

The **Youngest** Survivors

Supporting Child & Youth Witnesses of Domestic Violence

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Topics to Cover:

- Understanding children's **experiences** and **effects** of domestic violence
- Developing a child-centered **safety plan**
- Discussing **core concepts** of working with child witnesses

Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV)

GCADV is a federally recognized domestic violence coalition, representing over 53 domestic violence organizations and programs across the state. GCADV provides free training, technical assistance, statewide outreach, public policy and advocacy.



Please **take care** of yourself during
this training.



Understanding the Experiences of Children

How are children experiencing
domestic violence?

How do children **experience** domestic violence?

Witness

Visually seeing violence happening

Hearing violence in the other room

Seeing the aftermath of the violence

Sources: National Child Traumatic Stress Network & Michelle White, Child & Youth Project Manager with GCADV

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How do children **experience** domestic violence?

Intervene

Getting in-between the abusive caregiver and non-abusive caregiver during abusive incident

Protect

Intervening to minimize harm to non-abusive caregiver

Join

Intervening to participate in violence against non-abusive caregiver

Sources: National Child Traumatic Stress Network & Michelle White, Child & Youth Project Manager with GCADV

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How do children **experience** domestic violence?

Confidant

The offending and/or the non-offending caregiver discusses adult-content and abuse with child, like an adult friend

Caretaker

Takes on adult-responsibilities before, during or following an abusive incident

How do children **experience** domestic violence?

Distract

Attempts to call attention to self rather than non-offending caregiver to distract from abuse

Hide

Remains out of sight during abusive incident

Escape

Exits abusive space

CORE CONCEPT

What are the **long term effects** of children being exposed to domestic violence?

- According to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) survey, children who have been exposed to domestic violence and other ACES have a **higher risk** of experiencing physical and mental health risks as adults.
- **Risks include:** medical issues, suicide ideation and attempts, anti-social behavior, experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence.
- A great determinant of child witnesses becoming resilient to the effects of domestic violence is their relationship with a safe, supportive adult. This adult is usually their **non-abusive parent**.

During Pregnancy

Typically Developing

- The non-abusive caregiver is receiving support from loved ones
- Experiencing low stress
- Proper health care and treatment
- Access to regular medical care

Exposure to DV

- Poor pre-natal care
- Inadequate nutrition
- Emotional distress
- Increased risk of physical violence
- Increased hormone Cortisol
→ increased stress

Sources:

Futures Without Violence, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Mary Reynolds, Director with Casa Central & Michelle White, Child & Youth Project Manager with GCADV

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Infancy to Toddlerhood

Birth to 3 Years Olds



Typically Developing

- Feeling secure and safely attached with caregiver
- Eager to explore their surrounding
- Learning social skills & building autonomy
- Beginning to recognize faces & emotional cues

Exposed to DV

- Interruption in learning language
- Disinterest in being curious and exploring
- Confused with who to go to for protection
- Intense separation anxiety, easily startled or lack of responsiveness

Sources:

Futures Without Violence, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Mary Reynolds, Director with Casa Central & Michelle White, Child & Youth Project Manager with GCADV

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Preschoolers

3 to 5 Years Olds



Typically Developing

- Learning and using motor skills
- Figuring out right from wrong
- “Copying” adults and role playing
- Asking “Why?”

Exposed to DV

- Re-experiencing or re-enacting play of the event(s)
- Regressing skills
- Trouble concentrating
- Becoming increasingly aggressive and/or withdrawing

Sources:

Futures Without Violence, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Mary Reynolds, Director with Casa Central & Michelle White, Child & Youth Project Manager with GCADV

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Young children are particularly vulnerable ...

- **Unable** to anticipate or prepare for danger
- Less able to **distinguish** a real from a perceived threat
- Have no means of **preventing trauma** from occurring
- Have developed **fewer** coping skills
- Responses are **highly dependent** on how adults around them react

Sources:

Futures Without Violence, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Mary Reynolds, Director with Casa Central & Michelle White, Child & Youth Project Manager with GCADV

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School-Age

6 to 11 Years Old



Typically Developing

- Building capacity to develop a skill
- Beginning to compare self to peers
- Developing self-esteem
- Learning boundaries

Exposure to DV

- Difficulty with concentration and task completion in school
- Acting younger or older than chronological age
- Increased attention-seeking behaviors

Sources:

Futures Without Violence, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Mary Reynolds, Director with Casa Central & Michelle White, Child & Youth Project Manager with GCADV

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Youth

12 to 18 Years Old

Typically Developing

- Discovering their identity
- Coping with puberty and transition into adulthood
- Attempting to negotiate “fitting in” with peers
- Peer relationships are primary relationships
- Anticipating and considering consequences of behavior

Exposure to DV

- Difficulty in school
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Social isolation
- Difficulty imaging or planning for the future
- Anti-social behavior

Sources:

Futures Without Violence, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Mary Reynolds, Director with Casa Central & Michelle White, Child & Youth Project Manager with GCADV

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Youth

12 to 18 Years Old

- Higher risk of engaging in impulsive, reckless or self destructive behaviors:
 - School truancy
 - Lower academic achievement
 - Substance abuse
 - Running away
 - Involvement in violent or abusive dating relationships
 - Inappropriate aggression or significant withdrawal
 - Self-harm and/or suicidal ideation
- Over or underestimating danger



Sources:

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CORE CONCEPT

Is a child's
exposure to
domestic violence
considered **child
endangerment**?

- Under Georgia state statute (code 16-5-70), a child **witnessing** domestic violence is now defined as child endangerment.
- According to Georgia law, if the primary aggressor **intentionally** or **has knowledge** that the child is **under 18**, is present and sees and heard a forcible felony, battery or family violence battery, that child is considered to have been exposed to family/domestic violence.
- Please utilize the “**Best Practices for Mandated Reporting**” tip-sheet.
- When reporting child abuse in a domestic violence case, **please do not** share or include other information related to the non-abusive parent and the services she and her children are receiving without written permission from her.
- Please connect with your local **DFCS director** and **Prevent Child Abuse organization** for additional guidance and support around reporting.

Developing a Child-Centered Safety Plan

Exploring strategies to promote
children's safety

Myths to Safety Planning with Children

Myth

- All children are **incapable** of enacting a safety plan.
- Children are **over-burdened** with the adult-responsibility of planning for safety.
- Safety plans should **only** be created with children and advocates.

Fact

- Some children have the **capacity, ability** and the **desire** to plan for their safety.
- Some children feel **less burdened** and **more empowered** with creating a safety plan.
- **Involving** the non-abusive parent **is essential** in safety planning with children.

Safety Planning

- Safety planning with children can sometimes feel **overwhelming** and/or **not necessary** to the non-abusive parent
- Provide information on how safety planning with children **can be helpful** and **offer choices**
- Meet with the non-abusive parent **first, one-on-one**, to discuss safety planning strategies
- Ask **questions** when assessing safety and child's capacity to safety plan

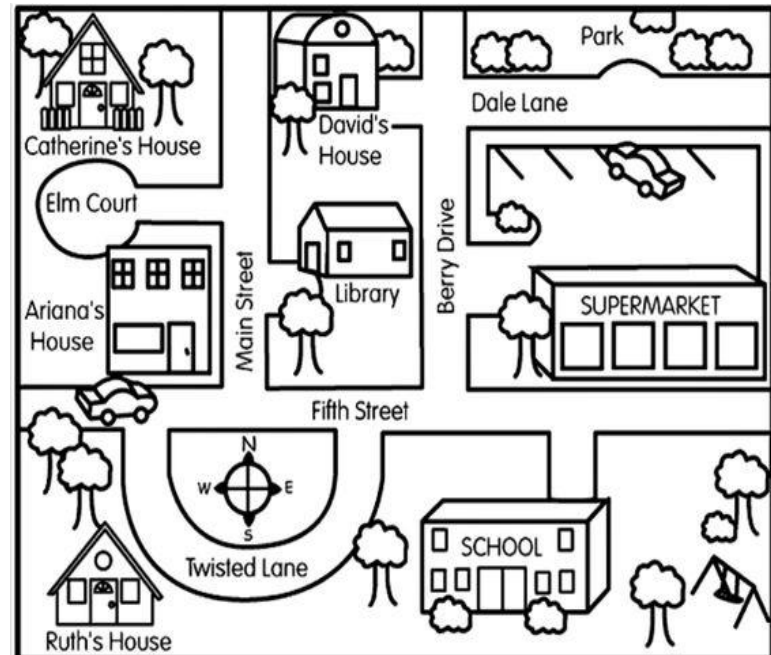
Questions for Caregiver

- **How** do your children you know if something scary or unsafe is about to happen?
- **Where** are your children usually when something unsafe happens?
- **What did your kids do** when something unsafe happened? Could you give me an **example**?
- What would your children **like to do** when something scary happens at home?
- What would **you like to do** if abuse is happens, or you feel your children are unsafe in the home?

Safety Planning Ideas

Safety Planning Ideas:

- Create a **safety map** of the neighborhood or community for safe places that the child can escape to
- Use a familiar **code word** that children and non-abusive can use
- Discuss children **learning** their address, how to use a phone, dialing safe phone numbers and how to dial 911



Safety Planning Ideas



- Prepare a backpack for children of important documents, cash, emergency items, etc. to be easily accessible to children.

Or

- Prepare a backpack to be stored at a safe person's house.

Safety Planning

Items to consider:

- Be **very cautious** of the serious risks that can be involved with safety planning
 - * *Higher risk of harm if abusive parent is aware of the plan*
- Safety planning can sometimes make children **feel more fearful**
- Children can feel **at fault** if they are unable to protect themselves, cannot enact their safety plan, or if their caregiver gets hurt

Safety Planning

Items to consider:

- The non-abusive caregiver is **essential** to the safety planning process
- **Keep in mind** age-appropriateness, maturity and safety issues of the children
- Make sure all steps of the safety plan are **realistic** and **simple**
- Educate non-abusive caregiver in **empowering ways** rather than *giving advice*
- Consider safety planning based on family's **culture**, **interpersonal resources** and **non-traditional** strategies
- Remember, there it is not possible for us to **guarantee** safety. Try not to make promises.

CORE CONCEPT:

Why does the non-abusive parent **stay** in the domestically violent relationship with her children?

- The most **dangerous** time for a non-abusive parent and her children is **attempting to separate** from the abusive parent.
- Leaving the relationship is **not always** the safest option. Sometimes, attempting to separate from the abusive parent **increases the severity** of violence.
- In the 100 cases reviewed by the Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project between 2004 and 2015, 134 minor children **lost a parent or caregiver** to domestic violence homicide.
- The impact of the abusive parent's tactics can **heavily impact** the non-abusive parent's ability to leave long-term, short-term, or **at all**.

CORE CONCEPT:

What **services** are available for parents that **perpetrate** domestic violence?

- Certified Family Violence Intervention Programs (FVIPs) are programs **designed to rehabilitate** family violence offenders.
- The 24-week program holds family violence offenders **accountable** and the program prioritizes **victim safety**.
- Research finds that participants that complete a certified FVIP program are **less likely** to commit new acts of violence or to violate restraining orders.
- Be **mindful** of addressing domestic violence by ways of “anger management” or “couples counseling”.
- FVIPs state that violence is seen as one of the **many forms of abusive behavior chosen** by the abusive parent to control intimate partners.

Any Questions?

Training Summary

Children and youth can **experience trauma** and domestic violence in **many different ways**, depending on their **development**.

Developing **safety plans** should **involve NOC** and **be appropriate** for the child(ren).

Be mindful of the **core concepts** when **providing support** for children and caregivers.

Thank you!

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