

Safety & Wellness in Conflictual Relationships

Keeping Kids Safe

Kids and youth witness violence in their home in many ways:

See it

- See a physical assault occur
- See the physical impact – bruises, broken bones, trips to the hospital
- See the physical impact in the home – holes in walls, broken items
- See a parent yelling at or mistreating the other parent
- See a parent crying a lot
- See a parent cringe or pull away from the other parent
- See a parent hiding things from the other parent

Hear it

- Hear a hit, slap, punch, or someone fall to the floor
- Hear yelling, swearing, threats, criticism, cruel words, put downs
- Crying
- A parent lying to the other parent for fear of safety
- Fear in their parent's voice
- Anger in their parent's voice
- A parent always apologizing

Feel it

- Feel anxiety and stress in the home
- Feel fearful of one of their parents (or another person in the home)
- Feel fearful for a parent or other person in the home
- Feel fearful for their own safety
- Feel anxious if they might do something that could cause a negative response
- Feel anxious as they hide from an aggressive parent

Are impacted by it

- They notice that a parent is always afraid and trying not to upset the other parent
- Their needs might be put second to trying to keep the peace in the home

Impact on kids and youth from witnessing violence in their home:

Short-term impact

Infants

- At this age babies may:
 - Develop sleeping problems
 - Have challenges with attachment
 - Develop feeding and eating challenges
 - Develop failure to thrive/lose weight that does not meet milestones
 - Cry more often
 - Higher risk of physical injury

Children in preschool

- May start doing things they used to do when they were younger:
 - Bed-wetting
 - Thumb-sucking
 - Increased crying and whining
 - Difficulty falling or staying asleep
 - Show signs of terror, such as stuttering or hiding
 - Show signs of severe separation anxiety

School-aged children.

- At this age children may:
 - Feel guilty about the abuse and blame themselves for it
 - Develop low self-esteem
 - Not participate in school activities or receive good grades
 - Have fewer friends than others and get into trouble more often
 - Have a lot of headaches and stomach-aches
 - Develop mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), eating disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Teens

- May act out in negative ways, such as:
 - Fighting with family members or skipping school
 - Engage in risky behaviours, such as unprotected sex and using alcohol or drugs
 - Have low self-esteem and have trouble making friends
 - Start fights or bully others and are more likely to get in trouble with the law
 - Experience anxiety, social withdrawal, and depression
 - Develop mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), eating disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Long-term impacts

- Experience mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), eating disorders, and low self-esteem
- Experience physical health challenges such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease
- Experience substance abuse and addiction challenges
- Be violent or be the victim of violence in their future relationships