

Children Living with Family Violence

How does living with violence at home affect children and how can we support them?

Effects of living with family violence

Children are always affected by violence and abuse within the home. Living in an abusive home can have profound, traumatic and long-lasting effects on children's development. In addition, children who live with violence are more likely than others to experience abuse and/or neglect themselves.

These issues can be compounded for children because their home life is more likely to be socially disrupted and chaotic, with high levels of transience and few social supports.

The effects of family violence on children vary according to stages of development, the frequency and severity of exposure, access to supportive relationships and whether children are themselves abused. These effects may include:

Babies and toddlers

- ◇ Failure to thrive and/or attachment difficulties
- ◇ Difficult to settle or listless and lethargic

Pre-schoolers and primary school children

- ◇ Developmental delays or mental health problems e.g. anxiety, PTSD
- ◇ Difficulty with peer relationships
- ◇ Hyper-vigilant/eager to do their best, or withdrawn, difficult behaviour, low educational attainment

Adolescents and young adults

- ◇ Chronic mental or physical health problems e.g. depression, eating disorder, cardiovascular or lung disease or other inflammatory conditions
- ◇ Suicide or self-harm, violent relationships
- ◇ Alcohol/substance abuse, risky sexual activities

Ways you can support children

If you have concerns about a child being exposed to family violence you can discuss this with Child, Youth and Family (CYF) on 0508 FAMILY (326 459). In an emergency call the Police (111).

You can also support children living with abuse at home by helping them to build resilience. Resilience enables children to cope with stressful situations and promotes healthy development. Family and community members can help children develop their resilience by listening, validating and respecting children's views. You can also:

Support children's parents to:

- ◇ Parent well with warmth and affection
- ◇ Be honest with children about the abuse
- ◇ Reassure children that it's not their fault
- ◇ Access counselling for their children

In your own relationship with the children:

- ◇ Affirm the child's reality
- ◇ Empower children with a safety plan
- ◇ Provide a safe place for kids in a crisis
- ◇ Model good adult behaviour
- ◇ Provide strong boundaries

Educational providers and social clubs can also:

- ◇ Get kids into social activities and keep them engaged
- ◇ Support them to cope with grief and anger
- ◇ Set rules with wide but firm boundaries
- ◇ Understand that behavioural problems are sign of difficulties at home and be there for the child

We can all support children by helping them build resilience; we need to be able to recognise when a child is hurting and act to support them appropriately.

Are you concerned about the wellbeing of a child?

You can find out about the services available in your area by contacting:

Family Violence Helpline: 0800 456 450 (9am–11pm); CYF 0508 FAMILY (326 459)

OR you could let the child know about What's Up: 0800 What's Up (942 8787) www.whatsup.co.nz

Kidsline: 0800 Kidsline (543 7544) www.kidsline.org.nz