



Education

Family Violence: The Effects on Children

Family violence is a major problem. Violence in the home affects children in many ways. It can often affect how children do in school, their relationships, and their emotional development. Children are hurt simply by seeing or hearing violence in their homes. Abused or abusive adults are often not able to properly care for children.

What is adult family violence?

It is any violent behavior between adults in the home. Problem behaviors include:

- biting
- grabbing
- hitting
- kicking
- name calling
- pushing
- slapping
- threatening with a weapon
- throwing things.

Family violence often exists along with alcohol or drug abuse. Usually the victims of violence are women. However, both men and women can be abusers and both can be victims.

How does family violence affect children?

Seeing violence between trusted adults has a greater effect on a child's development than television and movies ever could. Witnessing family violence can have an even greater negative effect than on children than being the victim of abuse themselves. Even if children do not see it, they may hear it. And even if they can't hear it, they will **always** feel the effects of violence in their home. They may hear about the violence from adults talking about it. They may see how the violence affects their parents. They may be caught in the crossfire or victims of violence themselves. Children in violent homes are at increased risk for serious physical and sexual abuse.

Children are never safe from family violence.

The way that violence affects children depends, in part, on how severe the violence is and how often it happens. It also depends on how well parents are able to love and care for the children. Being a loving parent is often hard for both the adult victim and the abuser.

Even infants can sense something is wrong. Babies may have problems in feeding, play, and other daily activities. They may get fussier. The fussiness can increase an infant's own risk of being a target of violence. Child-rearing problems may be one cause of violence between adults. For example, arguing about who should change diapers may lead to a fight.

Older children may imitate the violence they see. Some children become aggressive, cruel, disobedient, and destructive. Other children keep their feelings inside. They may become sad, anxious, fearful, or withdrawn. Violence between adults can also lead to violence between siblings. Children in violent homes have poor impulse control and poor self-esteem. They have a hard time getting along with other children and do not do as well in school.

Teens from violent homes take more risks than other teens and may become violent adults.

How can children be protected from family violence?

There is only one way to protect children: The violence must stop.

1. The abuser may need to enter a treatment program.
2. The adult victim (usually female) and the children may have to leave the abuser (usually male). Community family violence shelters can help create a plan for both the adult victim and the children. See the yellow pages for referral numbers.
3. Children may need to be evaluated and treated. Adult victims often need treatment as well.

If there is violence in your home, call your child's health care provider's office for help in stopping it. In case of emergency, call the police or go to the hospital.

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