

Kids Can't Cope with Violence at Home

Children who live with domestic violence face a high risk of exposure to traumatizing events, neglect, being directly abused, and losing one or both of their parents.

In fact, 90% of children who live in homes where there is violence see and hear the abuse. Since kids learn how to handle their own conflict, anger, and pain from what they see their parents and caregivers do, they learn unhealthy patterns of coping with problems, setting them up for a lifetime of relationship problems and poor problem-solving skills.

When they witness abuse at home, children also grow up anxious, fearful, and hopeless. They are often insecure and worried about the future. They are at high risk for substance abuse, dropping out of school, and the complications that come with chronic stress-related disorders.

Younger children can't express their feelings and worry about abuse they don't understand, so they often blame themselves and become more withdrawn. School age kids can verbalize their feelings so they may lash out inappropriately by threatening peers or siblings, and getting into fights. Some studies show that when it comes to adolescents, a history of family violence is the biggest predictor of delinquency. Their dating relationships often imitate the same cycle of escalating violence they know so well.

Most health insurance policies cover the service of MFTs so long as the services are "medically necessary." This typically includes coverage for face-to-face sessions for a diagnosable mental health problem. Such coverage may be limited. Please contact your health insurance company for detailed information about the coverage available to you and your family.



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THEY SEE, HEAR, AND FEEL IT ALL:

The Effects of Domestic Violence
on Children



Brought to you by the
California Association of
Marriage and Family Therapists



WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence includes physical abuse (pushing, hitting, choking, use of weapons, slapping, physical force); sexual abuse (any unwanted sexual intimacy forced on one person by another); and psychological abuse (threats, isolation, verbal abuse).

Are You in an Abusive Relationship?

Many abusers and victims don't realize they are in an abusive situation. They might even hide it from themselves by rationalizing, minimizing or denying their experience. Ask yourself:

- Are you afraid of your partner?
- Has your partner ever hit, slapped, choked or pushed you?
- Is your partner very good to you most of the time, but sometimes very cruel or scary?
- Are you sure you're not being abused because you fight back or you feel you deserve what you get?
- Are you afraid to ask for help because you are afraid no one will understand?

If you answered yes, it's time to seek help for you and your children.

What Children Learn When a Parent is Abusive

- Nothing is safe
- Women have no rights; it is okay for men to control them
- Violence is an acceptable way to solve problems
- Violence at home is normal
- Intimidation is a good way to get what you want

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Listen and talk to your children about their feelings.** When children have witnessed domestic violence, let them know it's not their fault and show understanding if they express fear and anxiety. Tell them violence is not okay, that you love them, and will try to keep them safe. Accept that your child may not be ready to talk right away.
- Have a safety plan for a crisis.** Whether you are with an abuser or have left, you'll want to memorize safe numbers (e.g. police, family) you can call for help and keep a cell phone with you if possible. Identify places you could be trapped in your home and have an escape plan. Make sure your child's school is aware of custody issues; who children can be released to; and ensure they do not give out any information. Keep a copy of a restraining order with you at all times.
- Learn the number of the domestic abuse hotline in your community.** Hotline advocates are trained to intervene, advise and assist in a crisis so that you and your children stay safe and protected.
- Get counseling for you and your kids.** Find a Marriage and Family Therapist who specializes in helping families navigate the effects and crises of domestic violence. A qualified therapist can help stop the cycle of violence, help you and your children heal, and connect you with support resources

OFFERING EXTRA SUPPORT About Marriage and Family Therapists

Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are relationship experts. They work with individuals, couples, families, children, adolescents, and the elderly, providing support and perspective as patients struggle with life's challenges.

Licensed by the State of California, MFTs are psychotherapists who are uniquely trained and credentialed to assess, diagnose, and treat a wide range of issues so individuals achieve more adequate, satisfying and productive relationships and social adjustment.

The California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT) is an independent statewide non-profit organization made up of over 28,000 practicing Marriage and Family Therapists. CAMFT is dedicated to advancing marriage and family therapy as a healing art, science, and mental health profession. In fact, CAMFT sponsors TherapistFinder.com so Californians can gain access to qualified local experts who can help.



Seeking a Marriage and Family Therapist or other mental health professional to assist with life's difficulties is a sign of courage and a step in the right direction. Always ask about a therapist's special areas of expertise (e.g. grief counseling, children's issues, relationship counseling) before you engage them to ensure it's the right fit for you.

TherapistFinder is a California-wide interactive, online directory that is user-friendly and searchable by name, location, and area of expertise. It's your introduction to one or more qualified psychotherapists who hold a California license.

