

The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

Emotional

- Grief for family and personal losses.
- Shame, guilt, and self blame.
- Confusion about conflicting feelings towards parents.
- Fear of abandonment, or expressing emotions, the unknown or personal injury.
- Anger
- Depression and feelings of helplessness and powerlessness.
- Embarrassment

Behavioral

- Acting out or withdrawing
- Aggressive or passive
- Refusing to go to school
- Care taking; acting as a parent substitute
- Lying to avoid confrontation
- Rigid defenses
- Excessive attention seeking
- Bedwetting and nightmares
- Out of control behavior
- Reduced intellectual competency
- Manipulation, dependency, and mood swings

Social

- Isolation from friends and relatives
- Stormy relationships
- Difficulty in trusting especially adults
- Poor anger management and problem solving skills
- Excessive social involvement to avoid home
- Passivity with peers or bullying
- Engaged in exploitative relationships as perpetrator or victim

Physical

- Somatic complaints, headaches, and stomachaches
- Nervous, anxious, and short attention span
- Tired and lethargic
- Frequently ill
- Poor personal hygiene
- Regression in development
- High risk play
- Self Abuse

Age-specific indicators

Infants

- Basic need for attachment is disrupted
- Routines around feeling/sleeping are disturbed
- Injuries while “caught in crossfire”.
- Irritability or inconsolable crying
- Frequent illness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Diarrhea
- Developmental delays
- Lack of responsiveness

Preschool

- Somatic or psychosomatic complaints
- Regression
- Irritability
- Fearful of being alone
- Extreme separation anxiety
- Developmental delays
- Sympathetic toward mother

Elementary Age

- Vacillate between eager to please and being hostile
- Verbal about home life
- Developmental delays
- Externalized behavior problems
- Inadequate social skill development
- Gender role modeling creates conflict/confusion

Preadolescence

- Behavior problems become more serious
- Increased internalized behavior difficulties: depression, isolation, withdrawal
- Emotional difficulties: shame, fear, confusion, rage
- Poor social skills
- Developmental delays
- Protection of mother, sees her as “weak”
- Guarded/secretive about family

Adolescence

- Internalized and externalized behavior problems can become extreme and dangerous: drug/alcohol, truancy, gangs, sexual acting out, pregnancy, runaway, suicidal.
- Dating relationships may reflect violence learned or witnessed in the home.