

The Cycle of Domestic Abuse

Domestic violence and abuse can happen to anyone, yet the problem is often overlooked, excused, or denied. This is especially true when the abuse is psychological, rather than physical. Noticing and acknowledging the signs of an abusive relationship is the first step to ending it. No one should live in fear of the person they love. If you recognize yourself or someone you know in the following warning signs and descriptions of abuse, reach out. There is help available.

There are many signs of an abusive relationship. The most telling sign is fear of your partner. If you feel like you have to walk on eggshells around your partner—constantly watching what you say and do in order to avoid a blow-up—chances are your relationship is unhealthy and abusive. Other signs that you may be in an abusive relationship include a partner who belittles you or tries to control you, and feelings of self-loathing, helplessness, and desperation.

When people talk about domestic violence, they are often referring to the physical abuse of a spouse or intimate partner. Physical abuse is the use of physical force against someone in a way that injures or endangers that person. Physical assault or battering is a crime, whether it occurs inside or outside of the family.

The aim of emotional abuse is to chip away at your feelings of self-worth and independence. If you're the victim of emotional abuse, you may feel that there is no way out of the relationship, or that without your abusive partner you have nothing.

Emotional abuse includes *verbal abuse* such as yelling, name-calling, blaming, and shaming. Isolation, intimidation, and controlling behavior also fall under emotional abuse. Additionally, abusers who use emotional or psychological abuse often throw in threats of physical violence or other repercussions if you don't do what they want.

Domestic abuse falls into a common pattern, or cycle of violence:

- **Abuse** - Your abusive partner lashes out with aggressive, belittling, or violent behavior. The abuse is a power play designed to show you "who is boss."
- **Guilt** - After abusing you, your partner feels guilt, but not over what he's done. He's more worried about the possibility of being caught and facing consequences for his abusive behavior.
- **Excuses** - Your abuser rationalizes what he or she has done. The person may come up with a string of excuses or blame you for the abusive behavior—anything to avoid taking responsibility.
- **"Normal" behavior** - The abuser does everything he can to regain control and keep the victim in the relationship. He may act as if nothing has happened, or he may turn on the charm. This peaceful honeymoon phase may give the victim hope that the abuser has really changed this time.
- **Fantasy and planning** - Your abuser begins to fantasize about abusing you again. He spends a lot of time thinking about what you've done wrong and how he'll make you pay. Then he makes a plan for turning the fantasy of abuse into reality.
- **Set-up** - Your abuser sets you up and puts his plan in motion, creating a situation where he can justify abusing you.



Excerpts taken from www.helpguide.org

Domestic Violence Impacts Children Differently at Different Ages

by Holly B. Tired, Michigan State University Extension

Exposure to domestic violence negatively affects children. In order to understand these affects, it helps to understand the complexities of domestic violence. Domestic violence occurs across all groups of people - age, race, socioeconomically, educational, occupational and religious. Typically, it involves repeated patterns of abuse, including physical, psychological, emotional and economical abuse. It is used to gain power and control through the use of intimidation, humiliation and fear. Domestic violence is always caused by the perpetrator, never the victim.

With regards to young children, domestic violence affects them differently at different developmental stages. As children grow and develop, each age presents new learning tasks. Witnessing or hearing of a parent being harmed by their partner can threaten a child's sense of security and interfere with normal healthy development. Children may begin to display emotional or behavioral problems, such as sleep disturbances, intensified startle reactions and constant worry about possible danger. Children become desensitized to aggressive behavior and begin to view aggressive, violent behavior as the norm. They may imitate and learn the negative, unhealthy, abusive attitudes and behaviors of the perpetrator of domestic violence.

Infants and toddlers

Infants and toddlers are learning how to form secure attachments and are learning through play and exploration. When exposed to domestic violence, infants and toddlers learn that parents may be incapable of consistently responding to their needs, which interferes with the development of a strong infant-parent bond. Children become fearful of exploring their world, which may interfere with play and subsequent learning.

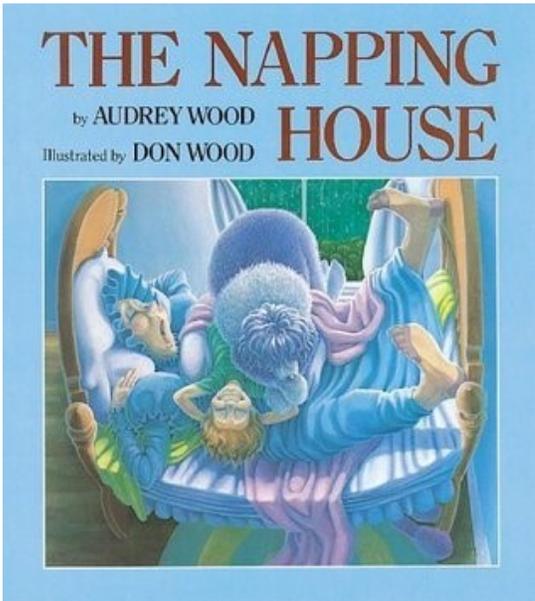
Preschoolers

Preschoolers are learning how to express all of their emotions, including those of aggression and anger. Living in a domestic violence situation can teach children unhealthy ways to express anger and aggression. They become confused with mixed messages of what they see versus what they are told. An example of such a mixed message occurs when children get spanked for hitting a sibling, and yet they see their parents hit each other. Preschoolers are beginning to learn about gender roles based on social messages. They may get the message that men are violent perpetrators and women are victims.

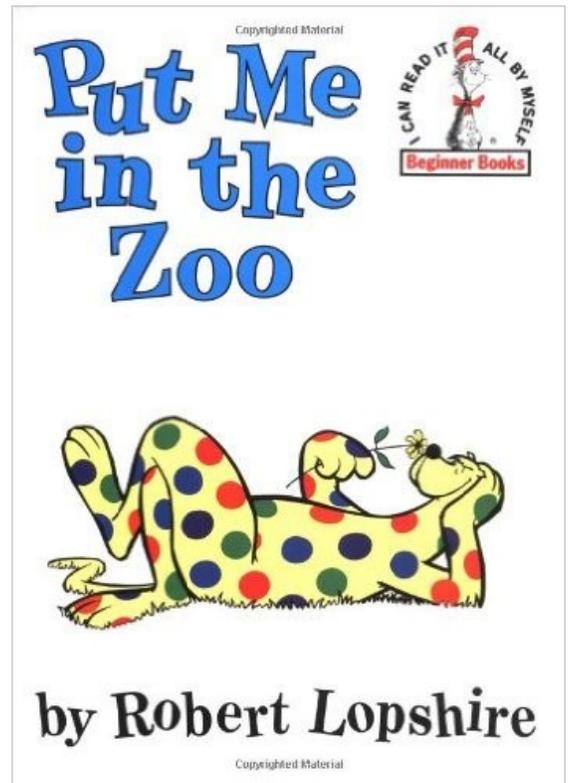
Whether children witness, hear or later learn about a parent being harmed by a partner, there are negative impacts on that child. It is important to know ages and stages of development and how domestic violence can interfere with normal healthy development. Being sensitive to how children of different ages may be impacted by domestic violence can help parents, caregivers and teachers better understand what children are going through, so they can work together to help them cope.



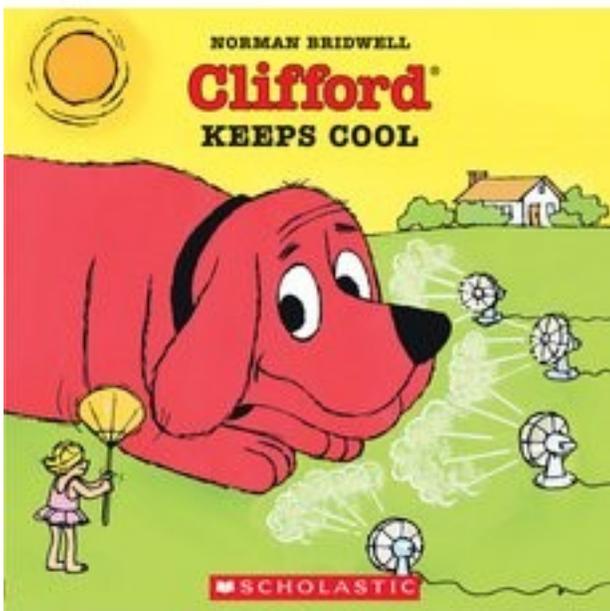
Books to Read this Summer



Granny is snoring on the bed in a cozy room. A child crawls on top of her and dreams. Gradually, the pile increases with a dozing dog, a snoozing cat, a slumbering mouse and finally a wakeful flea who, by biting the mouse, sets off a chain of events which results in a broken pile and even a broken bed.



Spot believes he deserves to be in the zoo with the other amazing animals. In this Beginner Book edited by Dr. Seuss, Spot shows two young friends all the exciting things he can do with his spots. From changing their color and juggling them to moving them onto everything around him, you won't believe what Spot can do.



How does a big red dog keep cool? Clifford tries many different ways, but nothing seems to work out as planned until Emily Elizabeth comes up with the perfect solution. In the end, a cool Clifford winds up in the right place at the right time and saves the day!



Quotations About Parenting

You don't really understand human nature unless you know why a child on a merry-go-round will wave at his parents every time around — and why his parents will always wave back. ~William D. Tammeus

To bring up a child in the way he should go, travel that way yourself once in a while. ~Josh Billings

It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it, myself. ~Joyce Maynard

If I had my child to raise all over again,
I'd build self-esteem first, and the house later.
I'd finger-paint more, and point the finger less.
I would do less correcting and more connecting.
I'd take my eyes off my watch, and watch with my eyes.
I'd take more hikes and fly more kites.
I'd stop playing serious, and seriously play.
I would run through more fields and gaze at more stars.
I'd do more hugging and less tugging.
~Diane Loomans, from "If I Had My Child To Raise Over Again"

You have a lifetime to work, but children are only young once.



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