



# 5 WAYS TO HEAL A CHILD WHO HAS WITNESSED DOMESTIC ABUSE

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## Overview:

1. Allow Communication
2. Reinforce Boundaries
3. Build Resilience
4. Safe Zone
5. Encourage Self-Care

## Introduction:

As parents, there are many things we hope our children will experience in the world. There are many many many MORE things that we hope our children will never have to experience. One of those things is witnessing domestic abuse. Seeing or hearing a violent scene can have lasting effects on anyone- child or adult. Whether this occurred at home or somewhere else, it is important to address the trauma as early as possible in any way we can.

The best way to heal a child from trauma would be finding a compatible therapist who specializes in children's mental health and trauma recovery. There are many ways to facilitate healing throughout the process of finding and benefitting from therapy services.





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## Allowing Communication

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Children who have witnessed domestic abuse may or may not want to discuss what they have seen. If they feel like talking, allow them a safe space to do so. Listen without judgement or ridicule. If they don't feel like talking about their experience, gently let them know that you are available to talk to in any way they need. Do not push them to talk before they are ready, this will cause more negative emotions.

Sometimes an adolescent will feel more comfortable communicating through other forms, such as writing. Encourage them to let out their experience any way they need to; as long as themselves and others stay safe. Be sensitive of any potential triggers that will lead to strong negative emotions such as certain words, touches, or sounds.

***TIP:** Even if an adolescent has opened up about their experience, it doesn't mean that they have fully handled the emotional trauma they now carry. A licensed therapist who specializes in child trauma recovery can help guide them the rest of the way to a place of long-term mental well-being.*



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## Reinforce Boundaries

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A child who has witnessed domestic abuse will feel a sense of chaos internally and externally.

Rules and boundaries present order to the world a child cannot make sense of. Establishing a routine before any more trauma has occurred gives the child something to count on, look forward to, and expect. A routine could be as simple as a bedtime routine, a morning routine, a Monday night dinner, or a song they listen to every day on the way home from school. As long as it makes sense for them and they can expect it, it will provide a small comfort to the child in any scenario they might encounter.

At the same time, enforcement of household rules is paramount to establishing boundaries. If you said no ice cream after 8:00 and it's now 8:10 and they want just *one little teeny tiny scoop*, reinforcing that those are the rules might make your child temporarily disappointed, but in their head, they are learning that there is an order to the world and that will provide them a sense of stability. Be clear and firm about what is going to happen and when, and then stick to it.



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## Build Resilience

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Inner work takes a lot of time and effort, training children to begin to practice mindfulness and stress relief in healthy ways will lead to an easier time as they grow into adulthood. Practicing stress-relief activities with them such as yoga, meditation, emotional literacy games, and creative expression is a great way to help them build inner resilience.

Their self-esteem may be shaken by their experience. Releasing this negative energy can be done in many ways. It should be encouraged with the intention that they will eventually know how strong they truly are and always have been.

**Tip:** A LICENSED THERAPIST WHO IS SPECIALIZED IN CHILDREN'S TRAUMA WILL BE ABLE TO SUGGEST STRESS-RELIEF ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR CHILD AND YOURSELF AS WELL AS BUILD UP THEIR SELF-ESTEEM.



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## Safe Zone

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Creating a space for your child where they feel safe, independent, and happy is a great way to encourage them to completely be themselves, relax, and connect with their emotions (negative and positive). This can be a large or small space such as a bed, a reading corner, a playroom, a chair, or a therapist's office.

Let them decorate this space however they like (within reason, remember to reinforce reasonable boundaries) and place a journal in this space as well and encourage them to write in it if they enjoy writing. Always ask before entering their "safe space" (if safety is not a concern) and respect their answer, this lets the child begin to set up their own boundaries.

Tip: If your child is consistently not letting you into their safe space, and you feel like they should, counseling can help establish an open communication between the family.

In the meantime, continue to respect your child's wishes and boundaries as you expect them to respect yours. They may surprise you one day and show you a page in their journal with glee.

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## Encourage Self Care

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Parents unfortunately cannot always be there to care for their children, and as they grow, they will need to learn more independent tasks\*. Learning about self-care will not only improve the child's hygiene, but also their mindfulness. Turning nail-trimming from a mundane chore into a self-care routine can boost a child's self-esteem, mood, and cleanliness. Exercise and eating right will help release negative tension and boost physical health as well.

*\*Is managing your child's daily hygiene constantly an uphill battle? Check with a licensed therapist who specializes in children's mental health for symptoms of cognitive disorders.*

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***If your child needs assistance processing emotional trauma from experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse or some other event, please call Cameron Pediatric Counseling, Inc.***

***Cameron Pediatric Counseling, Inc. has licensed therapists specialized in children's mental health needs. The counselors have been helping children and their families all around the Winchester, Virginia area for nearly two decades. Call today to see how they can help your child.***