

WHAT CAN THE LEGAL SYSTEM DO?

- ◀ Increase and improve affordable legal representation for victims of domestic violence and their children.
- ◀ All legal personnel including lawyers, prosecutors, judges and any additional personnel that come in contact with victims of violence should receive regular training in order to recognize and respond to domestic violence.
- ◀ All legal personnel should be aware of how to make appropriate referrals for shelter, legal and medical assistance, safety, and protection of victims and their children.
- ◀ All protective orders should encompass:

- the safety of the victim and the children.
- the removal of the abuser from the family home.
- child custody with the non-abusive parent.
- the possession of the family home.
- child support.
- SAFE child visitation (this will often be supervised visitation).
- the abuser's access to weapons.
- Full Faith and Credit Laws.

WHAT CAN LAW ENFORCEMENT DO?

- All law enforcement personnel, including any personnel that come in contact with victims of violence, should receive regular training in order to recognize and respond to domestic violence.
- All law enforcement personnel should be aware of how to make appropriate referrals for shelter, legal and medical assistance, safety, and protection of victims and their children.
- Upon securing a domestic dispute, officers should check for children in the home. They should talk with children to determine what happened, and whether they need medical attention.

WHAT CAN THE PUBLIC DO?

- Abuse of another IS your business. Report suspected or witnessed abuse of adults and children. NEVER get directly involved because you could be hurt or killed.
- Volunteer at your local shelter for battered women and their children.
- Tell local, state and federal legislators that you support programs for battered women and laws which can protect women and their children from abuse in their homes.

RESOURCES

Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV)

Toll-free 24-hour hotline.....800-332-7385
Voice and TTY
Administrative office.....317-917-3685
Resource Center.....317-917-3685
www.violenceresource.org

Indiana Family Helpline.....800-433-0746

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.....303-839-1852

www.ncadv.org

National D.V. Hotline.....800-799-7233
TTY.....800-787-3224

Family Violence Prevention

Fund.....415-252-8900
TTY.....800-595-4TTY

National Resource Center.....800-537-2238
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Prevent Child Abuse Indiana

CARE Line.....800-962-2798
www.PCAIN.org



Funded by Family Violence Prevention and Services



The effects of domestic violence on children

Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence
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317-917-3685 or 800-538-3393
317-917-3695 Fax
www.violenceresource.org
icadv@violenceresource.org

Imagine.....you are ten years old. It's supper time and Dad is not home yet. Finally, Mom tells you to eat. She says she's not hungry. So you eat alone, knowing that this might not be a good night. It gets later and later and when Dad finally comes in the door, you know that he is angry. Maybe if he hears how good you were in school he will feel better, but he doesn't want to be bothered with you. He is too busy yelling at Mom about the "slop" she is giving him for supper (the same food you ate a few hours ago). No matter what Mom does, you see Dad getting angrier and angrier. His face changes, his voice is loud and scary, and your fear is almost paralyzing.

Eventually, just like all the times before, things begin to happen. Dad throws a plate of food at Mom, she runs for the kitchen, he follows her, you follow him, crying and trying to get him to stop. The hitting starts, he hits you, and like always, you know in your heart it's only because you got in his way. As the blood runs down Mom's face, you get really scared. You run into the living room where you can get to a phone. Does anyone understand how frightening it is to say to the police, "Please come quickly, I think my Daddy is going to kill my Mom!! Hurry, please!!?"

The police arrive with sirens and flashing lights, and neighbors are all standing at their front doors. Daddy is shouting and cussing. The paramedics are wiping the blood off Mom's face. The police put handcuffs on Daddy. As he is led to the car, he is yelling bad words and saying, "By God, I'll kill you if you do this to me!" Mom just stands there crying.

Finally, everyone goes away. Mom hugs you and says, "Don't worry, everything will be okay", but you know that it won't.

You go to your room, get in bed and turn off the light because "only sissies sleep with the light on". Then the dreams come—dreams of yelling, of hitting, of blood, of dying.

The next day you take a spelling test. You miss eight out of the ten words. The teacher says, "Johnny, it looks like you really aren't trying. Didn't you study last night?" So you think, "Maybe I am dumb, so why even try?" You slide down in your seat, feeling angry and embarrassed because you're so dumb, and everyone knows what happened at your house last night. You know that this will make Dad angrier at Mom because, it's all her fault that you are so stupid - he says so all the time.*

Exposure is Abuse

Between 3.3 and 10 million children will witness domestic violence this year. For the majority of these children, life will never be the same and many will suffer severe consequences.

Physical Danger

Children in violent homes are in grave physical danger. Children are often hurt during an abusive incident, either by getting caught in the crossfire, or by trying to intervene. 62% of sons over the age of 14 are injured in an attempt to protect their mother during an abusive incident. Current statistics also show that children are the actual target of abuse at a rate that is 1500% higher in violent homes than the national average.

Perpetuation of Violence

Violence is modeled from generation to generation. Of children who witnessed their mothers being abused by their partners, 53% acted out with their parents and 60% acted out with siblings. As this method of dealing with conflict is generalized, the children often have to face the consequences of their own behavior in society. These children may be expelled from school, labeled emotionally handicapped, or incarcerated.

* paraphrased from *Why Johnny Can't Learn* by Gail Beaton and Jackie Hobaugh.

Emotional Trauma

Every 9 seconds a woman in the U.S. is beaten by her husband. In families, 87% of these incidents are witnessed by children. Of these children, it is reported that 40% suffer anxiety and 48% suffer depression. 75% of children over age 15 reported two attempts to run away in the previous year. Repeatedly, studies show that children who witness domestic violence exhibit low self-esteem, poor impulse control, sleeping difficulties, and other mood-related problems. They are at high risk for alcohol and drug use, sexual acting out, isolation, loneliness, and suicide.

Academic Delays

Violent homes are often loud and tension filled. The environment makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for children to concentrate on their education. Often their basic needs for safety and shelter are at stake, moving school and education to a much lower priority.

Abusive families move frequently. Some may move to keep their violence a secret; in others, the mother may move to get away from the abuser. However the move takes place, children are relocated from school to school experiencing gaps and lags in their education.

The Cycle

Domestic violence is a problem that affects all members of the family. One of the most important dynamics to be aware of when referring to domestic violence is that it follows a continuous cycle from generation to generation.

"I want to run away and just cry when Mom and Dad fight...When they fight I want to go to another family."

Whitney, age 7

"It changed my whole life...It's like I hate now, but worse."
Julian, age 8

The chances of breaking the cycle are greater when the victims are offered assistance and support which allows:

- Moving to a place of safety that offers protection from the abuse.
- Beginning long-term counseling focused on domestic violence for the mother and her children.
- Initiating and enforcing any legal procedures that structure the abuser's contact with the mother and children.

The legal system has the authority to assist with instituting the above processes as requested by the victim.

Who we are as adults is strongly determined by the environment in which we were raised. A child who lives in a home where there is abuse may very likely believe that this abuse is appropriate behavior. After witnessing the violence, the child learns that violence is an acceptable and normal way to resolve problems. Since families involved in domestic violence are often very isolated, parents are usually the only role models available to the child. The male children learn that it is acceptable to perpetrate the violence. Female children learn that when the male becomes angry or the female does something "wrong", it is acceptable for her to be "punished" by the male. As long as the children continue to witness abuse in their homes, they continue to be abused. It is extremely important that the legal system utilize all available resources to stop the generational cycle of abuse.