

Domestic Abuse and Children

Some of the signs that children may be affected by domestic abuse:

- Becoming withdrawn.
- Sleep problems, including nightmares.
- Having difficulties with their friends.
- Emotional numbing.
- Having low mood.
- Having difficulty in managing angry feelings.
- Having physical symptoms, for example, tummy aches or headaches.
- Act younger than their age.
- Have low self-esteem.
- Have difficulty focusing in school or during activities.
- Bedwetting/ soiling.
- Becoming overly anxious and overly vigilant.
- Engaging in risky behaviors, truanting, substance misuse etc.

Some of the common feelings that children may experience:

- Guilt/ responsibility- They may feel that the domestic abuse is their fault and that it is their responsibility to manage it.
- Anger-They may feel feelings of anger, perhaps towards the abusing parent/ care or towards the situation in general.
- Numbness-They may feel disconnected from their feelings.
- Confusion- they may experience a number of different feelings and this may not make sense to them.
- Anxiety-They may be worried about what is going on and what is going to happen next.
- Sadness- loss and grief.
- Loneliness- Feeling isolated, feeling like they are the only ones going through this experience.

The hand model of the brain- A useful way to talk to teenagers about their feelings:

Jeannette Yoffe shows how to explain the hand model of the brain in this following you tube video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_dxnYhdyuY

Speaking to children about domestic abuse:

Helpful ways to talk about the domestic abuse:

“What happened is not okay”

“It’s not your fault”

“I can see that what’s happened has been “frightening/confusing for you. That’s ok for you to have these feelings, we can talk about them“

“I will listen to you”

“You can tell me how you feel; your feelings are really important “

“I’m sorry you had to see/hear it”

“I will help you to stay safe”

“There is nothing you could have done to prevent/change it “

“We can talk about what to do to keep you safe if it happens again. (For example, staying in your room, going to neighbours, etc.)”

Speaking about an abusive partner/ ex-partner/ adult.

It can be difficult to speak about the abusive partner/ ex-partner/adult without expressing your feelings about them. As much as possible, try to remain calm and objective whilst talking about them. Challenge the behaviour not the person.

Understand that the child may still love the abusive parent and may be confused by feeling this way. This could be hard for you too! But it will really help your child if she/he is able to express these feelings.

- Be patient.
- Take your time.
- Sometimes having an activity like playdoh, Lego, art etc. can be helpful as it can take the pressure off having to talk face to face.
- Be kind to yourself, it may be hard for you to talk about the domestic abuse and it's likely to be hard for your children as well. Once the conversation is started it could help to make things easier.
- Try practicing what you are going to say with a friend. Or try writing it down first to get a feel for how you might like to word what you are saying.

The Children's Toolbox

Inform: Share with them in an age appropriate way, the main points of what has happened/ is happening. Be careful not to overwhelm them with too much information and to remain factual. Reassure them that what is happening is not their fault.

Listen: Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Acknowledge how they are feeling without trying to solve the problem.

Write: Some children find it easier to write their feelings down. Writing in journals, writing letters, writing stories or writing worries on post it notes are all helpful ways for children to express feelings.

Create: Some may prefer to express how they feel through drawings/ painting / playdoh and clay modelling/ collage.

Mindfulness and helpful activities:

Use bubbles as a fun way to help children slow their breath down and to help them to calm.

Create a 'breathing star' – Encourage the child to make or draw a star. Place their finger on the outline and breathe in and out slowly as they trace each line. This breathing exercise can be done with other shapes as well, such as triangles or squares.

Messy play- For example, making slime, playing with Playdoh, is a fun sensory activity that can help children to calm and express themselves.

The 'worry jar'- This can be drawn or can be an actual jar or container that a child can write their worries down or write on to paper and place in the jar.

The 'helping hand'- Get the child to draw around their hand and label or draw on each finger someone that can help them or that they can talk to when they are worried. They can also write down activities or strategies that they can do to help them when they are having difficult feelings.

Sensory Taste exercise:

- Start by holding your coffee bean/ fruit piece and rolling it in your hand, noticing how it feels.
- Hold it close to your nose and take a sniff. Think about what it smells like.
- Pay attention to what it looks like and what it feels like.
- Taste the coffee bean/ fruit, noting the flavour, the texture, the juiciness, etc.

Sensory Focusing exercise

- Holding a small object such as a stone, a piece of jewellery, a pen etc, start to slow down your breathing.
- Focus on the object and notice the colour of it.
- Then notice how the light bounces off it.
- How does it feel in your hands?
- What temperature is it does it feel warm or cold??
- What is the weight?
- Is there anything else that you notice about it?

Self-Care

It is important to look after yourself so that you are able to support you child.

Think about how you are able to meet your own needs:

- Practical
- Emotional
- Calming

Some ideas around self-Care:

- Taking a walk
- Going for a coffee
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Listening to music
- Breathing exercises.

Specialist Support

Childline: 0800 1111 , www.childline.org.uk

A free helpline for children to talk about their worries and ask for help.

The website contains information on lots of topics, moderated chatrooms to talk to other children and access to childline counsellors via email.

NSPCC Helpline : 0808 800 5000

Email help@nspcc.org.uk

Online www.nspcc.org.uk/helpline

The NSPCC helpline is a free helpline to report worries and concerns for children's wellbeing and safety.

The Helpline operates Monday to Friday 8am – 10pm and 9am – 6pm at the weekends. The Helpline can be contacted by email or online reporting form 24/7.

The hideout: www.thehideout.org.uk

A space for children and young people created by Women's Aid to help them understand domestic abuse and how to take positive action if they are affected.

Women's Aid: www.womensaid.co.uk

Advice, information and support for women experiencing domestic abuse, including resources for children and young people.

Kooth- <https://www.kooth.com/> An online mental health support service with forums, journal tool, advice and information for young people.

Online community for single parents <https://frolo.com/>

Support around eating disorders <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>

Support around Domestic abuse:

- National Domestic Violence Helpline
 - information and advice
 - 0808 2000 247
 - www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/
- Rights of Women
 - free legal advice
 - 020 7251 6577
 - www.rightsofwomen.org.uk
- London LGBT Abuse Partnership
 - advice and therapeutic services
 - 020 7704 2040
 - www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse
- Shelter

- advice for people with housing needs
- 0808 800 4444
- www.shelter.org.uk
- Samaritans
 - 24/7 emotional support
 - 116 123
 - www.samaritans.org
 - jo@samaritans.org
- Victim Support Helpline
 - emotional support for those affected by crime
 - 0808 1689 111
 - www.victimsupport.org.uk
- Support Line
 - support for adults, young adults and children
 - 01708 765 200
 - www.supportline.org.uk
- Men's Advice Line
 - helpline for men affected by domestic abuse
 - 0808 801 0327
 - www.mensadvice.org.uk
- Respect
 - help for abusers
 - 0808 802 4040
 - www.respect.org.uk

If you need help:

- For queries regarding counselling call the Woman's Trust on 020 7034 0303
- If you are in immediate danger call 999
- For 24/7 advice on domestic abuse call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247

References:

www.childline.org

<https://www.nicabm.com/trauma-how-to-help-your-clients-understand-their-window-of-tolerance/>

NSPCC - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/domestic-abuse/>

<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-for-kids/>

[Women's Aid – Online Safety](#)

[Women's Media Centre](#)

Talking to children about domestic violence and abuse – A guide for parents and practitioners. – North East Hampshire Domestic violence forum, 2012