

Domestic Violence

What a CASA Volunteer Can Do.

As a CASA volunteer, it is important for you to be aware of the possibility that domestic violence exists in the families you encounter. If you suspect domestic violence is occurring, make sure the victim has several opportunities to talk to you alone. The partner who has been battered is often terrified of revealing the truth for fear of further violence.

Be both knowledgeable and concerned about domestic violence. Children from violent homes are at a higher risk for abuse than other children. According to *A Nation's Shame*, a report compiled by the US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, "[D]omestic violence is the single, major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in the US."

Take into account the history and severity of family violence when making any recommendation for placement of a child. Many professionals in the field of domestic violence believe that you cannot protect the child unless you also protect the primary nurturer/ victim (usually the mother). As part of that perspective, they advocate for placement of the child with the mother regardless of other factors, saying that to do otherwise further victimizes the mother at the hands of the system.

Determine the best interest of the child. It may be that, with proper safeguards in place, the victim can make a safe home for the child while the threat from the batterer is reduced by absence, treatment, and/or legal penalties. It is also possible that the victim has shortcomings that prevent her from caring for her family at even a minimally sufficient level. You should assess the situation with a clear understanding of domestic violence dynamics, but in the end, you must make a recommendation based solely on the best interest of the child.

Seek resources for children from violent homes. Children need:

- Positive role models and supportive environments that will help them develop social skills and address feelings about the violence in a constructive manner
- Help adopting alternative, nonviolent ways to address and resolve conflict (through specialized counseling programs, therapy, domestic violence victim support groups, youth mediation training, and relationships with supportive mentors)

Recommend help for parents.

- Try to ensure that domestic violence victims are treated fairly by the legal system and not further blamed in child abuse/neglect proceedings.
- Advocate in your community for things like housing, emergency shelters, legal

procedures, and court advocates that increase the safety of mothers and children and support the autonomy of the adult victim.

- Encourage parenting classes for battered parents focused on empowering them to become more effective parents and teaching them how to help children cope with the consequences of witnessing domestic violence.
- Advocate for treatment programs for batterers followed by parenting classes focused on how to parent in a non coercive, nonintrusive manner.

Be alert to any signs that domestic violence has recurred or even that contact between the batterer and the victim is ongoing if that might compromise the child's safety. The foremost issue is the safety of the child.

Definition. Domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks and economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use to control their current or former intimate partners (e.g., spouses, girlfriends/boyfriends, lovers, etc.). Domestic violence ranges from threats of violence to hitting to severe beating, rape, and even murder. Victims and perpetrators are from all age, racial, socioeconomic, sexual orientation, educational, occupational, geographic, and religious groups. Abuse by men against women is by far the most common form, but domestic violence does occur in same-sex relationships, and some women do abuse men.

Impact on Children. Lenore Walker, author of *The Battered Woman*, describes the world of children who grow up in violent homes:

Children who live in battering relationships experience the most insidious form of child abuse. Whether or not they are physically abused by either parent is less important than the psychological scars they bear from watching their fathers beat their mothers. They learn to become part of a dishonest conspiracy of silence. They learn to lie to prevent inappropriate behavior, and they learn to suspend fulfillment of their needs rather than risk another confrontation. They expend a lot of energy avoiding problems. They live in a world of make-believe. Children in families where there is domestic violence are at great risk of becoming victims of abuse themselves. Studies indicate this group is 15 times more likely to experience child abuse than children in nonviolent homes are. Over half of children in families where the mother is battered are also abused. In some cases, children may try to intervene and protect their mothers, getting caught in the middle of the violence. In most cases, however, children are also targets of the violence.

Volunteer Training Curriculum, The National CASA Association

Local Resources

Klamath Crisis Center
884-0390