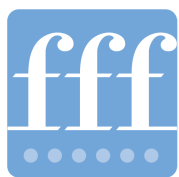


[HOME](#) » [FAMILIES/YOUTH](#) » Facts for Families



Domestic Violence and Children

No. 109; Updated May 2019

As many as ten million children and adolescents witness violence between their parents or caregivers each year. This kind of violence is called domestic violence or intimate partner 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." Domestic violence can be verbal, physical, sexual, or psychological. Domestic violence can occur between heterosexual or same sex couples.

Parents or caregivers involved in a violent relationship may think that the fighting does not affect their children. Even children who do not see domestic violence are affected by the conflict in the family. Children may develop serious emotional and behavioral problems. These problems are not always recognized by their parents or caregivers. As a result, children do not always get the help they need.

When there is domestic violence between partners, there is often child abuse as well. Sometimes children get hurt accidentally. Children need to be assessed for their health and safety when domestic violence occurs.

Symptoms to watch out for in young children include:

- Anxiety or increased fear
- Depression
- Loss of interest in school, friends, or other things they enjoyed in the past
- Sleep problems including nightmares or bedwetting
- Increased aggression
- Anger
- Spending more time alone
- Fighting at home or at school
- Bullying or being bullied
- Changes in appetite

Symptoms to watch out for in adolescents include:

- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Skipping school
- Changes in peer groups
- New rebellious or oppositional behavior
- Declining grades

- Social withdrawal
- Depression or anxiety
- Loss of interest in school, friends, or other things they enjoyed in the past

Children and adolescents exposed to domestic violence should be evaluated by a trained mental health professional. There are good treatments for the emotional and behavioral problems caused by domestic violence. Treatment can include individual, group, or family therapy, and in some cases, medication may also be helpful. It is critical for the child/children and victimized parent to receive treatment in a setting where they feel safe.

It is important to remember that the non-abusive parent needs support as well. There is no typical victim. Domestic violence can happen to anyone. Shame or embarrassment often gets in the way of victims getting help.

If domestic violence happens once, it usually happens again. It is important to put a crisis plan in place, both for the caregiver and the child. A crisis plan should include a safe place to stay, friends or relatives who can help with childcare, transportation, and financial support.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline for victims is 1.800.799.SAFE (7233), 1.800.787.3224 (TTY), or www.thehotline.org. Information about local programs or resources is also available through this service.

References:

<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence>

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

If you find *Facts for Families*© helpful and would like to make good mental health a reality, consider donating to the [Campaign for America's Kids](#). Your support will help us continue to produce and distribute *Facts for Families*, as well as other vital mental health information, free of charge.

You may also mail in your contribution. Please make checks payable to the AACAP and send to *Campaign for America's Kids*, P.O. Box 96106, Washington, DC 20090.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 10,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

Facts for Families© information sheets are developed, owned and distributed by AACAP. Hard copies of *Facts* sheets may be reproduced for personal or educational use without written permission, but cannot be included in material presented for sale or profit. All *Facts* can be viewed and printed from the AACAP website (www.aacap.org). *Facts* sheets may not be reproduced, duplicated or posted on any other website without written consent from AACAP. Organizations are permitted to create links to AACAP's website and specific *Facts* sheets. For all questions please contact the AACAP Communications Manager, ext. 154.

If you need immediate assistance, please dial 911.

Copyright © 2022 by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.