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# Children and Domestic Violence Guidelines for Child Care Providers

Presented by: Child Care Training Consultants

Dr. THERESA VADALA





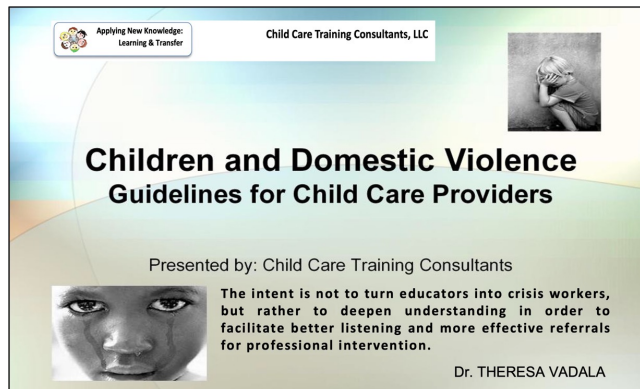
## Children and Domestic Violence

by

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## Children and Domestic Violence




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## Learning Objectives

**By the end of the training participants will be able to:**

- 1) Recognize what domestic violence is and how it effects children
- 2) Identify their own values as they work with young children given the resources from the Children and Domestic Violence training course
- 3) Implement clear communication skills between adult care providers and the children in their care
- 4) Organize an early child care facility environment to minimize issues with children and domestic violence



## What you will learn

- Definition of Domestic Violence
- Effects of Domestic Violence on Children
- Domestic Violence Intervention
- Prevention Education
- Resources





There is no simple answer or formula for overcoming the barriers that make it more difficult to provide effective services to a battered parent and his/her children. Educators must be prepared to seize the opportunity to identify and respond to domestic violence appropriately.

As an educator, you are in a unique position to identify domestic violence and child abuse. Teachers see students all day, every day, and are in a position to monitor students' emotional and behavioral changes.

By educating yourself and developing a heightened sensitivity to the issue, you can help create an atmosphere of openness that will encourage children and young people to come forward.

Educators work with the children of battered parents, and it is important to understand the effects of witnessing domestic violence on children. However, that discussion can only take place in the context of how domestic violence affects adult victims. Society finds it "easier" to be sympathetic to child victims, and more difficult to be sympathetic to child victims, especially a battered parent. In order to be effective, we must continually guard against blaming the victim. Education about domestic violence is one of the keys to understanding. Protection of children is best accomplished by offering protection to the mother.

**You may become a lifesaving link simply by deepening your understanding of the dynamics and effects of domestic violence, identifying problems early, and making appropriate referrals.**



# What is Domestic Violence?

- Between 5.5 and 10 million children witness domestic violence each year (Carlson, 2009)
- Between 50 and 70 % of the men who batter their female partners also abuse their children (Pagelow, 2009)
- Children witness domestic violence have lower verbal, cognitive, and motor skills than children who have not (Westra & Martin, 2008)
- Growing up in a violent home has been correlated with substantially higher levels of serious crime convictions later in life (Walker & Wolovick, 2008)

Domestic violence is a system of power and control over an intimate partner. Domestic violence includes any and all forms of abuse:

**Physical abuse:** pushing, shoving, hitting, biting, kicking, throwing things at a person, using a weapon, forced sex or touching, rape, choking, etc.;

**Isolation:** keeping you from seeing people; controlling who you see and talk to; wanting to control where you are all the time;

**Emotional abuse:** calling you names; putting you down; playing mind games; humiliating you in public;

**Economic abuse:** taking your money; making you ask for money; controlling all the money;

**Sexual abuse:** treating you like a sex object; forcing you to have sex or do sexual things when you don't want to;

**Using children:** using visitation as a way to harass you; pumping the children for information about you; insulting you in front of the children;

**Threats:** saying he will take the children; telling you that you will never see the children again; threatening to hurt you; threatening to report you to welfare or DSS; threatening to hurt your family; threatening to hurt himself;

**Insisting on being in charge:** treating you like a servant; making the big decisions;

**Intimidation:** using looks; hurting pets; destroying your property.

The motivation is always to control another person's thought and behavior.

# How do victims of domestic violence feel?

- Fear
- Confusion
- Shame and guilt
- Minimization of abuse
- Trapped, powerless



**Fear** -- fears for personal safety and the safety of the children are often overwhelming

**Confusion** -- the victim may believe her partner when he promises to change or to stop abusing her. The victim may feel confused over the change in the partner's behavior from day to day

**Shame and Guilt** -- victims are told they deserve the abuse, and they try to change their behavior to stop the abuse. This makes victims feel progressively worse about themselves because nothing they do stops the abuse. Victims may be ashamed about staying in the relationship.

**Minimization of the abuse** -- the abuse constantly tells the victim that the abuse is deserved, or even that it did not occur at all. Victims begin to think they may be exaggerating and may begin to view the abuse as "normal".

**Trapped, powerless** -- when all control is taken away, it takes all a victim's energy merely to survive and protect the children. Leaving is seen as an unattainable goal.



# Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

- Terror
- Rage
- Confusion and Helplessness
- Guilt and Shame
- Grief and Depression
- Emotional Withdrawal
- Fear of Abandonment
- Divided Loyalties
- Identification with abuser



Domestic violence interferes with the nurturing and care of children. The effects of domestic violence on children are enormous. Children who witness the abuse of a parent experience profound trauma, and only very recently have we begun to recognize witnessing domestic violence causes some of the same behavioral and psychological problems as experiencing child abuse.

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**Terror** – Once abuse has occurred, children live in fear that it will happen again. This state creates hyper vigilance and a feeling of being on guard all the time.

**Rage** – Children may feel extreme anger toward the abusive parent as well as anger about not being protected.

**Confusion and helplessness** – Children do not have a context in which to place their experiences and they do not feel as though they have any options.

**Guilt and shame** – Children are often told by the abuser that the abuse against their parent is their fault and many times they are used as a way to further punish their parent.

**Grief and depression** – If the mother decides to leave, the children may feel grief over leaving their home and their father.

**Emotional withdrawal** – Children may have trouble forming friendships and other relationships because of low self esteem, anxiety and/or depression.

**Fear of abandonment** – Children in violent homes are uncertain whether the family will remain together. In the process of seeking safety, they may have had to leave their homes; they may have been sent to neighbors or family; siblings may have been separated.

**Divided loyalties** – In trying to protect their families, children often must lie to teachers or other authority figures. This creates a feeling of shame and isolation.

**Identification with abuser** – Some children (usually 4 years old and older) have a tendency to identify with the aggressor and lose respect for the victim.

# Cognitive Effects of Witnessing Domestic Violence

- Children learn that violence is normal behavior -- They have witnessed that anger means violence and that violence is an effective means of getting what they want
- Children learn that adults are not to be trusted
- Children begin to think that love means abuse
- Children begin to believe that they are responsible for the abuser's behavior
- Children may learn to be deceptive and indirect in their communication, especially if they were punished if they disclosed their conditions at home
- Children learn stereotypical sex roles. Men are viewed as powerful, aggressive and in charge. Women are seen as passive and deserving of abuse

## Children's immediate reactions to domestic violence may include:

- Generalized anxiety
- Sleeplessness
- Nightmares
- Difficulty concentrating
- High activity levels
- Increased aggression
- Increased anxiety about being separated from a parent
- Intense worry about their safety or the safety of a parent

## Long-term effects, especially from chronic exposure to domestic violence, may include:

- Physical health problems

## Behavior problems in adolescence (e.g., juvenile delinquency, alcohol, substance abuse)

- Emotional difficulties in adulthood (e.g., depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD)

# Behavioral Effects of Witnessing Domestic Violence

- Children may suffer developmental delays because of the abuse
- Learning disabilities are common among children who have witnessed domestic violence. Severe stress and anxiety may affect school performance
- Stress related illnesses are common (i.e. sleep disorders, headaches, stomachaches, diarrhea, ulcers, asthma, depression)
- Acting out is common and some children learn to respond to conflicts by using force, coercion or violence

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# Domestic Violence Intervention

- In emergency situations, always call 911 first
- Reassure the child that the violence is not their fault
- Assure the child he/she is not alone
- Give the child a sense of safety
- Teach children they have a right to be safe
- Allow the children to share their emotions if they wish to do so
  
- Encourage them to report dangerous or stressful home environments
- Understand that a child may be “acting out” because he /she may have just witnessed an act of violence in the home





Contact the authorities (Child Protective Services) or 911 if you cannot get through to the child but you know there is a persistent domestic violence in the home and you worry for their safety. Sometimes children require more help than you can possibly give. That is when it is time to involve professionals, let them make assessments and do their jobs uninterrupted.

Other resources include the National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-7233 ). The nonprofit organization helps children and their parents by providing crisis intervention, referrals and information on therapy options to victims of domestic violence. Their emergency hot line is available 24/7.



Physicians, teachers, caregivers, and anyone who works directly with children are responsible for the health and well-being of the next generation. Many professionals are legally bound to report signs of possible abuse. Anyone dealing with children on any level should learn how to identify and respond to signs of distress.

Other ways to help include educating and empowering children: Teach children they have a right to be safe. Encourage them to report dangerous or stressful home environments. Doing so has the potential to save lives.

Understand some children may pretend nothing has happened, while younger children may feel overwhelmed and older children may simply want to talk to their peers about what happened rather than adults.

Allow children to share their emotions if they wish to do so.

# Summary

- Domestic violence is a system of power and control over an intimate partner
- Domestic violence interferes with the nurturing and care of children
- Children may suffer developmental delays because of the abuse
- Learning disabilities are common among children who have witnessed domestic violence
- Stress related illnesses are common
- Acting out is common and some children learn to respond to conflicts by using force, coercion or violence
- Contact the authorities (Child Protective Services) or 911 if you cannot get through to the child but you know there is a persistent domestic violence in the home and you worry for their safety.



Domestic violence rarely has only one victim. Children under age five are more likely to live in a household where domestic violence occurs than are children in any other age category. Child care providers and early childhood programs have an unique opportunity to make a difference in the life of a child who is affected by violence and help families in crisis.

Institutional and societal changes can only begin when an expansive network of service providers, like yourself, integrate their expertise, resources, and services to eliminate domestic violence in their communities.

# Resources

- [http://www.clarkcountynv.gov/depts/district\\_attorney/vwac/pages/resources.aspx](http://www.clarkcountynv.gov/depts/district_attorney/vwac/pages/resources.aspx)
- <http://www.aardvarc,irg.dv.states.nvdv.shtml>
- Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence 1-800-992-5757
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233



<http://www.aardvarc,irg.dv.states.nvdv.shtml>

[http://www.clarkcountynv.gov/depts/district\\_attorney/vwac/pages/resources.aspx](http://www.clarkcountynv.gov/depts/district_attorney/vwac/pages/resources.aspx)

Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence 1-800-992-5757

National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233

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