

What they see can hurt for life

Children of all ages, even infants, can be harmed by seeing or hearing abuse. Below are some symptoms that may appear when children and teens witness domestic abuse.

Babies and Toddlers

- Irritability, frustration or inconsolable crying
- Frequent illness such as diarrhea
- Trouble sleeping
- Problems sleeping or eating
- Toileting problems (wetting him/herself)
- Difficulty separating from caregiver
- Developmental delays
- Lack of responsiveness
- Not showing any feelings
- More tantrums

Children

- Headaches, stomach aches, trouble sleeping
- Loss of skills learned earlier (toilet training)
- Fearful of being alone
- Difficulty separating from caregiver
- Developmental delays
- School difficulties
- Anxiety, aggression and acting out
- Repeated play or drawing about the violent event
- Problems with attention and hyperactivity

Teenagers

- Using drugs/alcohol
- Missing school/Running away
- Risky sexual behavior/Pregnancy
- Eating disorders
- Depression and anxiety
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Withdrawing from activities and friends
- Abuse in dating relationships

Children who witness violence may also:

- Act like a parent and feel they need to take care of the family
- Take on role of abusive parent and bully family members if that parent leaves
- Blame the non-abusive parent for "breaking up the family"
- Be misdiagnosed with ADHD because of trouble focusing and hyperactivity

While these behaviors may be hard to handle, children are only doing what they need to survive. Be patient and seek help to deal with these behaviors.

Often, one child in the family appears to be the one with a "problem". That child is the one letting us know the whole family needs help. Siblings that are quiet and appear fine may just be suffering in different ways.

When we don't talk about abuse, children will make up their own explanations. They should know that:

- Abuse is not normal and not okay
- Violence is not an okay way to solve problems
- Men do not have a right to control women
- People do not have the right to abuse others
- They have a right to feel safe

Stop domestic violence.

Call 1-800-494-8100.

www.ricadv.org

How we can help children heal

There are things you can do to help the children in your life heal. Remember that children understand violence differently. Sometimes it is hard to listen to the child's distress, but talking helps children heal. Acting out may be the only way they know how to tell you they need help.

The most important thing for a child who has witnessed abuse is a positive relationship with the non-abusive parent. That means the parent:

- Listens to the child's feelings and experiences of the abuse
- Talks with the child about the abuse
- Is emotionally available and present
- Provides ongoing love and support
- Creates routine, stability and safety in the home
- Seeks help for her/his own emotional and physical needs in order to deal with the abuse. This may include seeking therapy.

Caring relationships with other trustworthy adults can help as well.

When talking to children:

- Give children permission to tell their stories.
- Listen carefully to how they make sense of what happened.
- Give clear, simple explanations about scary events.
- Be patient if they are acting out.
- Have rules and routines so that children can predict what will come next.
- Build self-esteem in children by reminding them that they are loveable, competent and important.
- Let children see you solving problems in non-violent ways.
- Encourage creative and non-violent play and activities.

When a child feels...

Fear, lack of control or safety

Anger at the abuser or the non-abusive parent for not leaving

Anger and love for the abuser. Guilt for both feelings.

Loss of a parent due to separation, loss of safety in the home

Guilt or responsibility for causing the violence or not being able to stop it

Help them...

- Create a safety plan, such as going to a neighbor's house
- Find areas of their life where they can make plans and decisions
- Create daily routines that give a sense of control

- Learn how to express their anger in ways that do not harm themselves, others or property
- Understand it is okay to feel both things. They are not bad if they love the abuser. They can love him/her but not the abusive behavior.

- Develop a support system of extended family and friends outside the home

- Understand that it is never their fault and it is a problem for adults to work out

Remember:

Sometimes people think that if children are not talking about the abuse, they have forgotten about it. Some children do not bring it up because they are afraid of getting in trouble.

But they may actually feel relieved when you show them that it is okay to talk about it. Even if children are not ready to talk about it, they will know it is okay to bring it up when they are.

Let children's teachers and any other close adults in their life know about the abuse. This way, they will understand their behavior and be able to offer support. It also helps to break down the silence that keeps abuse going.

For more information and services, call 1-800-494-8100 or go to www.ricadv.org

Member agencies of the RICADV are:

- Blackstone Valley Advocacy Center
- Domestic Violence Resource Center of South County
- Elizabeth Buffum Chace Center
- Sojourner House
- Women's Resource Center

SOAR (Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships) is the RICADV task force of survivors.



DEFENDING CHILDHOOD
PROTECT HEAL THRIVE

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How do you know if children are witnessing violence at home?

Children and adolescents need their parents to provide a caring and safe home where they can grow, learn and play. However, when a child sees, hears or knows that one parent is being hurt by another, then the security usually found at home is threatened. Often parents think children do not know about the abuse and violence that is happening. But children know more about what is happening than we think they do. They may hear or see the scary event occurring. Other times they know something bad happened because of the worry on a parent's face, the injuries on a parent's body, or things that are messed up or broken in the home.

Ways a person can be hurt by a partner include:

Disrespect

Interrupting. Changing topics. Not listening or responding. Twisting their words. Putting them down in public. Saying bad things about their friends or family.

Abusing Trust

Lying, withholding information. Cheating on them. Being overly jealous.

Breaking Promises

Not following through on agreements. Not taking a fair share of responsibility. Refusing to help with childcare or housework.

Economic Control

Interfering with their work or not letting them work. Refusing to give them money or taking their money. Taking their car keys or preventing them from using the car. Threatening to report them to welfare or other social service agencies.

Intimidation

Making a partner afraid by using looks, actions, smashing things, hurting pets. Using children to hurt or control a partner's behavior.

Minimizing, Denying & Blaming

Making light of abusive behavior and not taking the victim's concerns about it seriously. Saying the abuse didn't happen. Shifting responsibility for abusive behavior.

Emotional Withholding

Not expressing feelings. Not giving support or attention. Not respecting feelings, rights, or opinions.

Self-Destructive Behavior

Abusing drugs or alcohol. Threatening suicide or other forms of self-harm. Deliberately saying or doing things that will have negative consequences (e.g., telling off their boss).

Isolation

Preventing or making it difficult for them to see friends or relatives. Monitoring phone calls. Telling them where they can and cannot go.

Harassment

Making uninvited visits or calls. Following them. Checking up on them. Embarrassing them in public. Refusing to leave when asked.