



### ***Effects on Children Who Witness Domestic Violence***

The experience of witnessing domestic violence can have serious and long-lasting effects on children, regardless of whether the children have been directly abused by a parent. The following is a summary of some of the effects that can result when a child witnesses violence between her/his parents.

Children will sometimes attempt to intervene, putting them at risk for physical harm. In one study, 63% of boys, ages 11-20, who committed homicide, murdered the man who was abusing their mother (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence). Children often feel guilty that they were not able to prevent the violence and sometimes feel they were somehow to blame for the violence.

Depression, impaired trust, and low self-esteem are common in children who witness domestic violence.

Witnessing violence in the home often leads to behavior problems in children; typically, children will develop aggressive or submissive behaviors. Children may identify with the role of the victim or the abuser.

Effects may include emotional problems in children such as anxiety disorders, phobias, learning problems, delayed social development and developmental delays.

Because of the emotional and behavioral effects of domestic violence, children may also develop academic or behavioral problems at school, drug or alcohol abuse, or delinquent behavior.

Research points to a strong tendency for the cycle of violence to continue to the next generation. Children from violent homes are at higher risk of getting involved in violent relationships as teens or adults. One researcher found, for example, that men who had witnessed domestic violence were three times as likely to abuse their own spouses. Sons of the most violent families have a rate of spouse abuse one thousand times greater than sons from nonviolent homes (Straus, 1980).

The Children's Program at Artemis provides counseling and advocacy for children and teens who witnessed violence in their home.

## ***Children's Response to Domestic Violence by Age***

### *Under 2 years*

- Respond to loud stimuli with increased fear (crying)
- Developmental delays (slower to walk, crawl, talk, etc.)
- Nightmares

### *2 – 5 years*

- Regressive behavior (lose toileting skills, baby talk, more clingy, revert to use of bottle)
- Somatic problems
- Nightmares
- Hyper vigilance
- Repetitive play, acting out domestic violence
- Increased sibling violence
- Cruelty to animals
- Developmental delays (slower to learn ABC's, read, etc.)
- Decreased playfulness and spontaneity
- Feel responsible for violence (believe if they behaved better, it would not occur)
- Increased dependency on primary caretaker

### *6 – 12 years*

- Increased problems at school (misbehavior, grades drop)
- Increased acting out, getting into trouble (may see lying, stealing, truancy, setting fires)
- Often viewed by others as having attentional problems or learning disabilities
- May withdraw and become reclusive rather than acting out
- May take on role of "family hero" or caretaker
- Increases anger directed at victim of violence (it is unsafe to direct anger at the perpetrator) batterer leaves anger escalates
- Develop inflated sense of responsibility
- Learn to disrespect the victim of violence because perpetrator models that behavior
- Confuse love and violence (learn that people hit those they love)
- Develop emotional problem such as depression

### *12 – 18 years*

- Aggressive behavior (violence to control others and solve problems)

- Severe behavior and emotional problems (running away, theft, depression, anxiety)
- Develop rigid sex roles – usually stereotypical
- Increased incidence of dating violence
- Self-destructive behavior (eating disorders, drug and alcohol)
- Increase risk for early marriages and/or teen pregnancy (often as an escape from parents)
- Increase risk for suicide and homicide
- Develop poor boundary systems (either too rigid or too weak)
- Develop distrust for most authority figures (or all adults)

For more information, call Artemis Center for Alternatives to Domestic Violence:

**(937) 461-HELP (4357)**

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