


When Children Witness Violence in the Home

Helping Children Cope





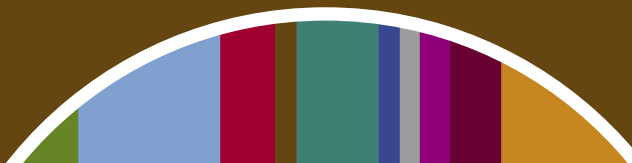
Children can be deeply affected by violence in the community and at home. They see violence on TV and in video games, and hear it in music. Children may also witness fights that involve yelling, screaming, or hitting. Sometimes these fights end with someone getting hurt, badly beaten, stabbed, or even shot. But, witnessing violence at home is especially troubling for children.





Did You Know That:

- ▶ Children see, hear, and remember more than adults think they do. Parents may think that their children are asleep or watching TV, but children often know when their parents are fighting.
- ▶ Children are sensitive to the tone or loudness of a parent's voice. A parent who yells a lot in the home is upsetting to a child.
- ▶ Children react differently at different ages, but all children — even infants and toddlers — can be affected by witnessing violence.





How Children React When They See or Hear Violence

Symptoms vary by age and personality, but these are some of the common reactions children might have:

- ▶ Difficulty with sleeping, poor appetite, stomachaches, headaches, nightmares, and bedwetting
- ▶ Becoming fearful or moody
- ▶ Worrying about the safety of loved ones
- ▶ Trouble with concentration, learning, and behavior at school
- ▶ Trouble making or keeping friends
- ▶ Running away
- ▶ Involvement with drugs and alcohol

Children may react immediately to the violence they witness; however, some will have a delayed response.

There are now effective treatments to help children who have symptoms related to witnessing violence. Your child's physician can help you.

Children learn from what they see. When children grow up seeing others acting violently, they are more likely to use violence.

How You Can Help

TIP It may be hard for children to begin talking about the violence they have witnessed. Help children talk about violence with a trusted adult. When children can share their worries and fears with a parent, relative, teacher, school counselor, faith leader, or family friend, they will feel less frightened and alone.

Start a conversation with:

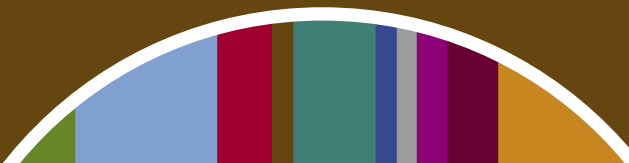
"Did something upsetting happen today? Tell me about it."

"If you want to talk about something, you can always talk to _____."

TIP Sometimes children blame themselves for the violence they see and hear.

Tell the child:

"What happened is not your fault."





Remember

- ▶ Children who witness violence can become frightened. They should have a chance to talk to someone about what they are thinking and feeling.
- ▶ Doctors and other health care professionals can help parents learn how to raise children in a home without violence.
- ▶ The goal is for everyone — children and adults — to live in a world without violence.



For additional information or help when you know someone is being hurt or feels afraid, speak with your doctor or contact:

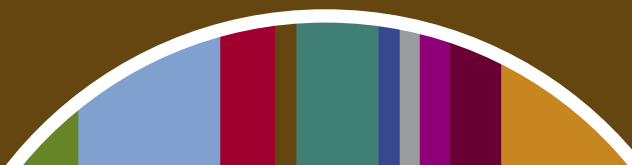
**Massachusetts Domestic Violence Hotline
(SAFELINK): (877) 785-2020**

**Jane Doe Inc. (information other than crisis services, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.):
(617) 248-0922 or www.janedoe.org**

**National Domestic Violence Hotline:
(800) 799-SAFE (7233)**

**Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of
Cruelty to Children (MSPCC): (617) 587-1500
www.mspcc.org**

**Boston Medical Center Child Witness to
Violence Project: (617) 414-4244
www.childwitnessstoviolence.org**



For additional copies:

**Massachusetts Medical Society
Public Health and Education
860 Winter Street
Waltham, MA 02451-1411**

www.massmed.org/violence

(800) 322-2303, x7373

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This tip card is part of a series originated by Robert Sege, MD, PhD, Boston, MA, and developed with the Massachusetts Medical Society's Committee on Violence Intervention and Prevention.

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