

Children and Domestic Violence

Celebrating Your Child's Strengths

Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior that one person in a relationship uses to control and dominate the other. The behavior may be verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive. You as a parent may have left an abusive relationship or you may still be in one. This fact sheet is **#2** in a series of 10 sheets written to help you understand how children may react to domestic violence, and how you can best help them to feel safe and valued and develop personal strength. For other fact sheets in the series, visit www.nctsn.org/content/resources

Living with domestic violence and its aftermath is stressful for all members of a family. As a caring parent you may worry that your child will not be able to move forward or succeed in life given what's happened. It is important for you to know that children, like adults, can overcome hard times, and that you have a pivotal role in helping them build the strengths they need to move forward.

Studies show that many children who have experienced domestic violence are able to cope and stay on track. They remain well adjusted and can succeed in school and make friends. We call these children resilient because of their ability to weather stress and bounce back. One of the most essential ingredients for resilience is a secure relationship between the child and a person who loves him, believes in him, sees him as special, and celebrates his accomplishments. That person can be you, the parent.



WAYS TO SUPPORT AND CELEBRATE YOUR CHILD

Identify your child's strengths. Before you can nurture your child's strengths you must identify them. Think about what your child does well or really enjoys, and make a list. Or think about the things you like most about your child. This could be as simple as "My son has a great smile" or "My girl is sensitive and cares about other people." Take a moment to feel proud about your children's strengths and share your pride with them.

The NCTSN Domestic Violence Work Group developed this fact sheet, drawing on the experiences of domestic violence survivors, research findings, and reports from battered women's advocates and mental health professionals. For more information on children and domestic violence, and to access all fact sheets in this series, visit www.nctsn.org/content/resources

Make time for your child. It may be difficult if you are in an abusive relationship, but spending time with your child is valuable in many ways. As a caring parent, you are the most important person in your child's life. The time you devote to him, just doing simple activities that he is good at or enjoys, can go a long way in supporting his resilience. You teach him that no matter how stressful things may be, he is special and loved. You help him feel good about himself and see the possibility of having fun even when times are tough.

Your support teaches him that no matter how stressful things may be, he is special and loved.

Praise your child. Children thrive from hearing about what they do well and what their parents love about them. Remember to praise the small things your child does, such as being helpful or kind. Tell her that you notice, and that you are proud of her. Praise from someone as important as you can make a big difference in how children feel about themselves.

Nurture your child's strengths. Help your child build on her strengths by involving her in activities such as sports teams, art and music programs, faith-based activities, or community programs. There she can find children with similar interests, positive adults, and opportunities to be the best she can be at what she enjoys.



REMEMBER...

Children can be resilient and move forward from stressful events in their lives. One way they heal is by having the adults who care about them provide the guidance, attention, and support they need to explore and build upon their strengths.

IMPORTANT!

If you feel unsafe now and need help for yourself, your family, or someone else in a domestic crisis, contact

- 911 for emergency police assistance
- Your local child protective services if your children are in danger
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline. Advocates are available to intervene in a crisis, help with safety planning, and provide referrals to agencies in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands. Call 1-800-799-7233 or go to www.thehotline.org