

## TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

### CARING FOR CHILDREN EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND OTHER TRAUMA

There are many common behaviors and reactions in children who have been exposed to domestic violence and other traumatic events. Some of these include difficulty sleeping, increased aggressive behaviors, angry outbursts, difficulty concentrating, and separation anxiety.

Consistent support and love from a caring, stable adult is the most powerful tool to helping children heal. Talk to your children. Remind them they are safe now. Let them know that in this house, no one hits or hurts other people. Let them know they have a safe, strong caregiver now.

Here are some tips on how to respond to the difficult behaviors that stem from the child's stressful and traumatic experiences.

#### **Regression**

Children under stress tend to forget some of the things they have learned and regress to earlier behaviors. Some examples may include bedwetting, toilet accidents, or thumb sucking. Try to be patient and respond to the child as if they are the age they are regressing back to. Try to gently help them regain these skills.

#### **Separation Anxiety**

Children traumatized by violence might experience difficulty being away from you and become clingy. Be patient with the child. Try giving them a small object to carry in their pocket that they will associate with you. Help the children use calendars and clocks to anticipate when they will see you again, and be sure to be on time when you say you will pick them up!

#### **Fear**

After a traumatic event, fear might be one of the child's strongest emotions. Let children know that it is okay to be scared. Let them know they are not alone and that you are there to protect and love them.

#### **Breaking the rules**

Try to maintain consistent rules and expectations. Children feel safer when they know what is expected from them. Avoid physical punishments, you don't want the child to learn that it is okay to use violence to solve problems.

#### **Anniversary reactions**

Children may occasionally react to violent events after much time has passed. They might show signs of stress around the anniversary of the date when the violence event happened. Let the child know that you are aware it is a difficult time for them. Be open and available to talk with your child about their thoughts, fears, and feelings.

#### **Nightmares**

Children who are under stress often have difficulty sleeping, and even have nightmares. You can help the child to have a sound and peaceful sleep by establishing a regular schedules for naps and bedtime. Use daily rituals to help settle them down, such as reading a book or snuggling.

Adapted from: Cohen, E. & Walthall, B (2003). Silent Realities: Supporting Young Children and Their Families Who Experience Violence. Washington, D.C. National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice.

*Copies of our tip sheets may be found on our web site at [www.mainekids-kin.org](http://www.mainekids-kin.org)  
For permission to reproduce Maine Kids-Kin materials contact us at [info@mainekids-kin.org](mailto:info@mainekids-kin.org)*