK INFORMATION

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