

# Early Childhood Exposure To Domestic Violence: You Can Help



This info sheet provides highlights from the "Early Childhood Exposure to Domestic Violence: You Can Help" Toolkit. Page numbers of the Toolkit are included for more details.

## Did you know?

**1 in 10 Canadians have witnessed domestic violence in their families.**



is emotionally harmed, or likely to be physically harmed by living in a home with domestic violence.

You do not need to have all the details to make a report, or any proof. Your role is to report your concern, including anything the child may have said or signs you have noticed.

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE? (Page 6)

Domestic violence is not just about physical abuse. It includes any form of abuse within a relationship - sexual, emotional, spiritual, financial and psychological, including threats. Domestic violence can happen even after a relationship is over. Domestic violence is different from other forms of violence because it is usually ongoing and the offender uses abuse to control and intimidate the victim.

## HOW DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IMPACT CHILDREN? (Page 7-8)

Between the ages of 0-5 very important brain development is occurring for children. While not all children are affected in the same way, living in a home where there is domestic violence can negatively affect all aspects of a child's development - physical, emotional, mental, behavioural and social. Some common problems for children exposed to domestic violence are anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder-like behaviours, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

## WHY YOU PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 5

You are in a position to make a difference. Children who have supportive adults and environments in their lives can move past the trauma of domestic violence and succeed.

## Did you know?

**30-40% of children who witness domestic violence also experience physical abuse.**

## DUTY TO REPORT (page 9-11)

According to the law in BC, a duty to report means you personally have a legal obligation to let child welfare workers from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) or a Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) know if you have reason to believe a child of any age (up to age 19) has been or is likely to be abused or neglected, or

To make a report call:

**MCFD Centralized Screening at 1-800-663-9122 ANYTIME** day or night. If you feel a child is in immediate danger, call **9-1-1 or your local police.**



## WARNING SIGNS THAT A CHILD MAY BE EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (Page 12-13)

### TODDLER

- May copy violence by hitting, biting, hurting animals, screaming, yelling or breaking toys
- May react to the tension in the home by whining, clinging, crying, having eating or sleeping problems or withdrawing
- May comfort themselves by excessive rocking, sucking their thumbs or touching themselves
- May hurt themselves or someone else



### PRE-SCHOOLER

- May be excessively obedient and pleasing
- May copy abuse by hitting others, being cruel to animals, destroying toys or property, fighting with others, being rebellious, swearing, name calling and yelling
- May be easily startled and have extreme separation anxiety. If siblings are in child care together, they may want to be with each other all of the time
- May lose skills they have already learned like naming colours, toilet training or eating with their fingers
- May complain of headaches, stomach aches and have difficulty sleeping



## THREE IMPORTANT THINGS FOR CHILDREN TO KNOW

- 1. It is not your fault.**
- 2. Never try to get in the middle or stop a fight— your only job is to stay safe.**
- 3. You are not alone.**

## HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (Page 13)

Below are some ideas for how you can support a child who has been exposed to domestic violence.

BEHAVIOUR	TIPS
<b>SEVERE SEPARATION ANXIETY AT DROP OFF</b>	Plan for future separation anxiety by making a plan or routine with the child (i.e. arrive, hang up coat, go to classroom, find teacher, give parent hugs, kisses, wave goodbye and reassure child that mommy or daddy will come back later)
<b>WANDERING AND AIMLESS BEHAVIOUR</b>	Help the child find an activity to master because this helps give the child a sense of control over his/her environment
<b>RE-OCCURRING VIOLENT PLAY THEMES</b>	Do not judge or try to shut down the child. Listen, watch and comment on how the child might feel. In some situations you will have to intervene to ensure safety of child and others
<b>NEEDING TO SEE SIBLINGS</b>	Set times for siblings to be together (i.e. after nap) and follow through on this as it builds trust with the child
<b>INATTENTION</b>	Keep activities short Sit the child close to an adult Praise all attempts to participate Follow the lead of the child (i.e. discuss topics of interest to the child)
<b>ANXIOUS BEHAVIOUR DURING NAP TIME</b> <i>(i.e. fidgeting, excess movement)</i>	Have child join naptime after most of the others are asleep Do not demand sleep but use this time as a chance to nurture and reassure the child that they are loved, valued and safe Encourage the use of transition objects (i.e. blankets, stuffed toys)
<b>A LACK OF FOCUS DURING CHANGES IN ACTIVITIES</b> <i>(i.e. running around, poking others, increased movement)</i>	Remind children about upcoming changes in activities both individually as well as in groups Make a chart of pictures outlining the daily schedule and refer to it often Draw a clock and have the child tell you when it is time to let the group know about the new activity

### Did you know?

Children **under the age of five** are more likely to live in a home where domestic violence occurs.

### SUPPORTING A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: WHY IT MATTERS FOR CHILDREN

(Page 16-21)

One of the ways to keep a child safe is by supporting their victimized parent. Remember, there are many reasons that domestic violence is kept a secret. This is why it is important that you take time to build a relationship with the victimized parent. Stay open-minded and compassionate as you provide help.

#### CAUTION!

Before getting involved, ask yourself "is it safe for everyone involved?" If anyone is in immediate danger, call the police. **Do not attempt to intervene or speak to the offender about the violence.** Not only does this put you in danger, but the offender may become more violent with the victim or the child later.



### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (Page 16-21)

#### CALL FOR HELP

If you or the victim believe they or the children are in **immediate** danger there must be a plan. This plan usually includes:

- Calling the police
- Going to a transition house or other safe housing
- Calling MCFD or a DAA

#### SAFETY PLANNING

A safety plan for a victim includes a plan of what they can do to help keep themselves and their children safe. Find out what steps a victim may have already taken to protect themselves and support them to build on these steps.

#### RESOURCES & REFERRALS

Be familiar with resources or services in your community and help a victim contact them if needed. Some common ones include: Community-based and Police-based Victim Services, Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs, Children Who Witness Abuse Programs, Aboriginal Friendship Centres, Women's Centres, Multicultural Centres, Settlement Services, Transition and Safe Houses and MCFD or DAAs.

### SUGGESTED PROVINCIAL RESOURCES TO GET YOU STARTED:

VictimLinkBC: [www.victimlinkbc.ca](http://www.victimlinkbc.ca) or 1-800-563-0808

The BC Housing Transition Houses and Safe Homes List:

[www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/women-fleeing-violence/transition-houses-safe-homes](http://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/women-fleeing-violence/transition-houses-safe-homes)

The government's #SaySomething Campaign website: [www.saysomething.bc.ca](http://www.saysomething.bc.ca)

**Thank you for the work you do every day to support children and their families!**

