



When Young Children Are Exposed to Violence

Television, social media, the internet, conversations between adults—these are all possible scenarios in which young children may be exposed to violent situations. Children may also be victims of, or witness firsthand, violence through physical or verbal assaults, maltreatment or sexual abuse. ChildTrends reported that in 2014, 37% of children were physically assaulted within the previous year and about half had been assaulted during their lifetime (51%). In the prior year, 15 percent suffered some form of maltreatment (25% during their lifetime) and 5% reported being sexually victimized (8% over their lifetime).

Common responses of young children who have been exposed to violence

- Excessive crying
- Inability to calm down
- Nightmares and other sleep problems
- Separation anxiety
- Behavior problems (hitting, grabbing, shoving other children)
- Tantrums



- Regressive behavior
- Repeating the violent event during play or conversation

Practical tips for parents and caregivers

- Offer comfort in the form of a security object or special toy and extra hugs and cuddling.
- Ask questions and use storybooks to help children talk about their feelings. Encourage children to draw pictures about how they feel.

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- Maintain normal routines and schedules, and always explain any changes to children ahead of time.
- Be aware of the importance of protective factors like stable caregivers, high quality childcare, and nurturing environments.
- Don't hesitate to seek professional help if you are concerned about the child's responses or behavior.
- At a more systemic level: teach conflict resolution, cooperation, and respect for differences; learn more about the effects of violence and "toxic stress" on young children; limit TV, violent video games and "war play"; advocate for good access to physical, social, and mental health services in your community.

Please note: This does not address issues related to suspected child abuse where mandated reporting laws apply.

R E S O U R C E S

Children's Exposure to Violence. Child Trends.

www.childtrends.org/indicators/childrens-exposure-to-violence

Healing the Invisible Wounds: Children's Exposure to Violence A Guide for Families. Safe Start Center. <http://bit.ly/31VP0IJ>

Limiting the Toxic Effects of Trauma When Tragedy Strikes. Zero to Three. <http://bit.ly/2pOxGqU>

Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at PAIECMH@pakeys.org with questions or concerns.

