



Tools to Build African-Australian & CaLD Men as Leaders in the Prevention of Domestic Violence Project

Copied from the 1800RESPECT website:

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/violence-and-abuse/children-and-violence//>

Domestic and family violence and children

Exposure to domestic and family violence can affect every aspect of children's lives

Being a witness to violence and abuse is a distressing experience for children, whether or not the violence is directed at them

With a safe environment and the right support, children can recover from the trauma of domestic and family violence

The impacts of domestic and family violence on children

Living with domestic and family violence is a distressing experience for children. The effects can be traumatising, ongoing and long-lasting. They can build up over time and impact on every aspect of children's lives, including health, development and wellbeing.

When are children affected by domestic and family violence?

Children are affected by violence and abuse if they:

- Witness or hear the violence against their parent, guardian or carer, or see their fear
- Have to hide or run from abuse because they're afraid
- Have to constantly watch themselves around an abuser to try to prevent outbursts
- Have to comfort, clean up or take extra responsibilities for siblings, their parent or primary carer or others in the home following violence
- Are victimised for supporting their parent or primary carer
- Are encouraged to join in with abuse or contempt for their parent, guardian or carer
- Can't be cared for properly due to the abuse, or because the abuse is causing poor mental health and exhaustion for their parent or primary carer
- Experience poor bonding with their parent or primary carer as infants because of domestic or family violence
- Are abused themselves – people who abuse their partners or ex-partners often abuse their children as well
- Are forced to have ongoing contact with someone who scares them or whose presence reminds them of times when they have been traumatised (that is, the person acts as a 'trauma trigger')

How are children affected by domestic and family violence?

When children experience domestic and family violence, it can impact their:

Behaviours – they can act out, over-react, be hostile, impulsive, aggressive or defiant. They can also withdraw or run away. This can all be normal for children who have been traumatised by family or domestic violence. It does not mean the children have 'disorders'. Drug and alcohol use can be a problem with older children.

Development – normal development can be impaired. They can look like they are regressing or acting younger than their age. This can be a subconscious way of trying to get to a state where they are safe and secure. It can also be a result of the harm to the brain's development caused by exposure to trauma.

Relationships – they may avoid closeness and push people away. Children may also attach to peers or adults who may be unsafe for them, to try to develop an alternative secure base, if home feels insecure.

Emotions – children often feel fearful, stressed, depressed, angry, anxious or ashamed. Emotional security is the foundation of healthy relationships later in life. This security can be damaged if attachment between the parent, guardian or primary carer and baby is disrupted by domestic violence.

Learning – they may not be able to concentrate at school because they are constantly on the lookout for danger. This can be subconscious. Detentions, missed school and frequent changes of schools can also affect learning.

Cognitions – children may have low self-esteem, and think negatively about themselves or people around them. (For example, they may think, 'everyone hates me'.)

Physical health – a range of illnesses may be related to domestic and family violence. Headaches, stomach aches, stress reactions (for example rashes or immune system related illnesses) and sleep disturbances (for example nightmares, insomnia or bedwetting) are common.

Can children recover from domestic and family violence?

How quickly and completely children recover from the affects of domestic and family violence depends on whether:

- They can be kept safe from violence and from reminders of previous trauma – known as 'trauma triggers'
- They are supported and comforted within a 'protective cocoon' of care after they experience trauma
- Their schools, childcare centres, support services and centres provide an understanding and supportive environment to help with healing and recovery
- There is good communication between the parent, guardian or primary carer and the school, childcare centre, support service or centre that is supporting the child and family
- They can have security, safety and care in their everyday lives
- They have access to specialised trauma-informed counselling, if they need it
- They can rebuild a safe and secure attachment with their parent, guardian, primary carer, or another adult who can act as a protective carer, if they have been exposed to violence in their early years. Support is also essential for the parent, guardian or primary carer for the secure attachment to be rebuilt between them.

What other factors can affect a child's recovery?

Recovery for children can also depend on a number of other factors being in place:

Children may have access to other adults in their lives with whom they have a good relationship, such as:

- A grandparent, an aunt, uncle, other relative
- An adult family friend, who understands what is happening in the family and can provide some protective support to the child
- A support worker

Children may also have access to other social networks such as being part of an activity or sports group. This enables them to have other friends and adults who can be supportive and where they are able to experience positive ways that adults relate to each other and to children.

Sometimes the social conditions that children are living in, such as living in poverty or where families are isolated from other networks, can have a negative impact on their ability to recover. Families living in poverty or without access to other social networks can experience greater stress levels than other families.

Children may experience bullying or other negative behaviour in other settings that may impact on their ability to deal with and recover from domestic and family violence.

Children may have internal strengths or cope with stress in ways that are protective. This might include accessing other forms of support, being engaged in hobbies or activities such as sports that allow them some time away from the stressful situation they're living in and to focus on other things. They may also display a positive attitude that allows them to get on with things.

Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

Copied from www.LiveInTheLight.com

- Taking responsibility for the abuse.
- Constant anxiety.
- Fear of abandonment.
- Guilt for not being able to stop the abuse or for loving the abuser.
- Very poor or inconsistent self-image and low self-esteem.
- Poor problem solving/conflict resolution skills; may use violence at school, with peers or family.
- Loss of appetite or any change in eating patterns.
- Sleep disturbances such as nightmares and restlessness.
- School problems such as refusing to attend, truancy, or drop in performance.
- Withdrawal.
- Clinging to mother or siblings.
- Shyness.
- Fear of the dark.
- Increased violent behavior such as kicking, hitting or fighting.
- Verbal abuse or talking back.

- Regression such as bed-wetting, wanting a bottle, baby talk, and thumb sucking.
- Inappropriate responses to discipline.
- Temper tantrums.
- Whining.
- Over-sensitivity.
- Role reversal such as taking on a parenting role.
- Testing and pushing limits as far as possible.
- Stealing.
- Lying.
- Irregularity or diarrhea.
- Inappropriate dress for age, especially in girls.
- Poor grades in school, skipping classes, or dropping out as soon as possible, often in detention.
- Lack of concentration in school.
- Disrespect to teachers or others in authority.
- Physical, emotional, and verbal abuse toward teachers, school staff such as secretaries or janitors, or other students.
- Arguing and fighting with everyone.
- Damage of class materials.
- Use of objects as weapons, or use of weapons to appear “big.”
- No or little regard for classroom or group activity rules.
- Vandalism to schools, neighborhoods, stores, etc...
- Little or no participation in class or school sponsored extracurricular activities.
- Always tired, hungry or both. Will fall asleep during class discussions, movies, etc...Gets very angry if can't go to lunch on time.
- Controlling of peers and dates.
- Gang involvement.
- Stalking behaviors toward significant others in life.
- Teen pregnancies.
- Running away from home.
- May exhibit poor hygiene in body and mouth care, even into high school.
- Difficulty trusting others, including peers, but will often choose someone with a similar background to “pal” around with.
- Involvement with groups at school that do not value education and seek alternative ways to cover pain.
- Very defensive if conflicts arise with anyone.
- Goes reactive at the drop of a hat at times, or withdraws into own world when hurt or fearful, great amounts of fear over minute things to cover up the internal fear of the violence at home.
- Part of pecking order; may re-enact violence with younger siblings, animals or parents in later years.
- Heightened suicidal thoughts and/or attempts; may contemplate doing away with self and/or parents.
- May continue pattern of family violence in adulthood.
- Children in homes where domestic violence occurs are physically abused or seriously neglected at a rate of 1500% higher than the national average in the general population.

- Older children may be hurt while trying to protect their mother.
- Children in homes where domestic violence occurs may “indirectly” receive injuries. They may be hurt when household items are thrown or weapons are used. Infants and young children may be injured while being held by their mother when the abuser strikes out.
- Approximately 90% of children are aware of the violence directed at their mother.
- Research results suggest that battering is the single most common factor among mothers of abused children.
- 63% of boys 11 to 15 years of age who commit murder, murder the man who was beating their mother.
- Children are present in 41-55% of homes where police intervene with domestic violence calls.

www.LiveInTheLight.com