

Children's Immediate Reactions and Long-term Effects

Children's *immediate reactions* to IPV may include:

- Generalized anxiety
- Sleeplessness
- Nightmares
- Difficulty concentrating
- High activity levels
- Increased aggression
- Increased anxiety about being separated from a parent
- Intense worry about their safety or the safety of a parent

Long-term effects, especially from chronic exposure to IPV, may include:

- Physical health problems
- Behavior problems in adolescence (e.g., delinquency, alcohol or substance abuse)
- Emotional difficulties in adulthood (e.g., depression, anxiety, PTSD)

Exposure to IPV has also been linked to poor school performance. Children who grow up with IPV may have impaired ability to concentrate; difficulty completing school work; and lower scores on measures of verbal, motor, and social skills.

In addition to these physical, behavioral, psychological, and cognitive effects, children who have been exposed to IPV often learn destructive lessons about the use of violence and power in relationships. Children may learn that it is acceptable to exert control or relieve stress by using violence, or that violence is in some way linked to expressions of intimacy and affection. These lessons can have a powerful negative effect on children in social situations and relationships throughout childhood and in later life.

As with other trauma types, children's responses to IPV vary with age and developmental stage. In addition, children's responses depend on the severity of the violence, their proximity to the violent events, and the responses of their caregivers. (<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/intimate-partner-violence/effects>)

Reactions by Age Group

The table below shows a brief list of possible reactions or symptoms by age group.

Birth to 5	Ages 6 to 11	Ages 12 to 18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleep and/or eating disruptions • Withdrawal/lack of responsiveness • Intense separation anxiety • Inconsolable crying • Developmental regression, loss of acquired skills • Intense anxiety, worries, and/or new fears • Increased aggression and/or impulsive behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nightmares, sleep disruptions • Aggression and difficulty with peer relationships in school • Difficulty with concentration and task completion in school • Withdrawal and/or emotional numbing • School avoidance and/or truancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antisocial behavior • School failure • Impulsive and/or reckless behavior, e.g., <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School truancy ▪ Substance abuse ▪ Running away ▪ Involvement in violent or abusive dating relationships • Depression • Anxiety • Withdrawal

It is important to remember that these symptoms can also be associated with other stressors, traumas, or developmental disturbances, and that they should be considered in the context of the child and family's functioning.

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