

When a partner hurts their spouse or partner by causing fear, threats and injury in the relationship; this partner is also hurting their babies, children and teens by putting them in the midst of the threats and harm. They don't create a sense of co-parenting either.

These upsetting and on-going experiences likely create chronic stress, trauma and traumatic responses for the kids and their parent victimized by this type of hurting. Traumatic responses often show up in kid's behavior. But they might not be noticed because their trauma reactions often look disruptive and perhaps disrespectful or they may be really quiet or clingy.

Living with or visiting a parent who batters and hurts puts children on high alert. Trauma causes people to be on high alert throughout the day and night for what could happen to them next.

# Experiencing Trauma Affects Our

## Thoughts

Children & teens may think the fighting, hurting & yelling is their fault. They may think every family has this kind of hurt happening. They may think, "If I could do better this wouldn't happen." They may blame the parent who gets hurt. They just want the **hurting** to stop.

## Feelings

Kids who witness hurting in their family experience many feelings like *sad & mad* that this is happening; *guilt* that they can't stop it, very *worried* about when something scary will happen again, *afraid* of being hurt, and *overprotective* of their siblings, pets and parent. They feel *confused* by the hurtful parent's twisting of love and fear.

## Physical Sensations

Feelings show up in our bodies too. This is true for everyone. Kids that have lived with a parent who hurts may stress cry more, have headaches or stomach aches, and feel shaky, fidgety or jumpy. They may have nightmares, throw-up or feel dizzy, and some cover their ears from sounds. Lots of thoughts race through their heads and so it's hard to stay focused.

## Behaviors

Babies, children and teens may be jumpy, startle easily, have difficult behaviors, cry a lot, be grumpy and irritable, have difficulty sitting still and can't fall or stay asleep. Some may be quiet, shy or clingy and regress back to sucking thumbs or wetting their beds or clothes.

## Coping

All kids find ways to cope during their stress and worry. **Their actions and choices are survival skills developed in the midst of living with a parent who hurts their family. Their behaviors may show up as disruptive or disrespectful or overprotective.** This is most likely linked to the abuse they have watched or heard.

Children and teens show resiliency through these difficult times, especially when a caring adult provides care, comfort, lets them know they matter and this hurting is not their fault.



You, as their caring parent, taking the time to try these suggestions, can help regulate their behavior and reactions to things in the present moments.

## Rocking & Swinging

Take some time to rock your babies and children or go to the playground and swing. The back and forth repeating motion of rocking is so soothing and calms children.

## Humming & Singing

Singing or humming also has been shown to increase the feelings of goodness and control. Picking a favorite family song to sing together to build a stronger connection is a wonderful way to teach healthy coping to your children.

## Playing

Every child and teen needs time to play. Moving and playing lets the body heal and gets rid of stress stored inside their bodies, especially when upsetting things have happened to them.

**Playing on Floor**—Giving younger kids daily times to play on the floor with you where they have your attention is an amazing way to offer your kids support, care and love. This restores a sense of calm in your family.

## Sleeping, Eating & Drinking Water

Hungry and tired kids become irritable and have trouble listening, which in turn makes parenting more challenging. It's important every day to feed a child healthy food, make sure they get enough water, and have plenty of rest because it helps manage the many feelings they are experiencing. It also regulates their blood glucose levels so their behavior stays more even.

## Breathing

Your breath is your anchor to regulating emotions, shifting moods, and feeling calmer. Stress can cause us to breathe in a rapid way. Practice breathing with your children & teens many times a day. This helps kids learn to manage their sensations and feelings. Breathing in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth 4 or 5 times lowers blood pressure, slows heart rate and brings kids back to a sense of control..

## Create & Keep Basic Routines

Having routines or doing the same thing each morning and night creates a sense of safety and consistency. This is important because the abusive person has always changed the rules and disrupted routines.

**Some parents think it's spoiling them but in fact it helps them to feel safer and calmer inside their bodies.** Please stick with it! It's going to take time to heal the hurting that you've all been through.

## Emotional & Physical Safety Planning With Children & Teens

If your child or teen needs support when they feel overwhelmed by too much or because of the changes, then making a plan for your child might help. If you are concerned or would like more ideas please know advocates are here to talk with you and your kids. We can also offer community referrals for extra support or counseling too.

## Catch Them Doing Good

Finding times to support your children and catch them doing the right thing can go a long way in guiding your children and teens. So much of what they heard before leaving was filled with cruelty and mixed messages. Children and teens can benefit from such positivity and hope.

## Give Hugs & Calm Responses

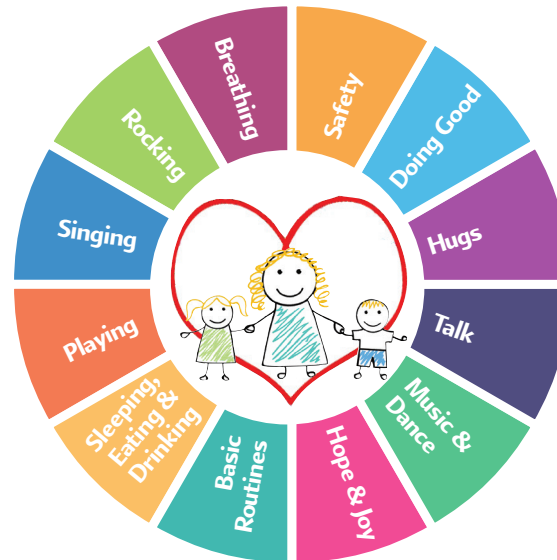
When domestic violence has happened in a family, hands and harsh words have so often caused hurting. Kids can feel safer with positive attention filled with hugs and peaceful responses from their caring parent.

## Talk With Your Babies, Children & Teens

Kids need to hear from you, their caring parent that you understand upsetting things have changed their family. When each of you has been through fear, isolation and ever-changing rules, you can talk with them about what they worry about most, and what they miss most. You can praise them for being brave through all of this even though each child may have mixed feelings about leaving.

## Music & Dance

When times are demanding, get your kids to moving in the right direction by using music, dancing or marching. You'll create a positive feeling which brings laughter too! It can be easier on you then time outs and taking away things. Building kids up and showing them that you can create fun while expecting them to listen, works during times of change and loss.



## Inspire Hope & Joy

Kids need built back up after living with an abusive parent who has caused hurt for all of you. Finding the little joys in your day can encourage children to use their strength this way too. Kids like to be helpful. Praise them when they are pitching in!

**You and each of your children deserve respect, kindness and safety in your lives!**

This publication was supported by a Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) grant award administered by the Ohio Attorney General's Office. Victims of federal crimes will be served. Provided by The Ohio Domestic Violence Network's Youth Institute. Contact [soniaf@odvn.org](mailto:soniaf@odvn.org)