

Choctaw Children's Advocacy Center

Project  
PONY



Protecting Our Native Young

**Educational**  
**Curriculum**

A Program of the Department of Family & Community Services  
Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians  
Choctaw, MS 39350

April 2006

## **Project PONY Format**

Week 1:	“One Brick at a Time”	(Intro to program/group)
Week 2:	“When Mothers Cry”	(Domestic Violence and Child Abuse)
Week 3:	“The Path Begins Here”	(Speaker – Survivor)
Week 4:	“Stretch marks on my Sanity”	(Self-care/NOC needs)
Week 5:	“Bring in the Mop”	(Crisis/Stress mgmt-grp support)
Week 6:	Open Break	Group break or alternate activity
Week 7:	“Recipe for a Healthy Child”	(Child Development and Discipline)
Week 8:	“Protecting the Gift”	(Healthy relationships)
Week 9:	“How the snakes acquired their poison”	(Sex Offender Dynamics)
Week 10:	“Protectors of the Village”	(MDT – Criminal Investigations/AGO)
Week 11:	“It Takes a Village...”	(MDT- Soc Svc Investigations)
Week 12:	“It’s a celebration!”	(Family Day/Night Activities)

## Week 1 – “One Brick at a Time”

Project PONY	Goal 1 – Prevent reoccurrences of child abuse Goal 2 – Foster parental protectiveness
Objectives	Introduction to program, define child abuse, engage participants
Outcome:	Participant will acknowledge that other parents of children who have been abused can support one another in positive ways Participant will acknowledge that they can be proactive in creating a safe home environment for their children.
Indicators:	___% of participants Commit to attending 8 of the 12 sessions by a show of hands Participants will manage family life to promote self sufficiency, safety and stability.
Intervention:	“Choices Questionnaire” – Adapted from the “LAMS” – Learning About Myself self revealing exercise

The main premise of this lesson is that life is made up of choices, both good and bad. Some parents may feel they have made bad choices, or no choices and that life has “just happened” and is beyond their control. The activities in this session will mark a beginning of opening minds to see that many life happenings that were thought of as “happenings” are the results of choices made. The negative events in life can then be changed by making more informed decisions and thinking about the possible outcomes of our choices. Bad choices can be recognized, acknowledged, and many times changed. Group members can learn to live their lives by choice, not chance.

### Making Choices

You may feel that a lot of things have just “happened” to you in your life. Really, you have made them happen. Your past choices have put you where you are today. When you learn how to make the right choices, you can choose what you want your life to be like and change what it is like now. You can choose to live your life by *choice*, not by *chance*.

### Brain and Storage

All life experience are stored in the brain and nothing is ever erased unless there is an injury to the brain. Everything that has been seen, heard, said or done is stored in the many compartments of the brain like a file drawer. You may forget some things are in the drawer, but they are still there. We learned to sit, crawl and walk as children, but we don’t have to be reminded how to do these activities today. When decisions are to be made, sometimes without thinking, we look into the drawers in our brain to help us make choices. What we have stored in our brains have a big influence on the decisions we make all the time. We can take more charge of our lives by putting more thought into the choices in our lives.

“One Brick at a Time” – Project PONY Brochure  
Nane Chaha –Choctaw legend of beginnings – handout

The legend is an example of new beginnings and the participation in the program is a new beginning for the parents. The program will introduce activities for parents so they can take insight of their attitudes and beliefs, parenting styles and nurture interaction with the system in place to protect children. The brochure outlines the topics to be discussed in future sessions and also introduces the Project PONY staff.

Activity: “Top Secret”

This activity is conducted by asking participants to write anonymously on a piece of paper the one thing they would be most reluctant to share with the group. Then the papers are given to another group member to read and discuss. This reinforces group cohesiveness as the members perceive the similarities that usually result from this activity.

## Session 2 – “When Mothers Cry”

Project PONY Goal 1 – Prevent reoccurrences of child abuse.

Goal 3 – Identify risk factors for victimization

Objective: To promote the reduction of risk factors by increasing the knowledge of the link between Domestic Violence and Child Abuse

Outcome: Participants will:  
Understand the effects of Domestic Violence upon the family  
Create violence free homes.

Indicators: \_\_\_% of the participant do not re-enter the system for new or repeat events of violence in the home at 3, 6, and 12 months after participation.

Intervention: Speaker – Domestic Violence program specialist or survivor(20 minutes)  
Children are In Pain Handout

Activity: Bracelets for children – (15 minutes)

The speakers come to share their knowledge and/or their experience of Domestic Violence and the effects it has upon the well being of the family. The professional will describe what domestic violence is and explain the programs that are available to assist the parent who chooses to stop the violence. The professional will also conduct a self assessment to help the participant perceive their relationships and the potential negative impact it has upon the children. The survivor is able to share their experience of a domestic violent relationship, and the strength that helped them remove those risk factors for the safety of their children. The handout describes the effect of Domestic Violence upon the children, and what s describe what an MDT is and who is part of the MDT. The non-offending parents learn who to address specific questions to and where to get information during the process of investigations and prosecution of their case.

The bracelet activity is to reinforce to parents that choices are made in selection the different colors and aligning them to make a pattern that is pleasing to the eye. Similarly, creating a safe home for children requires conscious decision making and choosing those options that promote wellness for the family.

### Week 3 – “The Path Begins Here”

Project PONY Goal 1 – Prevent reoccurrences of child abuse.

Goal 2 – To foster parental protectiveness

Outcome: Participant will  
Understand the effects of child abuse on children  
Understand how to meet the child’s need for health and safety.

Indicators: \_\_\_\_\_ % of participants will  
attend intake and therapy sessions for child and family as appropriate.  
Practice giving and receiving emotional reaffirmation in the Car Wash activity  
that children and parents need during the crisis and aftermath of child abuse

Intervention: Speaker or video(Child Sexual Abuse Survivor) – 30 min  
Video – Hidden Shame 17 min  
“If Angels Could Speak” Handout

Activity: Car Wash Exercise – 5 min  
(Reference – LAMS self esteem building activity, page 49)

The speakers in the video share experiences about the abuse events in their life and how childhood abuse has impacted their life. The speakers also communicate what they viewed as lessening the impact of the trauma they suffered and the impact of the experienced in their life.

The handout reflects real statements made by individuals who have suffered sexual abuse. Some of the statements reinforce what research continues to show that children who are listened to and understood do much better than those who are not. The response to the disclosure of sexual abuse is critical to the child's ability to resolve and heal the trauma of sexual abuse.

When a child tells someone about sexual abuse, a supportive, caring response is the first step in getting help for the child and reestablishing their trust in adults. Adults, because of their maturity and knowledge, are always the ones to blame when they abuse children. The abused children should never be blamed.

The exercise is a group and individual building activity. This helps the participants become aware that any time a traumatic memory is re-lived, there is a need to put everything back together through support systems. This activity encourages the participants to give and receive the emotional reaffirmation that is needed during the crisis and aftermath of child abuse.

#### Week 4 – “Stretch Marks on My Sanity”

Project PONY Goal 2 – To foster parental protectiveness

Goal 1 –Identify risk factors for victimization.

Outcome: To develop self awareness of psycho-social limitations.  
Know when their emotions interfere with their ability to provide good parenting

Indicators: \_\_\_% of the participants will  
Make self reports engaging in an activity that “feed your soul” (hobbies or other activity for self affirmation) during the program.  
Make use of the opportunity to participate in the support program for families impacted by child abuse.

Intervention: Healthy Life Brochure ([www.herhealthylife.org](http://www.herhealthylife.org))  
Self awareness and setting boundaries activity

Activity: Examples of Hobbies-craft activity, crossword puzzles, etc

Child abuse seems to occur in the midst of families suffering stress or crisis in various forms. The stress upon the family becomes compounded with a disclosure of child abuse and the response from systems such as the police, child welfare and the courts. For families to build healthy relationships and adapt to the stressors of the child abuse response, it is necessary to address the needs of the parent who remains to re-build the family. Building a healthy mind and body for the individual is vital to managing stress and developing family resiliency.

The information presented are suggestions on managing routine activities and preparing simple, healthy, meals that children may enjoy helping to prepare. This allows the parent and child to build team work while managing routine chores.

The activity of making hair bows or bows for packages can also allow a parent to learn a simple craft. The exercise will allow parents to explore their creativity and give them an opportunity to realize the positive results of a hobby which is a healthy escape from worries. Other hobbies may be used during the session which may include, puzzles, sewing, etc.

## Week 5 – “Bring in the Mop”

Project PONY Goal 1 – Prevent reoccurrences of child abuse.

Goal 2 – Foster parental protectiveness

Outcome: Participants will  
Practice prosocial methods of stress and anger management.  
Access help when their emotions (depression, anxiety, anger, fear, etc.) interfere with their ability to provide good parenting.

Indicators: \_\_\_% of the participants will  
Identify times when the anxiety, exhaustion, anger, depression or other stressors affecting their mental health has affected their parenting decisions.  
Utilize community resources or self help groups

Intervention: Speaker (Behavioral Health – Stress)  
Stress self-evaluation  
Choctaw Legend “Help from Above”-handout

Activity: Stress Relief Exercise

Everyone has stress, regardless of age, sex or race. In every day terms, stress is better known as the tension or pressure we feel as our bodies respond to everyday demands and changes. All stress is not bad nor does all stress have a negative effect on us. Some stress we experience is good and has a positive and motivating effect on us. Too much stress causes us to feel tense and pressured; this creates conflict in our experiences. Stress also affects the way parents relate to their children. Children of all ages require an enormous amount of their parents' energy and patience - sometimes more than you feel you can give. It's reassuring to know that all parents find it difficult at times. Children from all kinds of social, religious and cultural backgrounds can grow up to be happy, well adjusted adults - so long as their basic needs for love, physical care, security and respect are met. Parents all have their 'off days', but if they feel that their lives are bad most of the time, it can be difficult to meet their children's needs. Some adults may take out their anger and frustration on their children, or blame them for the problems in their own lives. Stress can sometimes push parents past their limit and lead parents to discipline or punish their children in ways which can do them harm.

Whatever happens in life, it is always easier to cope if you have a supportive partner, family and friends. If you are bringing up children alone, the problems you face may not be so different from those faced by two-parent families but they will quite often feel very different and are frequently more difficult to solve. There's nearly always something you can do to reduce there are often people who are willing to help. Remember that being a parent is one of the most valuable and important jobs you can do. The occasional angry word to your child probably won't do much harm, as long as the relationship is basically good. But if you get angry and find yourself shouting at your child a lot, they will suffer - and you'll probably not feel so good either.

Week 6 – Open (goals accomplished by Week 4)

Goal: To promote recognition of common bonds among group members.

Outcome: Participant will gain an understanding of individual and group needs.  
Participants will gain an understanding of collaboration for shared decision-making.

Indicators: Participants will identify and voice individual needs.  
Participants will identify a common topic of interest or need they all share.

Intervention: Open to group

Activity: Open to group

This session is open to allow a group break or an enjoyable activity for participants. This also allows for holidays or make up days in case a class is canceled.

Suggestions: elder to speak about traditions, cultural activity, movie related to parenting, movie with children, etc.

## Week 7 – “Recipe for a Healthy Child”

Project PONY Goal 1 – Prevent re-occurrences of child abuse.

Goal 2 – To foster parental protectiveness

Outcome: Participant will  
Understand the need for an effective and nurturing manner in management of child behaviors that foster optimal child development  
apply knowledge of child development in mediating their child’s challenging behaviors

Indicators: \_\_\_% of the participants will  
Address one problem behaviors of toddler, school age child or adolescent where they can use appropriate discipline techniques.  
Identify one new approach to address their child’s behavior pattern

Intervention: “Discipling Kids” –Video  
“Effective Discipline and Child Development of the Toddler” Brochure

Activity: Puzzles

Discipline can be defined as *a process to help children learn appropriate behaviors and make good choices*. Effective discipline aids a child in exercising self-control, responsibility, and respect. Through proper discipline, children learn how to function in a family and society that is full of boundaries, rules, and laws by which we all must abide. All parents seek disciplinary techniques that work. However, not all techniques work for all ages or for all children.

Children learn primarily through example and learn more from parents than all of their peers. The messages that parents send concerning their own personal goal directed activities are what children will adapt as theirs. Parenting and teaching takes not only sacrifice and energy, but also consistency. Good parents and teachers don't just happen by accident. People plan to be good parents and teachers and good parents and teachers plan. Good planning requires consistency.

Jigsaw puzzles can offer an escape from the routine or troubled times, as well as provide parents an opportunity to succeed with their children in a modest way. The team of parents and children completing a jigsaw can give a sense of accomplishment that is shared among the family of puzzlers. This simple and inexpensive task of completing a jigsaw puzzle also provides the family time together in a relaxed natural environment for conversation and relationship building. Puzzles and discipline have a similar goal—a sense of team develops as participants work toward accomplishment of a meaningful product.

## Week 8 –“Protecting the Gift”

**Goal:** To guide and assist the non-offending caregivers’ ability to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children to live and grow.

**Outcome:** Gain an understanding of characteristics of healthy vs unhealthy relationships.  
Gain an understanding of elements vital to building healthy relationships.

**Indicators:** \_\_\_% of the participants will  
complete a self-evaluation quiz of their relationship with their partner.  
identify two elements in their relationships with their children to improve.

**Intervention:** Healthy Relationships brochure  
Speaker – Victim of Domestic Violence, or History of Child Witness to Violence

**Activity:** Describe a Shape Exercise (Adapted from the LAMS curricula)

Communication is at the heart of every successful relationship. When there is no communication it is hard to tell someone exactly what you mean. This is important in an argument with a partner or when telling children what is expected of them. For example, when you ask a child(ren) to “clean up your room”. They may have a different understanding of what that means than their parents. The exercise to describe a shape is an example of how what we say is not always what another person hears.

Draw several geometric figures on blank 3 X 5 (or larger) cards, one on each card. Distribute blank cards of the same size and a pencil to each participant. The facilitator picks up one figure card and describes the shape aloud, very precisely. (Example-this shape is one and one half inches from the right side of the card, straight up three inches, one inch to the left, etc). Group members listen and try to reproduce the shape on one of their blank cards. The Leader cannot use gestures, only words, and cannot answer questions. On completion of the diagram, participants are asked to hold up their cards so the leader can see the results. Comments can be made that some are close, but no identification should be made of a correct copy. Then participants are asked to turn the same card over and redraw the diagram as the leader describes the shape again—this time with gestures and responses to questions from the group. Ask them to hold up their drawing, then the facilitator shows them the diagram they have been trying to copy.

When the exercise is completed, explain that they have just illustrated how hard it is to tell someone exactly what you mean. The speaker may think that what they are saying is perfectly clear; yet the listener is hearing something very different. Gestures and answers to questions make it clearer, but it is still hard to see what someone else is seeing or trying to explain.

## Week 9 – “How the Snakes Acquired their Poison”

Project PONY Goal 2 – Prevent revictimization  
Goal 2 – Foster parental protectiveness  
Goal 3 – Identify risk factors

Outcome: Understand the dynamics of the sexual offender.  
advocate for their abused child(ren).

Indicators: \_\_\_% of the participants will  
be able to identify three personal safety rules to teach their children.  
Not have any events of child maltreatment in their homes for up to 1 year after  
interventions

Intervention: Speaker – Behavioral Health  
Video – “Truth, Lies and Sex Offenders”  
Choctaw Legend, “How the Snake Acquired their Poison”

Perpetrators know they have to lower their victim’s guard to successfully engage their victim. There are many techniques perpetrators use to gain cooperation from their victims. Perpetrators also know that the acts they commit with children must be kept in secrecy to continue their victimization. In many instances, the non-offending caregiver may not be aware of abuse until much later when it is disclosed by the child. This session focuses on bringing to the surface the methods perpetrators use to manipulate children into cooperation and the need to teach parents and children about recognition and responding appropriately to “lures”.

Activity: Checklist for Protecting Children

This activity focuses on the parents as the “teachers” of personal safety to their children. The check list is designed to identify protective factors that can be taught by a parent. The parents are also asked to self-examine their ability to prevent abuse, and their willingness to strengthen those areas of doubts. The checklist is to help bring awareness of protective factors and is not an evaluation of learning.

## Week 10– “Protectors of the Village”

Project PONY Goal 1 – Prevent re-occurrences of child abuse.

Outcome: Participant will  
Understand that professional in the community are involved in activities that can help families reduce the likeliness of child maltreatment.  
Understand that professional in the community are involved in activities to reduce risk factors in their local community.

Indicators: \_\_\_% of the participants will  
Engage as a partner with the criminal justice system in the community to hold offenders accountable.

Intervention: Speaker (Criminal investigator or prosecutor)

The CI or prosecutor will give an overview of the investigation process and prosecution phase of the criminal justice system. The speaker will provide information on federal and tribal laws that govern child abuse and the overall goal of protection and safety for the community.

Activity: Pipe cleaner Art

Most people worry about what will happen in the future. Not knowing if something good or bad will happen to you can produce a lot of fear and anxiety. This is especially true when faced with the unknowns that can happen through the court and judicial system in cases involving children who are alleged to be abused. No one can predict the future with 100 Percent certainty. A lot of times, our worrying can make problems even worse. It is not easy to deal with the fear of the unknown; however the way we react to the fear can be worse than the situation. You have a choice, a choice you can make again and again or that you can change based on what is best for you.

The items in this activity are available to help with bringing to conscious the fears surrounding your encounter with the court system. Or these items can be used to plan a different action you will take when overcome with the fears that prevent you from handling the situation facing your family. You are free to choose whether you want to create an item that represents your fears, or something that you can hold in your hand that represents the strength you will rely on when faced with the fear of the unknown.

Example: the creation of the hot air balloon represents the fear of height, the butterfly can represent freedom from fear, etc

## Week 11 –“It Takes a Village to Raise a Child”

Project PONY Goal 1 – Prevent reoccurrences of child abuse.

Outcome: Participant will  
Understand that professional in the community are involved in activities that can help families reduce the likeliness of child maltreatment.  
Understand that professional in the community are involved in activities to reduce risk factors in their local community.

Indicators: \_\_\_% of the participants will  
Engage with their case workers to develop treatment plans that promote the safety of children in their homes.

Intervention: Speaker – Division of Social Services  
Handout – Parent Guide to the Division of Social Services  
Choctaw story of “Iyyi-Kowa”

This African saying teaches unending truth, that no man, woman or child can stand alone. The Choctaw tribe once had a similar outlook on families and the community. The “Iyyi-Kowa” is the Choctaw tradition of families coming together to help a member who had become sick or injured and found themselves and their family in need. The community took care of their members, whether it was a financial problem or family disputes.

We all want to live in a place were people care about others—where people pitch in to help when things get rough—where its safe to leave the door unlocked and where kids can safely play by themselves outside. Today, communities are not always what they should be. Today the Choctaw communities face challenges such as poverty, drug abuse, violence in the home and sadly, child abuse. Today, we have laws to keep the social order in our community and helpers like the police and social services.

It does take a village to work with a family, raise a child and weather the storms of life. It takes cooperation of family, schools, leaders and community programs working together to make sure a child lives a healthy and safe life. It is this same village that is called upon to build a foundation of support when a child is abused. Keeping families safe and intact is the goal of the Division of Social Services.

Activity: Garbage Pail/Treasure Chest  
Adapted from “Creative Therapy” page 7

This activity encourages the participants to review the negative outlook they harbor which may hinder their current involvements with the criminal justice system. Each participant is asked to discard one negative belief they have concerning the police, the courts or the child abuse response system in the garbage pail. Then the same activity is repeated except a positive outcome is placed in the treasure chest. Then the facilitator gets approval to read the results to stimulate group discussion.

Week 12 – “Celebrate”

Goal: To create an opportunity for caregivers and their children to experience positive and enjoyable interactions with each other and their peers.

Outcome: Participants will plan a family day for children.

Indicators: Parents will participate in activities with children.

Intervention: meal and activities

Activity: Affirmation

I am important  
What I say is important  
What I think is important  
What I do is important,  
To myself and those around me.  
I choose to be the best, most caring, accepting and  
Understanding person I can be.