

Children and Domestic/ Family Violence

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WARNING: SOME OF THE INFORMATION IN THIS FACT SHEET MAY BE DIFFICULT TO READ. PLEASE TAKE YOUR TIME AND FIND ASSISTANCE IF YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO.

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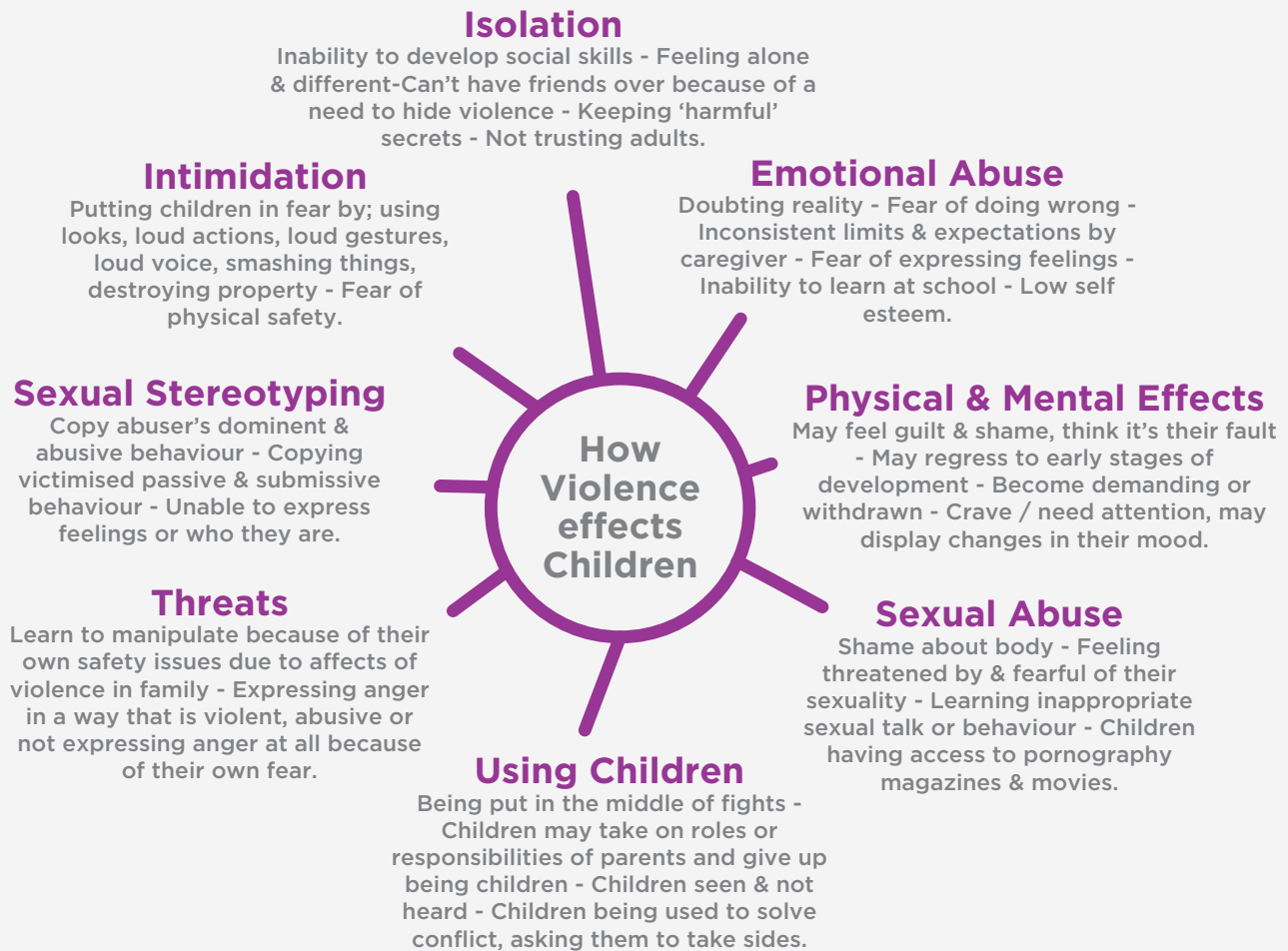
This belief has been around for an awfully long time, both in society and in research. However, we now know that despite the non-abusive parent's best efforts, children are not only witnesses. They are direct victims of domestic/family violence. Even when they are not being directly abused or used as a tool for abuse against the non-abusive parent, they will still be a **direct victim** like you are and they will feel the same intimidation, fear, and threat to their safety that you experience. However, this is **not your fault**. The fault **always** lies with the perpetrator of the violence that you and your children are experiencing.



DOMESTIC/FAMILY VIOLENCE CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT BOTH YOUR CHILDREN THEMSELVES AND YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILDREN.

Effects of Children Experiencing Domestic/Family Violence:

The following information is not exhaustive, but does include the more common effects of domestic/family violence on children. The following 'children's domestic abuse wheel' below provides a visual representation of this:



Research has found that children who experience domestic/family violence have an increased risk of:

- Displaying socially inappropriate and/or aggressive behaviour.
- A decreased sense of self-worth and self-esteem.
- Decreased problem-solving skills, concentration, and academic performance.
- Phobias, anxiety, depression and/or emotional distress.
- Physical concerns and/or injuries.
- Being more likely to commit domestic/family violence (boys) or be victims of domestic/family violence (girls) in their own romantic relationships.

Research has also found that because of the domestic/family violence they have experienced, or are experiencing, children may:

- Be cautious and distrusting of adults.
- Avoid bringing friends home (if they can - many controlling partners will not allow this) in case their friends see the abuse.
- Learn behaviours that are inappropriate.
- Have feelings of shame, guilt and responsibility for the abuse and a sense of responsibility for making the abuse stop.
- Copy the perpetrator's abusive behaviours.
- Learn to be quiet, not express their emotions, and to comply.
- Learn to 'keep up appearances' and to keep secrets.

Effects of Domestic/Family Violence on the Mother-Child Relationship:

Domestic/family violence can have a negative impact on the relationship that you have with your children in relation to both your confidence as a parent and your emotional connection with your children. This is because to keep the children safe, you have probably had to change the way you parent and the emotions that you are able to show to them. The perpetrator of the abuse may also be actively undermining your parenting and your relationship with your children.

They can use many tactics to do this, but the more common ones are:

- Stopping you from comforting your baby or child when they need comforting.
- Ridiculing and/or putting you down in front of the children.
- Using the children as tools to insult you, for example by saying things like “Tell mummy how dumb she is.”
- Blaming you for all the things that go wrong, for example “It’s all mum’s fault.”
- Telling the children that you do not love them and that you don’t care about them.

- He may buy gifts to bribe the children with and compare himself to you, for example “mum would never take you there... only dad buys you cool things.”
- He may hurt the children and then stop you from comforting and/or protecting them
- He could undermine your authority by saying things like “I am the boss of the house; it doesn’t matter what your mum says.”

However, you can rebuild your relationship with your children despite the things that your abusive partner has done, or continues to do, to sabotage this relationship. For example:

- You can tell your children that you love them.
- You can try to take the time to do fun things with them.
- You can work at keeping communication between you and your children open by being there and listening to them as much as you can.
- You can model problem-solving techniques that are not violent or abusive.
- You can reinforce behaviours that are positive.
- You can encourage your children to get counselling and support them when they do so, and
- You can create a safety plan with your children that includes their concerns and opinions where appropriate.

How to keep children safe:

NURTURING CHILDREN Love and care for your children

Trust & respect

Acknowledge children’s right to have their own feelings, friends, activities and opinions. Promote independence. Allow for privacy. Respect children’s feelings for other parent. Believe your children.

Care for yourself

Give yourself personal time. Keep yourself healthy. Maximise friendships. Accept love.

Give affection

Express verbal and physical affection. Be affectionate when your children are physically or emotionally hurt.

Encourage & support

Be affirming. Encourage children to follow their interest. Let children disagree with you. Recognise improvement. Teach new skills. Let them make mistakes.

Promote emotional security

Talk and act so children feel safe and comfortable expressing themselves. Be gentle. Be dependable.

Provide physical security

Provide food, shelter and clothing. Teach personal hygiene and nutrition. Monitor safety. Maintain a family routine. Attend to wounds.

Provide discipline

Be consistent. Ensure rules are appropriate to age and development of child. Be clear about limits and expectations. Use discipline to give instruction, not punish.

Give time

Participate in your children’s lives, activities, school, sports, special events/days, celebrations and friends. Include your children in your activities. Reveal who you are to your children.

Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers:

- Children in this age bracket who have experienced domestic/family violence often do not understand their experiences and the tension they are living with – however they will have a response to the heightened emotions and sense of danger within the home. Because they lack the language capabilities, in this age bracket children tend to express their emotions through their behaviour. There are things that you can do to enhance the safety of infants, toddlers and preschoolers who are experiencing domestic/family violence including:
 - Try to bond with them. You can do this with simple things like making eye contact, kissing, and hugging them. This will help the children to feel safe and secure.
 - Meet their everyday needs as much as possible. This includes making sure that they are getting enough sleep, food, baths, and playtime.
 - Keep up routines, like regular meal and bed times. Structure and routines make the world seem more secure and predictable for children.
 - Use a soothing voice when you talk to your children. Whilst they may not understand what you are saying, the sound of your calm voice can help children to also be calm.
 - If you have left the relationship, reassure your children that the abuse and violence are in the past and that their home, other adults, and yourself are safe now and will keep them safe. If you have not left the relationship, reassure your children that you will always do your best to keep them safe and that the abuse is not their fault.

School-aged children & teenagers:

- By this age, children are often mature enough to be able to know what the safety plan is and what roles they may have in these safety plans. You should try to actively include school-aged children and teenagers in the making of safety plans, and where appropriate you should hear their voices and include their ideas in your safety plan – whether you have left the abusive relationship or not. Doing so can help children

to feel valued and less afraid. This is especially true for teenaged children who often want to be actively involved in the safety planning process.

- Children in this age bracket will also benefit from talking with you about what domestic/family violence is and who is, or was, responsible for the violence within your home – though they may have mixed emotions about this which you should also discuss. It is essential that your children know of a safe place that they can go, and a safe person that they can call, during periods of danger at home.

The following can also be helpful to keep children this age safe:

- Encourage them to ask questions – they may need your help sorting out misunderstandings such as their believing the abuse was their – or your – fault or that they are responsible for ‘fixing’ their family.
- If the violence is still present, or there is still a risk, you should talk about the safety plan for yourself and them and you should practice the plan where possible.
- If the violence is no longer present and there is no more risk of the violence (such as during co-parenting), you should reassure your children that they are safe now.
- Teach your children not to interfere during a domestic violence incident and that they should not put themselves in danger to protect you or themselves.
- Help your children to not obsess on their upset feelings and concerns, instead help them to focus more on positive thoughts such as a pet, an activity they like and/or a happy memory.
- If they feel like they need someone to talk to, encourage them to turn to an adult that they trust such as a teacher, school counsellor, church leader or a sports coach.
- Teach your children where they can hide in the home and any exit points that they can use during violent periods and when they feel their safety is at risk.
- You should also teach them how to call ‘000’ in an emergency.

Further Information

Yemaya Women’s Support Service

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Please note that all information contained within this fact sheet is to be used as a guide only. If you require further information or assistance please contact Yemaya Women’s Support Service.