

Children and Adolescents Exposed to Domestic Violence

A stylized illustration of a butterfly with orange and yellow wings, set against a background of abstract shapes in green, blue, and purple. The butterfly is the central focus, with its wings spread wide. The background consists of various geometric and organic shapes in shades of green, blue, and purple, creating a vibrant and abstract environment.



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Effects On Children & Teens

When there is domestic violence in the home, children and teens see and hear more than we realize. Exposure to domestic violence can impact the health, development, and wellbeing of children and teens. As a parent or caregiver, you can reduce the effects of exposure to domestic violence by nurturing care and love. Your relationship as a parent or caregiver to your child is the single most important factor in determining their safety and healing.



Witnessing Domestic Violence

Witnessing and experiencing domestic violence can have lasting effects on your child's social, emotional, and physical development. The effects of exposure will vary depending on several factors, such as the child's age, frequency, and severity of the abuse. While not all children will develop long-term trauma symptoms from exposure to domestic violence, it is important to take a child's experiences into account and intervene as soon as possible.

Interrupting the abuse cycle and/or choosing to leave an abusive relationship can be difficult and complex, but the sooner the intervention, the sooner you can begin to prevent the long-term impact of violence on your child's developing brain and begin their healing.

Common Effects of Exposure to Domestic Violence

Prenatal:

- Health risks to mother and fetus
- Increased risk of miscarriage
- Challenges in accessing prenatal care
- Increased risk of pre-term birth and low birth weight

Infants:

- Developmental delays
- Separation anxiety
- Difficulty sleeping
- Disruptions in feeding schedule
- Failure to thrive
- Frequent illnesses
- Lack of responsiveness
- Injury to infant

School-Aged Children:

- Depression, anxiety, confusion, low self-esteem, anger, guilt and fear
- Aggression, withdrawal, acting-out, and self-destructiveness
- Disciplinary problems in school or the need to appear perfect or wanting to please
- Irrational fear of failure; perceive punishment as love
- Difficulty developing meaningful friendships and poor social skills in general
- Headaches, stomachaches, insomnia/sleep disturbances, bed-wetting, excessive clinging, and/or separation anxiety
- Regressive behaviors
- Trauma re-enactment, especially seen with siblings, peers, or animals



Teens:

- Over/under performance in school
- Refusal to go to school
- Feeling responsible for siblings and/or the abused parent; caretaking
- Low self-esteem
- Poor social skills and difficulty managing emotions
- Sudden disinterest in activities or changes in friends
- Manipulative behaviors
- Mood swings
- Little understanding of what a healthy relationship looks like
- Views of relationships that involve coercive controlling behaviors, fear, anger, and mistrust
- Greater risk of victimization and perpetration of teen dating violence or domestic violence Engaging in risky behaviors such as use or abuse of drugs and alcohol use, delinquency, self harm or suicidal ideation, running away, etc.
- Hypersexuality, pregnancy, and early marriage
- Increased risk for depression, separation anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder



Co-Occurrence of Domestic Violence with Child Abuse and Neglect

Whether children or teens are a target themselves or a witness to violence in the home, children and teens exposed to domestic violence are affected because they are actively involved. They may try to make sense of the abuse. They are likely to be worried and confused about their own emotional and physical needs and the safety of the non-abusive parent or partner living in the household. Children and teens exposed to domestic violence are at higher risk of neglect, emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse, and more likely to become desensitized and normalize violence in their own relationships.

Children exposed to domestic violence are often isolated, called names, degraded and humiliated, intimidated, and/or manipulated into abusing the non-abusive parent or partner living in the household. They may be threatened with abandonment or suicide by the abuser, and/or denied access

to healthcare, proper nutrition, clothing, and shelter. The abusive parent or partner living in the household may escalate destructive behaviors to maintain power and control over their partner and children. It can be very confusing for children to know what to do or who to believe.

All children are resilient. However, exposure to violence can make children more susceptible to developing behavioral, developmental, and mental disorders, and can reduce their natural resiliency.

What Can You Do?

Trust your intuition. If you are a parent or caregiver in an abusive relationship, know there is help available. You don't have to navigate these experiences alone. Find a supportive network of friends and family and community resources such as a domestic violence organization, who can help you through challenging times.

Remember that you and your child(ren) deserve to feel safe. Your child needs you, and your wellness is key.

Create opportunities for your children and teens to have trusting and safe relationships with other safe adults in their lives. Talk with them about safe people in their lives and connect them to family members, teachers, or counselors that they trust. Children and teens are resilient if they are listened to, supported, and encouraged to find creative ways to express themselves.

For teens, it is important to recognize the complexities of their developing identities. Provide teens with developmentally appropriate information and skills to navigate unhealthy situations that could cause them harm. Build trust by being consistent, patient, and avoiding judgement. Provide opportunities for building skills necessary to promote their independence and develop healthy relationships.

What you can say to your child or teen:

- You love them.
- It is okay to talk about their feelings.
- The violence is not their fault,
- The abuse is not the non-abusive parent or guardian's fault.
- They are not responsible for taking care of their family or for controlling the actions of abusive family members.
- There are safe places to go—give them specific names of people or places.
- Anger and frustration are normal, violence is not.
- It's ok to be mad, not mean.
- They can choose to be in a healthy relationship as a teen or adult.
- Ask them what else they need to feel safe and valued.

What you can do:

- Create predictable routines as well as clear rules and expectations about daily living.
- Help them identify people they trust who know about the abuse are able to provide support or provide a safer space.
- Provide them opportunities to express their full range of feelings.
- Recognize their unique abilities and build confidence by encouraging them to try new activities or interests.

Domestic Violence and Communities

Domestic violence can impact generations and whole communities; however, it does not have to stay that way. Studies show that violence can be prevented and decreased when a community is aware of the harmful impacts of domestic violence.

Encourage family and friends in your support network to learn more about domestic violence. We can all do our part to respond to and reduce domestic violence by educating ourselves about it and the types of power and abuse tactics commonly used. Understanding the domestic violence warning signs and risks is knowledge that can be passed down through the generations and can both prevent future violence and lead to collective healing.

Service Providers in Our Communities

There are different types of community service providers or governmental organizations that assist individuals experiencing domestic violence.

Each of these professions has different roles, ethical guidelines, and confidentiality requirements. Those of us who are working with any of these individuals can **ask them to explain their role and their limits of confidentiality.**

- Domestic violence advocates employed by community and tribal domestic violence programs.
- Mental health professionals (licensed counselors or social workers) in private practice or employed by a domestic violence program.
- Victim witness coordinators employed by law enforcement or prosecutors.
- Domestic violence court coordinators employed by the court system.
- Civil attorneys in private practice or with Idaho Legal Aid Services, or criminal prosecutors employed by the city or county government.
- Culturally specific or issue specific organizations may provide access and resources specific to an individual's culture/ethnicity or other identity.
- Disability advocacy organizations may provide assistive technology or resources specific to an individual's disability.

Services at Our Domestic Violence Programs

Advocates at a community or tribal domestic violence programs generally provide these services:

Information to help us understand our rights and options, how to heal from trauma, and the root causes of violence.

Safety Planning so we can decide what we want to do to avoid harm as much as possible.

Skill Building for coping, dealing with strong feelings, problem solving, connecting with your children, and accessing resources.

Encouragement for understanding, respecting, and embracing our diverse cultural realities and lived experiences.

Supportive Counseling or support groups for us and our children to better understand and heal from the trauma.

Connecting us to Community Resources including government benefits we might be eligible for, court processes, child protective services, assistive technology for those of us with disabilities, health care, reproductive health needs, immigration relief, housing, employment resources, and more.

Identifying Social Support and Connections like family, social, and community support networks.

Promoting Social Change to encourage behaviors or social norms to interrupt violence against girls and women and people who are gender oppressed.

Idaho Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Programs Help-line Numbers

Advocates Against Family Violence – Caldwell (208) 459-4779

Advocates for Survivors of Domestic Violence – Hailey (208) 788-6070

Alternatives to Violence of the Palouse – Moscow (208) 883-4357

Bingham Crisis Center – Blackfoot (208) 681-8712/ Spanish (208) 681-8715

Boundary County Youth Crisis and DV Hotline – Bonners Ferry (208) 267-5211

Coeur d'Alene Tribal STOP Violence Program – Plummer (208) 686-0601

Crossroads Harbor Domestic Violence Shelter (previously known as Mini Cassia Shelter for Women & Children) – Rupert (208) 436-0987

Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Center – Idaho Falls (208) 235-2412

Elmore County Domestic Violence Council – Mountain Home (208) 587-3300

Family Crisis Center – Rexburg (208) 356-0065

Family Safety Network – Driggs (208) 354-7233

Family Services Alliance of SE Idaho – Pocatello (208) 251-4357

Lemhi County Crisis Intervention – Mahoney House – Salmon (208) 940-0600

Oneida Crisis Center – Malad (208) 766-3119

Priest River Ministries – Priest River (208) 290-6529

ROSE Advocates – Weiser (208) 414-0740

Safe Passage Violence Prevention Center – Coeur d’Alene (208) 664-9303

Shoshone County Women’s Resource Center – Wallace (208) 556-0500

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Victims of Crime Assistance Program – Fort Hall (208) 339-0438

Shoshone Paiute Tribes STOP Domestic Violence Program – Owyhee, NV (775) 757-2013

‘Úuyit Kímti Program (New Beginnings) (formally known as the Nez Perce Tribe Women’s Outreach Program) – Lapwai (208) 621-4778

Voices Against Violence – Twin Falls (208) 733-0100

Women’s & Children’s Alliance – Boise (208) 343-7025

YWCA of Lewiston-Clarkston – Lewiston (208) 746-9655

National Hotlines

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787- 3224 (TTY line for Deaf/hearing impaired). Free, confidential assistance 24/7 to victims of domestic violence. Multilingual and may connect you with a local program that can provide assistance.

National Latin@ Network, Casa de Esperanza Bilingual Helpline: 1-651-772-1611 or www.casadeesperanza.org; www.nationallatinonetwork.org
A 24-hour Spanish bilingual domestic violence helpline as well as an online resource directory to find organizations that are equipped to assist individuals. Information on the website is also available in Spanish.

Strong Hearts Native Helpline: 1-844-7NATIVE (1-844-762-8483) open 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. CST, 7 days a week.

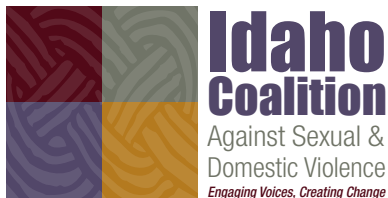
National Human Trafficking Resource Center: 1-888-373-7888 or www.traffickingresourcecenter.org. Available to answer calls from anywhere in the country, 24/7. More than 200 languages.

RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network): 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or www.rainn.org. Free, confidential assistance 24/7 to victims of sexual assault. This hotline will connect you with a local program that can provide assistance. RAINN is multilingual via phone and the RAINN website has a “chat” feature that you can use to talk with an advocate.



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