



The cycle of abuse can be broken through intervention and support.

Witnessing abuse can lead a child to develop dangerous ideas about violence, including the beliefs that violence is an acceptable response and that there must be an aggressor and a victim in every relationship.

To replace unhealthy perspectives with more constructive ones, Interval House counsellors first work to build trust with the children individually and in a group setting. Group discussions that encourage young residents to talk about their best and worst experiences during the week, for example, often shed light on what children are thinking and feeling, according to Children's Counsellor-Advocate Rubina Khan.

In addition, since male facilitators were introduced at Interval House in 1987, the various

aspects of the Children's Group purposely model positive male roles and cooperation between men and women.

"The biggest thing I can do as a male role model is to show how I relate to girls and how I relate to female staff. They see how we address each other, the way we agree and the way we disagree," says Children's Recreation Facilitator Frederick Shayo-Mushi. By his actions and in words, he demonstrates that, although he is a man, there is never a reason for him to use force in his relationships with women or anyone else.

For children who have rarely seen respectful exchanges between men and women, the ongoing displays of cooperation and respect can be eye-opening, even shocking, says Frederick. "They may not get it at first ... but over time, they change."



Safe and secure

Macho behaviour and a fascination with toy guns were hints but a drawing of his fantasy home – guarded by army and police, attended by an ambulance and surrounded with security cameras – spelled out 10-year-old Dylan's* worries about keeping his mother and younger sister safe. "He had so much stress about being safe," says Frederick Shayo-Mushi. "He felt he had to always 'be the man' and take care of his family."

With this awareness, counsellors could help Dylan learn to cope with his sense of insecurity in more positive ways – always letting his mother know where he's going and helping to care for his sister, for example. Such lessons, Frederick hopes, will be part of more permanent changes for Dylan and other children in the group once they leave Interval House.

*name has been changed