

IMPACT OF ABUSER BEHAVIOR ON YOUR PARENTING

Your partner's behavior may be affecting your ability to parent by undermining your authority and damaging the relationship between you and your child. Children learn from the abusive man's behavior that disrespecting you is acceptable. This behavior can destroy any source of strength, pride or self-confidence that you have in your ability to parent. It also ensures that the abuser maintains control of the home and is the primary influence on family members.

- Does your partner overrule you?
- Does your partner make jokes / tease / put you down in front of children?
- Does your partner interfere with your parenting?
- Does your partner reward the children for inappropriate behavior toward you?
- Does your partner forbid you to go to the aid of your child?
- Does your partner punish the children when mad at you?
- Does your partner play favorites between the children?
- Does your partner sabotage your relationship with your children?
- Do your children act as if they don't respect you?
- Do your children ignore limits you attempt to set for them?
- Is your partner rude or domineering to you in front of the children?
- Does your partner overrule or undercut your parenting decisions?
- Does your partner think you are not a very good mother, especially when it comes to big or tense issues?
- To control your children, do you have to threaten to tell their other parent what they did?
- Do your children listen to their father more than they listen to you?

You have the right to fully equal say over how your children are to be raised, including:

- What style of discipline they will experience.
- What their routines will be.
- What freedoms they will be permitted.
- How they are allowed to express their emotions.
- What people they can spend time with, including your friends and relatives.
- What schools and religious institutions they will attend.
- What types of extracurricular activities they can participate in.
- How to approach every other aspect of the complex and highly demanding process of deciding how best to help children flourish.

IMPACT OF ABUSER BEHAVIOR ON CHILDREN

Even if the child has not directly witnessed abuse, almost all children know that the violence is going on in their home and are affected by it in some way.

There are lots of things we can do to help children when they have witnessed domestic violence. It is normal for people who have been in a violent relationship to NOT want to talk to their kids about it. It is difficult to realize that your children are aware of the violence and are impacted by it. It may seem like not talking about it will help them forget it happened. But not talking about the violence often causes kids to be more confused and scared.

How to Talk to Kids about Domestic Violence:

- ♦ Be patient. Don't push it. Try another time if they don't want to talk/listen.
- ♦ Talk about it at a time when you are both relaxed and won't be interrupted.
- ♦ Remember that you are helping them by talking about it; you are not making it worse.
- ♦ Listen. Stay Calm. Pay attention to your non-verbal cues when you talk to your children (how you face and body express your feelings).

When you talk to your kids about the violence you might find out they have been more affected than you were aware of. It is not easy to hear about your children's bad feelings and fears. Most parents feel responsible and that they have not been a good parent. Remember that you are doing the best thing you can do right now to help them recover.

Know that when you talk to your children about the violence you are helping them to:

- ♦ Feel safer.
- ♦ Learn that violence isn't their fault.
- ♦ Learn that violence is not the way to solve problems.
- ♦ Feel cared for and understood.
- ♦ Learn that it is OK to talk about their feelings.

It is a lot scarier for kids when no one ever talks to them about the violence.

Resiliency

Most children are very resilient, meaning they can recover naturally with help from their mother and from other supportive, non-violent people in their lives, rather than professionals.

When to Get Counseling for Your Child

If you notice any of the reactions listed below in your children lasting for an extended period of time without improvement, or if they have extreme changes in behavior, it may be necessary to seek counseling for them:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ♦ Withdrawing | ♦ Running away from home |
| ♦ Bullying, threatening or intimidating others | ♦ Intentionally hurting her/himself |
| ♦ Initiating physical fights | ♦ Having frequent nightmares for a prolonged period |
| ♦ Using a weapon | ♦ Showing a sudden change in behavior/personality |
| ♦ Being physically or emotionally cruel to people | ♦ Changes in eating/sleeping patterns |
| ♦ Being cruel to animals | ♦ Showing lack of interest in friends/school/etc. |
| ♦ Deliberately destroying others' property | ♦ Grades change at school. |

How to Find a Counselor for Your Child:

- ♦ Ask for recommendations or referrals from others that you trust.
- ♦ Ask what licenses the counselor has and what their training and experience is in working with children.
- ♦ Ask what their approach to treatment is and take some time to learn about that approach to decide if you think it would be helpful for your child.
- ♦ A counselor should be an ally with the parent and help strength the child's support, not try to replace you or other supportive adults.
- ♦ A counselor should help families in learning skills and taking actions that create positive change, not blame the child, family, school or other for issues.
- ♦ A counselor should understand and respect your culture, and be willing to build on how your culture can help strengthen your child.
- ♦ Not all counselors are a fit for every person. If the counselor can't seem to build a rapport with your child or your child isn't engaging with the counselor, find another that works.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROFESSIONALS

Psychiatrists: These are doctors who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of mental or psychiatric illnesses. They have medical training and are licensed to prescribe drugs. They are also trained in psychotherapy, or "talk" therapy, which aims to change a person's behaviors or thought patterns.

Psychologists: These are doctoral degree (PhD or PsyD) experts in psychology. They study the human mind and human behavior and are also trained in counseling, psychotherapy, and psychological testing -- which can help uncover emotional problems you may not realize you have.

Cognitive behavioral therapy is the psychologist's main treatment tool -- to help people identify and change inaccurate perceptions that they may have of themselves and the world around them. Psychologists are not licensed to prescribe medications. However, they can refer you to a psychiatrist if necessary.

Social Workers: These are specialists that provide social services in health-related settings that now are governed by managed care organizations. Their goal is to enhance and maintain a person's psychological and social functioning -- they provide empathy and counseling on interpersonal problems. Social workers help people function at their best in their environment, and they help people deal with relationships and solve personal and family problems.

Licensed Professional Counselors. These counselors are required by state licensure laws to have at least a master's degree in counseling and 3,000 hours of post-master's experience. They are either licensed or certified to independently diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders.

HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP IN HEALTHY WAYS

Even though your children may have been affected by domestic violence, they can recover and be emotionally healthy, especially if they receive encouragement and support in the following ways:

1. **Encourage your children:** Notice your children's positive qualities and let them know that you appreciate these.
2. **Set clear limits:** Set limits that are reasonable and appropriate to your children's ages, to help them feel valued and secure.
3. **Set routines and structure:** Children thrive in structured homes, where there is set meal times, play times and bed times. It helps them feel safe and secure.
4. **Listen carefully:** Pay attention to what your children say, and let them know you hear what they are saying.
5. **Be affectionate:** Hug, kiss, pat, and smile at your children. Tell them you care for them.
6. **Allow them to solve problems:** Encourage your children to solve problems and make some decisions for themselves.
7. **Communicate respectfully:** Share your feelings, expectations and needs with your children in a way that is respectful.
8. **Promote independence:** Allow your children to play independently in a safe environment.
9. **Spend time with your kids:** Reading together, talking and listening, or playing together helps children feel cared for.
10. **Arrange for new activities in which your child can succeed:** Set up new activities for your children that they enjoy, like playing on a sports team, or taking music lessons, so that your children learn new skills and gain self-confidence.
11. **Be a positive, non-violent role model for your children:** Maintaining safe, reliable interactions with your children can help them develop self-esteem.
12. **Let your children know they are capable:** Allow your children to have responsibilities and let them know you have confidence in them.
13. **Let your children know they are worthy of love** just for who they are, and not related to their behavior: Tell them you like them, enjoy them, and appreciate them.

Often you may see an increase acting out or misbehavior after you are separated from your partner.

Throwing tantrums or having "fits" are a natural emotional healing process in children. Crying, especially loud sobbing with lots of tears, is a form of release and healing for feelings of grief or fear.

While this may be overwhelming, take pride in the fact that you have created a safe environment for your children to finally have the freedom to express all their emotions, both good and bad.

How to Assist Children in Releasing Painful Emotions

- Offer loving attention and name what the child is feeling.
- Keep child safe – away from hazards. Hold the child if it helps them feel more secure.
- Express love, and let them see you are not afraid.
- Do not permit child to break things, throw things or hit anyone. Provide safe items to hit or kick such a pillow.
- Allow tantrum to go on until it ends by itself.
- Lovingly refuse to give into demands.
- Children may cry after the source of distress has passed because it is only then that they are safe to release the fear.