



FORT GARRY WOMEN'S
RESOURCE CENTRE

Children Who Witness Abuse, and their Self Esteem: Fact Sheet

All children need help in developing and maintaining self-esteem. Children who have witnessed abuse may need extra support. Children who have seen or heard violence in the home often have low self-esteem because:

- Witnessing violence is as traumatizing as experiencing violence.
- They don't feel safe.
- They feel they are to blame.
- Their needs may be continually overlooked or suppressed in order to keep the violent partner appeased.

They Are Traumatized

Witnessing violence is as damaging as being abused. The child learns to accept violent behaviour as a normal part of family life.

They Don't Feel Safe

If there is violence in the home, children may not feel safe or secure because they are not sure when the next violent outburst will occur. They may also be confused by the inconsistencies of the violent behaviour (i.e. the violent partner may be loving and gentle as well as abusive). The message they learn is that they cannot trust their environment.

They Feel That They are to Blame

Children may feel they are to blame for the violence, they are not protecting their mothers from the violence, and they are the cause of the marriage break-up. They may believe that if they had behaved differently then the abusive incident would not have occurred. The message they learn is they are bad and incompetent.

The Needs May be Overlooked

Children may not get the attention and care they need because in order to appease the abuser his needs always come first. Therefore, the child learns they are not important or special and don't deserve to get their needs met.

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The Parenting Support Group For Women Who Have Experienced Abuse: Facilitator's Manual, by Angela Henderson, J. Eriksen & S. Ogden, 1997.

<http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/pdf/parenting.pdf>