

## AN OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN WHO WITNESS DOMESTIC ABUSE

Children often appear:

- Sad, fearful, depressed and/or anxious
- Aggressively defiant or passively complaint
- To have limited tolerance for frustration and stress
- To become isolated and withdrawn
- To be at risk for drug and alcohol abuse, sexual acting out, and running away
- To have poor impulse control
- To feel powerless
- To have low self-esteem
- To take on parental roles

Domestic abuse may be kept from relatives, neighbors, clergy, and others, but the children in the household know what is happening. In one home, there may not be any physical violence against a child whose adult caretakers have an abusive relationship, while in another home there may be physical abuse of the child as well. Either way, a child who lives in a house where domestic abuse occurs is also a victim of domestic violence.

Younger children with limited verbal skills are more likely to develop physical complaints and may regress to earlier developmental behavior. In adolescence, acting out behaviors and delinquent acts are more likely, and some cope by running away from home. Some behaviors that might be seen in children coming from violent homes include:

- Physical complaints- headaches, stomach aches, bedwetting, ulcers
- Eating problems- increased or decreased appetite
- Trouble sleeping- tired all the time
- Hair pulling, nail biting
- Physical injuries
- School phobias, truancy

- Impaired concentration
- Temper tantrums
- Nightmares
- Fear of men and/or their voices
- Fear of making mistakes
- Disruptive behavior- stealing, aggression (especially in boys)
- Passivity, clinging, anxiety (especially in girls)
- Withdrawal, isolation, loneliness
- Role reversal- child takes on parent roles, protector and caretaker
- Poor self-image
- Depression
- Suicidal ideation and/or suicide attempts
- Drug or alcohol abuse