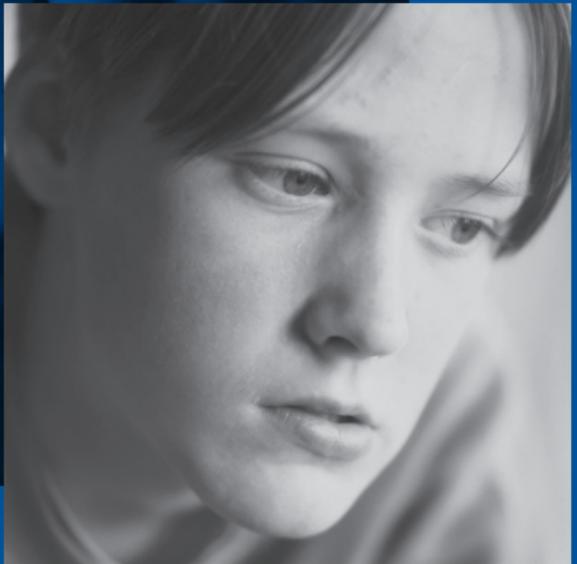




THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

*Where
Does It
Hurt?*



Child Abuse Hurts Us All

Every child has the right to be nurtured and to be safe.



According to: *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile (2009)*, police-reported data shows that close to one-third of physical and sexual offences against children and youth were committed by family members, with parents committing more than half of all family-related physical assaults and sexual offences. The damage can last a lifetime. An abused child is more likely to end up in violent or abusive relationships as an adult, and the destructive cycle continues.

We all need to care about children. Today, we are taking more responsibility for intervening in family violence and preventing child abuse — because it has to stop.

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is the physical, psychological, social, emotional or sexual maltreatment of a child. It harms or endangers the survival, safety, self esteem, growth and/or development of the child. It can involve a single act or a pattern of incidents.

Physical abuse is the deliberate use of force against a child which results, or may result, in bodily harm. It includes behaviours such as shaking, choking, biting, kicking, burning, poisoning, holding a child under water, or any harmful or dangerous use of restraint.

Emotional abuse refers to acts or omissions that harm a child's sense of self in a way that causes, or could cause, behavioural, cognitive and emotional disorders. This includes making verbal threats, put-downs, forcing a child into social isolation, intimidating, exploiting, terrorizing or routinely making unreasonable demands of a child.

Sexual abuse ranges from sexual harassment to sexual activity. It includes attempted or completed sexual relations, touching genitals, exposing adult genitals, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and voyeurism.

Neglect occurs when the child's basic needs are not being met. Physical neglect may involve inadequate food, clothing, shelter, cleanliness, medical care and protection from harm. Emotional neglect occurs when a child's need to feel loved, wanted, safe and worthy is not met.

The Facts about Child Abuse

- **Children rarely mistake it or lie about it.**
- The majority of physical abuse cases involve inappropriate punishment, meaning that the other cases of physical abuse are more severe.



- The most common form of sexual abuse involves touching the child's genitals, but some of the cases involve attempted or completed sexual intercourse.
- In many substantiated abuse cases, the alleged perpetrators are family members or other relatives. Most physical abuse is committed by fathers and mothers, but sexual abuse is usually committed by other relatives or non-relatives.
- Parents who abuse their children often come from harsh backgrounds themselves, including child abuse. They often lack a support system and have little idea of positive parenting. The family often functions poorly in terms of problem-solving, communication and behaviour control.
- Often, where there is intimate partner violence, there is also child abuse.
- Exposure to family violence is the most common form of emotional abuse of children.

Impacts of Family Violence on Children

Family Violence research indicates that even when children are not direct targets of violence in the home, they can be harmed by witnessing its occurrence. Children who live in situations of family violence can suffer immediate and permanent physical harm, even death. They can also experience short and long-term emotional, behavioural and developmental problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

In some cases of physical and sexual abuse, the victims have considerable problems with behaviour, negative peer involvement, depression, anxiety, violence to others, developmental delays, irregular school attendance and inappropriate sexual behaviour.

It is known that witnessing family violence is as harmful as experiencing it directly. Often parents believe that they have shielded their children from intimate partner violence, but research indicates that children see or hear many of the incidents. Children who witness family violence suffer the same consequences as those who are directly abused. In other words, a child who witnesses intimate partner violence is experiencing a form of child abuse.

Signs of Abuse and Family Violence

The effects of child abuse and family violence show up in many ways. These are some of the signs - especially when they appear in clusters or represent a change in behaviour:

- self-blame, feelings of guilt and shame, clinging, extreme shyness, extreme and repetitive nightmares, loneliness, long bouts of sadness, social withdrawal, separation anxiety, fear of strangers, fear of others of same gender as abuser, general fearfulness, anxiety and phobias;
- feelings of being out of control, intrusive thoughts, feelings of stigmatization, insecure attachment to parents and caregivers, loss of faith, truancy, running away, fighting with peers, criminal offending, early use of drugs and alcohol, substance abuse;
- developmental delay, headaches, stomach aches, bed wetting and soiling, eating disorders, self-mutilation or burning, thoughts of suicide, dissociation, inappropriate sexual behaviour; and
- very low self-esteem, difficulty trusting others, difficulty in problem-solving, relationship problems, high levels of anger and aggression, violent when angry, a victim or perpetrator of violence in dating.

Act to Help

It is usually very difficult for children who are abused or neglected to report the problem to anyone. That is why it is important to be aware of the signs of child abuse and know what to do about it. Everyone has a duty to report child abuse, whether a child tells you about it or you have reasonable suspicion. It's the law.

If a child tells you about abuse:

- believe him or her;
- listen openly and calmly;
- reassure the child and be supportive;
- tell the child that what happened is not her or his fault;
- write down what the child tells you, using the child's exact words; and
- contact your local police or child and family service agency.



There are also ways to help abused children heal:

- allow them to break the silence on the violence in their lives;
- increase their ability to protect themselves physically and psychologically;
- strengthen their self-esteem; and
- provide a safe and fun environment where they can have positive experiences.



If you are a parent, family member or caregiver who abuses, you can get help for yourself and for the children. It's never too late to stop family violence. Start today.

Resources

- local police department
- child and family service agencies
- family doctor
- community health centres
- friends and family
- parenting skills workshops
- alcohol and drug abuse programs
- support groups for post-partum depression
- crisis and distress lines

For more information and resources on family violence, please visit:

<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cp-pc/index-eng.htm>.

This brochure can also be ordered at a cost from St. Joseph Corporation. For ordering information please contact them at their toll free number: 1-888-562-5561.

If you're a child who needs help, call the
Kid's Help Line 1-800-668-6868.
It's safe and it's free.

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