

Impacts on Children

Watching, hearing or later learning of a parent being harmed by a partner threatens children's sense of stability and security typically provided by their family.

- Children may experience increased emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Some children who experience difficulties display traumatic stress reactions (e.g., sleep disturbances, intensified startle reactions, constant worry about possible danger)
- Children living with domestic violence are at increased risk of experiencing physical injury or childhood abuse (e.g., physical, emotional)
- The perpetrator may use children as a control tactic against adult victims

Examples include:

- claiming the children's bad behaviour is the reason for the assaults on the non-offending parent;
 - threatening violence against the children and their pets in front of the non-offending parent;
 - holding the children hostage or abducting them in an effort to punish the adult victim or to gain compliance;
 - talking negatively to children about the abused parent's behaviour
- Children may experience strong ambivalence toward their violent parent: affection coexists with feelings of resentment and disappointment
 - Children may imitate and learn the attitudes and behaviours modeled when intimate partner abuse occurs
 - Exposure to violence may desensitize children to aggressive behaviour. When this occurs, aggression becomes part of the "norm" and is less likely to signal concern to children

(Source: Children Exposed to Domestic Violence, A Teacher's Handbook, Baker, Jaffe & Ashbourne, 2002)