

How Are Children Affected by Domestic & Family Violence?

"Dad was always nagging at her and she was hardly ever happy. Plus he used to hit mum and make her cry ... They hardly ever talked. I could just tell they weren't happy".

Regardless of whether a child is a direct victim or an indirect victims, any exposure to abuse will result in tremendous emotional abuse. There are a number of risks for children who are living in Domestic Violence situations.

Domestic violence robs children of their sense of personal safety:

Since it is perpetrated by someone they know. Fear and vulnerability replace the basic trust children need in order to thrive and develop. Children not only lost their sense that their family is safe, but also see the rest of their world as unsafe. This can affect all of their relationships.

Experiencing direct or indirect abuse:

- A man who abuses his wife may also abuse his children
- A woman who is abused may vent her rage and frustration on her children
- The child may 'accidentally' be hurt when he / she tries to stop an attack on his / her mother

Children may suffer from post-traumatic stress:

- Feeling helpless and overwhelmed with anxiety
- Children may display heightened fears - this may include; fear of the dark, of being left alone, of going to school, or phobias. These fears act as a manifestation of the fear they live with at home.
- Children who accompany their mothers to a refuge or other new homes may experience problems even though they now feel safe. Support from refuge staff is important in helping with the trauma of moving and losing their familiar surroundings and possessions. School-aged children in particular miss the social support of peers they know in their own neighbourhood and at school.

Parents may be less able to help their Children:

- When adults are traumatised by violence they may be less able to help their child make sense of what is happening, as they might do in other frightening situations.
- Children may be inadvertently neglected as the primary care giver may be unable to provide for the physical, intellectual, and developmental needs of a child.
- Children may have poor hygiene. They may appear unkempt or dirty as a result of neglect.

