

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

CHILDREN & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FACTS

WHY IT MATTERS

Domestic violence creates a violent and hostile environment which can have devastating emotional and physical effects on children. Children who witness violence display emotional and behavioral disturbances such as withdrawal, low self-esteem, nightmares, and aggression against family, peers, and property.¹ The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse suggests that domestic violence may be the single major precursor to child abuse across the country.² Finally, studies of children who witness domestic violence show that they are more likely to perpetuate the cycle of violence in their own relationships.³

DID YOU KNOW?

- Studies have found that child abuse occurs in up to 70% of families that experience domestic violence.⁴
- 40 to 60% of men who abuse women also abuse children.⁵
- Between 3.3 and 10 million American children witness domestic violence annually.⁶
- In 43% of households where domestic violence occurs, at least one child under the age of 12 lives in the home.⁷

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

- Men who witnessed domestic violence as children are twice as likely to abuse their own partners and children than those who did not witness domestic violence.⁹
- Women who are abused as children are likely to become victims of abuse as adults.¹⁰
- Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to commit sexual assault crimes.¹¹
- Up to 40% of violent juvenile offenders witnessed domestic violence in their homes.¹²
- Between 30 and 50% of dating relationships exhibit the same kind of escalating violence as marital relationships.¹³
- One study revealed that recent exposure to violence in the home was a significant factor in predicting a child's violent behavior.¹⁴

CHILD CUSTODY

- Fathers who batter the mothers of their children, are twice as likely to seek sole custody of their children.¹⁵
- Despite the perception that mothers always win custody cases, studies show that fathers who contest custody win sole or joint custody in 40 to 70% of cases.¹⁷
- Batterers often use child custody as a forum for further abuse through harassing and retaliatory legal actions.¹⁸
- The need for supervised visitation centers far exceeds the number of available programs, resulting in courts ordering unsupervised visitation and endangering parents and children.¹⁹
- According to one study, during court ordered visitation, 5% of abusive fathers threaten to kill the mother, 34% threaten to kidnap their children, and 25% threaten to physically hurt their children.¹⁶

THE EFFECT ON CHILDREN

- Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to exhibit behavioral and physical health problems including depression, anxiety, and violence towards peers.²⁰
- Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, run away from home, and engage in teenage prostitution.²¹
- Children fail to report domestic violence or sexual abuse because of shame, fear of retaliation, or fear of not being believed.²²

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The Public Policy Office of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a national leader in the effort to create and influence Federal legislation that positively affects the lives of domestic violence victims and children. We work closely with advocates at the local, state and national level to identify the issues facing domestic violence victims, their children and the people who serve them and to develop a legislative agenda to address these issues. NCADV welcomes you to join us in our effort to end domestic violence.

IF YOU NEED HELP

If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence and needs immediate assistance, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE or visit www.ndvh.org.

HOW TO HELP

One of the most effective ways to help protect children from the harmful effects of domestic violence is to write your Members of Congress asking them to support the following initiatives:

- Ask your Members of Congress to support increased funding for the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) and funding for Supervised Custody Visitation Centers.
- Ask your Members of Congress to pass legislation providing additional funding for local program initiatives that provide counseling and other services to children who witness domestic violence.
- Ask Members of Congress to support legislation encouraging domestic violence education for middle and high school students addressing the problem of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking and providing resources on where students can turn for help.
- Encourage local schools and youth programs, including teachers, counselors, and athletic coaches to seek training on how to recognize children and teens who are in violent situations and how to provide resources to intervene in domestic violence, dating violence and stalking.
- Ask your Members of Congress to support college campus programs aimed at increasing domestic and sexual violence education, prevention, and intervention.

SOURCES

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- ⁷ Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, *Intimate Partner Violence*, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Government Printing Office (2000).
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- ¹² Famularo, *Child Maltreatment Histories Among Runaway and Delinquent Children*. *Clinical Pediatrics* 29 (12): 713-718. (1990).
- ¹³ Duke University Women's Center, Office of Sexual Assault Support Services, *Sexual Assault Survivor Survey* (1996).
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- ¹⁹ Straus, "Supervised Visitation and Family Violence," *29 Family Law Quarterly* 229, 232-33 (1995).
- ²⁰ Jaffe & Sudermann, "Child Witness of Women Abuse: Research and Community Response" in Stith & Straus. *Understanding Partner Violence: Prevalence, Causes, Consequences, & Solutions*. Families in Focus Services, Vol II. (1995).
- ²² Phillips, *Using/Losing Her Voice: Consent, Coercion, and Sexual Silences*, Paper presented at the Annual Ethnography and Education Conference, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (March 1993).