



What about the children?

Children of domestic violence are found in all socio-economic levels, racial and age groups.

What do I tell the children?

Family violence deeply affects children. Here are sample statements you can use to explain the situation to your children. Do teach your children to call 911.

- "What is happening is not your fault"
- "People are not for hitting"
- "I love you"
- "Hitting is one way of being mean. Hurting someone's feelings with name calling, threats or by ignoring them is mean, too."
- "When adults hit each other, it is not OK, and they need help to stop."
- "I love Daddy (or Mommy), but I won't let him (or her) keep hurting me and scaring you."
- "When adults get mad at each other, there are safer ways to deal with the angry feelings than hitting."
- "I don't want you to feel it is OK to hit when you are angry or feeling badly."
- "I feel afraid when I get hit and I don't want to always be afraid."
- "Kids, grownups, and animals need kindness and respect."
- "In order to get help to stop the hitting, we need the police, our family, counselors, our friends, and the court. Sometimes this means the person who hits has to go away."

When the police arrives...

- "We called the police because we were afraid I would get hurt if the hitting didn't stop."
- "People who hit don't stop by themselves. Sometimes the police needs to stop them."
- "The police came to our house to help us. We needed their help and Daddy (or Mommy) needed their help to stop hurting me and scaring you."

What are the effects of domestic violence on children?

Perpetuation of Violence Over Generations: Children often repeat behaviors they learn from their parents. 80% of battering men and 50% of battered women grew up in violent homes. Girls from violent homes may grow up expecting to be hit (i.e. that violence is "the norm") and boys from violent homes grow up feeling it's okay to abuse their partner.

Modeling: Studies show that boys in violent homes often behave aggressively and violently act out their anger. Daughters experiencing these family dynamics often behave in a clinging and dependent manner.

Low Self Esteem: Having a chaotic home life, one in which the parents are physically abusing each other and where there is constant fighting, is very detrimental to children's self esteem. They may feel responsible and blame themselves for the family's problems. It is unlikely that the children are getting the necessary emotional support from either parent to ensure healthy ego development. The fathers are unpredictable and the mothers often withdraw emotionally in self-protection.

Child Abuse: In approximately half of the families experiencing domestic violence, there is physical child abuse. Children who experience domestic violence are very often emotionally abused regardless of whether or not they are actually hit.



What about the children?

Effects of domestic violence on the children (continued...)

Excessive Responsibility: Children from families where domestic violence occurs often have to “parent” their mothers and/or fathers or take responsibility for younger siblings. They are often robbed of a “normal” childhood.

Shame and Isolation: Children from families where domestic violence occurs are rarely able to tell anyone what is going on at home. They feel embarrassed and ashamed. Furthermore, it is often difficult to bring friends’ home for fear of what may happen. This increases the isolation; the family may already be experiencing.

Inconsistency, Chaos: The abuser is often a “Jekyll & Hyde” character, changing from one moment to the next: sometimes being kind, loving and warm and other times being irrational, crazy and violent. These types of unpredictable behaviors take their toll on the children’s mental health and well being.

RESOURCES: Reading books about coping with domestic violence opens conversation and can help younger children understand what is happening. Some books to consider include:

- **A Safe Place**

By Maxine Trottier

Ages 4-8

Escaping domestic violence by going to a shelter helps Emily and her mom be safe and gain hope.

- **A Terrible Thing Happened**

By Margaret M. Holmes

Ages 4-8

Sherman the raccoon shares how seeing something scary made him feel and behave, then tells what he did to make it better.

- **The Mad Family Gets their Mads Out**

By Lynn Namka

Ages 3-8

A boy describes how he feels bad when he and his family get angry. The book suggests ways to express anger constructively so everyone feels better.

- **Something is Wrong at My House**

By Diane Davis

Ages 3-10 (two sets of text for different ages)

Chris describes how living with domestic violence makes him feel and behave, and tells the ways he can make himself safer and feel better.

- **A Family that Fights**

By Sharon Chesler Bernstein

Ages 6-10

This story shares how Henry feels living in a family with domestic violence. Strategies for coping are listed in the back of the book.