

# Bringing the Kids Back Into Focus:

Building a Community Response  
to Children's Exposure to Violence

Chicago Safe Start  
Office of Violence Prevention  
City of Chicago



# What is Violence?

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## Violence is...

...anything that hurts or destroys any person, place or thing. Violence can be experienced in a variety of forms that can include, but is not limited to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

What is **CEV**?

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**C**hildren's

**E**xposure

to

**V**iolence

# Exposure to Violence...

means being a victim of abuse, neglect, or maltreatment; or witnessing domestic violence, community, and/or media violence or other violent crimes/events.

# Get the Facts!

Estimates show that **3-5 children in every classroom** have witnessed a woman being abused

In Chicago, studies have shown that among 500 elementary school students **one in four** had witnessed a shooting and **one-third** had seen a stabbing

## More Facts...!

3 in 5 of those children who witnessed a shooting or stabbing, indicated that the incident resulted in death.

**More than 25%** of these children had been victims of severe violence themselves-that is, they had been shot at, suffered a knife attack, or had been beaten or mugged.

# Effects of Exposure to Violence

- Behavioral Effects
- Emotional Effects
- Social Competence Effects
- Physical Effects/Somatic Symptoms
- Family-Interpersonal Relationship Effects
- Cognitive Effects

# Behavioral Effects

- Act out or withdraw
- Overachieve or underachieve
- Refuse to go to school
- Bedwetting
- Nightmares
- Unable to set limits or follow directions

# Emotional Effects

- Feel guilty for the abuse & for not stopping it
- Confusion and conflicting feelings toward parents
- Fear of abandonment, expressing emotion, the unknown, and/or personal injury
- Angry about violence and chaos in

# Social Effects

- Isolate themselves from friends
- Have difficulty trusting people
- Have poor anger management or problem-solving skills
- May bully peers
- Impaired school performance

# Physical Effects

- Somatic complaints (stomach or head-aches)
- Nervous or anxious
- Short attention span (frequently diagnosed as Attention Deficit Hyper-activity Disorder)
- Frequently ill or tired

# Family-Interpersonal Relationships

- Separation anxiety
- Mistrust and/or anger
- Role reversal; “parentification”
- Enforced family secrets
- Inappropriate attempts to mediate conflict

# Cognitive Effects

- Blame others
- Believe it is acceptable to hit people to get what they want, express their anger
- Belief: to feel angry is bad, because people get hurt
- Have a low self-concept from a

# What will YOU do?

- What information will you consider before you respond?

What do you know about the incident? How severe was the incident? What is the child's reaction?

- What will you say to the child at that moment?

Example: *“That must have been scary?” “What happened next?” “Did you tell a grown-up?”*

- What will you do after the child's story?

How might you verify a child's story? Whom should you call? What further actions, if any, might be necessary?

# Ways You Can Help Children Exposed to Violence

- Find a comfortable and private place to talk
- Remain calm
- Be honest with yourself
- Read between the lines
- Validate feelings

# Ways to Support Caregivers of Children Exposed to Violence

- Provide information on the effects of exposure to violence & a list of local resources for people who may need help
- Identify or create support networks in the community
- Model how to listen and appropriately respond to children

# What Actions Will You Take?

- Get permission to post information on the issue in a public space
- Tell my friends and family about this information
- Help establish a local taskforce
- Connect with public officials and providers who support prevention

## *We Can...*

Improve our protection of children when we pay attention to:

What We See

What We Hear

What We Know

## Interested in more?

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Call the Office of Violence Prevention for details about and calendar for this full workshop.

[www.ChicagoSafeStart.net](http://www.ChicagoSafeStart.net)

(312) 745-0381