

Domestic Violence Hurts Kids Too

Prepared by: Karen Pautz, Executive Director First 5 Siskiyou

A child you know might be exposed to domestic violence and maltreatment. It might be your neighbor, your niece, grandchild, a child in your care, your daughters' class mate, a child at your church or a compliant child from your son's soccer team. Domestic violence affects children of all races, socio economic status and culture. Millions of children are exposed to domestic violence each year, and even those who are not themselves abused may be physically harmed when they try to protect parents or are caught in the crossfire. These children suffer increased depression, post traumatic stress and anxiety. Children who grow up witnessing domestic violence are more likely to become abusers themselves: they learn that violence is an acceptable way to cope with stress or problems or to gain control over another person. They have been found to have higher levels of behavioral and emotional problems than children raised in homes free of violence. Behavioral symptoms they exhibit include inability to concentrate in school, learning disabilities, violence and aggressiveness, and stress-related physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach pains. Children who witness abuse are 50 times more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs, and six times more likely to commit suicide than children in the general population. Children of battered women are up to 15 times more likely than children overall to be physically abused and neglected, and girls with violent fathers are much more likely to be sexually abused. While most children escape without physical injury they may bear emotional scars which in many cases can last a lifetime.

You can help!

- First understand the important role YOU play on the healthy development of children in your care. Nurture every child, especially the "hard to reach" children.
- Learn about attachment problems, bonding, normal development, and abnormal development, the more you learn the more you will be able to develop useful behavioral and social interventions.
- Play, more than any other activity supports healthy development of children.
- Understand and accept that witnessing domestic violence harms children.
- Try to understand children's behavior before setting consequences.
- Link abused parent to services such as Siskiyou County Domestic Violence (842.6629 or 1-877-842-4068) in order to improve her/his capacity to protect the children.
- If you have questions ask for help. Contact Remi Vista Early Childhood Mental Health Project therapist free of charge for resources and services to meet the needs of children in your care. 926-1436.

- Most importantly, children who witness domestic violence need to know they are loved by you unconditionally and are safe in your care.