



Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence Fact Sheet

Overview

The traumatic effects of domestic violence can impact more than just adult survivors. Children who are exposed to the abuse of a parent or guardian can face increased health risks, higher likelihood of engaging in or experiencing violence, difficulties in school, and psychological or developmental impairments. However, there are numerous protective factors that can promote resilience in children and youth, and can support their ability to heal and find wellness. By being aware of the impact of domestic violence on children, service providers and professionals who work with youth can be more trauma-informed and child-centered in their approach.

- **Domestic violence:** refers to a pattern of behavior that one partner uses to control the other and includes physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, or financial abuse.
- **Children's exposure to domestic violence:** refers to when a child directly witnesses the abuse of a parent or guardian, notices the aftermath, or generally experiences the dynamic of abuse in the home.

Prevalence

The research and data available about children's exposure or experience of domestic violence demonstrates the need for screening and support to child victims and non-abusing caregivers. Child advocates note that this data may suffer from underreporting, given children's dependence on adults and the stigma of domestic violence.

- According to the [2008 National Survey on Children's Exposure to Violence](#), 1 in 4 children (26%) had been exposed to family violence in their lifetime. 1 in 15 (6.6%) had been exposed to intimate partner violence involving a parent in the last year.
- [A 2003 study published by the Journal of Interpersonal Violence](#) indicated that 15.5 million children in the United States lived in families where partner violence took place in the past year, and seven million children lived in families where severe partner violence took place.

Impact

The effects of witnessing and experiencing domestic violence can have damaging short- and long-term effects on children's emotional, psychological and physical wellness. This points to the need for professionals who work with youth to be trauma-informed in their practice, and to understand the impact that adverse

childhood experiences (ACES) can have on their developmental growth and behavior.

- [A 1997 study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) and Kaiser Permanente](#) found that children who experience childhood trauma (including witnessing domestic violence) were more likely to have serious adult health problems such as depression, heart disease, substance abuse, tobacco use, and a higher risk of unintended pregnancy. They were also more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- [Futures Without Violence notes](#) that children who witness domestic violence can experience changes in emotions (such as mood swings, fearfulness, and aggression) and behavior (such as sleep troubles, temper tantrums, and separation anxiety).

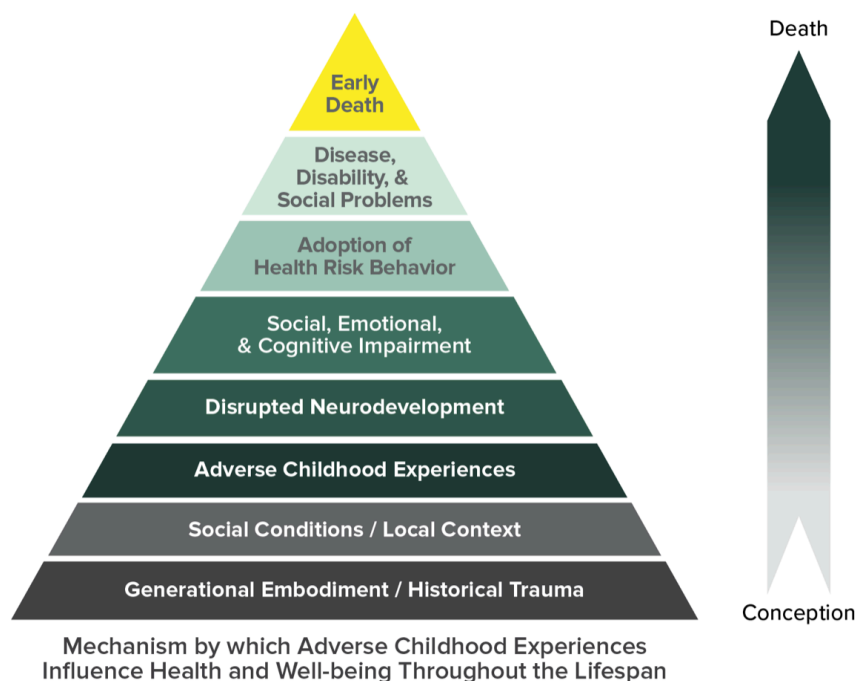


Image Credit: ACE Pyramid, [CDC](#)

Protective Factors

Resilience is the ability for an individual to be well despite hardship or trauma. Many protective factors at the individual, family, community, and societal level can promote resilience in children who have witnessed domestic violence. Most significantly, a positive relationship with non-abusing caregivers can provide much needed love, support, and safety to children. Service providers can promote this protective factor by engaging non-abusing caregivers in programming and services, such as offering counseling to both the adult and child at the same time. Other

protective factors include feelings of connection to community and culture, healthy relationships with other adults and peers, consistent attendance at school, and strengthened emotional literacy and self-calming techniques. For further learning, [read “Protective Factors for Survivors of Domestic Violence”](#) from the Quality Improvement Center on Domestic Violence in Child Welfare

Promising Interventions

There are many promising trauma-informed therapeutic interventions for children and youth exposed to domestic violence. There is no single “one size fits all” approach, so it is important for advocates, youth serving organizations, schools, and protective parents to be informed about the variety of practices available, as well as the credentials and training of the individual providing the therapeutic intervention. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has developed [fact sheets](#) and [assessment tools](#) to help with the process. Additionally, Futures Without Violence has compiled [a list of evidence-based practices](#) for prevention, intervention/treatment, and systems response programs for children exposed to violence. All interventions should be trauma-informed, culturally responsive and centered on fostering resilience, healing and hope for children exposed to violence and harm.

Getting Support

In addition to on-the-ground support from the [OVW Children & Youth and Engaging Men grantee programs](#) across the country, much work is being done to understand how to support children who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence.

- [ACEs Aware](#) offers resources for clinicians on screening and responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences
- [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) maintains a resource library of fact sheets (in English and Spanish) for parents and service providers about intimate partner violence and children
- [Promising Futures](#) is a useful resource for helping programs transform or enhance their ability to effectively meet the needs of women, children and youth experiencing domestic violence. The site includes fact sheets, program readiness assessments, intervention models, and more.
- Read Futures Without Violence’s publication entitled [“Everyday Magic: 16 Ways Adults Can Support Children Exposed to Violence and Trauma”](#)

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