



Domestic violence can include emotional, sexual and physical abuse, social isolation, financial control or deprivation, by one or more members of the family against another. Many children witness violence in the home and it can seriously affect them and their future lives as well.

Domestic Violence Hurts Children Too

- ∪ You might think children don't worry about people fighting at home. You might think children will soon forget things they see – like mum being hit or parents screaming and yelling at each other.
- ∪ They DON'T forget! In fact children who witness domestic violence can be badly affected themselves. Children can be direct victims of domestic violence.

- ∪ Studies have found that many children who witness domestic violence have been found to have higher levels of emotional and behavioural problems than other children. It affects children differently according to their age, sex, position and role in the family.
- ∪ Many children believe they are partly to blame and may think that they can make the situation better by not saying how they feel or by keeping out of the way. It is NEVER the child's fault!

Some Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

Effects can include:

- Disturbed sleep and nightmares
- Developmental delays
- Regressed behaviour eg a child wetting or soiling where they were once toilet trained
- Anxious or fearful
- Nervous and withdrawn
- A change in their demeanour, eg now they are quiet whereas they were previously happy and outgoing

- Psychosomatic illnesses eg headaches, stomach aches, stuttering
- Cruelty to animals
- Behavioural problems such as running away from home
- Aggressive language and behaviour at home and/or school
- Glue sniffing, substance abuse

Long Term Effects

Violent behaviours that are learnt early in life may become the types of behaviours that children come to expect and copy when they are adults.

- Violent behaviour can be passed on across generations.
- Many people responsible for violence in their personal relationships have witnessed domestic violence or experienced abuse as children
- Some boys and girls may behave as their parents did, following the role model of their same sex parents.

NOTE: It is important to remember that children exposed to violence in the home do not necessarily become violent themselves.

HOW TO HELP

- Encourage children to talk about anything that might be worrying them. Remember, children are NOT usually encouraged to talk openly about violence at home and no one is supposed to talk about it outside the family. Children's needs are often not recognised because of this.
- Make sure the child knows the violence at home is not his or her fault.
- Tell the child he/she is a very special person, and that the child is not alone.
- Give them permission to talk about the violence at home.
- Help them make a safety plan which they can follow.
- Let them know that other children have also had similar experiences.
- Provide information as to where all members of the family can get help.

There are people who care – like relatives, neighbours, teachers, and counsellors, etc. Encourage children to have a support network.

ORGANISE PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOUR EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND ALL THEIR CAREGIVERS. Protective Behaviour Groups may be found in all States and Territories.

Parents involved in violence in the home should seek help from – THE POLICE or DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES or COMMUNITY SERVICES listed in the phonebook.

CAPS Crisis line: 1800 688 009 available all over Australia

Children could ring KIDS HELP LINE available in all States & Territories.

Phone: 1800 55 1800