

## More on how VIBS can help children and their families

Children come into the program when a parent participates in their own counseling. Victims will develop a safety plan for themselves and their children, gain strength, and begin to create a healthy life. The children's counselor consults weekly with the parent to reinforce the parent's nurturing role with their children.

The children's program offers childcare/play groups while parents participate in counseling. Here, children can have fun in a safe environment and practice caring, social skills.

### *Specialty with witnesses of severe violence:*

VIBS specializes in counseling for children who have witnessed or are affected by severe violence, such as:

- Witnesses to domestic murder or murder-suicide
- Children whose abusive parent has committed suicide
- Children whose victimized parent has life threatening injuries.

**Legal Advocacy:** VIBS' advocates are experts in legal options and procedures in cases of domestic violence and sexual assault, and they work with victims of all ages. Advocates provide court accompaniment, information on victims' rights, and assistance with the criminal justice system.

## MISSION

Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk exists to assist survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault; to prevent these crimes through education and services; and to raise community awareness of the need for justice and compassion for victims.



VICTIMS INFORMATION BUREAU OF SUFFOLK

PO Box 428, Holbrook, NY 11741

24 Hour Hotline: (631) 360-3606

Business Phone: (631) 360-3730

[www.vibs.org](http://www.vibs.org)

[info@vibs.org](mailto:info@vibs.org)

*Printing of this brochure provided by the  
Town of Huntington*

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## Young Witnesses to Domestic Violence



For children who witness domestic violence, home is not a safe or happy place. Every year as many as 3.3 million American children see or hear their mothers\* being hit, pushed, kicked, thrown down stairs, verbally abused, or murdered. The effects of what they witness can be devastating and long lasting.

- Children are often injured by trying to protect their mothers.
- Boys who witness the abuse are more likely to grow up to become abusive also.
- Children in homes where there is partner abuse are at greater risk of child abuse.
- Over half of all child abductions are related to domestic violence.

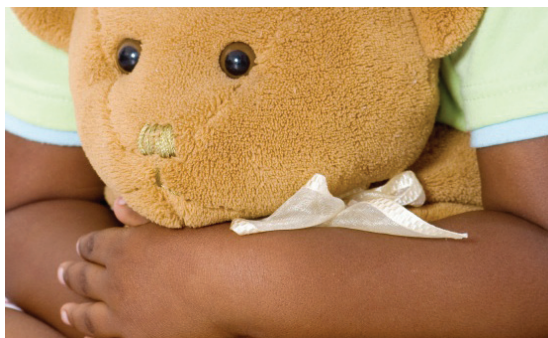
A batterer may harm his children in other ways as well, undermining the children's relationships with their mother by making her appear weak and passive. Sometimes he pits the children one against another and uses the children as pawns against the mother. As a role model he may influence the children to become either victims or bullies.

*\*Overwhelming research and practical experience show that primary aggressors are almost always male, and victims almost always female. There are, however, exceptions.*

Witnessing domestic violence causes physical and emotional harm to children. Children may feel frightened, anxious, depressed, or angry. Often they feel guilty, as if somehow it was their fault. Some children become withdrawn, while others become aggressive, copying the abuser's behavior. They may feel pressure to choose which parent to love, or feel torn between love and anger toward the abuser.

All these feelings come out in children's behavior. Depending on a child's age, some of the behaviors might include:

- Fighting or bullying
- Trouble in school; refusing to go to school
- Bedwetting, nightmares
- Losing temper
- Headaches, stomach aches, fatigue, frequent illness
- Clinging or whining
- Substance abuse
- Care-taking; filling adult roles



*Domestic violence is the use of physical, sexual, emotional, financial or psychological abuse to control or feel power over one's spouse or partner.*

### CHILDREN SAY:

**"My daddy says my mommy's bad."**

**"May I stay over here? My mommy and daddy are fighting about me."**

**"I curse at my mom like my dad does."**

### How VIBS Can Help Children and Their Parents

Although the effects of witnessing domestic violence can be traumatic and long lasting, children are resilient. With proper support, children can heal and grow in healthy ways.

**VIBS' Children's Program:** VIBS provides counseling to children ages 3 1/2 – 12. Through play, art or drama therapy, the child and therapist interact using toys, games, stories and other creative materials. The goal is to reinforce safety, comfort, and coping skills. Children are invited to speak at their own pace in a non-leading fashion. These services are available to children who have lived with domestic violence or who have been sexually abused.