

## Parent Handout

# ABUSE OR VIOLENCE AT HOME AFFECTS YOUR CHILDREN



When there is name-calling, yelling, threats, hitting or other abuse in the home, it affects the children. This is true even if your children are asleep, not in the room when the fighting or abuse happens, or are too young to talk. Even very young children know when something is wrong at home. The longer your children live in this situation, the harder it may be for them, especially if they are very young.

Each child in the family may react differently, depending on their age and what is happening at home. They may hide their feelings, or they may act up.

The following are some of the changes you might see in your children:

- Feeling sad, afraid, confused, angry, guilty, numb or ashamed
- Withdrawing from friends and activities
- Acting younger, such as clinging, bed-wetting, or thumb-sucking
- Physical symptoms like nausea, stomachaches, headaches, or tiredness
- Sleeping problems, nightmares, or being afraid of the dark
- Changes in appetite, or gaining or losing weight
- Trying to act like a perfect child, or trying to take care of everyone
- A drop in school grades, or difficulty concentrating
- Getting into trouble with other children or teachers at school – fighting, lying, stealing
- Using alcohol or drugs, taking dangerous risks, or getting into trouble with the law

Too many children who grow up in a home with violence grow up to hurt their own partners or children, and pass on violence from one generation to the next.

## YOU CAN MAKE A BETTER FUTURE

We know that asking for help is difficult, but it is important for you and for your children that you get support. We want to help you live a safe life with healthy relationships. You and your children deserve this. We all do.

Even if you feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or don't know what to say, talking is the first step to healing. While children can bounce back, they often need help.

### THINGS PARENTS CAN SAY TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN

- “What is happening is not your fault. This is between the grown-ups. It’s not your job to fix it.”
- “You can talk to me any time or ask me any questions about what is going on at home. Can we talk about what happened? How did you feel?”
- “Let’s figure out what we can do to keep you safe when things get scary for you.”
- “I am sorry that you saw/heard that. It is okay to feel upset/sad/angry when you think about what happened. It must be very hard for you to see what happened.”
- “What would make you feel better? What can we do together to feel better?”
- “What is going on at home is not okay. You are right to feel that this should not be happening. “ (Do not make angry comments.)
- “Other children and families have had the same things happen. We are not alone. There are people who can help us.” (Explain who might help.)

## THINGS PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN

- Let children know you are getting help to stop the yelling, put-downs and fighting
- Listen and hear your child's story – let them know it is okay for them to talk about what happened - don't guess and think you know what your child understands or feels
- Be extra patient, and answer your children's questions calmly
- Ask what they are most afraid of
- Make a plan to help each child feel safe
- For younger children, read storybooks about "feelings", write down their worries and talk about them, or have them draw pictures about how they feel
- Suggest that older children write their thoughts and feelings in a journal
- Provide or encourage safe and fun activities inside and outside of the home
- Keep a regular, consistent schedule as much as possible
- Have children spend more time with other trusted adults
- Show healthy ways to deal with anger and being upset, such as counting to 10 or doing something physical like walking or marching
- Try not to make promises that you can't keep
- When a change is going to happen, let children know ahead of time
- Consider counseling for your children



This information sheet is provided by the Santa Clara County Domestic Violence Council. (2012)  
Free download can be found at <http://dvc.sccgov.org>.

## SOME AVAILABLE RESOURCES FOR:

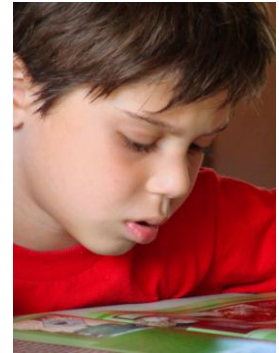
### CHILDREN & TEENS

#### Hotlines

- Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline  
1-800-422-4453
- National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline  
1-866-331-9474 [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)

#### Books

- *A Terrible Thing Happened* (age 4-8)  
by Margaret Holmes  
ISBN 1557987017
- *Something is Wrong at My House* (age 3-12)  
by Diane Davis  
ISBN 0943990106
- *A Family that Fights* (age 4-12) by Sharon Bernstein  
ISBN 0807522481



### PARENTS

#### Hotlines

- Parental Stress Hotline  
1-855-278-4204
- National Domestic Violence (DV) Hotline (for men and women)  
1-800-799-7233 [www.ndvh.org](http://www.ndvh.org)
- Santa Clara County DV hotlines and community shelters <http://dvc.sccgov.org>

#### Books, Pamphlets and Websites

- *Healing the Invisible Wounds: Children's Exposure to Violence – A Guide for Families* free download at <http://safestartcenter.org/pdf/caregiver.pdf>
- *Little Eyes, Little Ears: How Violence Against a Mother Shapes Children as they Grow* free download at [http://www.lfcc.on.ca/little\\_eyes\\_little\\_ears.pdf](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/little_eyes_little_ears.pdf)
- *When Dad Hurts Mom: Helping Your Children Heal the Wounds of Witnessing Abuse* by Lundy Bancroft ISBN 0425200310
- Men Stopping Violence  
<http://www.menstoppingviolence.org>

\* The content of this information sheet is based on the information that was available at the time the sheet was prepared, and was adapted with permission from Kaiser Permanente and other materials. Although we have attempted to provide accurate and useful information, please consult a professional counselor or adviser if you need counseling for yourself or your children, or a lawyer if you need legal advice.