

## **Domestic and Emotional Trauma and the implications for discipline**

Good afternoon everyone. Welcome once more to the grade 9's discipline life-skills workshop. I know that you are all possibly weary from all the activities of today, so I will try my best to make it as short and interactive as possible, but I will definitely need your cooperation in that segment. Today, we will be discussing domestic and emotional trauma and the implications for discipline. Simply put, how family-related trauma and emotional trauma affects how disciplined a child is.

I have for you here 3 pictures I want you to take a look at and at the end of the 3 slides, I want you to let me know what you felt while looking at them.

Scenario 1: here we have a mother protecting her child from being punished by the father. The father is visibly upset and about to hit the child with a force, or even the mother, but the mother is shielding them both.

Scenario 2: in the second one we have a mother and a father arguing. The child is physically trying to block them out by putting her hands over her ear and screaming at the same time.

Scenario 3: We have a child that is silently crying. Possibly trying to suppress a scream. On the hand of the child is written the word 'help'.

What are you feeling just by looking at these images and knowing what is possibly happening in them?

These pictures shown can provoke a myriad of emotions within us, it can provoke sadness, empathy, anger, disgust, loneliness, guilt, even resentment. What these pictures also represent is what many of you as children are going through in your very own household.

### **Statistics**

A survey of 6,000 American families found that 50 percent of men who assault their wives, also abuse their children. (Pagelow, "The Forgotten Victims: Children of Domestic Violence," 1989)

Research shows that 80 to 90 percent of children living in homes where there is domestic violence are aware of the violence. (Pagelow, "Effects of Domestic Violence on Children," Mediation Quarterly, 1990)

The more severe the abuse of the mother, the worse the child abuse. (Bowker, Arbitell, and McFerron, "On the Relationship Between Wife Beating and Child Abuse," Perspectives on Wife Abuse, 1988)

In families where the mother is assaulted by the father, daughters are at risk of sexual abuse 6.51 times greater than girls in non-abusive families. (Bowker, Arbitell and McFerron, 1988)

A child's exposure to the father abusing the mother is the strongest risk factor for transmitting violent behaviour from one generation to the next. (American Psychological Association, Violence and the Family: Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family, 1996)

Male children who witness the abuse of mothers by fathers are more likely to become men who batter in adulthood than those male children from homes free of violence. (Rosenbaum and O'Leary, "Children: The Unintended Victims of Marital Violence," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1981)

The word domestic relates to anything that has to do with the home or household. Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event we experience. So, domestic trauma has to do with terrible events that take place at home, and those events in turn cause a severe emotional reaction. This emotional reaction can be you withdrawing to your own little world where you pretend that everything is okay, or where you lash out at your parents by disobeying them, you may even begin to perform poorly in school because of how traumatised you are.

### **Domestic trauma in the home**

What does a normal household look like? Is it normal to have a household where our parents constantly fight and bicker at each other? Is it normal to feel like you are not loved in your own household? Is it normal to feel inferior and rendered self-conscious due to the constant name calling and being compared to your 'wukliss father' or 'wukliss mother'? That is not a normal household.

These are examples of domestic abuse. Not many of us would see it that way. Too many of us are accustomed to the lifestyle where there's a little hatred in the household and deem it normalcy. No, that shouldn't be. You should feel safe and secure in your own home, and without having to worry about if you did something right to deserve them treating you with love. However, instead of feeling safe, you experience traumatic stress, this refers to the physiological and emotional response we have to traumatic events. It produces intense physical and emotional reactions such as feelings of being overwhelmed and helpless.

Here are a few examples of the different type of domestic abuse that may lead to someone developing trauma:

Examples of emotional abuse (Doorways, n.d.):

- Ignoring a partner's or your child's feelings
- Insulting you
- Ridiculing or insulting valued beliefs, religion, race, heritage, or class
- Withholding approval, appreciation, or affection as punishment
- Continually criticising, calling names, or shouting at you
- Humiliating partners or children in private or public

- Refusing to socialise with people who are important to your child
- Regularly threatening to leave or told to leave
- Not allowing access to basic needs (toiletries, medication, etc.
- Abandoning someone in dangerous place
- Threatening to hurt or kill family members
- Punishing or depriving the children when angry
- Manipulating partners with lies and contradictions
- Destroying furniture, punching holes in walls or breaking appliances
- Wielding weapons in a threatening way

Examples of physical abuse:

- Pushing, kicking, slapping, punching or scratching
- Pulling or ripping out hair
- Strangling
- Biting
- Spitting at or near you
- Throwing objects at or near you
- Subjecting someone to reckless driving
- Using household objects as weapons
- Threatening you weapons
- Abuse that results in lacerations, broken bones, internal injuries or miscarriage
- Abuse that lead to disfigurement or disability
- Murder

Examples of sexual abuse that you might see among your parents or even with yourself for some who are facing this as well:

- Birth control sabotage
- Reproductive coercion
- Using a sexual derogatory name
- Forcing a partner to strip
- Forcing a partner to become a sex worker or prostitute
- Accusing a partner of promiscuity
- Forcing a partner to watch pornography, or the abusive partner having sex with others
- Subjecting the partner to unwanted touching
- Forcing a partner to participate in any form of unwanted sexual activity
- Biting, pinching or hurting a partner with objects during sex
- Sexually assaulting a partner

Examples of financial abuse you might experience in the household between your parents and with yourself as well:

- Having all bank accounts in the abuser's name
- Controlling how, when, and where money is spent
- Assigning an allowance (often very small or unrealistic cost of living)

- Denying a partner the right to work outside the home or make any financial contribution to the family
- Controlling all or most of the finances
- Misusing a partner's name for financial reasons
- Forcing partner to sign documents against their will, such as taxes, immigration papers or other important documents

Now, with all this abuse, it is understandable why children are having behavioural issues right now. Based on my experience, too many children are from a dysfunctional family, and that leaves them at risk to develop behavioural issues.

What I believe is important for individuals to understand is that, most adolescents are yet to have the emotional and cognitive capabilities needed to process trauma effectively, without having outside help. After witnessing and being victims of traumatic experiences, without the proper guidance, they will "lash out", exhibit behavioural problems, sleeping issues such as insomnia, sleeping too much, social withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, amongst others (Mission Harbor Behavioral Health, 2020). Why? Because that is the only way they know to express themselves. Instead of properly processing their emotions, they displace them. Not many adolescents would have been fortunate enough to grow up in a family that teaches them how to process their emotions, but only how to displace them.

Statistics show that over 3 million children witness violence in their home each year. Those who see and hear violence in the home suffer physically and emotionally.

“Families under stress produce children under stress. If a spouse is being abused and there are children in the home, the children are affected by the abuse.” (Ackerman and Pickering, 1989)

Sometimes children themselves don't understand why they are acting the way they are. Sometimes they don't know how to explain what they are going through or why their behaviours have taken a turn for the worse, and in reality, that is understandable. Why? Because it is only through experiences and parental guidance that they are supposed to understand their emotions, process them, and then develop a suitable response towards them. But with children that are faced with these situations, it is the opposite.

Children exposed to family violence are more likely to develop social, emotional, psychological and or behavioral problems. Recent research indicates that children who witness domestic violence are more likely to develop anxiety, low self esteem, depression, anger and temperament problems. The trauma they experience can show up in emotional, behavioural, social and physical disturbances that affect their development and can continue into adulthood. So, many of the issues schools face with indiscipline in the school starts from the household (Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Vi, n.d.).

Domestic trauma makes disciplining in schools hard because we have not addressed the root of the problem, domestic abuse. And in reality, we cannot. The guidance counsellor can help to an extent, but the decision to actually change your circumstance will come from the actual household, and that in itself will be a challenge. But as usual, we will do what we can from this side of the lines.

Earlier we spoke a little on traumatic stress, here are a few examples of what traumatic stress might look like in children, and i hope you can recognize if you are currently experiencing any of them:

Emotional you may feel:

- Grief for family and personal losses
- Shame, guilt, and self blame
- Confusion about conflicting feelings toward parents
- Fear of abandonment, or expressing emotions, the unknown or personal injury
- Anger
- Depression and feelings of helplessness and powerlessness
- Embarrassment

Behavioural changes be be:

- Acting out or withdrawing.
- Aggressive or passive.
- Refusing to go to school.
- Care taking; acting as a parent substitute.
- Lying to avoid confrontation.
- Rigid defences.
- Excessive attention seeking.
- Bedwetting and nightmares.
- Out of control behaviour.
- Reduced intellectual competency.
- Manipulation, dependency, mood swings.

Socially you may:

- Isolation from friends and relatives.
- Stormy relationships.
- Difficulty in trusting, especially adults.
- Poor anger management and problem solving skills.
- Excessive social involvement to avoid home.
- Passivity with peers or bullying.
- Engaged in exploitative relationships as perpetrator or victim.

Physical changes may be:

- Somatic complaints such as headaches and stomachaches.
- Nervous, anxious, short attention span.

- Tired and lethargic.
- Frequently ill.
- Poor personal hygiene.
- Regression in development.
- High risk play.
- Self abuse.

Now, those were about how you may react to trauma, how you may have internalised trauma and how it may have affected you. As it relates directly to domestic related trauma and its effects on indiscipline, due to possible depression, suicidal thoughts, or development of post-traumatic stress, they may try to deal with these feelings by developing some of the internalised and externalised behaviours that we have mentioned earlier, that can become extreme and dangerous: such as drug/alcohol abuse, truancy - prone to telling lies, gang involvement, sexual acting out, pregnancy, runaway, or become suicidal. Their dating relationships may also reflect violence learned or witnessed in the home.

The traumatic effects that domestic abuse has on children are endless to say the least. Children are supposed to be in a family household that is loving and cares for their needs, instead, some are met with the complete opposite.

How can the school family help you?

To establish this, we have to know the role we play as professionals in your life and the role that you and the children play as students here at school. It would be impossible for us to step out of character and say that we are going to your homes and demand that there be a change and they should make the change now. No, we cannot do that.

The teachers have a responsibility to pay attention to the students that they have, their behavioural characteristics, how you talk, how you act, how you treat others. That's how they may be able to point out that something is internally wrong. And when I say wrong, please do not be offended by it, and do be comfortable with saying this to yourself as well, because experiencing trauma is not something that is right. So, it is through noticing your students and their behaviours that you, the teachers will be able to refer them to the guidance counsellor to have some background checks done. It is also an opportunity for you to have a talk with them. Yes, we cannot change their present circumstances but, chances are, that student actually does need someone they can trust to talk to.

Administration, including the Dean of Discipline, Guidance Counsellors, and myself, the Nurse, also play an integral part in this. The DOD aims to help prevent behavioural dysfunction in the school, and when he cannot prevent it, he tries to contain it. So, that is where the calling in of your parents takes place to help him figure out what is happening at home that is causing you to act like this. And when we think of it, it is a perfect opportunity for you to actually speak all that is on your mind and how it's affecting you. And what happens next will be determined by what happens within the circumstance. So, if you are being physically or sexually abused, the police will have to come within the midst, if you are

being emotionally abused, you might be referred for counselling at the GC and if things are that far out of hand, they may have to call the Child Development Agency. So, whichever way it works out when you tell the truth, it should have a good end. Your school nurse, whichever school you attend, should be a great resource personnel, working alongside all members of staff to bring your comfort and safety. That person should also be a source of moral support and personal development as well, just as your GC.

So, though we may not be able to 'fix' your problem, we can help you to cope better with it than you are now, before it gets to a point of no return. It will take your own effort as the students as well, you may have to go to a teacher or the guidance counsellor to let them know that you are going through something difficult at home and you need help. There is no shame in admitting you need help, admitting you need help shows that you are self-aware and you know where your weakness and your strength lies. And we all get weak from time-to-time.

To conclude, traumatic stress derives from domestic abuse. Children are yet to completely develop the emotional and cognitive capabilities needed to process trauma effectively, without having outside help. Because of this, they process and interpret trauma the best way they know how, and often it is done so negatively. The indiscipline that is faced in school is largely attributed to home dysregulation, but I believe that children need to know that they can get help from their school, they just have to be brave enough to take a step towards it. I leave you with this Bible Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:7 NIV  
"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."

Do we have any questions? I have come to the end of my presentation.