

Note:

“The components of the parenting course are intended to educational purposes only. The presentation of this material is not intended to constitute mental health therapy, give information on specific mental health disorders nor medications to treat mental health disorders. Participants are encouraged to discuss specific mental health questions with licensed health therapist of their choice.”

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence, child abuse, and child neglect are a feature of family life for many in the United States. For some, these events are unique to the period leading up to and during the separation or divorce. For others, a long history of violence, abuse or neglect convinces one or both parents that a separation or divorce is necessary. Physical violence, threats of violence, sexual assault, and child abuse are illegal. Specific definitions of domestic violence vary from state to state. But federal laws say it is illegal to injure—or threaten to injure—anyone related by blood or marriage, or with whom you are living together or are in an intimate relationship. This is true regardless of your cultural or religious heritage, citizenship status, or personal beliefs about discipline or the proper relationship between husbands and wives.

Domestic violence constitutes the willful intimidation, assault, battery, sexual assault, or other abusive behavior perpetrated by one family member, household member, or intimate partner against another. In most state laws addressing domestic violence, the relationship necessary for a charge of domestic assault or abuse generally includes a spouse, former spouse, persons currently residing together, or those who have resided together within the previous year, or persons who share a common child.

Victims of violence should understand that ignoring abuse will not make it stop. Abuse becomes more serious with time, and victims must realize that an abusive relationship is unhealthy and unsafe. Also, remember that a victim of domestic violence may be either male or female. Children can also be victims—physically, emotionally, or both.

The CDC has noted from survey data, domestic violence is a public health concern that may involve as many as 1 in 4 women and nearly 1 in 10 men have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime. These numbers translate to over 43 million women and 38 million men experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

To read more about the CDC’s finding, please the article found below.

CDC, *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence* (2019),
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-factsheet508.pdf>(last visited May 14, 2022)



The National Center for Victims of Crime describes the following behaviors as indicative of an abusive personality prone to domestic violence:

- **Intimidation:** certain looks, gestures, or actions; smashing things; destruction of property or hurting pets; brandishing weapons.
- **Emotional Abuse:** making the victim feel guilty; calling the victim names; embarrassing, humiliating, or demeaning the victim; playing mind games; telling the victim they are crazy; doing or saying things that make the victim feel that they are crazy.
- **Isolation:** keeping the victim from going places like visiting family or friends, attending social groups, etc.; listening to phone conversations or opening personal mail; following the

victim around and/or questioning them about their whereabouts; using jealousy to justify actions.

- **Minimizing, denying, and blaming:** making light of the abuse, saying it wasn't that bad; denying the abuse happened; saying the abuse was the victim's fault.
- **Excessive domination:** acting like the master of the house; treating the victim like a servant; making all the big decisions; defining the victim's role/job; patronizing or in any other way treating the victim like a child, not as an equal adult.
- **Economic abuse:** preventing the other parent from working outside the home; making them ask for money; limiting money; making them account for all expenditures; not allowing them access to information about family finances.
- **Using children:** making the victim feel guilty about their parenting skills; making the victim responsible for all the children's misbehavior or mistakes; undermining the victim's authority and effectiveness with the children through criticism; telling the children that the victim is stupid or dumb—can't do anything right; threatening to take the children away or kill them; telling the victim that the Department of Child and Family Services will take the children away.
- **Coercion and threats:** threatening to take the children away; threatening to destroy property; threatening to harm family or friends; making physical threats and/or actions toward the victim; threatening to leave the victim; threatening to commit suicide.

What are the effects of domestic violence on children?

Spousal abuse can have lasting emotional effects on children living in the same household. They often develop coping skills and strategies to intercede and protect the parent who is the victim of abuse. A parental victim may develop strategies to redirect the abuser away from the children, and as a result may be abused while trying to protect the children. Children who grow up in a household where a parent has been abused may imitate that abuse in relationships later in life.

Please watch video from the CDC explaining Intimate Partner Violence

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/>

Options for victims of domestic violence

- *Contact a local domestic-violence program.* These programs are in many communities around the country and can provide counseling and support groups; information about legal options, the criminal justice system, and social services; shelter; attorney referrals; vocational counseling; safety planning; and case advocacy. Programs will assist victims regardless of their decision to stay in the relationship or leave it.
- *Create a comprehensive safety plan.* With assistance from a victim-service professional, victims should create an individualized plan for safety in all situations, including a checklist of necessary items to take when leaving an abusive situation.
- *Consider legal options.* Domestic Violence Advocates are available to speak to victims regarding questions concerning domestic violence and the process to obtain an Order of Protection or Injunction Against Harassment. They can assist victims in obtaining a 911 emergency cell phone; and refer victims to other agencies and organizations that can help with shelter and counseling. In addition, Advocates can accompany individuals to court to

get an Order of Protection or Injunction Against Harassment, or other proceedings related to domestic violence. Advocates cannot provide legal advice.

On the US Department of Health and Human Services website, it is stated that “more than 15 million children in the United States live in homes in which domestic violence has happened at least once. These children are at greater risk for repeating the cycle as adults by entering into abusive relationships or becoming abusers themselves.

(<https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/effects-domestic-violence-children>).

You can help your children by:

- **Helping them feel safe.** Children who witness or experience domestic violence need to feel safe. Consider whether leaving the abusive relationship might help your child feel safer.
- **Talking to them about their fears.** Let them know that it's not their fault or your fault.
- **Talking to them about healthy relationships.** Help them learn from the abusive experience by talking about what healthy relationships are and are not. This will help them know what is healthy when they start romantic relationships of their own.
- **Talking to them about boundaries.** Let your child know that no one has the right to touch them or make them feel uncomfortable, including family members, teachers, coaches, or other authority figures. Also, explain to your child that he or she doesn't have the right to touch another person's body, and if someone tells them to stop, they should do so right away.
- **Helping them find a reliable support system.** In addition to a parent, this can be a school counselor, a therapist, or another trusted adult who can provide ongoing support. Know that school counselors are required to report domestic violence or abuse if they suspect it.
- **Getting them professional help.** Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a type of talk therapy or counseling that may work best for children who have experienced violence or abuse. CBT is especially helpful for children who have anxiety or other mental health problems as a result of the trauma. During CBT, a therapist will work with your child to turn negative thoughts into more positive ones. The therapist can also help your child learn healthy ways to cope with stress.

If you know that a sex offender or a person who has been convicted of a dangerous crime against children will be around our child, the co-parent must be notified immediately.

Resource PDF link to talk to your child about Domestic Violence found below:

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//children_domestic_violence_listening_talking_to_your_child.pdf

How can I get help in an emergency?

****Immediately dial 911 and request help from the police**

Protection Orders

Protection Orders, also called Restraining Orders, are orders to stop specific acts against everyone named in the restraining order as a “Protected Person.” Some of the things that the restrained person can be ordered to:

***Stop** contacting, harassing, injuring, intimidating, molesting, threatening, touching, stalking, sexually assaulting or abusing any Protected Person;

***Stop** entering or remaining on premises, or coming within a specified distance of a Protected Person or premises;

National domestic-violence centers usually provide:

- A 24-hour crisis line
- Temporary shelter
- Advocacy and counseling for victims
- Advocacy and counseling for the children of victims
- Legal information, court accompaniment, and assistance with restraining orders
- Welfare/economic support
- Support groups for battered women and their children
- Information and referral
- Community education
- Outreach to schools, including education on teen dating violence and support for victims
- Batterers treatment
- Sexual-assault services

Important Phone Numbers:

National Domestic Violence Hotline.....(800) 799-SAFE (7233)
National Domestic Violence Hotline(800) 787-3224 (TTY)
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.....(303) 839-1852
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.....(800) 537-2238
National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence.....(800) 222-2000
Women in Distress: 24-hour crisis line in English and Spanish.....(800)-500-1119

Child Abuse

Abuse means any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child’s physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child. The legal definition of a child is any person under the age of eighteen.

Any person who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, abandonment, or neglect by a person responsible for a child's welfare is required to report that information to the state's toll-free hotline, an appropriate law-enforcement agency, or (in the case of a child's death), the medical examiner responsible for the city, town, county, or other area where the death occurred.

Children Exposed to Violence

- *Psychological health*: depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, isolation, shame, fear, guilt, and low self-esteem
- *Physical health outcomes*: poor overall health, have illnesses requiring medical attention, attempt suicide, or be involved in self-injury. Exposure to child abuse and neglect has profound effects on brain development and cognition.
- *Academic difficulties and failure*: Exposure to violence increases the risk that children will drop out of school or do more poorly in school
- *Behavioral problems*: substance abuse or dependence, teen pregnancy, aggression, conduct disorder, delinquency, and violence, including dating violence and intimate partner violence
- *Delinquency and offending*: Seventy percent of youth in residential placement had some type of past traumatic experience, with 30 percent having experienced frequent and/or injurious physical and/or sexual abuse

Other Kinds of Child Maltreatment

Abandonment is a situation where the parent, legal custodian, or the caregiver responsible for a child's welfare, although able to care for the child, doesn't provide for the child's support and makes no effort to communicate with the child—legally, this is a willful rejection of parental obligations. Token or inadequate efforts to support or communicate with the child may result in a court declaring the child to be abandoned.

Mental injury means substantially decreased ability to function intellectually or psychologically within the normal range of performance and behavior.

Neglect occurs when a child is deprived of necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment, or when a child is permitted to live in an environment where such deprivation or environment significantly impairs or threatens to impair the child's physical, mental, or emotional health.

Harm to a child's health or welfare can occur when any person inflicts upon the child (or allows to be inflicted) physical, mental, or emotional injury. In determining whether harm has occurred, the following factors are considered: the child's age; any prior history of injuries to the child; the location of the injury on the child's body; the number of injuries; and the type of trauma inflicted.

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms The following material is reproduced with permission of the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (2003).

The first step in helping abused or neglected children is learning to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is occurring in a family; however, when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination, you should take a closer look at the situation and consider the possibility of child abuse.

If you do suspect a child is being harmed, reporting your suspicions may protect the child and get help for the family. Contact your local child-protective services agency or police department. For more information about where and how to file a report, call the Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-4-ACHILD).

Please watch video from the CDC explaining Child Abuse and Neglect

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/index.html>

Recognizing Child Abuse

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect.

The Child:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance;
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention;
- Has learning problems that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes;
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen;
- Lacks adult supervision;
- Is overly compliant, an overachiever, or too responsible; or
- Comes to school early, stays late, and does not want to go home.

The Parent:

- Shows little concern for the child, rarely responding to the school's requests for information, for conferences, or for home visits;
- Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child's problems in school or at home;
- Asks the classroom teacher to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves;
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome;
- Demands perfection or a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot give; or
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs.

The Parent and Child:

- Rarely touch or look at each other;
- Consider their relationship entirely negative; or
- State that they do not like each other.

None of these signs taken alone proves that child abuse is present in a family. But when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination, there is the possibility of child abuse.

Types of Abuse

The following are some signs often associated with physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. It is important to note, however, these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child also may be neglected.

Signs of Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes;
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school;
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home from school;
- Shrinks at the approach of adults; or
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury;
- Describes the child as 'evil,' or in some other very negative way;
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child; or
- Has a history of abuse as a child

Signs of Neglect

Consider the possibility of neglect when the child:

- Is frequently absent from school;
- Begs or steals food or money from classmates;
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses;
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor;
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather;
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs; or
- States there is no one at home to provide care.

Consider the possibility of neglect when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child;

- Seems apathetic or depressed;
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner;
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs; or
- States that there is no one at home to provide care
- Consider the possibility of neglect when the parent or other adult caregiver:
- Appears to be indifferent to the child;
- Seems apathetic or depressed;
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner; or
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the child:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting;
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities;
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting;
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite;
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior;
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14;
- Runs away; or
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex;
- Is secretive and isolated; or
- Is jealous or controlling with family members.

Signs of Emotional Maltreatment Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the child:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression;
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example);
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development;
- Has attempted suicide; or
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent.

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child;
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems; or

- Overtly rejects the child.
This fact sheet was adapted, with permission, from Recognizing Child Abuse: What Parents Should Know. Prevent Child Abuse America, © 2003.

Please watch the following video:

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/traumatic-experiences/?activity=responses-trauma-age-age-video>

What are the consequences of filing a false child-abuse report?

In some instances, a parent may be tempted to file a false child-abuse report against the child’s mother or father. This is usually done to gain some kind of advantage over the other parent. You should never resort to this, and parents are strongly discouraged from this type of action. According to most state statutes, a person who knowingly and willfully makes a false report of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect, or who advises another to make a false report, is guilty of a felony in the third degree. However, anyone making a report who is acting in good faith is immune from liability.

Important Phone Numbers*

Missing Children Info.....	1-800-342-0821
Runaway Helpline.....	1-800-621-4000
Child Abuse Hotline	1-800-962-2873
Child Support Hotline.....	1-800-622-KIDS
National Center for Missing Children.....	1-800-843-5678

Choosing a Mental-Health Professional

One of the hurdles in finding a qualified therapist to help your family is wading through the various kinds of mental-health professionals. At a minimum, you will want to seek a professional who holds a license in marriage and family therapy, mental-health counseling, or social work. These professionals will have either a master’s degree or a doctorate. Keep in mind, however, that the individual therapist is always more important than their degree, certification, licensure, or other qualification. Most of the professional’s expertise will come as they specialize in their work. You will want to make sure that a professional you choose has experience with divorce issues and helping families in transition.

Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). For example: experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, having a family member attempt or die by suicide.

Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with: substance misuse, mental health problems, instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison.

ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education and job opportunities. However, ACEs can be prevented.

How big is the problem?

ACEs are common. About 61% of adults surveyed across 25 states reported that they had experienced at least one type of ACE, and nearly 1 in 6 reported they had experienced four or more types of ACEs.

Preventing ACEs could potentially reduce a large number of health conditions. For example, up to 1.9 million cases of heart disease and 21 million cases of depression could have been potentially avoided by preventing ACEs.

Some children are at greater risk than others. Women and several racial/ethnic minority groups were at greater risk for having experienced 4 or more types of ACEs.

ACEs are costly. The economic and social costs to families, communities, and society totals hundreds of billions of dollars each year.

What are the consequences?

ACEs can have lasting, negative effects on health, well-being, and opportunity. These experiences can increase the risks of injury, sexually transmitted infections, maternal and child health problems, teen pregnancy, involvement in sex trafficking, and a wide range of chronic diseases and leading causes of death such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and suicide.

ACEs and associated conditions, such as living in under-resourced or racially segregated neighborhoods, frequently moving, and experiencing food insecurity, can cause toxic stress (extended or prolonged stress). Toxic stress from ACEs can change brain development and affect such things as attention, decision-making, learning, and response to stress.

Children growing up with toxic stress may have difficulty forming healthy and stable relationships. They may also have unstable work histories as adults and struggle with finances, jobs, and depression throughout life. These effects can also be passed on to their

own children. Some children may face further exposure to toxic stress from historical and ongoing traumas due to systemic racism or the impacts of poverty resulting from limited educational and economic opportunities.

How can we prevent adverse childhood experiences?

ACEs are preventable. Creating and sustaining safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children and families can prevent ACEs and help all children reach their full potential.

CDC has produced a resource, Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Leveraging the Best Available Evidence, to help states and communities take advantage of the best available evidence to prevent ACEs. It features six strategies from the CDC Technical Packages to Prevent Violence.

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/communicationresources/pub/resource-for-action.html>

Raising awareness of ACEs can help:

Change how people think about the causes of ACEs and who could help prevent them.

Shift the focus from individual responsibility to community solutions.

Reduce stigma around seeking help with parenting challenges or for substance misuse, depression, or suicidal thoughts.

Promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments where children live, learn, and play.

Let's help all children reach their full potential and create neighborhoods, communities, and a world in which every child can thrive.

Please watch the following video:

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/traumatic-experiences/?activity=responses-trauma-age-age-video>

Case Study

One of the responsibilities for being a licensed marriage and family therapist is that of being a mandated reporter. It is not a therapist job to prove or uncover if abuse or violence is taking place, but rather to report suspected abuse. Most people know that child abuse is a reportable offense, however many people are unaware that parents abusing one another is also considered child abuse. Regardless of whether parents are abusing one another emotionally, physically, or psychologically (state laws typically don't distinguish), if children are present that is a reportable offense.

Christine and Michael sought help for their 14-year-old son Ryan. Ryan was acting out in a variety of ways and both parents were concerned about the choices he was making. Initially, Christine brought him in for few sessions and it became apparent to me that there was a pretty intense triangle involving the two parents and Ryan. I asked Christine if she would invite Michael to our third session. She said she would prefer if I called him directly, which I did. As always with couples, when you listen to one of them, you can get pulled to seeing things from their perspective. In the first two sessions, I had had certainly gotten an earful about what a terrible parent Michael was from Christine's perspective.

As in most cases, when I met with Michael, he had his side of the story that painted Christine as the more guilty party with respect to their problems. In these situations, both parents fail to realize that their behaviors are both contributing to the overall distress that the family is experiencing. Both parents feel like they are doing the right thing and that all the problems can be linked to the behavior of the other parent. The escalating cycles of disagreement between Christine and Michael became screaming matches that degenerated into name-calling. Though they were civilized in my office, they both agreed that the intensity outside of therapy was of concern to them both.

This couple was caught in an escalating cycle of verbal and emotional violence toward one another. Through therapy, they became aware of the destruction this was causing. Even with that insight, they were still not motivated to do anything different. Once I learned about the escalating cycle of intensity, it was apparent to me that a call needed to be made to the child abuse hotline. This is never an easy situation for a therapist because you are jeopardizing the client/therapist relationship. From their perspective, they feel they are reaching out for help so the phone call is unnecessary. On the contrary, licensed mental health professional can lose their license if they fail to report suspected abuse. In this instance, Christine and Michael had given me many examples of when their escalating interactions were in the presence of Ryan, therefore qualifying as child abuse.

I gave this couple the opportunity to make the phone call to the child abuse hotline from my office and with me present. Though they were clearly upset, they did understand my responsibility. They also finally got the understanding of the destructiveness of their behavior. Being faced with having to make such a call for your own behavior can be a very sobering experience. If the therapeutic relationship can be salvaged, and many times it cannot, some very productive work can take place. In this case, Christine and Michael did not see me as the enemy, but rather a professional doing my job.

There are many situations of domestic violence where one partner is oppressing the other, a victim. However, in my experience, it is just as common to have two partners participating in the cycle of domestic abuse.

In the next session, we discussed the visit to their home by the child protective services worker. Both parents recounted the horror of having to answer questions about the quality of their parenting. It created quite a shift for Michael and Christine and it was their wake-up call to begin handling things differently with respect to their son Ryan. They each made themselves responsible to work on conflict resolution and anger management skills. There were going to do this through a combination of individual therapy and reading books on the subject. They both agreed to call timeout when things begin to escalate and they also agreed to cease having any discussions in front of Ryan that could lead to a blow up. Christina and Michael were very motivated clients and they both wanted the best for their son Ryan.