

INTERGENERATIONAL *cycle* OF VIOLENCE

WHAT IS INTERGENERATIONAL ABUSE?

This is abuse that crosses generational family lines. It occurs when one family member takes the violence they experienced and passes it on to another family member—when ill-treatment experienced during childhood is repeated by a child as they get older within their own adult family. Whether we want to admit it or not, our childhood shapes who we are. When we are forced to confront abuse as kids, we may find it difficult to walk down the other path when faced with a cross-road later in life.

VIOLENCE IS A LEARNED BEHAVIOR

When exposed to violence in the home, children learn it as a coping mechanism and a way to solve problems. If a child sees one parent hit, kick, or pull a weapon out on the other parent and then tells someone about it, the response received can influence how they view violence. For example, if the response is “that’s too bad, but that’s the way it is” or if the person the child tells remains silent, the child may begin to accept violence as normal in families.

Violence is one way of dealing with stress which some people have learned. Sources of stress include:

- Economic pressures
- Intimate relationships
- Work-related problems
- Family pressures
- Lack of housing
- Changes

Some people deal with stress by problem solving, crying, withdrawing, talking, writing, coloring, or other non-violent methods.

CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE

If one parent decides they will tolerate the violence to keep the family together, how does this impact the children? Because the parent who causes harm probably learned to use harm from their parents, they in turn will be teaching their children to harm their future partners.

The parent experiencing harm may have grown up thinking abuse and violence in families is “normal”. The children may come to the same conclusion. Children learn to cause harm and expect abuse from the role models set by their parents—from the abuse they observe and sometimes receive.

Teens are attracted to persons with whom they feel comfortable, relationships where they can behave in the ways they have learned. This may mean looking for someone they can control, or looking for someone who requires them to use the survival behaviors they have learned. Teens may carry this abusive cycle into their adult lives and pass it on to the next generation.



BREAK THE CYCLE

Domestic violence doesn’t have to be passed on to the next generation. If children and teens are exposed to non-violent role models outside the home; are taught non-violent problem-solving skills; and experience the developmental success that result in self-confidence.

THE CYCLE CAN BE BROKEN!

Violence is a learned behavior and therefore can be unlearned. Unless this is given serious attention however, the chronic pattern of learned violence will be passed on to the next generation of family members.

Alternatives Inc. provides specialized services for children residing in our housing programs. Programming is designed to help break the cycle of intergenerational violence by providing support, healthy relationship skill building, self-esteem enhancement, empowerment, and encouragement for children exposed to violence.

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