

facts on

For More Information

Contact:

1319 Colony Street
Saskatoon, SK S7N 2Z1
Bus. 306.651.4300
Fax. 306.651.4301
info@skprevention.ca
www.skprevention.ca

The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute is supported by:

Government of Saskatchewan
Kinsmen Telemiracle
Foundation
Saskatchewan Abilities Council
University of Saskatchewan
Community-At-Large

Domestic Violence and Young Children (Aged 0-6)

Intimate partner violence (sometimes called domestic violence or partner abuse) refers to abuse that occurs within an intimate relationship. Intimate partner violence can happen in any intimate relationship regardless of income, length, living arrangements, marital status, or social status.

Both men and women can be either the victim or perpetrator. Intimate partner violence can occur in both heterosexual and same sex relationships. It is important to remember that intimate partner violence is never the fault of the victim.

Below are examples of **intimate partner** violence:

Emotional Abuse

- Ignoring presence and feelings
- Swearing
- Acting jealous
- Belittling
- Giving the “silent treatment”

Physical Abuse

- Pushing, kicking, slapping, punching, throwing, choking, or shoving
- Threatening to punch, kick, slap, push, throw, choke, or shove
- Attacking with a weapon
- Refusing to help during illness or pregnancy

Sexual Abuse

- Forcing sexual acts against will
- Not allowing the use of birth control
- Failing to disclose HIV (*Human Immunodeficiency Virus*) and/or STI (*Sexually Transmitted Infection*) status

Spiritual/Religious Abuse

- Ridiculing beliefs
- Using beliefs to manipulate
- Preventing or forcing involvement in spiritual or religious practice
- Forcing involvement in ritual abuse

Financial/Economic Abuse

- Preventing financial independence
- Forcing into prostitution
- Maintaining total control over the family’s money or spending decisions

Are young children aware of abuse that happens in their home?

Yes, young children are aware of abuse that happens in their home and can be impacted in several ways. Witnessing domestic violence traumatizes a child each time it occurs; therefore, it causes ongoing, long-term exposure to trauma. Some of the impacts of witnessing intimate partner violence depend upon the age of the child. These impacts may be mitigated by supports in the child’s life as well as the child’s level of resilience.

Young children can be impacted when they:

- See and hear violence occurring
- Experience the aftermath such as damage to the home, injuries, or parental depression
- Are threatened as part of the abuse
- Become confidants or provide care of their parent(s)
- Have their family break apart
- Are victims of child abuse

What are the impacts on young children?

Young children are especially vulnerable during incidences of intimate partner violence because they are small, unable to protect themselves, and likely to be home when conflict is occurring. As well, young children are less likely than older children to have supports and relationships outside of their home, and frequently are unable to tell someone about the abuse due to language development.

Potential impacts of intimate partner violence on young children include:

- Increased risk of alcohol or drug use by the parent or caregiver
- Increased risk of mental health concerns for parents
- Deterioration of family functioning
- Impact of parenting skills of victim
- Risk of role reversal and caregiving of parent(s) by the child
- Learn about gender roles, relationships, love and trust within a violent environment
- Heightened risk to enter into abusive relationships later in life
- Increased stress because of being forced to keep the violence a secret
- Increased risk of intergenerational trauma
- Increased risk of being abused
- Increased exposure to verbal aggression
- Decreased ability to seek help and process what is happening
- Increased risk of chronic stress and Traumatic Stress Disorder

Young children may display high levels of behavioural symptoms, including:

- difficulty forming relationships and secure attachments
- sleep disturbances
- intense fears
- uncontrollable crying
- lower abilities to problem solve
- regression in behaviours
- reenactment of abuse that was witnessed
- high levels of aggression
- noncompliance
- post traumatic stress symptoms
- difficulty developing empathy
- lower verbal skills
- lower self-esteem
- impulsivity and reckless behaviour

What can adults do?

- Help young children learn how to regulate their emotions
- Allow young children to be children; don't give them adult responsibilities and roles
- Provide a consistent, safe place for exploration
- Help young children learn how to recognize and name their emotions
- Model social skills
- Provide opportunities for young children to positively release physical energy, e.g., running or swimming
- Help teach young children how to make decisions
- Pay close attention to what children are saying or the way that they are acting
- Model ways of positively dealing with anger
- Praise children for their accomplishments, being specific about what and why
- Help children learn to deal with defeat and success
- Let children know that they are liked/loved/accepted/supported and that this is not dependent on something that they do
- Help young children set and reach achievable goals
- Help young children learn a variety of different coping skills, such as relaxation techniques
- Create opportunities for interactions with same age children
- Build on children's strengths

References

- Beeman, S., Hagemester, A., & Edleson, J. (2001). Case management and service receipt for families experiencing both child maltreatment and women battering. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 16*, 437-458.
- Cunningham, A. & Baker, L. (2007). *Little eyes, little ears. How Violence against a Women Shapes Children as They Grow*. London, ON: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Family Violence Prevention Unit, Public Health Agency of Canada.
- Cox, C., Kotch, J., & Everson, M. (2003). A longitudinal study of modifying influences in the relationship between domestic violence and child maltreatment. *Journal of Family Violence, 18*, 5-17.
- Dixon, L., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., Browne, K., & Ostapuk, E. (2007). The co-occurrence of child and intimate partner maltreatment in the family: Characteristics of violent perpetrators. *Journal of Family Violence*. Retrieved online from <http://www.springerlink.com.cybre.usask.ca/content/a4813r014055040/fulltext.html>.
- English, D., Marshall, D., & Stewart, A. (2003). Effects of Family Violence on Child Behavior and Health During Early Childhood. *Journal of Family Violence, 18* (1), 43-57.
- Fitzgerald Rice, K. & McAlister Groves, B. (2005). *Hope and Healing. A Caregiver's Guide to Helping Young Children Affected by Trauma*. Danvers, MA: Zero to Three.
- Folsom, W., Christensen, M., Avery, L., & Moore, C. (2003). The co-occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence: An issue of service delivery for social service professionals. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 20* (5), 378-385.
- Hartley, C. (2004). Severe domestic violence and child maltreatment: Considering child physical abuse, neglect and failure to protect. *Child and Youth Services Review, 26* (4), 373-392.
- Hayes, J., Tracme, N., & Jenny, A. (2006). *Children's exposure to domestic violence. Cruel but not Unusual. Violence in Canadian Families*. Alaggia, R. & Vine, C., Ed. Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University.
- Huth-Bocks, A., Levendosky, A., & Semel, M. (2001). The direct and indirect effects of domestic violence on young children's intellectual functioning. *Journal of Family Violence, 16* (3), 269-290.
- Kernie, M., Wolf, M., Holt, V., McKnight, B., Hueber, C., & Rivara, F. (2003). Behavioral problems among children whose mothers are abused by an intimate partner. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 27*, 1231-1246.
- Lieberman, A. & Van Horn, P. (2005). *Don't Hit My Mommy! A Manual for Child-Parent Psychotherapy with Young Witnesses of Family Violence*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three Press.
- Malchiodi, C. (2008). *Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Machiodi, C. (2008a). *Creative Interventions and Childhood Trauma. Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children*. Malchiodi, C., Ed. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Machiodi, C. (2008b). *Effective Practice with Traumatized Children: Ethics, Evidence and Cultural Sensitivity. Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children*. Malchiodi, C., Ed. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Machiodi, C. (2008c). *A group art and play therapy program for children from violent homes. Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children*. Malchiodi, C., Ed. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Maikovich, S., Jaffee, S., Odgers, C., & Gallop, R. (2008). Effects of family violence on psychopathology symptoms in children previously exposed to maltreatment. *Child Development, 79* (5), 1498-1512.
- Maker, A., Kimmelmeir, M., & Peterson, C. (1998). Long-term psychological consequences in women of witnessing parental conflict and experiencing abuse in childhood. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 13*, 574-589.
- Mantymaa, M. et al. (2008). Infants' social withdrawal and parents' mental health. *Infant Behaviour and Development, 31*, 606-613.
- McDonald, R., Jouriles, E., Briggs-Gowam, M., Rosenfield, D., & Carter, A. (2007). Violence toward a family member, angry adult conflict, and child adjustment difficulties: relations in families with 1- to 3- year-old children. *Journal of Family Psychiatry, 211* (2), 176-184.
- Osofsky, J. (2003). Prevalence of children's exposure to domestic violence and child maltreatment: Implications for prevention and intervention. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 6* (3), 161-170.
- Perry, P. (2007). *Understanding Traumatized and Maltreated Children: Core Concepts*. Retrieved on May 2009 from www.childtrauma.org.
- Rea, J. & Rossman, B. (2005). Emotional abuse in intimate relationships. Children exposed to interparental violence: Does parenting contribute to functioning over time? *Journal of Emotional Abuse, 5* (1), 1-28.
- Safran, D. & Safran, E. (2008). *Creative Approaches to Minimize the Traumatic Impact of Bullying Behavior. Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children*. Malchiodi, C., Ed. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Tajima, E. (2000). The relative importance of wife abuse as a risk factor for violence against children. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 24* (11), 1383-1398.
- Zero to Three. (2009). *Laying the Foundation for Early Development. Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health*. Retrieved on May 5, 2009 from <http://www.zerotothree.org/>.

saskatchewan

preventioninstitute

our goal is healthy children

RESOURCE 8-302

Rev. 08/2015