

The Impact of Household Conflict on Young Children

For Parents of Preschoolers (Ages 3–5)

Why It Matters Children ages 3–5 are like sponges—they notice tone of voice, body language, and emotions, even if they don't understand all the words. Witnessing frequent conflict or violence can make them feel unsafe and confused.

How Children May Be Affected

Emotional Response

- Fear, worry, or sadness
- Feeling responsible for the conflict
- Trouble calming down after arguments

Developmental Impact

- Difficulty focusing or learning new skills
- Delays in language or social skills
- Trouble making friends or playing cooperatively

Behavioral Signs

- Acting out, tantrums, or aggression
- Clinginess or separation anxiety
- Regression (bedwetting, thumb sucking, baby talk)

What Children Need

Safety and Security

- Reassure your child: "You are safe."
- Keep routines steady- predictability helps children feel secure

Calm Communication

- Try to resolve disagreements away from children
- Use calm voices and respectful language in front of them

Healthy Modeling

- Show children how to express feelings with words: "I feel upset. I need to take a break"
- Let them see safe problem-solving and apologies

Attention and Comfort

- Spend one-on-one time each day with your child
- Offer extra hugs, cuddles, and reassurance after conflict

When Conflict Becomes Harmful

If children witness yelling, threats, or violence (hitting, throwing objects, intimidation), the impact is deeper. Exposure to violence can lead to long-term anxiety, difficulties in school, and struggles with relationships.

When to Seek Support

- If conflict feels unmanageable
- If your child shows frequent distress or behavior changes
- If there is any violence in the home

Support is Available

- Talk with a pediatrician or mental health professional
- Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- In emergencies, call 911



Remember

Children thrive when they feel safe, loved, and protected. Reducing conflict, modeling calm solutions, and seeking help when needed supports your child's emotional health now and in the future.

