

# Effects on Children



All children, who live in homes where domestic violence is occurring, are affected by this experience. The children will be affected differently, based on the following factors:

- Their interpretation of the experience (age influenced)
- How they have learned to survive and cope with stress
- The availability of supports (friends, relatives, other adults)
- Their ability to accept support and assistance from adults

The effect of this violence on children can be seen in many different ways. Each individual child will exhibit some of the following, and possibly exhibit different effects at different times:

## Emotional

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- Feeling guilty for the abuse and for not stopping it
- Grieving for family and personal losses
- Confusion regarding conflicting feelings toward the parents
- Fearful of abandonment, expressing feelings, the unknown, of personal injury
- Angry about the violence and the chaos in their lives
- Depressed, feeling helpless and powerless
- Embarrassed about events and dynamics at home

## Cognitive

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- Believe they are responsible for the violence
- Blame others for their own behaviors
- Believe that it is acceptable to hit people they care for to get what they want, to express your/their anger, to feel powerful, or to get others to meet their needs
- Have a low self concept originating from a sense of family powerlessness

- Do not ask for what they need, let alone what they want
- Do not trust
- Feeling angry is bad, because people get hurt
- To be a boy means...to be a girl means...to be a man, woman, husband, wife means...(rigid stereotypes)

## Behavioral (often seen in opposite extremes)

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- Act out vs., withdraw
- Overachiever vs. underachiever
- Refusal to go to school
- Caretaking, more concern for others than self - parent substitute
- Aggressive vs. passive
- Rigid defenses (aloof, sarcastic, defensive, "black and white thinking")
- Excessive attention seeking (often using extreme behaviors)
- Bedwetting and nightmares
- Out of control behavior, not able to set own limits or follow directions

## Social

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- Isolated from friends and relatives
- Relationships are frequently stormy, start intensely and end abruptly
- Difficulty in trusting, especially adults
- Poor conflict resolution and anger management skills
- Excessive social involvement (to avoid home life)
- May be passive with peers, or bully peers
- Engage in exploitive relationships either as perpetrator or victim
- Play with peers gets exceedingly rough

## Physical

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- Somatic complaints (headaches, stomachaches)
- Nervous, anxious and a short attention span (frequently mis-diagnosed as being A.D.H.D.)
- Tired, lethargic
- Frequently ill
- Poor personal hygiene
- Regression in development tasks (bedwetting, thumb sucking - depending on age)
- Desensitization to pain
- High risk play and activities
- Self abuse