

Walking Kids Through Aftermath of Domestic Violence

WEDNESDAY, Oct. 20 (HealthDayNews) -- A technique called emotion coaching can help parents help children surmount the effects of family violence, says a University of Washington study.

It found that when mothers in families where there is domestic violence use emotion coaching, their children are less aggressive, withdrawn and depressed. The role of fathers as emotion coaches was less clear. The study included 130 families. Forty-eight of the families reported low levels of domestic violence -- pushing, shoving or grabbing a spouse or partner -- during the previous year.

None of the families reported more severe forms of domestic violence, such as punching, kicking, biting, threatening, or use of a weapon.

"We know children experience high levels of stress when exposed to domestic violence. So this sets up a perfect place to intervene and help children. If we can develop an intervention for battered women and give them tools to coach their children it could help youngsters to be less depressed, less anxious and less withdrawn," study author Lynn Fansilber Katz, a research associate professor of psychology, said in a prepared statement.

To be successful emotion coaches, parents need to be aware of their own feelings and their children's emotions, Katz said. Parental emotion coaching can:

- Help children recognize their own emotions.
- Provide children with the words to express their feelings and to discuss their emotions with other people.
- Help children learn how to calm themselves when they're upset.
- Guide children in problem-solving so they can develop their own answers.

The intimacy of parental emotion coaching can also help create a strong parent-child relationship that makes children feel comfortable about discussing their fears and worries with their parents.

The study will appear in an upcoming issue of the *Journal of Family Psychology*.

More information

The American Bar Association has more about the [impact of domestic violence on children](#).

Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

For children, the impact of witnessing domestic violence can be devastating. Children may witness acts of domestic violence by being present in the room during the incident of abuse, by hearing the violence from another room, or by seeing their mother's bruises, black eyes, or broken limbs. Some children are traumatized and need intensive therapeutic interventions after witnessing the abuse, while others may require only removal from the situation and support. Clearly, the impact of living in homes where domestic violence is present is detrimental to the emotional, developmental and physical well-being of those children. Studies reflect that at least 3.3 million children are exposed to domestic violence each year.

Children may be caught in harm's way and inadvertently injured during a violent episode. One study found that males 15 years of age and older often attempt to intervene in the violence perpetrated against their mothers. The children may lie terrified in their beds as the violence rages outside their bedroom doors or cower within the safety of a closet or other hiding place. In the worst case scenario, children may suffer serious injury or be killed in the batterer's continuing endeavor to completely control his victim.

Many children exhibit signs of post traumatic stress disorder after witnessing domestic violence. Symptoms may include inability to sleep throughout the night, bedwetting, anger acted out through temper tantrums or directed inward and manifested by withdrawal or disassociation. As children grow older, they may experience feelings of guilt for not protecting their mothers and may turn to drugs or alcohol to numb these feelings. School-aged children tend to have poor academic performance, are absent frequently and may either have behavioral problems or withdraw and disassociate.

Studies have shown that living with domestic violence increases children's risk of encountering the juvenile justice system. One Massachusetts study found that children who grew up in violent homes had a six times higher likelihood of attempting suicide, a twenty-four percent greater chance of committing sexual assault crimes, a seventy-four percent increased incidence of committing crimes against a person, and a fifty percent increased chance of abusing alcohol or drugs.

Children who grow up in homes where domestic violence occurs are also more likely to abuse others or become victims of abuse as adolescents or adults. At a very early age, male children who have witnessed their fathers' abusive behavior may begin behaving similarly toward their mothers and female siblings. By age five or six, some children are disrespectful of the victim for her perceived weakness and begin identifying with the batterer. Female children learn early on that their mothers are subjugated through the abusiveness of their partners. Unfortunately, those perceptions are normalized and children actually begin to believe that their experiences are no different from the experiences of their friends or class-mates.

Children of domestic violence victims suffer in more direct ways as well. Studies have found, for example, that men who batter their partners are likely to also abuse their children.

**For help call the National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-799-SAFE 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)**



Contact information:

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