

# IDENTIFYING CHILDREN WHO LIVE WITH VIOLENCE

As domestic violence escalates in our society, the role of health care providers in enhancing awareness, identification and referral is a critical component in the process of assisting children who are victims of violence. The 12<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court Family Violence Coordinating Council and Illinois EMSC have developed this document to assist in identifying and helping children who are involved in or at risk for domestic violence.

## CHARACTERISTICS/BEHAVIORS OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH VIOLENCE

### INFANTS & TODDLERS (0-2½ years):

- Developmental delay
- Failure to thrive
- Emotional withdrawal
- Physical problems (frequent illness)

### PRE-SCHOOLERS (3-6 years):

- Developmental delay (especially in language)
- Low tolerance, easily frustrated
- Acting out, aggressive towards peers/adults
- Low self-esteem
- Abnormal startle response

### SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (7-11 years):

- Poor school performance, delay
- Behavior problems with peers/adults
- Aggressive acting out, purposeful & severe
- Fearful, nightmares, night terrors
- Abnormal startle responses
- Withdrawn, depressed, despondent
- Chronic physical complaints
- Chronic low self-esteem
- Beginning to mimic adult roles

### ADOLESCENTS (12-17 years):

- Depressed
- Signs of physical injuries including scars
- Aggressive
- Delinquent behavior, including running away
- Poor school adjustment
- Alcohol/drug experimenting or use
- Possessive/jealous of girlfriends/boyfriends
- Sexual activity
- Violence expanded to the community
- Proficient at mimicking adult behavior
- Death by suicide or murder

### INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE:

- Acting out behaviorally
- Taking responsibility for the abuse
- Low self-esteem
- Constant fear of another beating/abuse
- Fear of abandonment
- Guilt for not being able to stop the abuse

### INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE:

- Child reports abuse
- Overly compliant
- Can't make friends
- Extreme fear of males
- Lack of trust
- No participation in school or social activities
- Can't concentrate
- Sudden drop in grades
- Very withdrawn or depressed
- Delinquent behavior
- Self-destructive or suicidal
- Sexually aggressive
- Seductive behavior
- Inappropriate sexual play with peers, toys and themselves
- Age-inappropriate understanding of sexual behavior
- Sleep disturbances including bed wetting and nightmares
- Secretive behavior
- Hints about sexual behavior
- Arriving early/staying late at school

### PHYSICAL INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE:

- Torn or bloody underclothes
- Pain, swelling or itching of genitals
- Pain when urinating
- Discharge from vagina or penis

### NON-AGE SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS INCLUDE:

- Little or no empathy for others
- Sleeping in class regularly
- Absence of emotions
- Loses control easily
- Blames others for own action
- Boys may be undisciplined
- Girls may be overly compliant
- Uses force/violence to solve problems

**IN CASE OF DISCLOSURE:**

- How you react is important! Remain calm.
- Provide verbal reassurance to:
  - a) assure the child it is correct to disclose
  - b) assure the child he/she is not responsible
  - c) assure the child he/she is believed
  - d) assure the child he/she is not alone
  - e) avoid projecting your reaction onto the child
- Do not assume the child knows that the abuse is a problem.
- Remain relaxed.
- Be empathetic.
- Do not be judgmental.
- Explain the need to contact others who can protect the child and help resolve the problem.
- Contact DCFS hotline at 1-800-25-ABUSE (252-2873).

**HOW TO REPORT TO DCFS:**

- Call hotline at 1-800-25-ABUSE (252-2873).
- Information needed:
  - a) name
  - b) date of birth
  - c) address
  - d) phone
  - e) information on siblings
  - f) parent/guardian’s name
- State you are a mandated reporter.
- State if you think it is an emergency.
- State why you think the child is abused/neglected (report factual information not conclusions). Document name of hot line worker and date/time you call.
- Ask the local investigative worker to call you back if needed.
- Your agency should maintain extra blank DCFS report forms (or download directly from [www.state.il.us/dcf](http://www.state.il.us/dcf)). Completed forms must be sent to the local DCFS Investigative Unit. (Assure a copy of your report is retained at your institution).
- Your report will be investigated within 24 hours. Your name is not given to those being investigated. Confidentiality of a mandated reporter’s identity is protected by law.

**RESOURCES**

DCFS HOTLINE.....1-800-25-ABUSE (252-2873)  
 NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE.....1-800-799-SAFE (7233)  
 CRIME VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.....1-800-228-3368

**OTHER LOCAL RESOURCES**

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