

Children and Domestic Violence

Where to Turn if You Are Worried About Your Child

Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior that one person in a relationship uses to control and dominate the other. The behavior may be verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive. You as a parent may have left an abusive relationship or you may still be in one. This fact sheet is #8 in a series of 10 sheets written to help you understand how children may react to domestic violence, and how you can best help them to feel safe and valued and develop personal strength. For other fact sheets in the series, visit www.nctsn.org/content/resources

Children may react to domestic violence with behaviors and mood changes that are normal after an upsetting event. Usually these changes start to go away once the stress in the home has gone down and the child feels safe again. If the changes persist or otherwise worry you, be aware that there are people and places you can turn to for advice and help. Seek out guidance if:

- ▶ Your child's behavior changes don't go away, or they get worse.
- ▶ Your child is unusually sad, angry, or withdrawn.
- ▶ You are concerned that your child may harm himself or others.
- ▶ You are overwhelmed by your child's behavior.
- ▶ The violence in the home has been extreme.

You may be unsure about where to look for guidance, or even whether it's OK to tell anyone about your family's tough times. Perhaps you are embarrassed or worried that people will judge or blame you. You might be surprised at the support you receive when you reach out to trusted sources! You will realize that you are not alone with your worries, and that you can get the information you need to benefit your child and yourself going forward.



SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A good place to start is to contact a **domestic violence agency** in your area. These agencies can put you in touch with local **programs and experts**, including **lawyers**, with experience helping children affected by domestic violence. They may recommend a **counselor** or other supportive services such as a **group** for children dealing with stress at home. Your child's **pediatrician** may be a good source for advice or recommendations. You might also turn to a **family member** or a trusted **friend** or **neighbor** who is knowledgeable about domestic violence.

Many people turn to the **Internet** for information and guidance. If you need a computer, most public **libraries** offer free access. If you use a home computer and you are still living in an abusive situation, be careful about privacy and be sure to delete your browsing history.

Try to look only at **Web sites** that are trusted and reliable. Here are some well-known sites you can count on for solid information:

- ▶ The National Child Traumatic Stress Network offers fact sheets and other information about domestic violence and its impact on children. Visit www.nctsn.org or e-mail the Network at info@nctsn.org
- ▶ The Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse has a Web page that features the perspectives of children. Visit Honor our Voices at www.honourourvoices.org
- ▶ The Safe Start Center offers information about the impact of domestic violence on children, including a guide for families entitled *Healing the Invisible Wounds: Children's Exposure to Violence*. Visit www.safestartcenter.org
- ▶ The Child Witness to Violence Project offers information for parents and caregivers on its Web site. Visit www.childwitnessstoviolence.org or call the project at 1-617-414-4244.
- ▶ The Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System offers a variety of resources for families and children coping with domestic violence. Visit www.lfcc.on.ca or call the center at 1-519-679-7250.

REMEMBER...

There are people and resources that can help you and your children cope with the experience of domestic violence. Reaching out to them may be the most important step you take in helping your children grow and thrive despite difficult times at home.

IMPORTANT!

If you feel unsafe now and need help for yourself, your family, or someone else in a domestic crisis, contact

- 911 for emergency police assistance
- Your local child protective services if your children are in danger
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline. Advocates are available to intervene in a crisis, help with safety planning, and provide referrals to agencies in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands. Call 1-800-799-7233 or go to www.thehotline.org

The NCTSN Domestic Violence Work Group developed this fact sheet, drawing on the experiences of domestic violence survivors, research findings, and reports from battered women's advocates and mental health professionals. For more information on children and domestic violence, and to access all fact sheets in this series, visit www.nctsn.org/content/resources