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UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

# ENDING FEAR AND FINDING FUN IN FAMILIES AFTER CHILD TO PARENT VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

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Child to Parent Violence 15-03-2023

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# OUTLINE

- What is the problem?
- How can we tell the difference?
- What do we know about the problem?
- Families living with Child to Parent Violence & Abuse – what do we see?
- Common Factors
- Is this a Human Rights issue?
- How can we understand and respond to abusive & violent behaviour?
- Non Violent Resistance as an ecological & systemic response?
- Men/ boys and NVR?
- NVR in Ireland today and in the future?
- Questions/ Comments

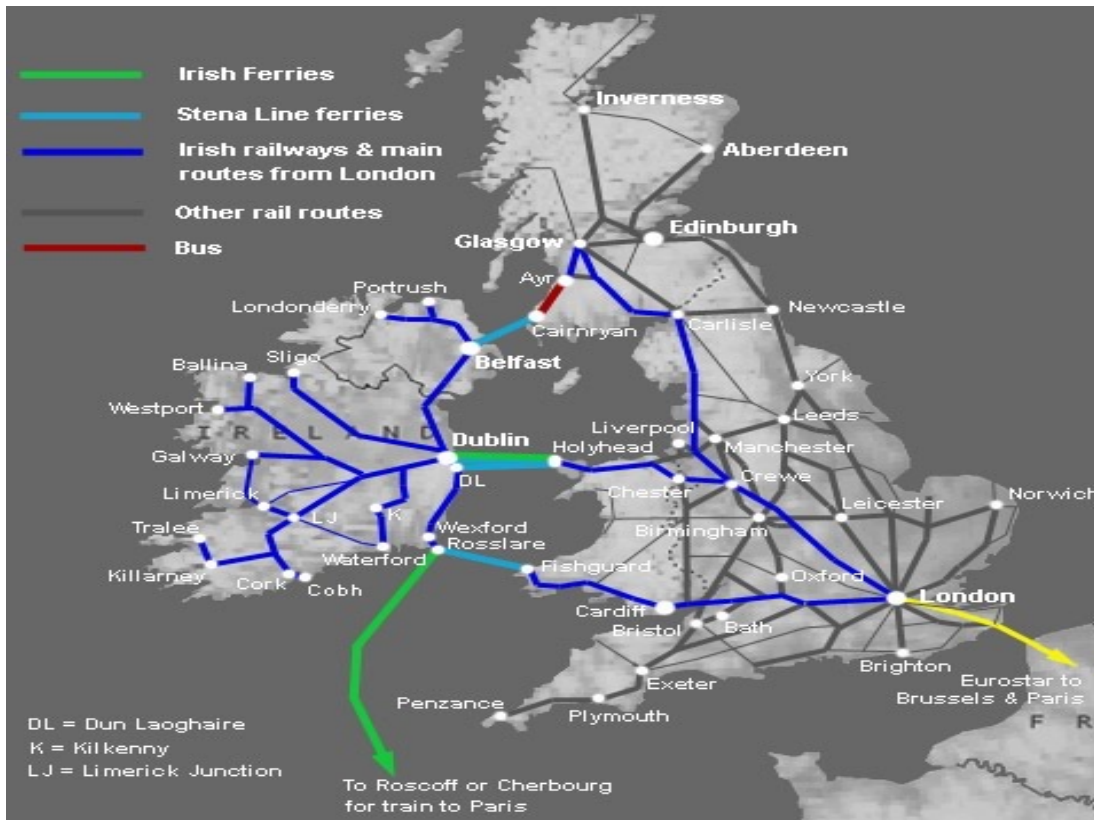


*WHERE AM I COMING FROM?*

Galway, on the Atlantic coast of Ireland.....



# GALWAY, ON THE ATLANTIC COAST OF IRELAND; GALWAY HOOKERS- TRADITIONAL BOATS SERVING ISLANDS ALONG THE WEST COAST OF IRELAND.















DANIEL O' CONNELL, MARY ROBINSON, & PRESIDENT OF IRELAND, MICHAEL D HIGGINS

***Cultural & historical traditions include commitment to  
human rights & social justice.***

## PERSONAL CONTEXT...



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**CHILD & ADOLESCENT  
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**



- First encounters with the kinds of abusive & violent behaviour we're talking about.....
- How can we respond to abusive/violent behaviour of a child or adolescent?





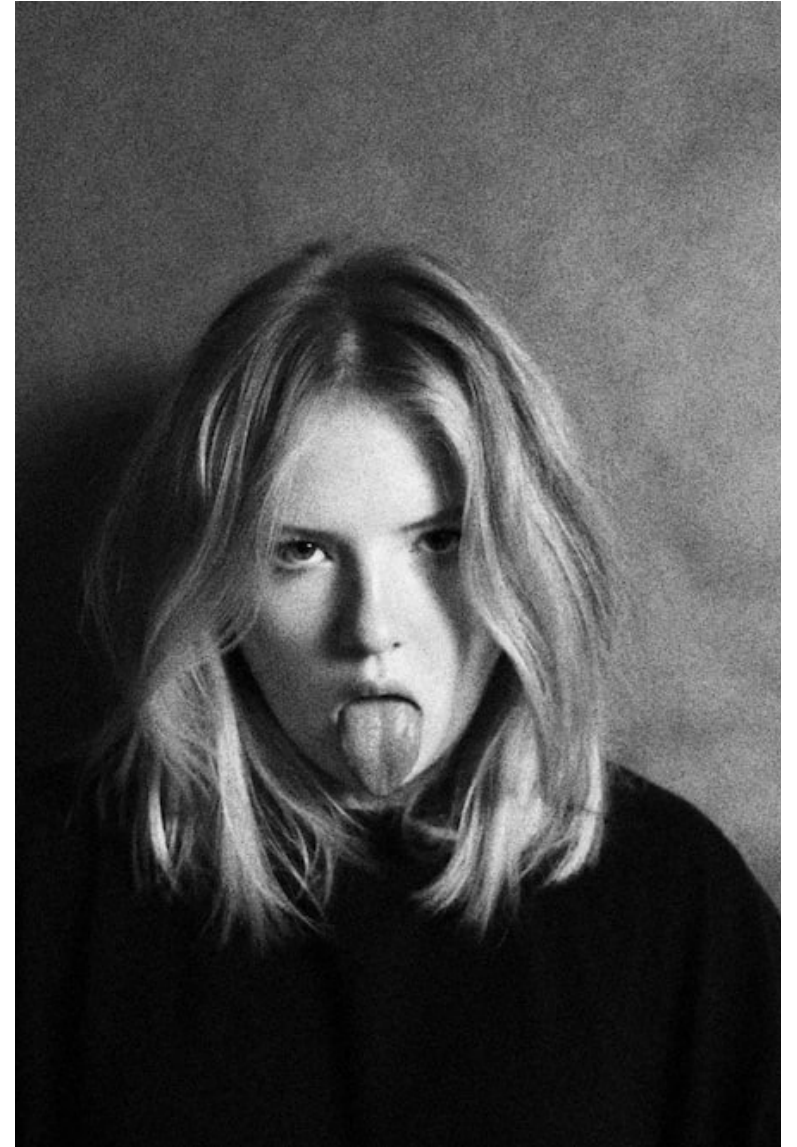
## CASE EXAMPLE: 'MARIA'

'Just leave me alone and let me be with my friends online'

Age 14

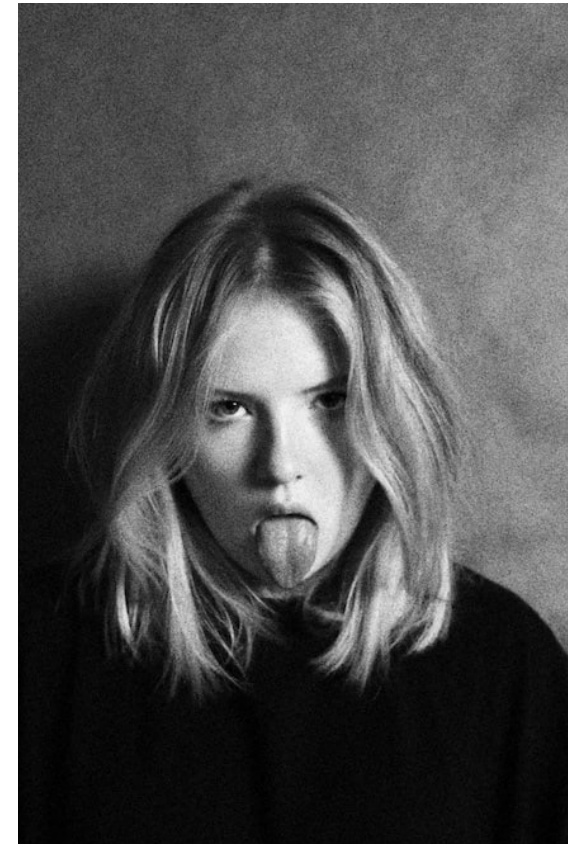
Maria has been diagnosed with ASD and anxiety

Image credits <https://unsplash.com/photos/5miAc099IMc>



## CASE EXAMPLE – ‘MARIA’

- ‘Maria’, aged 14 lives with parents ‘Ann’ (aged 41) & ‘Pat’ (aged 40) and with siblings ‘Jack’, aged 19 and ‘Joseph’, aged 20.
- Parents are struggling with ‘Maria’s’ challenging behaviour:
  - refusal to leave the house, threats to hit parents,
  - insisting on being left alone in room
  - Has ‘violent outbursts’ when challenged
  - Maria has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Anxiety Disorder
  - ‘Ann’ refuses to attend any more sessions with anyone – nothing much is changing’







## DIFFICULT TO THINK AND TALK ABOUT?

- The problem often starts with verbal abuse and escalates to emotional and physical abuse
- (Shanholtz et al 2020 )
- There is a serious breakdown in the parent-child relationship and inter-personal connectedness needs repair (Beckers et al 2022)
- Talking about these problems is difficult for those who want to counteract demonisation of young people (Selwyn & Meakings, 2016)

## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- Let's start with suggesting a clear definition....
- We're talking about an **abuse of power** through which a **child** or adolescent **coerces, controls or dominates parents/ carers**
  - Also known as child to parent violence/ abuse
  - This can be but is not necessarily intentional
  - See NVR Ireland 2023; Butler et al 2021, Coogan, 2018a, b; Coogan, 2016a, b; Wilcox et al, 2015; Lauster et al 2014; Coogan & Lauster 2014b; Holt 2013; Coogan 2012; Tew and Nixon 2010.



# WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHILDREN TESTING BOUNDARIES

- **and child to parent violence and abuse?**



## A CLEAR DEFINITION? IT INVOLVES FEAR & ABUSE OF POWER...

- The issues of **power** and **fear** clarify the difference.
- If parents feel they must adapt their behaviour due to threats or use of violence/ abuse by a child, then there is child to parent violence and abuse.
  - (Wilcox 2012; Coogan, 2016a, b; Coogan, 2018a, b).



## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD TO PARENT VIOLENCE & ABUSE IN IRELAND?



- Throughout Ireland, people working with children and families (e.g. Tusla, CAMHS) are hearing more and more about CPVA in their work (McMahon, 2013; O'Rourke, 2014; Lauster et al, 2014, Coogan, 2016a; Coogan 2018; Kelly & Coogan 2020)
- For Parentline, CPVA is the single largest reason for parents contacting the service. (O'Reilly, 2016; Hickie, 2021)

## WHAT DID WE FIND OUT DURING THE PANDEMIC?

- **Doubling of calls** to Parentline from parents living with their son/daughter's anger and aggression.
- Overall, contacts with Parentline went from 2,960 calls in 2019
- to **4,144 calls in 2020**.
- Over **25% of all calls** come from parents talking about and often fearful of, abusive and violent behaviour towards them from their child under 18 years old.
- ( See [www.Parentline.ie](http://www.Parentline.ie) and Wayman, 2021 )





PLEASE STAND AND PREPARE TO TAKE A POSITION



# CONFLICT BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN/ ADOLESCENTS IS TO BE EXPECTED



- If you AGREE, please **stay standing**
- If you DISAGREE, please **sit down**



# IN MY LIFE, I HAVE SOME GOOD HABITS AND I HAVE SOME BAD HABITS



- If you AGREE, please **stay standing**
- If you DISAGREE, please **sit down**

*THANK YOU – PLEASE SIT DOWN*





WHO EXPERIENCES CPVA....?



*WHO IS AT RISK FROM CPVA?  
WHAT ARE THE COMMON FACTORS AMONG FAMILIES LIVING WITH  
CPVA?*

**By the way, a note of caution.....**



*WHO IS AT RISK FROM CPVA?  
WHAT ARE THE COMMON FACTORS AMONG FAMILIES  
LIVING WITH CPVA?*

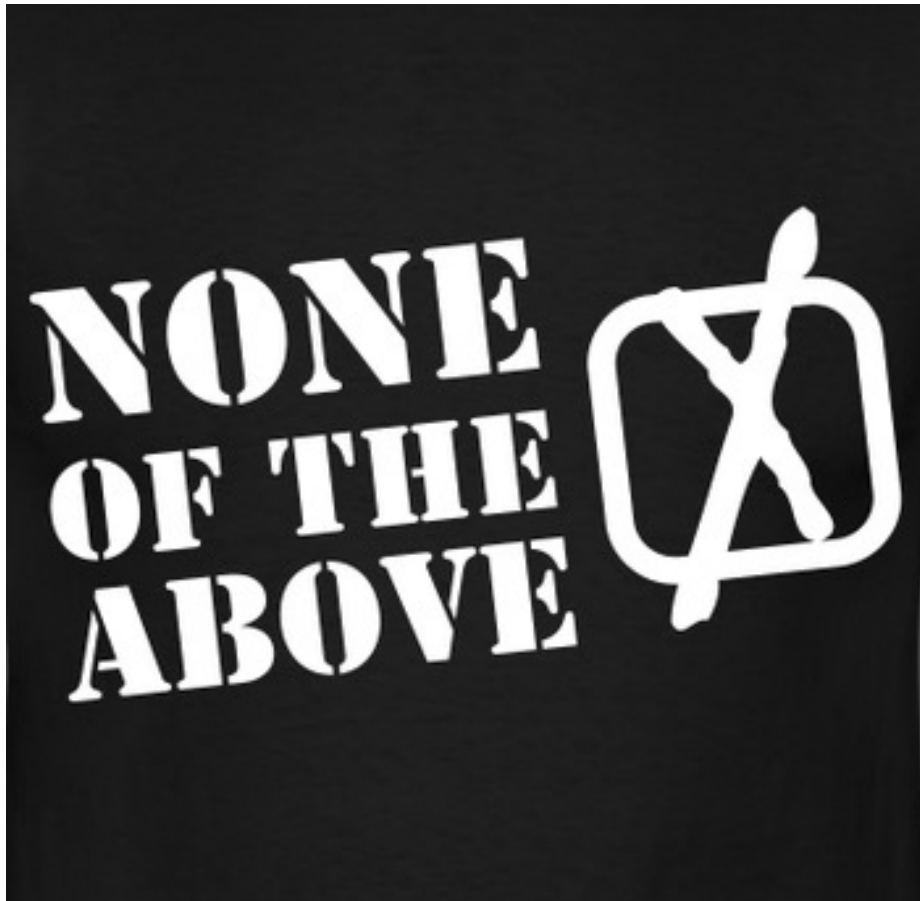
- Family composition?
- Family socio-economic status?
- Gender?
- Culture?
- Family experiences of domestic violence/ abuse?
- Mental health concerns/ diagnosis?
- Parental or child alcohol/ drug abuse?
- Experiences of child abuse and neglect?
- Attachment difficulties/ disorders
- Learning difficulties?
- School difficulties?





IT SEEMS.....

- But practice experience & research suggests...



**PARENTS/CARERS WHO FEEL ISOLATED  
& ALONE, WITHOUT SUPPORT.**





**PATTERNS/ HABITS DURING CONFLICT THAT ESCALATE THE SITUATION LEADING TO ABUSE/ VIOLENCE**



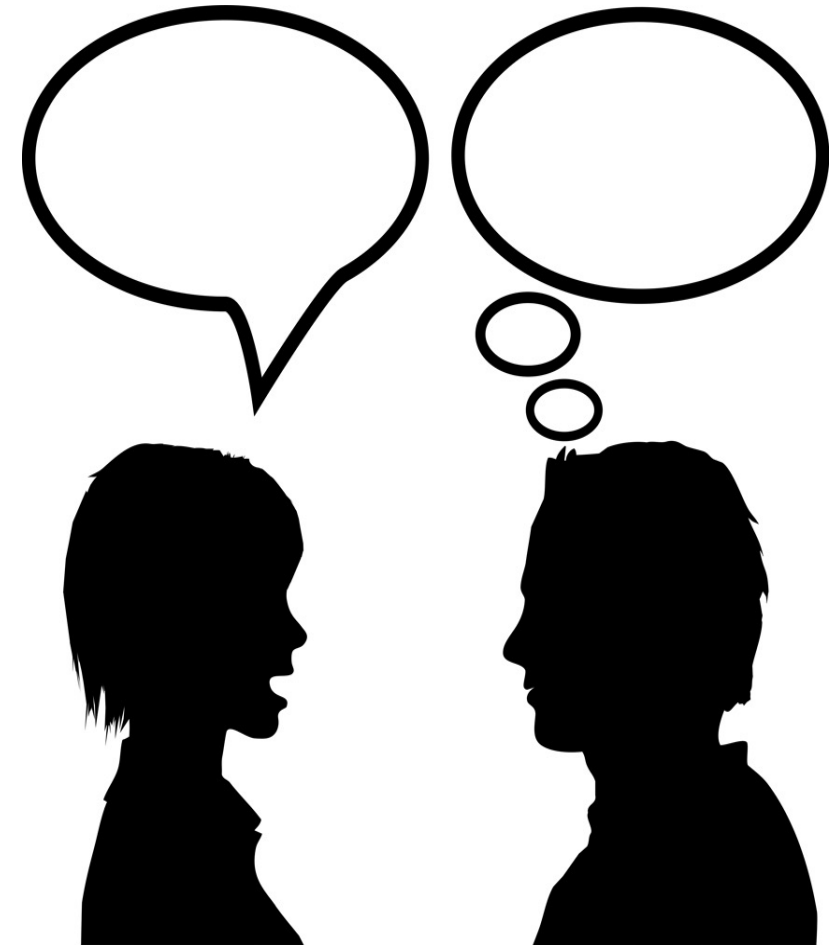


*FEAR OF THEIR CHILD,  
HELPLESSNESS, HOPELESSNESS*



## PAUSE FOR THOUGHT – IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

- Parents/ carers are living with CPVA where they
- feel **fear & helplessness**,
- feel **isolated** and where there are
- Have **patterns/ habits during conflicts that escalate the problem**
- So what could we do that could be helpful when the parent-child relationship is severely ruptured?



## *IMPLICATIONS? WE CAN HELP WITH NON VIOLENT RESISTANCE...*

- Making clear where we stand – there is **never any excuse for abusive behaviour**
- Talk to parents/ carers about taking a similar stance & **committing to non-violence & resistance**
- Look for and provide support for concrete skills and practical support that **restore confidence & competence**
- For example, from NVR,- **de-escalate; press the pause button; increase positive parental presence.....**



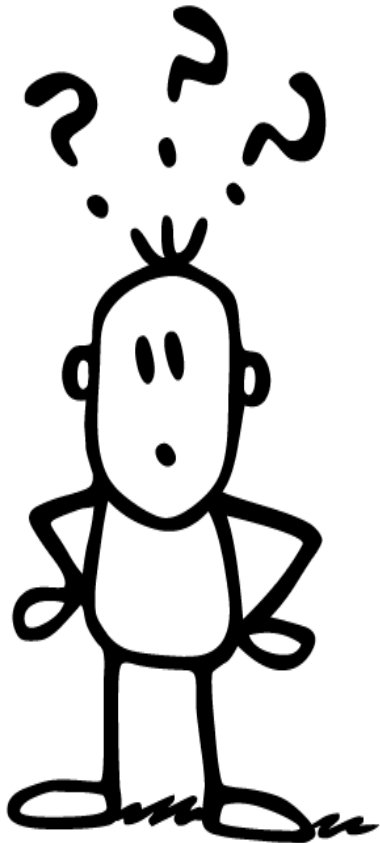


*IMPLICATIONS? WE CAN HELP WITH  
NON VIOLENT RESISTANCE...*

- Look out for/ ask about different **habits/ patterns of relationship and interaction** – change some, reinforce others (*strengths-based & solution focused*)
- Reduce **social isolation** by building up the (NVR) **Support Network** and getting agreement on what **they can concretely do.**
- Enhance/ increase **interpersonal connections**



## PAUSE POINT....REVIEW & WHAT IS NEXT?



- What is the problem?
- How can we tell the difference?
- CPVA in Ireland?
- Families living with CPVA – what do we see?
- Common Factors?
- Next...Human Rights?
- How can we understand and respond to CPVA?
- Non Violent Resistance as a systemic response?
- Men, boys and NVR?
- Case example – what happened next?
- Finding fun and ending fear with NVR
- Questions/ Comments

## PAUSE POINT - REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

- Please pause for a moment and make a mental or written note:
- **What comments/ questions do you have**
- **about what you have heard/ thought about so far this afternoon?**
- *I'll will ask you to share comments/ questions later.....*





# *CPVA AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE?*



# CPVA AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE?

- **everyone** has the right to life, liberty and security of person (art. 3)
- *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*



# CPVA AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE?

- **no one** should be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or
- degrading treatment or punishment (art. 5).
- *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*





# CPVA AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

- *Child to parent violence and abuse disrupts the parent-child relationship and **infringes the rights** of parents and of children.*
- *Our challenge is to take a clear position against these problems (**not against the child**) and to empower people to re-connect and to change.*



# HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND AND RESPOND TO ABUSE & VIOLENCE? (SEE ALSO WEI ET AL 2020

- The use of abusive and violent behaviour is rooted in the **interaction** of **biological, social, cultural and other backgrounds factors**
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) suggests using the **ecological model** when trying to understand and respond to abusive and violent behaviour
- The ecological model helps us think and talk in a **multi-dimensional way** so we can identify the **reciprocal inter-connected risk factors** of abusive and violent behaviour at 4 levels –
  - **individual,**
  - **relationship,**
  - **community and**
  - **society**

## HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND AND RESPOND TO ABUSE & VIOLENCE? (SEE ALSO WEI ET AL 2020)

- Individual factors = what are the **biological and personality factors** that affect an individual's behaviour?
- Relationship factors = what are the factors **within their relationships** that increase or decrease risk of violence?
- Community level factors = what is it about an individual's **social and community contexts** that increase or decrease risk of violence?
- Society level factors = what is it about **the society in which the person lives** that increase or decrease risk of violence?





KEY QUESTIONS IN CHALLENGING ABUSIVE & VIOLENT  
BEHAVIOUR

- How can we create and support families and communities where women, men, girls and boys can **thrive** and
- where **no one is oppressed**?
- Where the **human rights** of each person are fully respected?
- Where we can **end fear** and **rediscover fun and joy**?



## KEY QUESTIONS IN CHALLENGING ABUSIVE & VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR

- **Critique/ challenge patriarchy** - institutionalised male dominance.
- **Reject assumptions and practices that claim to control** female sexuality and the sexuality of those who do not conform to heterosexual norms.
- **Reject tactics of control and violence** that are part of systems of dominance and subordination.
- **Promote alternative strategies** for resolution of conflict
- **Promote diversity** in representations and expressions of **masculinities**



# ONE WAY OF RESPONDING TO THESE CHALLENGES

## Non Violent Resistance in Ireland

See also [www.nvrireland.ie](http://www.nvrireland.ie)



## HOW DO WE BEGIN TO RESPOND TO THESE CHALLENGES IN IRELAND?

- Name the problem – CPVA is an abuse of power involving coercion and controlling behaviour
- CPVA is a human rights issue.
- “**Explanations**, even good ones, **are not excuses**”
  - (See Gallagher, E 2004b; Coogan & Lauster 2021)).
- “The idea that any behaviour is inevitable,
- uncontrollable,
- or **excusable by gender,**
- **diagnosis or past experience**
- is simplistic, discriminatory and unhelpful.” (Gallagher, E 2004b; Butler et al 2021).



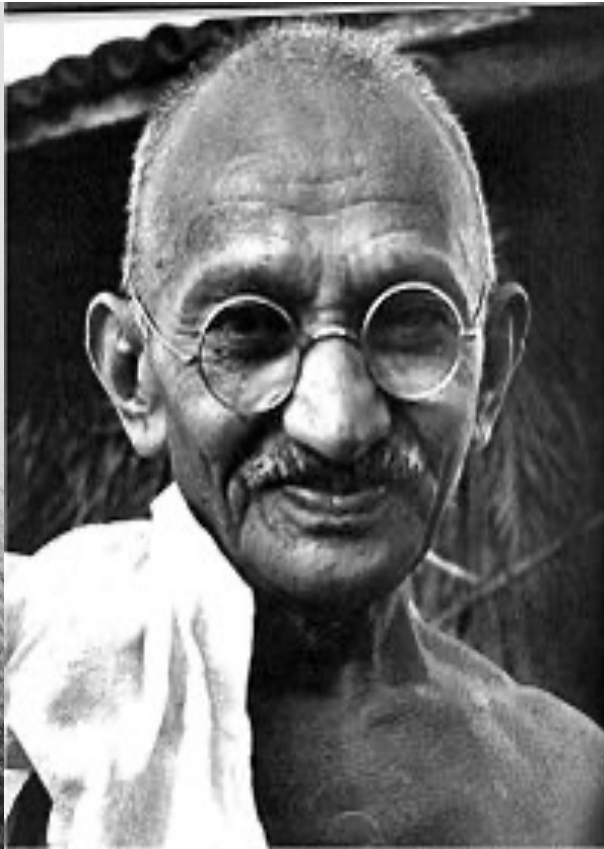
HOW DO WE BEGIN?

- A **zero tolerance** towards the use of any and **all** abusive and/ or violent behaviour by anyone
- **Understanding** does **not** mean **accepting** abuse/ violence.

**HOW DO WE DESCRIBE THE NON VIOLENT RESISTANCE  
MODEL OF INTERVENTION IN IRELAND?**







**NVR for families emerges from a commitment to non violence & resistance** (Omer, 2004; 2011)

**Daniel O'Connell (Ireland) Mahatma Gandhi (India), Martin Luther King (US) & Leymah Gbowee (Liberia).**

# NON VIOLENT RESISTANCE (NVR) (OMER 2004; 2011; COOGAN 2018; KELLY & COOGAN 2020; BECKERS ET AL 2022).

- It is a relatively brief systemic approach, working through parents/ carers as agents of change.
- Non violent resistance aims at giving the child a clear message
  - “I am your parent. I am no longer going to put up with this situation and I will do all in my power to change it – except by attacking you verbally or physically”.
- Parents/ carers take a firm stance against any violence, risk taking or anti-social behaviours.
- Parents/ carers commit to avoiding all physical or verbal attacks.

## NON VIOLENT RESISTANCE? (BECKERS ET AL 2022)

- NVR is a **trans-diagnostic approach**, where parents begin by changing interaction patterns where children use harmful, abusive or self-destructive behaviour
- Chosen by the parent(s), the support network shows **concern and protest** against repeated incidents of harmful or self-destructive behaviour.
- A growing evidence base includes RCTs for **externalising behaviours** (Wienblatt & Omer 2008), **repeated patterns of physical violence against parents, carers, siblings** (Ollefs et al 2009), **children in foster care** ( Van Holen et al 2017)



## NON VIOLENCE RESISTANCE – A DIFFERENT FORM OF FIGHTING.

- NVR is a form of fighting – a different kind of fight:
  - (1) Parents/carers commit to **a non violent and non humiliating stance.**
  - (2) Parents/carers **take responsibility for their own part** in escalation (and de-escalation).
  - (3) The goal of the fight is to **resist, persist and to prevent** violence.
  - (4) Parents/carers **increase their presence** in their child's life.

## NVR – A DIFFERENT FORM OF FIGHTING.

- (5) Parents/carers **build a support network** to help the family resist violence.
- (6) Parents/carers fight & resist any violence **while rebuilding connectness and drawing out positive elements** in the relationship with their child.
- (7) NVR **rebuilds parents/carers confidence and competence** without becoming punitive and authoritarian.
- (8) The **child is invited to come up with solutions** to the problems of aggressive and violent behaviours.

# FATHERS, SONS & NVR

Fathers as **targets** for CPVA

Fathers as parental **agents of change** with NVR trained practitioner as coach/ mentor

Fathers **taking the initiative** in resisting violence/ abuse and in parental presence and reconciliation acts

Fathers/ men as **active members** of the support network

Sons/ boys as making **suggestions for change** and/ or as sibling **support network members**





# NVR IN PRACTICE

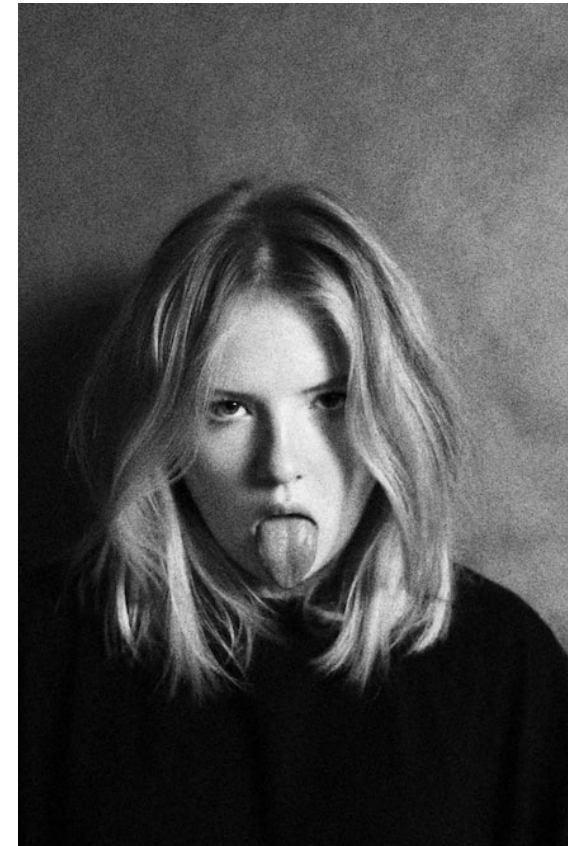
(COOGAN 2016A,B, KELLY AND COOGAN 2020, BUTLER ET AL 2021)

- NVR trained practitioner as the NVR 'coach' / mentor for parents/ carers
- NVR de-escalation, self-calming strategies, reconciliation acts, develop positive habits of interaction/ relating
- Self care strategies
- Supporters
- Parents and supporters united in responses to 'challenging behaviours'
- Family Announcement
- Ongoing support for parents and child through the support network



## LETS THINK AGAIN ABOUT 'MARIA'

- 'Maria', aged 14 lives with parents 'Ann' (aged 41) & 'Pat' (aged 40) and with siblings 'Jack', aged 19 and 'Joseph', aged 20.
- Parents are struggling with 'Maria's' challenging behaviour:
  - refusal to leave the house, threats to hit parents,
  - insisting on being left alone in room
  - Has 'violent outbursts' when challenged
  - Maria has been diagnosed with ASD and anxiety.
  - 'Ann' refuses to attend any more sessions with anyone – nothing much is changing'



## CASE EXAMPLE

- NVR referral – Pat attending individual and group work sessions ( 9 in total)
- clarifying goals, traffic lights and starting points.
- NVR de-escalation, self-calming strategies, some positive changes
- Parents united in responses to 'provoking behaviours'
- Supporters
- Family Announcement
- Self care strategies





## NVR IN IRELAND TODAY...AND IN THE FUTURE?

- NVR Ireland, voluntary association – a support network for practice & research
- Over 1,000 practitioners trained since 2013
- A practitioner needs to be ‘lucky’ to find NVR training and to have support to pilot it in own practice
- A parent needs to be ‘lucky’ to find NVR
- Is CPVA a domestic violence problem?

## NVR IN IRELAND TODAY...AND IN THE FUTURE?

- Raising awareness about the problem (and solutions) across society and challenging parental stigma, shame and isolation
- Involving men and boys in NVR intervention?
- How to get CPVA noticed by funders and services, so that they are recorded accurately
- How to make relatively short-term interventions such as NVR are easily available?

## NVR IN IRELAND TODAY...AND IN THE FUTURE?

- Developing an interagency approach to naming and responding to CPVA?
- A national telephone support service in Ireland offers NVR as one of the supports for parents who call them – Parentline
- Inter-disciplinary course for practitioners in Non Violent Resistance in Practice at University of Galway ( 5 day online course, 10 ECTs)
- NVR training events for practitioners continues throughout Ireland and further afield
- Ongoing interest in NVR around Ireland and internationally (for example, Belgium, Israel, UK)
- Websites [www.nvrireland.ie](http://www.nvrireland.ie) [www.parentline.ie](http://www.parentline.ie) & [www.newauthorityparenting.ie](http://www.newauthorityparenting.ie)



## THE LAST WORD – 'MARIA'S FATHER (1-12-2022)

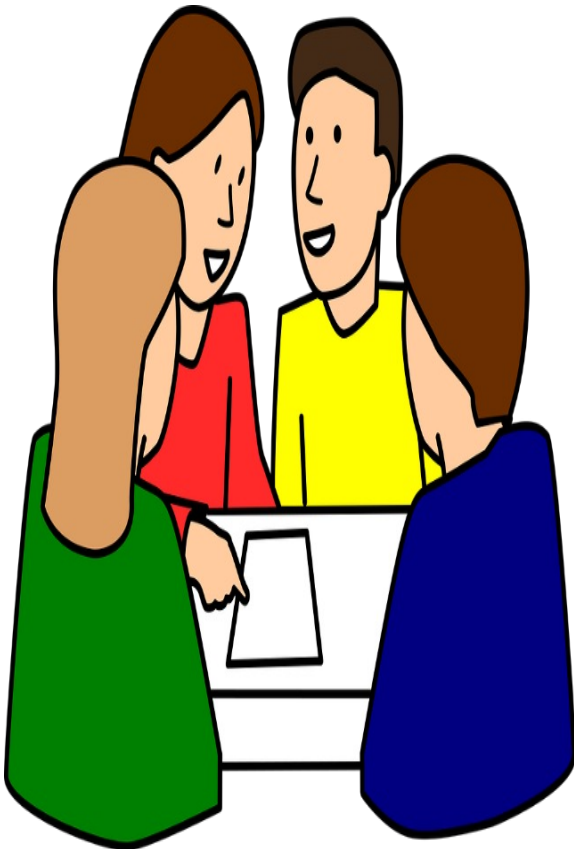


*"I wasn't sure that this would help, but it has....I thought it was just us, that we were doing everything wrong"*

*...I've listened to the advice here and I thought about it. We've made changes at home. I'm staying calmer, not flying off the handle. I'm definitely not adding fuel to the fire"*

*"...It has definitely helped. We still have concerns but I'm beginning to enjoy being with her more. We're having fun together again. That's really nice".*

## REVIEW AND QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS?

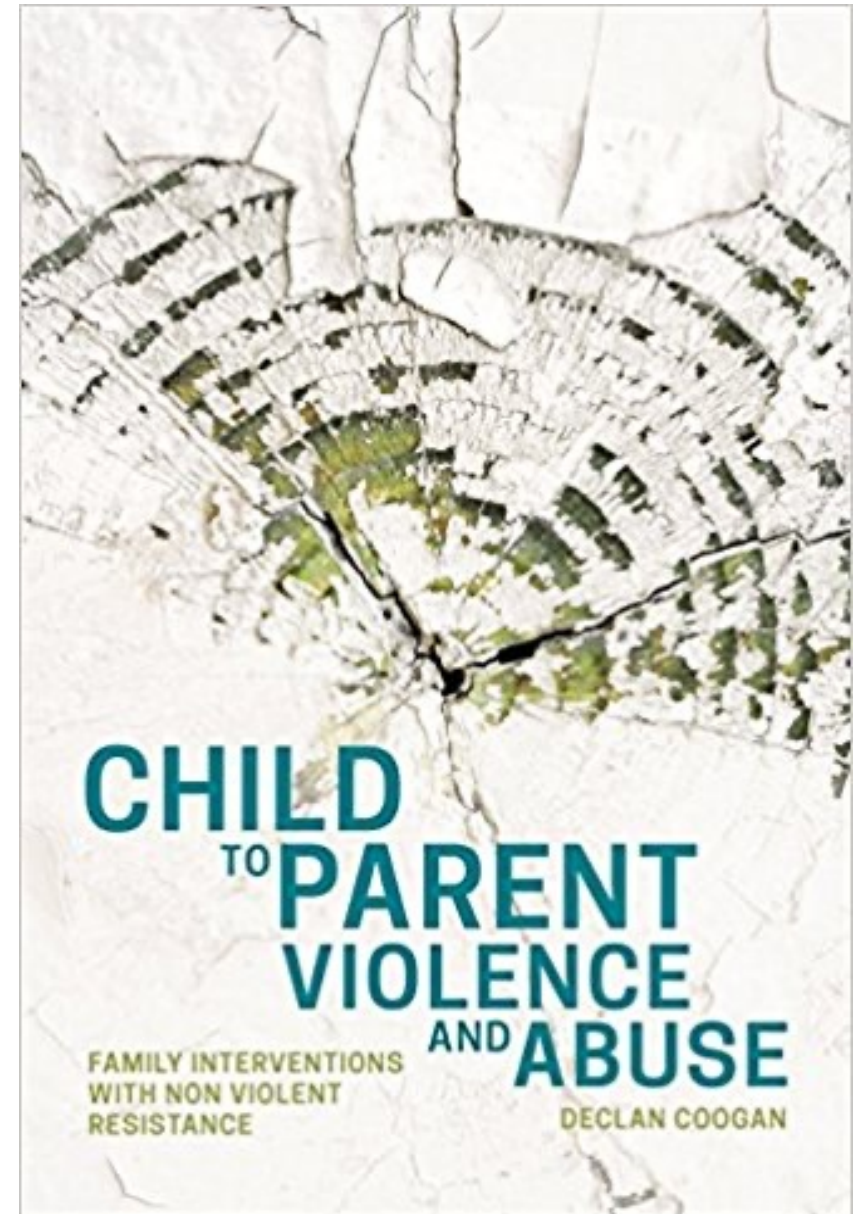


- What do we know about CPVA? What is NVR?
- Where do we start? CPVA as a human rights issue
- Parent/ carers as agents of change
- NVR trained practitioners as supporters and NVR coaches/ mentors
- ***Please turn to the person next to you and discuss:***
- ***What one idea stands out for you?***
- ***What questions do you have?***

Thank You  
ANY QUESTION???



- Paperback book available at [www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com)
- Some useful resources: [www.nvireland.ie](http://www.nvireland.ie) and also [www.newauthorityparenting.ie](http://www.newauthorityparenting.ie) and [www.parentline.ie](http://www.parentline.ie)
  - My email?  
[Declanp.coogan@universityofgalway.ie](mailto:Declanp.coogan@universityofgalway.ie)





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