

VULNERABILITY AND RISK FACTORS

Teachers should be aware that certain circumstances within the family, parent/carer, child and local environment place children at greater risk of child abuse.

Psychological stress and mental illness, substance abuse, disability and domestic violence within families are strongly associated with child abuse. Children in these situations may be more vulnerable to maltreatment due to:

- significant family stress or violence;
- a history of intrafamilial abuse;
- limited communication skills;
- different family or cultural values from mainstream societal values;
- physically and/or emotionally less able to protect themselves;
- Inability to understand inappropriate sexual behaviour

Characteristics of the child can lead to significant family stress which in turn can lead to increased vulnerability to abuse. For instance children:

- with high needs who may be unresponsive or cry a lot
- with disabilities or other special needs who have a greater dependence on
 - parents/carers for basic self-help needs;
- who are developmentally delayed or a tendency to be more compliant or adult centred.
- with chronic health needs
- with challenging behaviours such as aggression or hyperactivity
- born prematurely
- adopted
- under six years of age

Characteristics of the parent/carer that place a child at greater risk include:

- Alcohol or drug dependence
- Mental health problems
- A history of abuse
- Looks to child to provide social-emotional needs
- Lacks empathy
- Narcissistic
- Uses violence to solve problems
- Abuse occurring from deliberate intent

Factors within the environment that may be risk factors include:

- Teenage parenthood,
- Single parenthood
- Poverty
- Domestic and family violence
- Unemployment
- Death or divorce of a spouse
- Inadequate housing
- Absence of social supports

- Severity of abuse suggests that a child will be more vulnerable to future harm
- Perpetrator access to a child

APPENDIX C DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is behaviour which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation, economic deprivation, or behaviour which causes the victim to live in fear.

Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to be victims of abusive behaviour and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Not only is there a greater risk of abuse and neglect but there can be significant impacts on the emotional and psychological development of children and young people. The impacts will vary according to their age, the frequency of the violence and the level of support provided by external agencies.

While there are no typical responses to witnessing domestic violence, evidence indicates that they are more likely to exhibit psychological, behavioural and emotional problems such as those listed:

Age of child/young person	Possible impact/indicator
Pre-school	less secure in social situations responds to adult anger with greater distress than peers higher levels of aggression – hitting, biting frequent illness severe shyness withdrawn passive clinging anxious low self esteem social problems
Primary school aged	poor academic performance school refusal difficulties in concentration constantly fighting with peers rebellious against adult instruction unwilling to do school work aggression depression
Adolescents	depression aggression delinquency

Guideline:

Domestic Violence services across the state, includes emergency numbers:

<http://www.community.wa.gov.au/onlineresourceguide/>