

GENERATIONAL EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE

Battering is a chronic pattern. Part of this chronic pattern is the generational effect, which means that the legacy of violence is passed on from generation to generation. Our society gives messages that support and encourage violence, particularly when it is directed toward those who are weaker. Our society accepts the myth that anyone will become violent when pushed to the breaking point. In fact.....

- Violence is a learned behavior, a learned way of coping and trying to solve problems.
If, when a child sees her father beat her mother, she complains to others about being abused and is told, “That’s too bad, but that’s the way it is,” or if she tells and is met with silence, she begins to accept violence as normal in families.
- Violence is one way of dealing with stress that some people have learned.
Sources of stress include: economic pressures, work-related problems, and lack of housing, intimate relationships, family pressures, changes. Some people deal with stress by: problem solving, crying, withdrawal, talking, writing, or other non-violent methods.
- Children learn what they live:
A woman may decide that she will tolerate the violence to keep the family together, but what about the children? Because an abusing partner probably learned to abuse from his parents, he, in turn, will be teaching his children to abuse. The mother may very well have grown up thinking that abuse and violence is “normal” in families. Her children may come to the same conclusion. Children learn to abuse and to expect abuse from the role models set by the parents – from the abuse they observe and receive from their parents.
- Children learn to cope with the violence – they learn:
 - to be silent about the abuse
 - to suspend fulfillment of their needs rather than risk another confrontation
 - to blend into the background
 - not to express feelings
 - not to acknowledge the tension at home
 - to expend a lot of energy avoiding problems
 - to live in a world of make believe
- Effects of family violence on children
All children, no matter what their age, are affected in their growth and development when they witness or experience violence in the home. They may:
 - have trouble concentrating in school
 - be overly compliant and cooperative
 - be impulsive
 - be aggressive

The impact on young boys who have witnessed violence has been observed as early as two. Evidence shows that these young boys may be tomorrow’s batterers.

A girl who witness’s violence may grow up believing that battering is an expected part of a relationship and marriage.

Teens are attracted to persons with whom they feel comfortable, relationships where they can behave in the ways they have learned. The young men look for persons they can control. They young women look for persons who require them to use the survival behaviors they have learned. They are at risk of being attracted to each other.

Teens may carry this abusive cycle into their adult lives and pass it to the next generation.

- **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DOES NOT HAVE TO BE PASSED ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION.** If children and teens are exposed to non-violent adult role models outside the home, are taught non-violent problem-solving skills, and experience the developmental successes that result in self-confidence, the cycle can be broken.

Violence is a learned behavior and therefore can be unlearned. Unless this is given serious attention, however, the chronic pattern of learned violence will be passed on to the next generation of family members.

Written by Melva DeCraene

Edited by ICDVP Competencies Committee