

Be A Change Maker: Action Guide

Recognizing And Responding To Domestic Violence As An Educator



As An Educator, You Are Uniquely Positioned To Help

You often have daily or weekly contact with your students, which allows you to observe changes in behavior, appearance, or mood over time. This regular interaction provides an opportunity to notice signs of exposure to domestic violence that might not be as apparent to others. This daily or weekly contact can also help to build trust. If students feel safe and supported, they may be more willing to disclose their situations. In addition, as an educator you have been trained to observe and assess students' behavior and well-being. You are uniquely positioned to notice physical signs of abuse (bruises, injuries) or behavioral changes (withdrawal, anxiety, depression) that may be signs that a child has been exposed to domestic violence.

Recognizing Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Abuse may include any combination of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, reproductive, spiritual, and/or financial abuse and/or control. Some abusive relationships never include physical violence, but the effect on victims can be as or more severe. Domestic violence may be more common than you think. According to Futures Without Violence, "15.5 million U.S. children live in families in which partner violence occurred at least once in the past year." Depression, anxiety, isolation, and guilt are some of the common results of this kind of abuse. Some children even become violent to their peers, since they see it at home and know no other way of coping with emotions and may repeat abusive behavior in their own relationships as adults.

Mandated Reporting

- [North Carolina General Statute 7B-301](#) requires that, "Any person or institution who has cause to suspect that a child under age 18 is abused, neglected, or dependent must make a report to the county department of social services." Sometimes exposure to domestic violence rises to the level that requires a report to CPS. It depends on the level of exposure to domestic violence and its impact on the child. DSS is more likely to substantiate a report for abuse or neglect if any of the following factors are present:
 - The child has ever called 911, intervened, and/or been physically harmed during violent incidents between adults.
 - The child is fearful for his or her life or the non-offending parent/adult victim's life.
 - The child is present when the perpetrator inflicts injury on the non-offending parent/adult victim.
 - There has been repeated police involvement, and/or civil protective orders have been obtained.
 - There is a history of domestic violence, or the violence is increasing in frequency.
 - There are weapons present or weapons have been used.

Starting The Conversation

- Conversations with children can't always be planned—sometimes they just happen. The following tips will help you make the most of the conversation whether it's planned or spontaneous:
- Take the lead: when you open the conversation, you're telling them it is safe to talk and that they don't have to be alone with their thoughts and worries.
- Open with messages of support, like "I care about you, and I will listen to you."
- It is important to support and acknowledge their feelings, experiences, and their version of the story. Expect that children/youth who are exposed to domestic violence will know more than you think, no matter how young they are. Sometimes when adults assume children are asleep or not paying attention, they are actually listening to everything. If they are too young to understand what's going on, they may fill in the gaps with their imagination.

- Talk to children and youth in a way that is appropriate for their ages. Use words that you know they understand. Be careful not to talk about adult concerns or at an adult's level of understanding.
- Monitor your own feelings. If you are able to talk calmly and confidently, you convey a sense of security. A calm tone sends the message that you are in charge and capable.
- Be alert to signs that your child is ready to end the conversation. Children who have heard enough may get restless or silly, stop listening, or stop asking questions.

Helpful Messages For Kids About Domestic Violence

1. If something is going on, we will need to get help from someone together.
2. Violence isn't OK.
3. It isn't your fault.
4. I will try my best to help you in being safe.
5. It's not your job to fix what is wrong.

Among Other Things, Educators Can:

- Attend/offer trainings on how to help children and youth facing domestic violence, beginning with understanding how to discuss the topic with their students.
- It's important for educators to understand a student's home life. Sometimes something as simple as school pick-up can be a serious matter for the safety of these children.
- Since educators spend long hours with their students it's important for them to look out for signs of trauma.
- Educators have the power to create a safe, healthy culture in the classroom.

Know The Resources

- [NCCADV](#)
- [Domestic Violence Support | National Domestic Violence Hotline \(thehotline.org\)](#)
- [Preventing Teen Dating Violence](#)
- [Recognizing and Responding to Teen Dating Violence for Educators](#)

To view the resources referenced in this guide and to connect with your agencies, please visit <https://nccadv.coalitionmanager.org/resourcemanager/resourcefile/details/689> or scan the QR code below.

This product was supported by grant number 2018-V2-GX-0061, awarded by the NC Governor's Crime Commission, NC Department of Safety, Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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