

Child Abuse and Domestic Violence

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners. Domestic violence is a serious crime which often results in serious injury and even death. In fact, one third of domestic violence assaults involve the use of a weapon and/or result in serious bodily injury. Of all female victims of homicide in the United States, 30 percent are killed by husbands or boyfriends, a total of almost 1,500 women each year.

Domestic violence hurts children

Between 50-70 percent of men who abuse their female partners also physically abuse their children. Children from families in which there is adult domestic violence often suffer negative consequences, even if they are not direct targets of the abuse.

Children who witness domestic violence are:

- In constant danger. They may be caught in the middle and hurt or killed.
- Experiencing constant chaos because they never know what to expect at home.
- Stressed and fearful.
- Confused. At home they learn that hitting and violence solves problems, and away from home they learn that it is wrong.
- Isolated. A batterer often seeks to shut off the family from the outside world.
- Feeling hopeless. They often blame themselves for the violence, yet they feel powerless to prevent, stop, or escape from it.

Warning signs

How can you tell if a child is living in a violent home? Warning signs include:

- Signs of neglect, such as poor hygiene or dirty clothing.
- Withdrawal or the absence of friends.
- Depression or low self-esteem.
- Use of violence to solve conflicts.
- Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping during school.
- Difficulty expressing emotions other than anger.
- Problems at school, including lengthy absences.
- Acting overtly responsible, as if the child is the adult of the family.

Positive influences can help

Children who come from violent homes need:

Role models. Many children who grew up with violence credit a relative, teacher or friend's parent with showing them a better way and giving them love and attention.

Family Support. Being close to brothers, sisters or other relatives helps children feel loved and needed.

Community support. Positive youth activities and mentoring programs give children a chance to learn new skills. It gives them a sense of purpose and builds self-esteem.

Protection. It may be necessary to file a report of child abuse and neglect with the reporting hotline at the New York State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment. The number is **1-800-342-3720**. They will notify the local Child Protective Services (CPS), which is part of the county Department of Social Services.

The reason to make a report is to get help for the child and the family. CPS will investigate and take needed action to protect the child and to help the parent(s) solve problems which are leading to violence, abuse, and neglect.