



Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence

AN OVERVIEW FOR PROFESSIONALS

Exposure to domestic violence can have a profound impact on the lives of children.



Research has shown that experiencing domestic violence is one of many adverse childhood experiences (ACE) directly associated with negative outcomes, such as homelessness, unemployment, poverty, chronic physical and mental health problems, and future domestic violence. Approximately 1 in 15 children are exposed to domestic

violence each year¹ and in 2017, at least 2,934 children in North Dakota were directly impacted by domestic violence in their homes². Children who witness domestic violence are also at greater risk of becoming victims themselves. The chance the abuser hurting his or her partner and the children at the same time could be as high as 30% to 60%.

Sources:

¹Hamby, S., Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., and Ormrod, R. (2011). National survey of children's exposure to violence: Children's exposure to intimate partner violence and other family violence. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/232272.pdf>

²CAWS North Dakota (2017). North Dakota domestic violence fact sheet. Retrieved from: http://www.cawsnorthdakota.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2017-ND-Domestic-Violence-Fact-Sheet_8.5x11.pdf

³Childhood Domestic Violence Association. Signs of childhood domestic violence. Retrieved from: <http://cdv.org/signs-of-cdv/>

Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to:

- Have serious emotional and behavioral problems
- Experience developmental delays
- Use and abuse drugs and alcohol
- Have difficulty regulating temperament
- Have low self-esteem
- Develop problems with anxiety or depression
- Attempt suicide
- Struggle academically
- Commit crimes, especially sexual assault
- Use violence in response to perceived threats
- Become abusers in their own relationships
- Experience physical, sexual, or emotional abuse



Every child responds to exposure to domestic violence differently. When signs are present, they can come in a variety of forms – some more subtle, others more pronounced. **Here are some possible signs and symptoms you might see or hear about from a parent or child³:**

BEHAVIORAL

- Trouble eating and/or sleeping
- Irritability, acting out, or frequent outbursts
- Aggressive behavior
- Substance use
- Early sexual activity
- Self-harm
- Suicidal ideation or attempts
- Frequent tardiness and/or absences from school, activities, or work
- Frequent bed-wetting
- Bullying behaviors
- Victim or perpetrator of dating violence
- Criminal behavior

COGNITIVE

- Difficulty concentrating
- Low or delayed verbal skills
- Lack of trust toward others
- Academic problems
- Short attention span
- Distracted or inattentive
- Frequent bad dreams
- Lack of interest in hobbies or activities
- Attitude supportive of violence

SOCIAL

- Startling easily and frequently
- Isolation from others
- Difficulty forming and maintaining peer relationships

EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Fear, anxiety, sadness, or worry
- Feelings of anger or rage
- Emotionally withdrawn or detached
- Frequent physical or health complaints
- Inappropriate emotional responses
- Low self-esteem
- Self-blame or shame

While you may not directly serve victims in the aftermath of domestic violence, you can still play a critical role in assisting victims and their children through support or referral. Here are a few things to consider:

- Develop protocols in your workplace to ensure consistent practices for providing care to clients or patients who experience domestic violence.
- Be victim-centered and use trauma-informed care when working with victims and their children. Avoid victim-blaming statements and listen attentively.
- Commit to routine screenings for both domestic violence and children's exposure to domestic violence in your workplace.
- Be familiar with resources in your area (healthcare, financial support, legal services, shelter, etc.) to make appropriate referrals to victims and their children. For information about shelters and advocacy services near you, visit: <https://www.domesticshelters.org>.
- Share information about domestic violence, its effects on children, and local resources in your place of work (waiting area, break room, restrooms, and newsletters).
- Know your obligations as a mandated reporter: <http://www.pcand.org/NDDHS/mandatedreportertraining>.
- Be an active bystander and intervene when you witness inappropriate behavior. For your own safety, be cautious to intervene if you see physical violence. Instead, call 9-1-1.