Storybooks and Videos for Helping Children with Family Violence

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Introduction

Titles can be ordered through your local bookstore, the publisher or Internet booksellers.

The prevalence of domestic violence, and the subsequent number of children witnessing such violence, can no longer be denied by society. According to research, 3 - 5 children in every classroom have been exposed to domestic violence (Kincaid, 1982).

This list and these guidelines were compiled by a school social worker and mental health professional in the hope that breaking the shroud of silence surrounding domestic violence will empower victims of all ages, and will prevent future violent relationships.

Storybooks for Helping Children with Family Violence

Guidelines for Using Books Depicting Domestic Violence in Therapeutic or Educational Settings

• Define your goals & objectives concerning the use of a book discussing domestic violence. In a classroom setting, it should open meaningful conversation about a serious social issue. Teachers should be prepared for follow up in the days and weeks to come, in case a child finds the courage to disclose an experience. Therapeutically, it offers children a concrete avenue for understanding a painful & confusing life experience, while gaining hope and coping skills through disclosure (bibliotherapy). Either setting requires a well-developed sense of trust between the children and the teacher or therapist.

• Create an emotionally safe climate. Prepare children for the content, and give them options for dealing with potential discomfort. In a classroom environment, your audience will need more preparation than a one-to-one setting, in which the most essential element is remaining mindful of the individual child's emotional responses and needs. For example:

• Classroom: This book tells about a family that fights. You may feel sad, mad or confused about this subject. If you feel too uncomfortable, you can set your head down on your desk, or go next door to Mrs. Jones' room.
• Individual: This book is about a family that fights. We can read it if you'd like. Some kids think it helps to read or talk about this; but if it's too uncomfortable, just tell me & I'll quit reading.

• Be familiar with common emotional reactions of children exposed to domestic violence (see handout "How to Help a Child Exposed to Family Violence"). Be open to and accepting of diverse reactions to the topic.

• Prior to discussing students' reactions to the story in a group or classroom, define rules around confidentiality & respecting others' responses. For example:

  • We'll talk about this book, and we may talk about things we've seen in our own lives. We will respect all the students in this classroom by listening thoughtfully and by not repeating any life stories others share. You may, of course, share your feelings with others, and I hope you do that - especially with your parents.

  • Children's reactions and responses may be very different from your expectations or from the storyline. Children may need to be reassured that the emotions expressed in the story are not emotional expectations of children living with family violence. Although society often dictates how one ought to react, there are no "right" or "wrong" feelings for any given situation. For instance, while the story may stress a child's relief when the parents are not fighting, a child with a chronic experience of family violence may no longer experience such relief, and may instead feel anxious, anticipating the next incident.

  • Be ready to accept all reactions, questions, ideas, thoughts and feelings as valid. This includes nervous responses such as giggling, fidgeting and eye rolling. You can respond in a genuine and informative fashion, while opening the door to more contemplative responses.

  • I know that people sometimes laugh or fidget when they feel nervous - and I expect some of that to happen when we discuss uncomfortable topics. Let's not let that get in the way of talking about it, though.

  • Be prepared with questions to help elicit children's understanding of the emotions experienced by both children and adults in the story. Help them generalize these emotions to others living with family violence.

  • As you would for other emotionally intense curricula, inform parents about the content of the lesson plan and their children's potential reactions to it.

  • A letter home might state: We are providing a curriculum on families that includes information about family conflict and family violence. We will read an age-appropriate book that depicts family abuse. Your child may be upset to learn about this social problem, and may want to talk with you afterward. We encourage you as parents to use this opportunity to discuss your values with your children.
• After the story, allow children an opportunity for a free-form activity to process the content at their own pace.

• After the story, you'll have some time to draw, sculpt, paint or scribble your thoughts or feelings. If you'd like, you can share your art or tell what you thought about the story. I'll be here to listen if you want to talk with me alone. You can also ask to sit with me during our lunch break (or other specific time).

List of Books and Reading Materials

*Highly recommended title

*A Family That Fights* by Sharon Bernstein

An 8-year-old boy & his two younger siblings live in a home where the father abuses the mother. Directly addresses the impact of domestic violence on family relationships. Picture book with illustrations in pencil, 4 - 12 years. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co. (847) 581-0033

**Place for Starr: A Story of Hope for Children Experiencing Family Violence** (I have not seen this title myself).

Softcover, 40 pp., 8.5 x 9.5, four-color throughout. $8.95 ISBN: 1-55864-082-7, Charlotte, NC: KIDSRIGHTS (800) 892-5437 /FAX (704) 541-0113

*A Safe Place* by Maxine Trottier


**A Safe Place to Live: A Story for Children Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence** by Michelle Harrison (I have not seen this title myself).

Softcover, 24 pp., 8.5 x 8.5, 2002 Price: $3.95 Spanish translation also available: Charlotte, NC: KIDSRIGHTS (800) 892-5437 /FAX (704) 541-0113 www.kidsrights.com (Site no longer functioning as of 2/08/11)

*Clover's Secret* by Christine Winn & David Walsh, PhD

In an imaginary land where people can fly, two girls form a friendship that eventually exposes Clover's secret - the violence in her family. Clover's Secret approaches domestic violence indirectly, which may prove helpful when working with children who would be emotionally threatened by a more direct approach. The story ends with the teacher providing adult support and understanding, but without a radical change in Clover's family functioning. For children living with violence, the message is: we believe you, it's not your fault and you can do things to help yourself cope. Picture
*Daddy, Daddy, Be There* by Candy Dawson Boyd & Floyd Cooper

Children's poignant pleas for fatherly love & support throughout the life span. This easy-to-read story gives voice to all that children seek in their lifetime relationship with their fathers. This book only alludes to domestic violence, but should not be passed over. It is a useful therapeutic tool. Picture book with multicultural illustrations in pastels, ages 3 - 10. New York City: Philomel Books Division of Putnam & Grosset

**Hear My Roar: Lungin's Broken Family** by Dr. Ty Hochban

A bear family struggles with the father bear's drinking and abuse. When the mother bear discovers how the baby bear is affected, she seeks help from the family doctor. Eventually mother & baby bear leave, seeking shelter from the violence. It is written in 5 short chapters, so young children will need to take breaks between chapters. Includes information for mothers and paraprofessionals on the effects of domestic violence on children and how to share this book with a child. It also validates the mother's reactions to the abuse. When using this book, be very careful to keep children from inferring that drinking causes abuse, and from assuming that abuse will end if drinking does. Storybook with woodcut illustrations, 6 - 11 years, 31 pages, $9.95. Buffalo, NY: Annick Press Ltd. www.annickpress.com

*I Wish the Hitting Would Stop* by The Rape and Abuse Crisis Center of Fargo-Moorhead

Actually a workbook that can be used as a storybook, it is written from the perspectives of young persons living in violent homes. Their feelings & thoughts about parental violence are explored. Safety-planning & coping skills are addressed. A 68-page facilitator's guide is available, which includes discussion questions, related activities and a resource section listing books, films & games for children and adults, as well as "Cycle of Violence" and "Myths & Realities of Domestic Violence" ($14.95). Large softcover book with simple black & white drawings suitable for coloring, 6 - 14 years, 28 pages, $3. A Spanish language version of the workbook is also available. Fargo, ND: Red Flag Green Flag Resources (800) 627-3675 /FAX (888) 237-5332

**Mommy & Daddy are Fighting** by Susan Paris & Gail Labinski

Three young sisters build a fort of blankets & huddle together to cope with their father's abuse against their mother. A discussion guide & bibliography are included. Picture book with washed illustrations, 4 - 8 years, 18 pages, $8.95 paperback. Seattle, WA: Seal Press (206) 283-7844/FAX (206) 285-9410 www.sealpress.com/home.php

*Something Is Wrong At My House* by Diane Davis

A boy tells about the violence in his home & how it affects him. For younger children, you can read just the text below the illustrations. Includes advice for children on coping. Small book with
pencil sketch illustrations, 3 - 10 years, 40 pages, $5.95 paperback. A Spanish language version is also available, **Algo Anda Mal En Mi Casa**.

Also in their Books to Help Protect Children series: **Loving Touches** (a book about positive, nurturing touches), **The Trouble with Secrets** (helps young children decide whether to keep or share a secret), **Something Happened & I'm Scared to Tell** (for sexual abuse victims) and **It's MY Body** (sexual abuse prevention). Spanish versions of these are also available.


**When They Fight** by Kathryn White & Cliff Wright

In simple & poetic prose well suited for young children, a little badger shares the fear, loneliness & sadness he feels when his parents fight. When they "are friends again . . . the world smiles." He feels safe & reassured. Large hardcover book with watercolor illustrations, 3 - 9 years, 24 pages. Available through the publishers or through Paperbacks for Educators, (800) 227-2591. Delray Beach, FL: Winslow Press www.winslowpress.com [http://www.winslowpress.com]

**The World I See - A Story for Children Who Have Felt the Impact of Domestic Violence** by Debra Whiting Alexander, PhD

A storybook/workbook that provides an opportunity for children to tell their own story about living in a family that fights. Explores issues of disclosure, assertiveness, guilt, coping and personal power. Available through the publisher for $3.95, with discounts for quantity orders on this title. Large softcover book with blank pages for expression, and simple black & white drawings suitable for coloring, 3 - 12 years. From the **Something Bad Happened** series. Huntington, NY: Bureau for At-Risk Youth (800) 99-YOUTH /FAX (516) 349-5521

**The Words Hurt** by Chris Loftis

Greg's dad never physically hurts anyone, but he yells things that make the people around him feel awful. One afternoon, though, Greg finally expresses his sad & hurt feelings to his father, who then changes his ways. This book is long, and may not hold the attention of some children. Storybook with graphic art illustrations, 8 - 12 years, 44 pages. Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon Press (908) 604-6311 www.newhorizonpressbooks.com [http://www.newhorizonpressbooks.com]

List compiled by Margaret Kearney, LCSW, CISW Book list last updated March 11, 2003.
Videos for Helping Children & Youth with Family Violence

Guidelines for Showing a Video Depicting Domestic Violence

• Prepare before showing the video. Be familiar with the entire video. Be aware of which parts may be emotionally difficult or intense for your audience.

• Create an emotionally safe climate. Prepare children for their potential emotional reactions to the content, and give them options for dealing with potential discomfort. For example:
  
  • We are about to watch a video about a family that has a serious problem (or about a family that fights). You may have sad, mad or confused feelings while you watch it. If you feel too uncomfortable to watch, you can set your head down on your desk, or go next door to Mrs. Jones' room.

• Prior to discussing their reactions, define rules regarding confidentiality & respecting others' responses. For example:
  
  • Out of respect for each other and for this classroom, I expect that you will not discuss what others have to say about this video or this topic with anyone outside of our classroom. You may, of course, discuss your own feelings, and I encourage you to do so - especially with your parents or others in your family.

• Children's reactions and responses may be very different from your expectations. Be ready to accept all reactions, questions, ideas, thoughts and feelings as valid. This includes nervous reactions such as giggling, fidgeting and eye rolling. You can respond in a genuine and informative fashion, while opening the door to more contemplative responses.

  • I know that people sometimes laugh or fidget when they feel nervous - and I expect some of that to happen when we discuss uncomfortable topics. Let's not let that get in the way of talking about it, though

• Consider stopping the video for discussion. Be prepared with questions to help elicit children's understanding of the emotions experienced by both children and adults in the story. Help them to generalize these emotions to others living with family violence.

• As you would for other emotionally intense curricula, inform parents about the content of the video and their children's potential reactions to it.

  • A letter home might state: We are providing a curriculum on families that includes information about family conflict and family violence. We will show an age-appropriate video that depicts a family experiencing spousal abuse. Your child may be upset to learn about this social problem, and may want to talk with you afterward. We encourage you as parents to use this opportunity to discuss your values with your children.
After the video, allow students an opportunity for some free-form activity to process the content.

After the video, you'll have some time to draw, sculpt, paint or write down your thoughts or feelings. If you'd like, you can share your art or tell what you thought about the video. I'll be here to listen if you want to talk with me alone. You can also ask to sit with me during our lunch break (or other specific time).

**Video List**

**It's NOT Okay: Let's Talk About Domestic Violence** (10 mins)

Actor Fred Savage speaks about domestic violence: what it is, its effects on children, & what children can do to stay safe if exposed to domestic violence in their home (ages 7 - 12). Distributed by: American Bar Association Customer Service Center (800) 285-2221 750 N. Lake Shore Drive Chicago, IL 60611 $15 + $3.95 shipping http://www.abanet.org/domviol/home.html

**Tulip Doesn't Feel Safe** (12 mins)

This cartoon validates the feelings of children when parents or other significant adults fight, and gives them strategies for staying safe. A coloring/workbook accompanies this video. Excellent as an adjunct to a classroom-based family violence curriculum (ages 4 - 8). Distributed by: Hazelden Bookplace (800) 231-5165 7205 Ohms Lane Minneapolis, MN 55439-2159 $225 + shipping http://www.hazelden.org/

**Secret Wounds: Working with Child Observers of Family Violence** (8 vignettes, 1-4 mins each)

Two segments of about 15 minutes each. The first is for the adults working with these children; the second has animated vignettes based on drawings by child witnesses of woman battering. The children speak about their experiences (voiceover). Excellent as an adjunct to a classroom-based family violence curriculum, or as a tool for small therapeutic groups. Leader's guide & reproducible activity sheets are included (ages 5 - 13). Distributed by: Banerjee Associates (609) 683-1261 2 Sycamore Skillman NJ 08558-2013 $95 + $4 shipping http://www.childdevelopmentmedia.com/intervention-prevention/10453p.html

**Tell 'Em How You Feel** (18 mins)

It is the story of a child who feels all alone & angry with his parents & best friend. A friendly troll that the child meets in the woods teaches him how to handle anger & conflicts without holding in feelings or fighting (ages 4 - 9; $89.95).

**What Tadoo With Fear** (20 mins)

The film explores, with the help of puppets, both the positive & negative aspects of fear. It also gives real-life examples of situations to show children how they can conquer fear & open up to adults they trust (ages 4 - 9; $99.95).
It's Not Always Happy at My House (33 mins)

The video traces the consequences of woman battering on 3 children in a family, leading to their admission to a battered women's shelter (ages 8 - 13; $89.95). Order by title and price. Distributed by: Phoenix Films 2349 Chaffee Drive St. Louis MO 63146 FAX (314) 569-2834 (800) 221-1274 http://www.phoenixlearninggroup.com

The Crown Prince - National Film Board of Canada (38 mins)

The video depicts the feelings & frustrations of 2 sons of a battered woman: a grade-school child & an adolescent. The film explores issues related to student disclosure to a teacher (10 - 12 years).

*Kid Stuff (6 mins)

Intense & powerful, this short film combines drawings & puppet animation to convey how violence at home tears at the equilibrium & sensitivity of a child. Winner of the Festival Award for Human Relations, Chicago Children's Film Festival and the Bronze Apple, National Educational Film & Video Festival. Item #C 0090 018. Distributed by: Nat'l Film Board of Canada (212) 629-8890 FAX (212) 629-8502 350 Fifth Avenue, Suite 4820 New York, NY 10118 video $99; rental $35; $5 shipping; e-mail: NewYork@nfb.ca

What About Us? (28 mins)

One in a series of videos on domestic violence, What About Us? explains to children who have witnessed spousal abuse what has happened and why they feel the way that they do. Addresses children's specific concerns, such as returning home, dad's whereabouts and police intervention. Other videos in the series: Right From the Start; Seen But Not Heard; One Hit Leads to Another; Time to Change. Item #8497/0270. Distributed by: Kinetic Video /USA (800) 466-7631 or (716) 856-7631 FAX (716) 856-7838 350 Fifth Avenue, Suite 4820 Buffalo, NY 14202 video $149

Kinetic Video /Canada (800) 263-6910 or (416) 538-6613 511 Bloor Street West FAX (416) 538-9984 Toronto, Ontario M5S 1Y4 http://www.kineticvideo.com email: info@kineticvideo.com

Our Silence Today Will Be Their Screams Tomorrow Break the Silence - Stop the Violence Listen to the Children - Give Them a Voice

Video list compiled by Margaret Kearney, LCSW Last updated June 25, 2003