



## **Helping children witnessing or experiencing domestic violence during the pandemic**

For anyone experiencing domestic violence, these are especially dangerous times, as survivors isolate at home with their abusers. For survivors with children, their challenges are magnified even more by knowing their children are witnessing or experiencing abuse as well.

To those survivors, Hubbard House wants to support you during these unprecedented times. It is ok to feel overwhelmed, challenged, and more.

Hubbard House is here for you and your children. You can reach trained advocates 24/7 through our Hotline at (904)354-3114 or Textline at (904)210-3698.

### **What children are experiencing**

Children witnessing or experiencing domestic violence in their home are likely under a high level of stress. Because of coronavirus (COVID-19), they have the added stressors of upended routines and fear of the impact of the virus. This can create an incredibly challenging environment for children.

For children who witness or directly suffer from abuse, they may carry the stress in many different ways or a combination of ways. Many children show behavioral changes, including regressing, withdrawing, showing signs of confusion, and acting out. Children will often also experience physical signs of stress, like stomachaches or headaches.

When domestic violence and coronavirus intersect, it can cause some unique challenges. For example, children in a home where domestic violence occurs may see school and after-school activities as a break, where they can socialize with friends, be away from the stress at home, and potentially connect with a counselor or other resources. Because of coronavirus, schooling is now virtual and after-school activities are largely not taking place, meaning that relief has been taken away.

Additionally, since children are in the home more – potentially with the abusive parent, as the family unit isolates together -- they may be more exposed to or directly suffering from abuse.

### **What you can do**

Whether or not children are showing these signs, [the National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) recommends speaking with them about what's happening, even if it might seem better to not talk about it. Children's fears and concerns can increase if they don't discuss what they've experienced. Listening and understanding their feelings is a great start. Letting them know the abuse is not their fault, sharing that they are loved and that you want to keep them safe can make a difference. Creating a safety plan with children

so they know what to do when they don't feel safe can be empowering for both the survivor parent and the child.

To help you navigate those conversations, Hubbard House has trained advocates available 24/7 through our Hotline at (904)354-3114 or Textline at (904)210-3698. [The National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of School Nurses](#) also jointly issued guidelines for supportive conversations with children, including using age appropriate language, creating an open environment where children can ask questions, and providing reassurance that you will do what you can to keep them safe (this reference was published early in the coronavirus pandemic, so while some information is dated, it also includes many helpful considerations).

To help children navigate this challenging time, there are some additional things the child's support network can help with. Before engaging in any of these activities, the adult should carefully consider the safety of these actions, and safety plan for her/himself and the children.

- Build the children's self-esteem: Adults can speak with the children about what activities or actions make them feel happy and accomplished, and then work to consider how that can be adapted for the current settings. For example, if a child likes to play sports, are there video coaching sessions available that the child can watch and play along with?
- Help connect the children with peers. Many adults connect through video chat; children can do the same. Consider coordinating video chats between children who are friends, with the permission and assistance of their parents.
- Have engaging, educational resources available: Teachers have had to quickly adapt to the new virtual school structure, which parents are heavily assisting with. If the workload is leaving a child with too much free time, having other resources ready could continue to engage the child in a potentially rewarding way. [Wide Open School](#) is one platform that has educational resources, live events like story time, ideas for art projects, and more, all broken down by age.
- Maintain a routine: Many children benefit from stability, so while much of their normal routine has changed, try to build a new routine that can be followed. Identify meal times, screen time, bed time, and other benchmarks.
- Take time for self-care: While stress will show in different ways and children will seek to cope with it in different ways, presenting opportunities for children to focus on themselves can potentially help the children connect and understand their feelings. [Futures Without Violence](#) lists several websites that have self-care and de-stressing activities intended for parents and children experiencing domestic violence and trauma.

Just as children may be dealing with this dual trauma, adult survivors of domestic violence are as well – and even more, because they're directly experiencing the abuse, which may be heightened, because of [tactics an abuser may use in relation specifically to coronavirus](#). Identifying a second trusted adult for their child to turn to is

recommended, to supplement the support for their children at times that the abuser's actions limit the survivor's ability to provide care.

Even in this time of social distancing and isolation, Hubbard House continues to serve survivors of domestic violence around the clock through our emergency shelter, Hotline at (904)354-3114, and Textline at (904)210-3698. In addition to the trained advocates who can help a survivor navigate their situation and plan for their safety, we have staff dedicated to working with children experiencing or suffering from abuse.