
Protecting Children:

Often, the most effective way to protect the children is to protect and support the victim. *Holding the perpetrator rather than the victim accountable for the abuse is critical in protecting both the victim and the child.*

The following are a few tips for working with and caring for a child from a violent home:

1. Be Honest

A child may want you to fix a family problem. Let the child know what you can and can't do for them, and don't make promises you cannot keep.

2. Help Reduce Stress

If possible, create a calm and safe environment for the child using soft music, "quiet times," etc.

3. Promote Healthy Self-Expression

Teach the child non-violent ways to express themselves, such as talking, writing, drawing, or music.

4. Build Self-Esteem

Encourage the child to believe that they are worthy of love, and make sure they know that they are not responsible for the abuse.

Children need to understand that they are not responsible for the domestic violence at home, that they cannot change it nor control it, and that their first concern should be for their own safety.

**If you need help,
please call:**

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

1-800-787-3224 (TDD)

Se habla Español

**The Phone Number for the
Domestic Violence Program
in your area is:**

THE IMPACT of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE on CHILDREN



**Domestic violence is
experienced by children in all
socioeconomic,
educational, ethnic, racial, and
age groups.**



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Domestic Violence**
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Children and Domestic Violence: The Facts

Women who are battered often go to extreme and courageous lengths to protect their children from an abusive partner. However, growing up in a violent home may be a terrifying and traumatic experience that can affect every aspect of a child's life, growth and development.

Consider the following statistics:

- Slightly more than half of female victims of intimate violence live in households with children under age 12; studies suggest that between 3.3 million and 10 million children are exposed to domestic violence annually.
- In a national survey of more than 6,000 American families, 50% of the men who assaulted their wives also frequently abused their children. Men who as children were exposed to their parents' domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own wives as sons of nonviolent parents.
- Children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, run away from home, engage in teenage prostitution, and commit sexual assault crimes.

Studies clearly indicate that children free of physical injuries may still be damaged psychologically and emotionally by abuse in the home.

This information is adapted from the Family Violence Prevention Fund's "The Facts on Children and Domestic Violence," which can be found at www.endabuse.org.

Types of Abuse:

In homes where domestic violence is present, children may:

- Be used as weapons by the batterer—they could be physically injured when thrown at the victim, or abused for the purpose of coercing the adult victim.
- Become injured while being held by the adult victim during an attack, or while trying to stop the abuser's attack on the victim.
- Be intimidated by the abuser through threats (either to the child, the victim, or to a loved pet or object), name calling and belittling, or emotional withholding.
- Be interrogated by the batterer about the adult victim's activities, or forced to participate in assaults against the victim.
- Be isolated and not allowed to participate in peer activities and/or friendships.

Children may also be used by an abuser to continue controlling the victim, even after she has left, by:

- Trying to undermine the non-abusive parent's authority and/or attempting to convince the child that the victim is "worthless";
- Initiating lengthy custody battles;
- Violating visitation agreements or making visitation periods uncomfortable for the children; or
- Abducting the children/holding the children hostage to punish the victim—in extreme cases children have been murdered by the abusive parent as a means of punishing the non-abusive parent.

Negative Effects:

Even if these children are not physically injured, they may still be traumatized by the abuse in a variety of ways.

Children who are witnessing domestic violence in their homes may:

- Develop feelings of guilt and responsibility for the violence, confusion over conflicted loyalties, and shame. They may develop low self-esteem and/or feelings of self-loathing.
- Become generally aggressive, acting out or going into destructive rages. Some children may internalize their anger, leading to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and depression.

Witnessing domestic violence may include seeing the violence, hearing violent events, or experiencing the aftermath of a violent episode.

- Exhibit symptoms such as poor sleeping, delayed speech, and frequent illnesses.
- Regress in developmental tasks, such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking.
- Complain of headaches, stomach aches, nausea, and anxiousness; they may also be sick often with colds or the flu.
- Suffer from symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including flashbacks, eating disorders, anxiety, fatigue, forgetfulness, and withdrawal.

When important developmental tasks are interrupted, children carry these deficits into adulthood. Later on, these deficits may affect their abilities to maintain jobs and/or relationships.