



Preserving Kinship Connections

Family Violence



Texas Department of
Family and Protective Services
Child Protective Services



What is Family Violence?

The US Department of Justice defines domestic violence as “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner.”

- Family violence can be verbal, physical, sexual, or psychological.
- When there is domestic violence between partners, there is often child abuse as well. Sometimes children are hurt accidentally.



What is Family Violence?

Parents or caregivers involved in a violent relationship may think that the fighting does not affect their children.

- Children who do not directly see domestic violence are still affected by the conflict in their family, and this can lead to serious emotional and behavioral problems.
- These problems are not always recognized by caregivers, and children do not always get the help they need.



Witnessing Family Violence

“Witnessing family violence increases a child's risk of anxiety, depression and withdrawal, and may also result in outward behaviors, such as attention problems, aggression, and rule-breaking actions. About 30% of children exposed to family violence also grow up to perpetuate abusive behaviors toward others.”





Recognizing Types of Abuse

Threatening Behaviors

Making threats to:

- Take the children away from the other parent, or have them removed by CPS
- Have the victim deported
- Abuse their children, family, friends, or pets
- Kill someone
- Commit suicide
- Injure or disfigure their victim or their loved ones
- Stalk the victim (in person, via phone call, email or text message)

Mental and Emotional Abuse

- Using words designed to humiliate and shame
- Blaming
- Being cruel, or telling the child all of the things they are doing wrong
- Intimidating and threatening
- Destroying personal belongings
- Gaslighting, for example, the offender telling the victim that their abusive behavior is normal, or twisting the truth and telling the victim they are the abuser.



Recognizing Types of Abuse

Intimidation and Isolation

- Repeatedly criticizing
- Tell someone they are ugly, worthless or useless
- Preventing a partner from having contact with family and friends
- Humiliating a partner in front of others
- Giving a curfew to another adult
- Stopping or monitoring a partner's phone calls, or taking away their phone, computer, or other means of communication

Psychological Abuse

- Jealousy
- Blaming the victim for causing the abuse
- Lying
- Manipulating
- Ignoring
- Undermining or confusing
- Telling a partner they are losing their mind



Recognizing Types of Abuse

Financial Abuse

- Stealing money
- Limiting access to money
- Not allowing a partner to work
- Taking out loans/debt in someone else's name
- Claiming and keeping a partner's benefits
- Selling their possessions or food stamps
- Refusing to pay bills, including child support
- Threatening to report to the victim to a benefits agency or other authorities
- Using someone else's Social Security Number





Recognizing Types of Abuse

Sexual Abuse

- Forced sexual acts
- Degrading treatment
- Sexual name-calling
- Forced prostitution
- Trading sexual favors for basic needs
- Rape
- Making someone wear clothes that they haven't chosen
- Forcing someone to take part in or look at pornographic images
- Forcing sexual relationships with other people





Recognizing Types of Abuse

Violence and Physical Abuse

- Hitting/punching/kicking/shoving
- Spitting
- Strangling
- Pulling hair
- Making physical threats
- Biting
- Burning
- Using weapons
- Forcing someone to use drugs and/or alcohol
- Not allowing them to sleep
- Hurting a pet
- Invading someone's space
- Preventing another person from leaving, or not allowing them to seek medical care

Effects on Children

Caregivers may assume a child was not affected by the abuse they were exposed to if they were not present in the room, or were very young when it occurred, or if the child does not talk about it.

However, most children see and hear everything that happens in the home – in reality, children are greatly impacted by abuse.

Whether or not a child actually saw or experienced the verbal, emotional or physical abuse, the impact on their behavior, emotions and physical well-being can have long-term effects.





Effects on Young Children

A child's doctor and therapist should be informed if they have been exposed to family violence, so that the child's health and safety can be assessed.

Symptoms to watch out for in younger children include:

- Anxiety
- Conflicted feelings about the abuser: fear, anger, love, sadness
- Guilt and shame that they cannot stop the abuse
- Depression
- Regressing behavior so they act more like a younger child
- Loss of interest in school, friends, or other things they enjoyed in the past
- Sleep problems including being unable to get to sleep or get up in the morning, having nightmares, or bedwetting

Effects on Young Children

More symptoms to watch out for in younger children:

- Increased aggression and anger
- Spending more time alone
- Fighting at home or at school
- Bullying or being bullied
- Changes in appetite, or complaints that the child doesn't feel well



Effects on Adolescents and Teens

Symptoms to watch out for in adolescents include:

- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Skipping school or declining grades
- Changes in peer groups or difficulty maintaining relationships
- New rebellious or defiant behavior
- Increase in sexual activity
- Teens repeating negative behaviors they saw in their homes when they are in relationships – for instance controlling behavior may feel like love to them
- May be more co-dependent, clingy and jealous in relationships
- Social withdrawal – teens often feel as if they are the only person they can rely on and that no one else will understand what they are going through.
- Depression or anxiety
- Neglecting their hygiene
- Conflicted feelings about the abuser: fear, anger, love, sadness
- Guilt and shame that they cannot stop the abuse
- Loss of interest in school, friends, or other things they enjoyed in the past



Healing is Possible

Witnessing violence creates trauma for a child, but it is possible for the child to heal. We must be especially patient and understanding when caring for children who have experienced trauma.

Caregivers must learn to recognize the child's behaviors as a trauma response, and think about how we can best help them heal instead of how we can make them stop "misbehaving."





What Can We Do to Help?

- Recognize that abuse is used by offenders to gain power and control over victims, and it will be hard for the child to heal if the caregiver uses power and control tactics to force the child to obey.
- Shame or embarrassment may prevent victims from sharing their stories; it is very important that if the child tells you the story of their abuse, to let the child know you believe them.
- Kinship caregivers may have a hard time admitting their loved one did something wrong. However, minimizing the abuse makes the child feel unprotected, and provides cover that may encourage the offender to continue abusing the child or others within the family.
- Family violence often occurs more than once; caregivers must be prepared to put the child's needs first, to protect them from further abuse.

What Can We Do to Help?

Children who have witnessed violence should be provided therapy in a trauma informed setting.

- Teach children they cannot rescue or fix another person, including their parents or someone they are in a relationship with.
- Don't expect the child to be fine after one conversation; understand that healing takes a long time.
- Caregivers of children who have experienced or witnessed violence should become trauma informed as well.
- Consider allowing older children and youths to become involved with Al-Anon or Al-Ateen.





Skills to Develop with the Child

- Establish regular routines so the child knows what to expect.
- Be aware of behavior patterns and come up with a strategy ahead of time to help the child cope with big feelings.
- Be honest, and do not make promises unless you are absolutely certain you will be able to keep them.
- Provide age-appropriate responses to the child's questions.
- Let the child know that you are listening to them.
- Let the child know they've done the right thing by telling you, and share with them what you will be doing next.
- Tell the child that what happened is not theirs or another victim's fault.



Skills to Develop with the Child

Manage challenging behaviors using healthy boundaries:

- Ensure the child is aware of their expected boundaries. Check in from time to time to be certain the child remembers these expectations. It's ok to say no.
- Use natural and logical consequences when necessary
- Minimize punishments and instead teach the child how to think things through, how to manage their emotions. When they make mistakes, be a safe space and teach the child to talk about what they wish they had done differently.
- Become trauma informed yourself so that you are aware that negative behaviors are often a fear response. Punishment does not "fix" fears, but teaching coping skills does.
- Challenge yourself to offer lots of compliments and rewards for positive efforts, even when the results are not perfect.

Conclusion

Kinship Caregivers have a unique opportunity to help the children in their care heal from the effects of the violence they have experienced.

- Understand that in most cases, children are not being purposely bad. When we remember that frustrating behaviors are often a cry for help, this makes it easier to respond to the child with patience, which helps teach them how to build trust.
- Expect there will be setbacks; recognize that setbacks are normal and many stops and starts will occur during the process of healing.





Thank You



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