



# THE *Effects* OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

## CHILDREN LIVING WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Children exposed to violence at home may not exhibit outward cues. They may never discuss the violence or act-out behaviors that would alert others violence is occurring. This may also be true if a child is not only a witness of violence, but also the victim of violence. Some children will exhibit cues or “red flag” behaviors that may signal something terrible is happening at home, such as aggression; being passive/withdrawn; obsession with not making mistakes/perfectionism; manipulative; rebellious/acting out; health problems; depression.

## LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Exposure to violence increases the child’s chances of suffering from depression; experiencing anxiety; exhibiting low self-esteem; having impulse control problems; and demonstrating mood related issues. They are also at risk for: alcohol and drug abuse, sexual acting out, isolation, loneliness, and suicide.

Violent homes are often loud and filled with tension. Food, safety, and shelter begin to take priority in these environments. This can also affect a child’s academic performance. Children living in violent homes may also be moved from school to school for a number of reasons:

- Person causing harm relocates to keep the violence a secret
- The survivor may flee the person causing harm
- During the cycle of violence, the survivor may flee during the tension building phase to escape a violent outburst

## HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Reassure the child the abuse is not their fault. Validate their feelings by repeating back what they say; believe what they say; and express concern calmly and without shock or dismay. Do not make promises to the child you cannot keep. Normalize the child’s feelings concerning divided loyalties between their parents and never refer to the person causing harm as “bad”. Listen for cues to underlying feelings while the child is talking, but never tell them how they are feeling. If you can, help the child develop a safety plan.

## SAFETY PLANNING WITH CHILDREN

Talk to the child about calling 911 when the violence in their home escalates. Talk with them about other people they can call—help them find and/or memorize the phone numbers. Also talk with the child about safe places they can go when there is violence.



# THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Children are often present when the abuse occurs in the home. They can be traumatized by witnessing these attacks. They can even get in the way of the attack—either intentionally or on accident—and receive injuries. There is a high co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse, so many children will also be abused by the person causing harm. Abusers will also use children as a way to maintain control over their victim at times.

See the chart below to identify different red flags of children exposed to domestic violence at various life stages:

AGE	PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIORAL	DEVELOPMENTAL
Prenatal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor nutrition</li> <li>• Physical violence increase risk of miscarriages</li> </ul>	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased miscarriages</li> <li>• Low birth weight</li> </ul>
Birth - 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low weight</li> <li>• Digestive problems</li> <li>• No appetite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sleep problems</li> <li>• Startles easily</li> <li>• Cries excessively</li> <li>• Excessive screaming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to thrive</li> </ul>
2-6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of bowel control</li> <li>• Lack of bladder control</li> <li>• Stomach aches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Guilt (feels responsible for abuse)</li> <li>• Separation anxiety</li> <li>• Lacks self-confidence</li> <li>• Self-centered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acts out</li> <li>• Very aggressive (mimics abuse)</li> <li>• Verbally abusive</li> <li>• Defiant</li> <li>• Very withdrawn</li> <li>• Clingy/whining</li> <li>• Tries not to be noticed</li> <li>• Problems making/keeping friends</li> <li>• Regressing to younger behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor verbal skills</li> <li>• Quiet, doesn't talk</li> <li>• Poor cognitive skills</li> <li>• Poor motor skills</li> <li>• Poor impulse control</li> <li>• Fears new things and people</li> </ul>
7-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bedwetting</li> <li>• Stomach aches/ulcers</li> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Insomnia</li> <li>• Eating disorders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Denial &amp; secrecy</li> <li>• Indifference to abuser</li> <li>• Fear and anger</li> <li>• Guilt (can't protect victim, loves the abuser)</li> <li>• Self-blame</li> <li>• Nightmares</li> <li>• Ashamed &amp; embarrassed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressive, bully</li> <li>• Violent toward peers, animals, or siblings</li> <li>• Lies and steals</li> <li>• Self-abuse</li> <li>• Withdrawn or clingy</li> <li>• Deny violence in home</li> <li>• Doesn't invite friends home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor grades or failure</li> <li>• School phobia</li> <li>• Poor impulse control</li> <li>• Learning disabilities</li> <li>• Poor peer relationships (few or no friends)</li> </ul>
13-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bedwetting</li> <li>• Stomach aches/ulcers</li> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Severe acne</li> <li>• Eating disorders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Loneliness and isolation</li> <li>• Extreme anger</li> <li>• Anxious, fearful, withdrawn</li> <li>• Uncommunicative (especially about feelings)</li> <li>• Indifferent, no emotion</li> <li>• Blames others, especially parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very violent</li> <li>• Criminal activities</li> <li>• Self-destructive (substance abuse, promiscuity, self-mutilation, suicidal ideas, delinquency, risk taking)</li> <li>• Take on parent/caregiver role</li> <li>• Runaway or stays away from home</li> <li>• Protective/abusive to victim</li> <li>• Uses violence to solve problems</li> <li>• Refuses to bring friends home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor school performance, failure, truancy, drop out</li> <li>• Immaturity</li> <li>• Poor impulse control</li> <li>• Few friends</li> </ul>