

# Family Violence

## Child Abuse

It is estimated that family violence is prevalent in 3 to 4 million American homes. If 2.5 children are living in each, that's at least 7.5 million children learning violence every year, either as a spectator or participant. Reports by battered mothers indicate that 87% of children witness the abuse and one study found that at least half of the men who frequently assaulted their wives also physically abused their children.

### Emotional Reactions of Children to Domestic Violence

**Responsibility:** Children assume responsibility for the abuse and blame themselves. A typical statement is: "If I had just been a good boy or girl. . ."

**Anxiety:** Children are constantly anxious, afraid or hypervigilant.

**Guilt:** Children think they should have been able to prevent the violence and feel guilty for not doing so.

**Grief:** When the mother leaves the abuser, the children grieve over the "loss" of that parent and even the lifestyle they formerly lived.

**Ambivalence:** Children may not know how they feel or have two opposite emotions at the same time. This is difficult for them. They may love the abuser but hate what he is doing to their mom.

**Fear of Abandonment:** Children who have been separated from one of their parents because of the violent acts may be fearful that the other parent will also leave or die.

**Need for Adult Attention:** Children who have been severely traumatized require intense attention to minimize their fears. If they do not receive this attention, they may act out.

**Transfer of Anxiety from Mother to Child:** Children innately understand the fear and trauma that their mothers have experienced even if they can't verbalize these feelings. Children will express this anxiety in a variety of ways.

### You can help. . .

**Positive influences can help a child from a violent home overcome the negative influences of living with violence.**

**Be a role model:** Show children by your example that there is a better way to solve problems than by violence.

**Provide community support:** Advocate for positive youth activities and mentoring programs.

**Promote nonviolence:** Discourage children from fighting and teasing. Encourage cooperation and respect.

**Teach conflict resolution skills:** Help children learn to calm down and to use words -- not fists -- to resolve conflicts.

**Teach personal safety rules:** Help children from violent homes make a safety plan and practice it.



### For help in an emergency:

Virginia Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline  
**1-800-552-7096** (V/TTY)

Virginia Family Violence and Sexual  
Assault Hotline  
**1-800-838-8238** (V/TTY)

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