

Domestic Violence:
A pattern of abusive behavior
used to gain or maintain
power and control
over someone.

Restoring Power

The Effects of Violence on Children

Children may differ in their reactions to experiences of violence based on severity and frequency of the violence, gender and age, personal temperament, and resiliency factors, such as coping skills and social supports. Younger children are at a higher risk for long term adverse effects. With caring supports, youth can recover and heal from these effects.

Emotional Effects

- Emotions may include anger, confusion, hopelessness, powerlessness, nervous, anxiety, guilt, shame, self-blame, and/or fear
- Restrictive range of emotion identification and expression
- Conflicting feelings toward caregivers or loved ones
- Grief over ambiguous and tangible losses
- Disconnection from feelings; leading to numbness or emptiness
- Taking on the feelings of others or what is socially expected of them
- Increase in mental health symptoms which put them at risk of developing anxiety, depression, and/or PTSD

Behavioral Effects

- Acting out with big behaviors such as angry outbursts
- Withdrawing or isolating from others
- Caretaking or parentified behaviors
- Seeking validation or attention
- Overachieving or underachieving
- Difficulty attending school or school avoidance
- Bullying others or being bullied
- Needing to be perfect
- Increased risk of engaging in criminal and high-risk behavior later in life
- More likely to abuse drugs and alcohol

Social Effects

- Poor anger management and problem-solving skills
- Increased social involvement to keep busy and avoid being at home
- Increased isolation: distant and superficial relationships
- Difficulty forming healthy connections and trusting others
- Difficulty maintaining relationships
- Challenges in asserting personal boundaries
- Putting the needs of others before oneself

Physical Effects

- Somatic symptoms like headaches and stomachaches
- Difficulty focusing or maintaining attention
- Self-harming behaviors
- Tired and Lethargic
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Regression in age-appropriate developmental tasks
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Bedwetting or Nightmares
- Heightened fight/flight/freeze response in the brain

Cognitive Effects

- Blame themselves for violence
- Difficulty taking responsibility for actions;
- Decreased self-worth
- Difficulty identifying what they need and asking for it
- Unable to express anger in healthy ways
- Rigid thought patterns and expectations
- Decreased agency to make change in their world
- Difficulty using logic and reasoning when emotionally activated
- Difficulty with linear processing: using rules and logic to develop a conclusion

Effects on Sense of Connectedness

- Difficulty trusting own perceptions of the world and others
- Survivor guilt
- Separation of cognitive, emotional, and physical selves
- Difficulty integrating a whole sense of self (dissociative tendencies)
- Emotional and experiential numbness – inability to be creative, to play, and to feel joy
- Questioning spiritual and existential beliefs