



# Kinship Link

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## April is Child Abuse Prevention Month Children Are At Risk

### Pro Kinship for Kids

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Violence at home means children are at risk. Over three million children a year are in danger of serious emotional and physical injury. Children may be physically harmed even if they are not the targets of abuse. In fits of rage, many abusers throw objects and children “accidentally” get hit. Abusers may turn their anger on children as violence escalates. Children from violent homes are particularly vulnerable to being abused themselves. Abusers assault children in nearly 50 percent of women-battering incidents. Children also may be assaulted by the battered women. These families tend to have a variety of problems: economic, emotional, and social. Because these problems and the violence dominate much of the parents’ attention, children may experience neglect and physical or emotional abuse. Living in a violent home has high psychological costs. Violence brings many stresses: emotional pain, danger, the possibility of a parent’s death or personal injury, the trauma of helplessness, a battered self-esteem, and the

potential disintegration of the family. All these factors work together to make violence in the home a tremendously stressful situation for the child. This stress may interfere with the child’s normal emotional, social, and psychological development.

You can make a difference. Children may have a violent home life and need your help to find relief and hope.

#### Academics

Some students show difficulty in school. They feel school does not offer them hope for changing their circumstances. They want a solution to their problems at home - now! Their difficulties may include:

- Periodic absences - children may “nurse” mom’s injuries, be injured themselves, or be involved in substance abuse
- Chronic truancy
- Poor performance - the home environment is not conducive to studying
- Difficulty relating to school authority figures
- Trouble concentrating
- Distractibility

• Frustration  
Other students welcome school as a distraction from their home life. They plan to finish school and perhaps seek further education. Some see this as a “way out”, though not immediate, They:

- Do well in school
- Focus well on academic tasks
- Appear to be model students, though they may show other signs of a violent home

#### Social

Most children from violent homes find relationships difficult. Their social difficulties may include:

- Clinging behavior
- Verbal put-downs
- Inappropriate adult-likeness - they become parents to their needy parents
- Distrust of adults - they do not trust parents and project that distrust onto other adults
- Less sensitivity of others
- Passive or aggressive responses to conflict
- Difficulty solving problems when their first solution is blocked; may have no other ideas
- Fewer constructive solutions to problems

## Children Are At Risk Continued

Adolescents are especially anxious about peers. They fear others will uncover their secret and ostracize or ridicule them. These adolescents may:

- Rarely or never conduct any social activity at home
- Say “I’ll meet you there” - they don’t want anyone to come near their homes
- Isolate themselves from peers

### Emotional

Violence at home always has emotional consequences, although they may not be readily apparent:

- Unhappiness at school
- Crying or reluctance when it is time to go home
- Guilt
- Shame
- Fear - some may be startled by unexpected noises or arguments at school
- Hostility
- Ambiguity - they feel both love and hate for their parents and sometimes others
- Inability to distinguish between the person and the action - they cannot say “I hate it when Dad gets drunk, but I still love him”, instead they say “I hate him”
- Expressing anger through “character assassination” - swearing, name calling, put-downs, or criticisms
- Stress from uncertainties at home,

from relocations (leaving home), or financial problems

- Pain, grief, or hurt about their family

### Other

Children’s pain often finds expressions in behaviors. Behaviors may be either exaggerated internal or outward expressions. Although a behavior may alienate the child, it is still a plea for help.

- Lots of physical complaints - these are “real” illnesses and hurts that may be the result of injury or stress; being ill also may be the child’s only “safe” way to seek attention and nurturing
- Listlessness - they may have been kept up all night by fighting
- Marks and bruises - injuries hidden by clothing may cause the child to move stiffly or seem in pain
- Disheveled clothes
- Acting out
- Running away from home
- Nightmares while living at home
- Bed-wetting
- Chronic insomnia
- Substance abuse - many begin with alcohol at an early age to numb the pain
- Prostitution or promiscuity
- Open hostility toward teachers
- Rowdiness - especially boys
- Suicide attempts

### What you can do to help is any or all of the following:

- Listen to the child. Ask “Are things difficult at home?” Make no judgements about the family; just listen. Take the child seriously. Reassure the child that he or she is not at fault. This, in itself, offers a lot of relief.
- Never offer a quick fix.
- Never agree to keep it a secret.
- Involve the appropriate school staff: counselors, social worker, etc.
- Consult with the local domestic violence program. They may have ideas to help the victimized spouse, which also benefits the child.
- Consult local agencies like Child Protective Services.
- Report any incidents of violence that you see or hear to the police immediately. Often this is the only intervention that makes a difference for the family. It forces the abuser to be held accountable for his violence.
- Be a friend to the child. Find genuine abilities and characteristics to praise. Be generous with praise and affection.
- Encourage the child to find physical outlets, like running, to vent stored up anger. Creative activities may help, too.

## Doing All You Can For Kids

Did you know that there are things you can do to help prevent the occurrence of child neglect and abuse from happening in the first place? Knowing what can help is doing all you can for kids.

Here are some things to know:

1. **Be a nurturing adult.** Children need to know that they are special, loved, and capable of following their dreams.

2. **Learn about how children grow and mature.** Learn about children’s social and emotional development. A child’s ability to interact positively with others and communicate his or her emotions effectively helps adults to be more responsive to needs.
3. **Help yourself.** When the big and little problems of your everyday life pile up to the point you feel overwhelmed and out of control, take

a time out. Take a deep breath. Turn on some music. Know who to call for support. Parental resilience is what needs to develop. It is a parent’s ability to bounce back from the stress. Recognizing the signs of stress in your own life and enhancing your problem-solving skills can help all of us continue to have courage during and after a crisis. It is helping - ourselves.