

Children Who Witness Violence

Many children are not strangers to violence. They witness it frequently in their own homes. What are some of the effects on children who witness parental violence? What are some ways to help these children? Some studies show that emotional abuse of the mother and self-esteem of the mother are the most significant predictors of the child's adjustment and social behavior.

Social Learning Theory proposes that children who identify with the:

- abuser parent, learn aggressive and manipulative behavior.
- abused parent, learn to submit or blame themselves for problems.

Trauma Theory suggests that repeated trauma can:

- result in post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma arousal symptoms, and re-experiencing it.
- cause guilt or shame about the abuse if children blame themselves for the violence.

Relationship Theory explains:

- children learn patterns of interactions and develop general expectations of social relationships from their parents.
- parenting stress, marital satisfaction, and domestic violence have been found to affect the adjustment and social skills of children.
- children may be confused about their feelings regarding their parents.

If violence is witnessed, effects may include:

- behavioral problems ▪ inappropriate response to situations ▪ negativism
- aggression with peers ▪ ambivalent relationships with caregivers
- feelings of fear, guilt or shame ▪ withdrawal ▪ depression

Help is available:

- Teachers, and public officials are mandated to report suspected child abuse.
- Shelters offer support for battered women and children in domestic violence.
- Community-based post-shelter programs provide continued support.
- Group treatment programs teach children to establish group rapport; challenge assumptions and models of family functioning; increase positive self-worth; improve listening and problem solving skills; encourage assumption of responsibility; develop assertiveness skills; and increase the communication of feelings and anger control.
- School counselors and private counselors offer help.

Sources:

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