

## Witnessing Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Child's Experience

Intimate partner violence, whether physical or verbal, cannot be hidden from children. Children often know what is happening even when parents think they are asleep in another room. Exposure to intimate partner violence can have profound effects on a child's emotional and cognitive development.

Children may be **EXPOSED** to intimate partner violence between their caregivers, or one caregiver and that person's current or former partner, in many different ways. They may...

- See it
- Hear it
- Witness bruises or injuries on a parent
- Witness property damage
- Learn about it after it happens

Children may **FEEL** different kinds of emotions when they witness intimate partner violence. They may feel...

- Afraid or fearful
- Angry towards one or both parents
- Sad or lonely
- Helpless because they are unable to stop the violence
- Hopeless, like things may never get better

Children may **REACT** in different ways. They may...

- Hide in or retreat to a different room
- Try to keep a sibling from seeing or hearing the violence and take on a parenting role
- Try to stop the violence by asking questions or trying to talk down a parent
- Try to stop the violence by getting in between parents or getting physical with a parent
- Freeze up or appear shocked, unable to move
- Continue doing whatever they were doing before the violence started

### BY THE NUMBERS

#### In Connecticut...

1 or more children were present at the scene of 3,363 family violence arrests in 2015.

Over **1,000 children** stayed with a parent in a domestic violence shelter in fiscal year 2016.

**69%** of those children staying in shelter were **6 years old or younger**

Approximately **4,700 children** participated in support group or individual counseling in fiscal year 2016.

#### Nationally...

More than **15 million children** annually witness intimate partner violence.

Between **3,500 and 4,000 children** witness fatal family violence each year.



**1 IN 15 CHILDREN**  
witnesses intimate partner violence  
between their parents or caregivers.

A child's healthy development starts before they are born and continues into the teenage years and beyond.



### EARLY CHILDHOOD

- Developing a secure attachment with a caregiver
- Recognize/Respond to emotional clues (empathy)
- Capacity to assess danger
- Beginnings of self-concepts/self-esteem
- Motor/language development



### MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

- Sustained attention for learning and problem solving
- Increased emotional/behavioral control
- Increased self-concept/self-esteem
- Development of stronger peer relations



### ADOLESCENCE

- Physical body and hormonal changes
- Develop more mature peer-related social skills
- Ability to modify/control emotion and behavior to meet long-term goals
- Capacity for abstract thinking
- Develop independent self-identity

Exposure to violence can interrupt child development in a number of ways. These may include delays in meeting developmental milestones, clinical depression or anxiety, suicidal thoughts or behaviors, anger problems, academic or school problems, poor social relationships with peers or other individuals, alcohol or substance use issues, or serious mental health problems that can follow them into adulthood.

## BUILDING RESILIENCY

It is important to remember that each child's experience is unique and each child has within him or her the capacity for resiliency. Supporting the non-offending parent to provide a nurturing, loving and supportive environment will provide the base for teaching kids the skills they need to be healthy, happy and confident.

Futures Without Violence offers the following tips for building resiliency in children and their parents who have experienced intimate partner violence:

- Let the parent and child know that it is okay to talk about what has happened if the child expresses interest in doing so
- Tell children that the violence is not their fault and help their parent in expressing that message
- Foster children's self-esteem by showing and telling them that they are loveable, competent and important
- Help children know what to expect through a structured and predictable environment
- Incorporate the family's culture into interventions and support the parent and children to explore values, norms and cultural meanings that impact their choices and give them strength

## 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**  
ESPAÑOL

*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).*