



7 September 2015

## **Child protection is everyone's responsibility**

### **Child Protection Week 6-12 September**

This Child Protection Week, experts at The Children's Hospital at Westmead are urging the community to recognise their role in preventing and noticing domestic violence in an effort to decrease the number of children suffering from violence in the home.

In recent years the incidence of domestic and family violence has been increasing, as have the number of children requiring treatment after experiencing this violence both directly and indirectly.

Research has shown that domestic violence often begins during pregnancy and while the harm may not be obvious, domestic violence can cause harm to the baby's brain and in extreme cases can result in physical injury.

Sue Foley, Senior Social Worker, said it is essential to recognise that children are always harmed when there is domestic violence in the home.

"Children are never unaware of the physical, verbal, financial, emotional and psychological conflict and violence between their parents."

"The effects of violence on a child is long lasting; they learn to recognise the threat in the way a person drives into the yard, closes a door, raises an eyebrow, breathes, the look on a face, a tone of voice – each is a clear warning of imminent threat."

When children are exposed to domestic and family violence they can often experience ongoing psychological trauma, relationship problems and risk taking behaviour that can continue into adulthood.

Robyn Lamb, Head of the Child Protection Unit, said the issue is not beyond reach and the community can play a vital role in protecting children and families from further violence.

"When it comes to child protection, everyone is responsible. We can help put a stop to domestic and family violence by teaching ourselves to recognise signs of conflict, to speak up or report the issue when you see it and to encourage the person to be safe and to put their children and themselves first."

"Signs in children are not only physical but may also be emotional including feelings of helplessness, fearfulness or blame, experiencing different levels of stress like sleep problems, difficulty learning/concentrating, headaches and tummy pains, changes in behaviour with children likely to come rude or aggressive and thinking that violence and power are normal in relationships."

"Children have a right to safety and they have a right to parents who are doing the best they can to meet their needs".

Child Protection Week runs from the 6-12 September and is an initiative of the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN).

If you suspect a child may be at risk, please call the Family and Community Services (FaCS) Helpline on 132 111. For more information on domestic violence prevention please visit <http://napcan.org.au/>

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