

Children and Family Violence

Children living in homes where there is family violence are in an environment that is unpredictable and filled with tension and fear. If a child sees their mother threatened or harmed, overhears conflict, or sees the aftermath of the violence (such as their mother's injuries or distress), this can lead to significant emotional and psychological trauma.

The trauma can be ongoing and long-lasting.

Family violence can impact on a child's development which can affect their everyday functioning. The affects build up over time, and can impact on every aspect of their life.

Apart from the emotional, physical, social and behavioural damage abuse creates for a child, family violence can also become a learned behaviour. This means that a child may grow up to think it is okay to use violence to get what they want and as adults that it is okay for there to be violence in their adult relationships.

When children are impacted by family violence, it can affect their:

- **Development:** normal development may be impaired. A child may look as though they are regressing or acting younger than their age.
- **Behaviours:** they may dissociate, withdraw, over-react, be hostile, impulsive, aggressive or defiant. Such behaviours can be normal to a child who has been traumatised by family violence.
- **Relationships:** they may avoid closeness and push people away.
- **Emotions:** a child may 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 mother/carer and baby is disrupted by family violence.
- **Learning:** they may not be able to concentrate at school.
- **Cognitions:** children may have low self-esteem and think negatively about themselves or people around them.
- **Physical health:** this includes illness such as headaches or rashes; nightmares and bedwetting.

How you can help a child recover from violence

You can help your child emotionally recover from family violence in many ways:

- Protect children from violence by taking them to a safe place
- Reassure the child that none of the violent episodes were their fault in any way
- Tell them how much you love them and cuddle them often
- Encourage them to talk openly about their feelings
- Get extra help for your child if necessary
- Enlist a trusted adult to provide your child with emotional support
- Seek professional help, such as counselling, for all family members

For more information, contact:

safe steps Family Violence Response Centre: 1800 015 188

Kids Helpline Ph: 1800 551 800

Australian Childhood Foundation Ph: 1800 176 453