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Helping Children Heal After Witnessing Domestic Violence

Jun 05, 2025

Children who witness domestic violence at home can incur deep emotional and psychological scars, even if they are not directly harmed. Simply **witnessing domestic violence** can have long-lasting impacts. But with the right support, children can begin to heal and feel safe again. Here's what you need to know about the relationship between **domestic violence and children** — and what you can do about it.

The Impact of Witnessing Domestic Violence on Children

Unfortunately for their development, **child witnesses to domestic violence** often live in fear, confusion, and instability. The emotional toll can begin early and last a lifetime, manifesting in a wide variety of ways.

Short-Term Psychological Effects

The immediate **impact of domestic violence on children's psychological well-being** can be complex and extensive. Some **symptoms of children witnessing domestic violence** include:

- Aggression
- Social withdrawal
- Regressive behavior, such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking
- Intense anxiety
- Headaches
- Stomach problems
- Sleep disturbances
- Developmental delays

They may also feel responsible for the violence, especially when they've tried to intervene or call for help.

Long-Term Effects

From infancy through adolescence and onward, exposure to violence in the home alters how children process the world around them. That's because the trauma doesn't end when the violence stops. Many children and teens continue to experience emotional and

behavioral problems even after being removed from the violent environment. The **long-term effects of witnessing domestic violence as a child** often include:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Fearfulness and difficulty trusting others
- Use or increased use of drugs and alcohol
- Poor academic performance
- Difficulty forming healthy relationships

These lasting effects underscore the importance of early intervention and trauma-informed support.

Witnessing domestic violence as a child can disrupt a young person's sense of trust and attachment. Repeated exposure to domestic violence can negatively affect a child's brain development and stress response system. Ongoing **domestic violence impacting children** can impair emotional regulation and lead to chronic physical and mental health issues throughout life. Without intervention, children who grow up around violence are more likely to become involved in abusive relationships themselves, either as victims or perpetrators.

How to Help Children Recover From Domestic Violence

The good news is that healing is possible — especially when children are surrounded by caring adults who understand their trauma and respond with empathy. Nonprofit organizations like Connections for Abused Women and their Children (CAWC) offer essential children's services to help kids process their trauma, heal, recover, and become resilient individuals.

The first and most essential step is helping children feel safe. Safety is the foundation for any healing process and can be established through consistent routines, reassurance, and a calm, predictable home environment.

Here are several key ways to help:

1. Create an Emotionally Safe Space

Children who have lived with violence often feel they can't speak about what happened. Encourage open dialogue in age-appropriate ways. Let them know it's okay to talk about

their feelings and that they are not to blame for the abuse. Validate their emotions and listen without judgment.

2. Seek Trauma-Informed Counseling

Professional therapy with a counselor trained in trauma and domestic violence is one of the most effective ways to support healing. Many children benefit from expressive therapies such as art, play, or music, which allow them to communicate emotions they can't yet put into words.

3. Establish Routines and Boundaries

Domestic violence often creates chaos and unpredictability. Children feel more secure when daily routines, such as mealtimes and bedtimes, are consistent. Boundaries help children understand what to expect, which helps rebuild a sense of stability.

4. Model Healthy Relationships

Children learn by example. Showing respect, kindness, and healthy communication in your own relationships teaches them what safety and love look like. This modeling can help counteract what they saw in an abusive home environment.

5. Empower the Child

Encourage activities and hobbies that help the child feel capable and strong, whether it's sports, creative arts, or volunteer opportunities. Building self-confidence is essential for long-term healing.

6. Maintain a Connection to School and Community

Keeping a child connected to school and peer groups can provide structure and support. Educators and counselors should be informed (with appropriate discretion) so they can be alert to signs of distress and help the child navigate academic or social challenges.

7. Use Support Resources

Organizations such as CAWC offer online resources, trauma recovery programs, and group therapy specifically for young people affected by domestic violence. Accessing these resources can provide vital tools for both children and their caregivers.

8. Support the Non-Abusive Parent

Children's recovery is tied closely to the well-being of their non-abusive parent or caregiver. Supporting that parent — through therapy, housing, financial assistance, or legal

advocacy — also strengthens the child’s ability to heal. Children are more likely to recover when they feel their caregiver is safe, stable, and emotionally available.

Witnessing domestic violence can disrupt every aspect of a child’s development. However, with compassion, stability, and access to trauma-informed care, children can and do recover. Adults don’t have to have all the answers; they just need to be present, consistent, and willing to listen.

Every child deserves a safe and peaceful future. With the right help, children who have seen domestic violence can grow into resilient, emotionally healthy adults who break the cycle of abuse. Healing begins with hope — and with you.

Support Children Who Have Witnessed Abuse With CAWC

At CAWC, we believe that everyone has a right to a life free from abuse and violence. Our mission to end domestic violence in all demographics is rooted in education, service, and advocacy. In addition to working toward broader social change, we provide empowerment-based and trauma-informed support in the form of shelter, counseling, and advocacy for individuals and their children affected by intimate partner violence.