

## Resiliency in Children Exposed to Family Violence

Exposure to family violence can have a profound effect on a child's emotional and cognitive development. We know that children are exposed to abuse in a variety of ways such as:

- Seeing it;
- Hearing it; and,
- Feeling it.

Not all young people are affected in the same way. In fact, many children are resilient, able to heal and go on to thrive.

In Connecticut, we know that most of the 1,200 children that reside in family violence shelters throughout the state each year are six years old or younger.<sup>1</sup> Various risk and protective factors among the child, family, and community can impact the ways in which children and teens process and understand the exposure to violence. Resilience has been defined as the maintenance of healthy, successful functioning or adaptation within the context of a significant adversity or threat.<sup>2</sup> However, resiliency can only be built and obtained through multiple **PROTECTIVE FACTORS**. Some of these factors include the:

- Age of the child;
- Child's developmental stage;
- Severity, proximity, duration and frequency of the violence; and,
- Presence of loving and supportive adults in their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Though these factors do not guarantee the effects that exposure to violence has on a child, understanding the importance of each is instrumental in helping children build resiliency.

**RESILIENCE**  
*is the maintenance of healthy,  
successful functioning or  
adaptation within the context  
of significant adversity or threat.*

Often the younger the child, the more severe the impact may be due to their inability to regulate their own emotions and understand what is going on.<sup>3</sup> This also coincides with a child's developmental stage because first, a child who is younger may face issues developing attachment, and second, a child may miss developmental milestones due to the violence in the home.

The severity, proximity, duration and frequency of the violence can largely affect a child's ability to cope, find comfort, be provided their basic needs, and may result in aggressive or antisocial behaviors. This factor also correlates with higher than average anxiety, depression and trauma symptoms in children who are exposed at a greater frequency.

### BY THE NUMBERS

#### Nationally<sup>5</sup>...

In 2012:

**6.6%** or **> 5 million children** were exposed to physical intimate partner violence (IPV).

**5.7%** or **4.3 million children** were exposed to psychological/emotional IPV.

Over the lifetime:

**17.9%** or **13.6 million children** were exposed to physical IPV.

**31% of children** who witnessed IPV reported being physically abused themselves compared to only 4.8% of children who did not witness IPV.

**49.9% of children** intervened by yelling for the abuser to stop while **43.9% of children** tried to get away

Resilience provides a buffer between the child and the traumatic event, mitigating the negative effects that could result, such as physical, emotional, and behavioral health issues that can last into adulthood.<sup>4</sup> However, resiliency can be built in any type of family violence situation by providing children with:

- healthy attachment relationships,
- resources,
- identifying and strengthen pre-existing supportive factors
- social supports, and
- addressing the issues of safety for the family.

Research shows that these protective factors are also “promotive” factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development.<sup>3</sup> “Promotive” factors help a child feel safe more quickly after experiencing the toxic stress of family violence and help to neutralize the physical changes that naturally occur during and after trauma. If the child’s protective networks are in good working order, development is strong even in the face of severe adversity.



## PROMOTING RESILIENCY

[Futures Without Violence](#) provides eight ways parents and caregivers can support children’s healing<sup>3</sup>:

- Play with the child
- Listen to the child
- Inspire and praise the child
- Comfort the child
- Allow the child to express her/his feelings and talk about them
- Create calm and predictable environments
- Set clear rules and expectations
- Create a network of support for the child

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Connecticut Statewide Domestic Violence Service Statistics. 2016. Downloaded on June 6, 2017 from [http://www.ctcadv.org/files/4514/8234/3698/FY16\\_service\\_stats\\_11.16.pdf](http://www.ctcadv.org/files/4514/8234/3698/FY16_service_stats_11.16.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> Garmezy, N. Studying lives through time, personality and development. American Psychological Association. 1993; 377-398.
- <sup>3</sup> Futures Without Violence. Protective factors and resiliency. Downloaded June 6, 2017 from <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/what-do-kids-need/supporting-parenting/protective-factors-resiliency/>.
- <sup>4</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. The Resilience Project. Downloaded June 6, 2017 from <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/resilience/Pages/Promoting-Resilience.aspx>.
- <sup>5</sup> Futures Without Violence. The facts on children’s exposure to intimate partner violence. Downloaded on June 6, 2017 from <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/Fact%20sheet%20on%20Children%20Exposed%20to%20IPV%202013.pdf>.

## LEARN MORE AT [www.ctccfv.org](http://www.ctccfv.org)

### NEED HELP?

Parents looking for help can call the statewide domestic violence hotline. Counselors are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. All services are confidential, safe and free.

**888.774.2900**  
ENGLISH

**844.831.9200**  
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*The Children’s Center on Family Violence is a partnership between Connecticut Children’s Medical Center and Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence. It was established in 2016 to respond to and reduce the number of children impacted by family violence through a trauma-informed, multidisciplinary, multiagency approach. Learn more about The Center and our work at [www.ctccfv.org](http://www.ctccfv.org).*