EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

Many children exposed to violence in the home are also victims of physical abuse. Children who witness domestic violence or are victims of abuse themselves are at serious risk for long-term physical and mental health problems. Children who witness violence between parents may also be at greater risk of being violent in their future relationships. Children in homes where one parent is abused may feel fearful and anxious. They may always be on guard, wondering when the next violent event will happen. This can cause them to react in different ways, depending on their age:

CHILDREN IN PRESCHOOL
Young children who witness domestic violence may start doing things they used to do when they were younger, such as bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, increased crying, and whining. They may also develop difficulty falling or staying asleep; show signs of terror, such as stuttering or hiding; and show signs of severe separation anxiety.

SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN
Children in this age range may feel guilty about the abuse and blame themselves for it. Domestic violence and abuse hurts children’s self-esteem. They may not participate in school activities or get good grades, have fewer friends than others, and get into trouble more often. They also may have a lot of headaches and stomachaches.

TEENS
Teens who witness abuse may act out in negative ways, such as fighting with family members or skipping school. They may also engage in risky behaviors, such as having unprotected sex and using alcohol or drugs. They may have low self-esteem and have trouble making friends. They may start fights or bully others and are more likely to get in trouble with the law. This type of behavior is more common in teen boys who are abused in childhood than in teen girls. Girls are more likely than boys to be withdrawn and experience depression.
HELPING YOUR CHILD RECOVER FROM WITNESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Each child responds differently to abuse and trauma. Some children are more resilient, and some are more sensitive. How successful a child is at recovering from abuse and trauma depends on several things, including having:

- A good support system or good relationships with trusted adults
- High self-esteem
- Healthy friendships

Although children will probably never forget what they saw or experienced during the abuse, they can learn healthy ways to deal with their emotions and memories as they mature. The earlier a traumatic childhood experience like this is addressed, the less impact it will have on your child's future health and well-being. You can help your children by:

- Helping them feel safe.
- Talking to them about their fears.
- Talking to them about healthy relationships.
- Talking to them about boundaries.
- Getting them professional help. There are many mental health therapy interventions that are proven to help reduce symptoms of trauma and manage emotional and behavior issues that your child may have. Finding a therapist for yourself and your child is the beginning of healing for you and your child.