The Violence Against Women Act Training

Presented by Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

November 18-19, 2026 at Choctaw Casinos & Resorts – Hochatown, OK

2026 THEME:

Building Safer Communities and Advancing Accountability

UNIT FORMAT |

Each interactive unit has 1 presenter and includes:

- 50 minutes Lecture
- 15 minutes Activity
- 10 minutes Q & A

DAY 1 | **November 18 | 8:30am-4:30pm CST**

DAY 2 | **November 19 | 8:30am-4:30pm CST**

Survey Link Day 1:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ChoctawVAWA2026_Day1

Survey Link Day 2:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ChoctawVAWA2026_Day2

Event website here: **twgtrainings.com**

DAY 1
Wednesday, November 18

8:00am Registration
8:30am Breakfast

9:00-9:30 WELCOME

9:30-10:45 UNIT 1
Healing Families, Strengthening Systems: The Family Justice Center and Camp HOPE America Models

Sarah Schanck
Program Director, Alliance for HOPE International

Session Description: This session introduces two complementary models that help families affected by violence heal and help communities respond more effectively: Family Justice Centers and Camp HOPE America. We will explore how Family Justice Centers bring attorneys, law enforcement, advocates, social workers, and other partners together to offer coordinated, trauma-informed services in one place, and how Camp HOPE America extends that support to children through evidence-informed camps and year-round mentoring. Throughout, we will consider how culturally based practices and community leadership can shape and strengthen each model. By the end of the session, participants will be able to (1) describe the core components of the Family Justice Center model and how it strengthens safety and accountability, (2) explain how Camp HOPE supports children and youth exposed to violence, and (3) identify strategies for building cross-sector partnerships and next steps for strengthening a coordinated response in their own communities.

Speaker Biography: Sarah Schanck is the Program Director at Alliance for HOPE International, where she oversees the Family Justice Center Alliance and Camp HOPE America nationally. A systems builder and coalition architect with deep roots in both movements, she is passionate about creating collaborative systems that open lasting pathways to safety and hope for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families. Before joining Alliance for HOPE, she served as Director of One Safe Place Macon, a Family Justice Center serving seven counties, and founded Camp HOPE Central Georgia, Georgia's first Camp HOPE America affiliate. Sarah holds a BBA in Non-Profit Management and Marketing from Mercer University and an MEd in Higher Education Administration from Georgia Southern University. She lives in Macon, Georgia, with her husband and two children.

10:45-11:00 BREAK

11:00-12:15 UNIT 2
Tribal Protection Orders that Travel

Ron Whitener (Squaxin Island)
Co-Owner, and Director of Court & Justice Consulting, The Whitener Group

Session Description: This session explores the full faith and credit provisions of the federal Violence Against Women Act (18 U.S.C. § 2265) and how they apply to tribal courts and tribal domestic

violence protection orders. Participants will review key provisions of the statute, including consistency requirements, limitations on mutual orders, registration preemption, and Congress's affirmation of tribal civil jurisdiction over any person. The session will also cover federal firearms prohibitions and the expanded tribal criminal jurisdiction restored through the 2013 and 2022 VAWA reauthorizations. Participants will receive a practical drafting checklist to help ensure protection orders can be enforced in state, tribal, and territorial courts. The session will also address enforcement across jurisdictions, including federal prosecution.

Speaker Biography: Judge Whitener is a member of the Squaxin Island Tribe and a nationally recognized expert in the area of Indian law, tribal court administration and practice, including developing and presiding over healing-to-wellness courts, and tribal court judicial services. He has served as an in-house legal counsel to a tribe, a legal services attorney, a public defender, a clinical law professor, and a tribal judge. He has been recognized for his work by the White House, which named him a White House Champion of Change in 2011.

12:15-1:15 LUNCH BREAK

1:15-2:30 UNIT 3

The Effects on Children Who Have Witnessed or Experienced Violence

Melissa Riley (Mescalero Apache (NM))
Executive Director, Native Community Development Associates

Session Description: Children who witness or experience violence often carry those experiences into their relationships, classrooms, and communities. What they see and live through at home shapes how they understand safety, trust, conflict, and other people. For those of us who work with children and families, understanding this matters. It helps us offer real support and keeps violence from passing from one generation to the next.

This training looks at how exposure to violence affects children emotionally, socially, and developmentally, and how those experiences can shape behavior and relationships later in life. Along the way, we will cover childhood trauma, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and toxic stress, and how violence can come to feel normal in families and communities. Historical and intergenerational trauma in tribal communities is part of this picture too. Using the

Cycle of Socialization, we will explore how children learn behaviors from the people and systems around them, and how those patterns continue until someone helps interrupt them. Drawing on experience in social work, education, and child advocacy, the training asks you to look past a child's behavior and wonder what that child may have been through. It also asks how we respond to families. The goal is to work alongside them, not simply step in and solve their
problems for them.

For attorneys, judges, and tribal court personnel, the focus is on recognizing trauma in children and families involved in legal proceedings. How you interact, decide, and show up in the courtroom can help a child feel safe and respected. We will also talk about what it looks like for law enforcement, social services, courts, and community partners to work together. Through discussion and a practical family case study, participants will practice responding to children and families with more understanding, strengthen prevention efforts, and support healing. Breaking cycles of violence is not the job of one profession or agency. It takes all of us, building on the strengths of families and communities, so children can experience safety,

stability, and healthy relationships.

Speaker Biography: Dr. Melissa E. Riley (Mescalero Apache) is an educator, consultant, and former social worker and guardian ad litem whose work centers on Native American and Alaska Native communities, education, and family well-being. She owns Native Community Development Associates and is affiliated with New Mexico State University and New Mexico Highlands University; she holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. Her experience includes serving as Training and Education Programs Director for the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women. In her presentation, "The Effects on Children Who Have Witnessed or Experienced Violence," Dr. Riley brings a culturally responsive perspective to understanding children's experiences and supporting safety, healing, and resilience.

2:30-2:45 BREAK

2:45-4:00 UNIT 4

When Silence Becomes Survival: Understanding Coercive Control, Institutional Power, and Collective Trauma

Harmony Revard, (Citizen of the Osage Nation (WahZhaZhe))
Doctor of Healthcare Administration/Licensed Clinical Social Worker
Founder/Owner at Harmony Wellness & Consulting, PLLC

Session Description: Coercive control is a pattern of behaviors used to establish and maintain power over another person. Coercive control extends beyond the interpersonal relationships, operating withing institutions, systems, and communities in ways that reinforce power imbalances, silence voices, and perpetuate cycles of harm. This presentation examines the intersections of coercive control, historical and collective trauma, and institutional power, with particular attention to the experiences of Indigenous communities. Participants will be able to identify coercive control across interpersonal, institutional, and community contexts, examine how survival-based responses contribute to cycles of disempowerment throughout system levels, and apply trauma informed strategies to strengthen accountability, restore autonomy, and support individual and collective healing.

Speaker Biography: Harmony Revard, DHA, LCSW, (WahZhaZhe) is a citizen of the Osage Nation, a licensed clinical social worker, healthcare administrator, educator, and consultant with experience serving tribal communities and navigating complex systems of care. As the owner of Harmony Wellness & Consulting, PLLC, she provides clinical services, organizational consultation, professional training, and program development, with a focus on domestic and sexual violence, child welfare, trauma-informed practices, and systems-level responses to community health. Her work spans behavioral health, child welfare, victim services, and tribal healthcare systems, integrating clinical expertise with an understanding of the institutional and systemic factors that shape survivor experiences and community responses. Dr. Revard also serves as a graduate-level social work educator and a board member of the William Barnes Children's Advocacy Center. Through her work, she emphasizes culturally responsive approaches, institutional accountability, and meaningful collaboration to strengthen advocacy, improve systems of care, and support safer, healthier Indigenous communities.

4:00-4:30 ANNOUNCEMENTS

5:00-6:00 *EVENING EVENT – Basket Weaving* *(Optional)*

DAY 2
Thursday, November 19

8:00am Registration
8:30am Breakfast

9:00-9:30 REFLECTIONS FROM DAY 1

9:30-10:45 UNIT 5
Digital Evidence in Domestic Violence Cases

Jonathan (Jon) Kurland
Senior Attorney Advisor, AEquitas

Session Description: The way we interact with technology continues to increase and evolve as we rely on computers, smart phones, and other digital devices to complete many of our daily activities. Unfortunately, as technology becomes more integral to our lives, offenders have increasingly misused technology to facilitate crimes against women, and as a means to assert power and control in the course of an intimate partner relationship.

Where technology is being used to perpetrate crimes, investigators and prosecutors can identify, preserve, and present digital evidence in order strengthen cases, support victims, and hold offenders accountable for the full range of their criminal and abusive activity.

This presentation will demonstrate how digital investigations can be used to reveal evidence of criminal activity, as well as evidence of the power and control dynamics of an abusive intimate partner relationship. The presenter will discuss theories of admission, rules of evidence, and case law will be discussed using “real life” examples to demonstrate how to properly authenticate and introduce digital evidence in civil and criminal proceedings.

Speaker Biography: Jonathan Kurland is a Senior Attorney Advisor at AEquitas, where he brings nearly two decades of prosecutorial and leadership experience to advance strategies that improve justice system responses to gender-based violence and exploitation. In his role, Jonathan provides technical assistance, legal consultation, and training to prosecutors and allied professionals nationwide, with a focus on victim-centered, offender-focused, and trauma-informed practices.

Prior to joining AEquitas, Jonathan served for nearly 20 years in the Berks County District Attorney’s Office in Pennsylvania, rising to the role of Chief Deputy District Attorney. There, he led and prosecuted cases involving intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child abuse, and homicide, and oversaw grand jury investigations. His prosecutorial experience spans urban, suburban, and rural jurisdictions, giving him a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities in multidisciplinary responses across diverse communities.

Jonathan was instrumental in strengthening collaboration among prosecutors, law enforcement, victim advocates, healthcare professionals, and other stakeholders. He led numerous multidisciplinary investigative teams and played a central role in community-based initiatives to combat sexual violence, intimate partner violence, child abuse, and human trafficking.

In addition to his courtroom leadership, Jonathan served in the appellate unit and as a Special Assistant United States Attorney, facilitating federal prosecutions of complex criminal enterprises and violent offenders. He has also served as adjunct faculty in the Criminal Justice Department at Alvernia University.

Jonathan lives in Berks County, Pennsylvania with his wife and son. He is an avid runner—or at least aspires to be on days he doesn't skip his run.

10:45-11:00 BREAK

11:00-12:15 UNIT 6
State ICWA Laws and the New Uniform State ICWA Act

Addie Smith
Senior Consultant, The Whitener Group, LLC.

Session Description: This session will provide an overview of the new Uniform Law Commission State ICWA Act. It will discuss the ULC process, the pros and cons of a ULC State ICWA, and the most unique provisions of the Act. It will also describe briefly the next steps and what to consider when reviewing your own State ICWA that may already exist.

Speaker Biography: Addie Smith is a nationally known Indian Child Welfare Act trainer and has worked in states across the country to change policies and improve systems that promote ICWA compliance. She has also worked with a variety of tribes on projects designed to improve tribal social service systems and tribal courts. She was formerly the staff attorney at the Nation Indian Child Welfare Association after which she worked on issues related to child welfare and juvenile justice courts for Oregon Governor Kate Brown and then as Counsel to the Judiciary Committees in the Oregon State Legislature.

12:15-1:15 LUNCH BREAK

1:15-2:30 UNIT 7
Building Domestic Violence Cases without Victim Testimony

Jonathan Kurland
Senior Attorney Advisor, AEquitas

Session Description: A recurring issue in prosecuting domestic violence cases is whether and how the victim will testify at trial. Many domestic violence victims are subject to intense pressures—including intimidation and manipulation—that discourage them from participating in a criminal prosecution. And even when such victims do testify, they may recant prior statements, minimize the level of violence or the defendant's culpability, or even testify on behalf of the defendant. These cases can still be prosecuted successfully. A thorough and well-documented investigation enables the prosecution to build an evidence-based case that does not depend upon victim testimony.

This presentation will examine evidence-based prosecution techniques that will enable prosecutors to try domestic violence cases where the victim is an absent or reluctant witness. The presenter will discuss tools and strategies for successfully prosecuting these difficult cases and the practical steps necessary to achieve success. The presentation will focus on effective investigative techniques for documenting and securing evidence that will prove the elements of the offense, as well as trial strategies, including the use of expert testimony to explain victim behavior, that will enable the jury to return a guilty verdict regardless of whether or how the victim testifies.

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2:30-2:45 BREAK

2:45-4:00 UNIT 8

Ethical Considerations for Prosecutors in Domestic Violence Cases

Jonathan Kurland
Senior Attorney Advisor, AEquitas

Session Description: A prosecutor is "the servant of the law, the twofold aim of which is that guilt shall not escape or innocence suffer. . . . It is as much his duty to refrain from improper methods calculated to produce a wrongful conviction as it is to use every legitimate means to bring about a just one." Berger v. United States, 295 U.S. 78, 88 (1935). Achieving justice in intimate partner violence cases requires prosecutors to have a firm grasp of their legal obligations as well as their ethical responsibilities throughout each stage of the criminal justice process. Intimate partner violence cases present unique ethical challenges related to victim privacy and confidentiality, prosecutorial discretion, recantation, and disclosure of evidence.

This presentation will address the ethical considerations outlined above in the context of charging decisions, immunity, compulsion of victim testimony, Crawford, and the investigative function of a prosecutor. The presenter will use hypothetical case scenarios to challenge prosecutors to evaluate their decision-making in the context of ethical rules and principles.

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4:00-4:30 CLOSING