

Domestic Violence: Impact on Children

Infants and Toddlers

- *Developmental delays
- *Failure to thrive - often due to chaotic and loud environment
- *Irritability or inconsolable crying
- *Basic need for attachment is disrupted
- *Routines around feeding/sleeping are disrupted
- *Frequent colds, ear infections, diarrhea



Preschoolers (3-6)

- *Developmental delays - especially in language development as child may be afraid to speak
- *Low frustration tolerance - cry easily as home environment is chaotic & child cannot handle stress
- *Acting out aggressively towards peers and adults
- *Regression- excessive thumb - sucking, rocking, infant- like behaviors due to lack of security
- *Inability to play constructively-lots of throwing/kicking as children working out frustration & worry in play
- *Inconsistent or inappropriate display of emotions

School Age (7-11)

- *Scholastically delayed/poor school performance due to worry and fear about home life
- *Behavior problems with peers & adults- because of lack of observable appropriate interpersonal relationships
- *Aggressive acting out- models violent behavior witnessed at home
- *Severe behavioral difficulties - culmination of low frustration/tolerance
- *Nightmares/Night terrors- reliving fears of violence during sleep
- *Withdrawn/depressed/hopeless- life offers little other than pain, child loses joy of life
- *Chronic physical complaints- child knows no other way to realize or describe emotional stress
- *Beginning to mimic adult roles- girls adopt the role of victim; boys becoming aggressive/abusive
- *Chronic low self esteem- child blames self for situation at home; good feelings about self have not been nurtured

Adolescence (12-17)

- *Depression
- *Emotional neglect- by this time the child believes there is no one to listen or care
- *Signs of physical injuries, maiming, crippling, scaring
- *Aggression/delinquency/running away- realizing no one will take care of their needs--may use violence
- *Poor school adjustment- academically and socially unable to perform
- *Proficient at mimicking adult roles- carried role of victim or aggressor into interpersonal relationships
- *Early sexual activity/marriage- provides a means of escape or acting out
- *Alcohol/drug experimentation or use- another form of escapism; self-medicating for pain; modeling adults
- *Death by suicide or murder- taking of one's own life to end the pain or intervening to protect the victim in the family results in harm or death to child or child killing the abuser
- *Expansion of violence into the community- criminal activity sometimes through gang involvement where teen finds surrogate family- anger and frustration spills over into community

