



# Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

## Domestic Violence Perpetrators Risk to Children

- May physically/sexually abuse children directly.
- Endanger the children through neglect directly or by preventing mom from caring for their children.
- May coerce them into participating in abuse
- Create environments where they witness assaults against their mother
- Create possibility of child injury as bystander or hero intervention
- Create severe sense of instability in environment and identity.
- Endanger children by undermining the ability of child welfare workers and other community agencies to intervene and protect the children.

## Children's Exposure:

Child victims of domestic violence experience the violence in 4 ways:

- They see the abuse
- They overhear the sounds of abuse
- They see the aftermath—the inferred situation ie bruises, house destroyed, police, ambulance, mother's and father's behavior
- They are physically or sexually abused directly or 'accidentally' in an Intervention attempt.

## Family Violence Affects Children

Children are particularly vulnerable as both victims and witnesses to domestic violence. In order to break the cycle of violence, we must intervene and provide services. We must provide children with a safe and caring atmosphere in which to process their trauma and begin to heal. Children's services also help support the non-abusive parent as they deal with their own experience of abuse and begin to rebuild the family in an environment free from violence.

Approximately 15.5 million children are exposed to domestic violence each year. (McDonalds et al 2006)



**Myth:** Children aren't aware of the violence in their home  
**Fact:** Studies show that most children are aware of violence directed at their caregiver.

## Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

- A growing body of literature shows that children who have been exposed to domestic violence are more likely than their peers to experience a wide range of difficulties. These difficulties fall into three main categories:
- Behavioral, social and emotional problems
- Cognitive and attitudinal problems
- Long-term problems

## Warning signs of Children Exposed to violence

Children's reactions to exposure to violence can be immediate or appear much later. How a child responds also varies according to age. (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, & Kracke 2009)

Young Children (5 and younger)	Elementary School Age Children (6-12 years)	Teenagers (13-18 years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be irritable or fussy or have difficulty calming down</li><li>• Cling to caregivers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have difficulty paying attention</li><li>• Get into trouble at home or school</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage in risky behaviors</li><li>• Increase aggressive behaviors</li></ul>

## There's hope and help for children from violent homes.

Positive influences can help a child overcome the negative ones. Positive influences may include:

- **Role models:** Many children who grew up with violence credit a relative, teacher or friend's parent with showing them a better way — and giving them love.
- **Family support:** Being close to brothers, sisters and other relatives helps children feel loved and needed.
- **Community support:** Positive youth activities and mentoring programs give children a change to learn new skills. It also helps them have a sense of purpose in life and build self-esteem.

With treatment and support, children and families can recover.

- Individual therapy can help family members rebuild self-esteem, learn to trust again and develop ways to express emotions. Therapy for children may include play therapy, drawing and one-on-one counseling
- Group therapy and self-help groups can provide support for people who have had similar experience.

## Teach Personal Safety Rules

Help children from violent homes make a safety plan and practice it. The plan should include:

- Escape routes
- Safe places to go if there is a fight
- How to call for help

## How you can help:

Here are some tips for working with and caring for a child from a violent home:

- **Set Clear Limits**
  - Let the child know your rules and limits. Be consistent in how you reward success and how you deal with misbehavior.
- **Be Honest**
  - A child may want you to "fix" a family problem. Let him or her know what you can and cannot do to help. Don't make promises you can't keep.
- **Help reduce stress.**
  - A child from a violent home is under a lot of stress. Create a calm, safe environment with soft music "quiet times," etc.
- **Encourage play**
  - Help a child break free from the isolation. Provide lots of opportunities for play especially with other children.
- **Promote healthy self-expression**
  - Teach the child to express feelings through talking, writing, drawing and music, not violence.
- **Build self-esteem**
  - Encourage the child to believe that he or she is worthy of love, not abuse. Offer choices — and guide the child to making the right decisions.
- **Teach self control**
  - Help the child stay in control when he or she is angry or frustrated (by counting to 20, taking a time out, breathing slowly, etc.)
- **Tell the child often that he or she is not responsible for violence at home.**

# HELP STOP THE HURT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

- If you detect signs of abuse or neglect, report them to a child protection agency or the police or sheriff's department.
- Get help if a child is out of control or if you're unsure about how to handle a situation.
- Even if you are unsure about a case, report it. As long as you do so in good faith your rights are protected.
- Be a good listener. Don't force conversation, but let families know that you're "there for them."
- And, you may save a child's life.



**Lend a helping hand and make a difference in children's lives.**

- Understand the Damage caused by family violence.
- Recognize the warning signs of children suffering from family violence
- Support efforts to help children and their families—and to end family violence.

## Where can I get more information and support?

- Childhelp USA National Child Abuse Hotline  
1-800-4-A-Child  
1-800-422-4453
- National Domestic Violence Hotline  
1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

Or contact local sources such as:

- Shelters and hotlines
- Family, social service and child protection agencies
- Hospitals, health clinics and mental health services
- Legal aid offices

Look in your phone book under "child abuse", "family services", "shelters", or "parental stress/help lines."