

Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

Emotional

- feel guilty for the abuse and for not stopping it
- grieve for family and personal losses
- confusion about conflicting feelings towards parents
- fear of abandonment, or expressing emotions, of the unknown, and/or personal injury
- angry about violence and the chaos in their lives
- depressed, feelings of helplessness and powerlessness
- embarrassed by the effects of abuse and dynamics at home

Cognitive

- blame others for their own behavior
- believe it is acceptable to hit people they care for in order to get what they want, to express their anger, to feel powerful or to get others to meet their needs
- have a low self-concept originating from a sense of family powerlessness
- do not ask for what they need, let alone what they want
- do not trust
- believe that to feel angry is bad, because people get hurt
- hold rigid stereotypes about gender roles

Behavioral

- act out or withdraw
- overachiever or underachiever
- refuse to go to school
- caretaking, more concerned for others than self, act as a parent substitute
- aggressive or passive
- very rigid defenses
- excessive attention seeking
- bed wetting and nightmares
- out of control behavior, not able to set own limits or follow directions

Social

- isolation from friends and relatives
- relationships are frequently stormy, start intensely, and end abruptly
- difficulty in trusting, especially adults
- poor anger management and problem-solving skills
- excessive social involvement (to avoid home life)
- may be passive with peers, or bully peers
- engage in exploitive relationships, either as abuser or victim
- play with peers very roughly

Physical

- somatic complaints (headaches, stomach aches)
- nervous, anxious, and short attention span
- tired, lethargic
- frequently ill
- poor personal hygiene
- regression in development tasks (bed wetting, thumb sucking)
- desensitization to pain
- high risk play and activities
- self abuse