

Women Are Safe, Inc.

P O Box 2
Centerville, TN 37185

HOTLINE : 1-800-470-1117 (Dickson, Humphreys, Perry Counties) **729-5730** (Hickman County)



Silent Victims

To grow and blossom, children need security, warmth, nurturance, and guidance. Childhood should be a time of no-risk dependence on others, a time when they feel love and acceptance, a time when children get their needs met sufficiently so that they are able to enter into adulthood as secure individuals.

Children who grow up in homes where there is domestic violence often don't get these needs met in healthy ways. They often have a sense of mistrust about them. Many feel that they are somehow the cause of the violence, and they feel powerless to stop it. These children often feel alone in their experience and because of their shame, bear their pain in silence.

Family Violence figures indicate that each year an estimated 4 million American women are battered by their partners.

A number of experts have written about the characteristics of abnormal family systems and their impact on children. Friel and Friel (1988) write about the concept of vicarious abuse. Vicarious abuse refers to the phenomenon that when children witness the abuse of anyone else, they also become victims of that abuse. Vicarious abuse is just as painful, hurtful, and harmful as other kinds of abuse. It is important not to minimize the impact that this type of abuse can have on children.

90% of children from violent homes witness their fathers beating their mothers.

Children who are victims of direct or vicarious abuse may have a poor self-image; feel that they don't matter or that there is something wrong with them. Their educational and medical needs may not be being met. They may be delayed developmentally. Children from violent homes may be overly aggressive and difficult to control, or they may be unusually passive and withdrawn. These children need individual attention. They need to be able to express their frustration and anger in safe and appropriate ways. They need to know that they have rights too.

It is crucial that family violence be addressed with the silent victims, the children. The effects resulting from witnessing violence must be recognized early, and children must be helped to cope and overcome these effects if we are to break the cycle of violence in their lives, in our communities, and in our country.

If your family is dealing with domestic violence, we want you to know that help is available. Women Are Safe advocates can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 931-729-5730 or toll free at 1-800-470-1117. We can offer shelter and support groups along with many other services. If you won't do it for yourself, get help for your children. Don't they deserve better?

If you are interested in helping others, Women Are Safe has many volunteer opportunities available. Contact our office at 931-729-9885.

Korie Cochran
Children's Program Coordinator ~ Women Are Safe, Inc.