

CHILDREN WITNESSING VIOLENCE

Research shows that children exposed to violence in the home are left emotionally scarred, traumatized, and stigmatized. Many exhibit symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.¹ Such symptoms occur in patients as young as 2 and include:

- Sleep disturbances
- Night terrors
- Intrusive memories and flashbacks
- Separation anxiety
- Aggressiveness and hyperactivity
- Emotional detachment²

As violence in the United States has escalated, people have become more aware that children experience and witness violence in the home, school, and community. For example, movies and television shows glamorize violence.³ In addition, thousands of children and adolescents witness intimate partner violence between their parents and other adults.

The rise in violent acts committed by and toward children has created the sense among many children that violence is normal. Evidence shows that violence is a learned behavior. As it is passed from one generation to another, a cycle of violence develops. The statistics on children's exposure to domestic and community violence and its long-term effects are staggering:

- Each year an estimated 3.3 million American children between the ages of 3 and 17 are at risk of exposure to women being battered.⁴
- Between 11 and 20 percent of adults remember seeing violent partner incidents when they were young. An average of nine incidents were recalled by adults who remembered witnessing partner violence as children.⁵
- Witnessing marital aggression between parents is more strongly related to later spousal abuse than is physical abuse as a teenager.⁶ These "co-victim" exposures to violence are directly related to acceptance and use of violence.⁷
- Children exposed to physical violence often have trouble controlling aggression, anger, and tension.⁸ Exposure to community and/or family violence also negatively affects a child's ability to handle states of negative emotional excitement.⁹
- Other detrimental effects of witnessing violence include disruption of social and emotional development and lapses into states of trauma.¹⁰
- Witnessing violence as a child is a risk factor for becoming a child abuser.⁸
- Males who are abused or neglected or who witness violence between their parents in childhood are more likely to abuse intimate partners in adulthood.¹¹

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