



Your children are listening and sometimes watching too.

It is a myth to think yelling and screaming, pushing, shoving, throwing of objects and hitting between parents does not affect their children.

Consider the child's perspective. Children are wholly dependent upon their parents for safety and security. With violence between their parents, these children are not only no longer protected but their source of safety and security is now undermined. What was to be their source of safety and security are now the very persons from whom the children need protection.

Even when parents think the child is not witness, they are witness. They hear it from their rooms; they stand out of sight behind closed doors; they're sometimes at the foot or top of the stairs. They stand guard, not knowing what or how to defend their parents.

Children are terrified when their parents fight. Even if not in the room, they hear the shouts and screams and the hits and falls. They witness broken objects, holes in walls, not to mention bruises, black eyes and bloodied noses. Their fear is overwhelming and they carry it with them long after the violent event. The thoughts haunt both their dreams and waking life. They space out at school, unable to concentrate, being taken over by memories of parental violence and fear. Their mind wanders to thoughts of how to stop their parents' violence or how to protect one from the other.

Unable to tolerate the upset, some children, particularly young teens, turn to their friends. They slowly discuss the traumatic events, leaking a little more and a little more. Their friends catch on and feel the fear in their friends. The fear is palpable. Many of the young friends, not knowing what to do, may tell a teacher or parent.

The child whose parents are violent grows terrified of the secret getting out. Some, unable to contain themselves and their fear may resort to drugs,

alcohol, promiscuity or self-mutilation to release their tension.

If you are in a violent relationship, seek help. Women may call upon women's shelters. Further, although some people are afraid of child protective services, they still can refer you to counselling services for yourself and/or your children.

If you are an adult to whom a child has turned, do not fall prey to the veil of secrecy. It is secrecy that allows such behaviour to continue. Call child protective services and do the best you can to support the child as matters unfold. Truly the violence has to stop and it likely will not cease without intervention. Further, parents and child need support and counselling to understand how this problem developed, their respective roles and to learn more appropriate means for conflict resolution.

If not child protective services, you may have to call police. Do intervene. Again, do not hesitate. A criminal act is being perpetrated and someone is being assaulted and children as witness to the assault are suffering their own trauma. Bearing witness to parental violence directly, indirectly, before during or afterwards is a form of emotional and psychological abuse of the child.

Children whose parents are subject to violent behaviour between themselves, are never able to rest comfortably until long after the violence ends.

Take responsibility to end domestic violence. Don't let it continue if it comes to your attention.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.