

The Impact of Abuse on Children

Chris Moles

"It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend on of these little ones." Luke 17:2

What is Domestic Violence?

Definitions:

"A pattern of abusive behavior in an intimate relationship used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over the other. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone."

"An abuse of power, manifested through selfishly motivated patterns of behavior intended to exercise or maintain control over one's partner."

"A godless pattern of abusive behavior among spouses involving psychological, emotional, and/or physical means to exert and obtain power and control over the spouse for the achievement of selfish ends." John Henderson

Why is this Important?

- **Social Considerations**

- Domestic violence is the most frequently occurring violence children experience.

- 1 out of 15 children are exposed to domestic violence and 90% of them are eyewitnesses to it.

- Police encounter half a million children during domestic violence arrests in the US each year

- Children exposed to domestic violence may experience many of the same symptoms and lasting effects as children who are direct victims of violence.

- **Theological Considerations:**

1. The Incarnation: Jesus entered our world as an infant. He relates to our entire existence. The phrase, "are the children safe?" resonates with the heart of God.
 - a. Luke 2:7, Matthew 2:13, Luke 2:41-52

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“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
Philippians 2:6-11

2. Children and the Kingdom: In a culture that de-valued children, Jesus prioritizes them.

a. Mark 9:33-37; 10:13-16

“Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”
Matthew 19:14

3. The Church and the Vulnerable: The Church has a responsibility to care for those in need and children represent a significant class of, “the least of these.”

a. Matthew 25:35-40, Proverbs 14:31,

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”
James 1:27

4. Biblical Responsibility to Children:

a. Fathers and Church Leaders – Deuteronomy 4:9; 11:19, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21, 1 Timothy 3:4, Titus 2:4

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

1 Timothy 5:8

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Direct risks to children:

- *Their emotional well-being:* Including psychological development, sense of safety, general happiness
- *Their social development:* Including making social connections about family relationships, intimate relationships and peer relationships
- *How they behave at home, school:* Perhaps mimicking abusive behaviors; acting out or being excessively compliant.
- *Beliefs about violence:* Including beliefs about entitlement and normalcy
- *Physical health and well-being:* Due to direct abuse or on-going stress and anxiety that can threaten physical health.

Exposure:

Children may be drawn into abusive events in a variety of ways.

- *By what they hear:* Shouting, name calling, screaming, calls for help, threats, sirens, etc. This may also include sounds associated with trauma (i.e. thunder, dog barking, TV show, etc.)
- *By what they see:* Children may see their parent or caregiver being harmed (physically and/ or sexually), injuries, broken and destroyed furniture & other belongings, crying, looks of fear, looks of intimidation, and helpers (police, medical professionals, neighbors).
- *By what they smell:* Children may connect abusive and traumatic events through all of their senses, including what they are smelling as the events occur—such as what is cooking at the time, antiseptic used to clean wounds, atmospheric/seasonal (fall air, smell of rain, flowers, etc.).
- *By what they feel:* Children can sense the tension in the air, they pick up on non-verbal cues that create a sense of fear, anger, apprehension, anxiety.
- *By what they taste:* Children may associate the taste of foods they were eating during abusive events, taste of their own tears, or the taste of blood if they were injured in the mouth.
- *By what they experience:* Children may experience abusive behaviors (being threatened, called names, hit, pushed, injured intentionally, injured accidentally while trying to intervene), emotions such as fear, anger, confusion, responsibility for the abuse. And they experience ways of responding to the abuse such as calling 911 for help, helping other children to hide, distracting the abuser to try to stop or decrease the abuse, protecting the adult victim or participating in the abuse of the adult victim at the urging or forcing of the abuser.