CAMERON COUNTY FAMILY VIOLENCE TASK FORCE

What Parents Need to Know about the effects of domestic violence on children:

Parents who are caught up in the chaos of domestic violence often fail to recognize the impact that living in a home with violence has on children. Parents may believe that the children are unaware of the violence and therefore unaffected. In fact, most children who live with domestic violence in their families are aware and are affected. Some common effects are:

How children feel:

- **Frightened-** children can become frightened when adults are out of control. They may fear for their safety, or the safety of parents, or that a parent may go to jail. They worry about whether the adults in their life can keep them safe, or about who will take care of them.
- **Guilty-** children may feel responsible for the violence, or for not being able to protect a parent. They may also feel guilty for having loving feelings toward the abusive parent
- **Ashamed**- they may feel that this does not happen to other children, or be embarrassed to have other children visit their home because of the violence.
- **Confused-** they may receive mixed messages, "Every thing is fine" when they know it is not, or being told that violence is unacceptable and then having violent behavior modeled for them by a parent.
- **Hopeless**- because children of violent homes live with such uncertainty, they may feel that life will continue to be unpredictable, and therefore, they worry about their future. They may give up hope and decide it is not worthwhile to set goals or learn self-control.

How children may behave:

- **Acting out-** children may believe that it is okay to hit or threaten in order to get what they want. They may show little self-control. They may parrot the abusive parent's criticism, sarcasm, and verbal abuse, toward others or toward the abused parent. They may act out in order to try to divert parents' attention from an argument.
- **Withdrawal-** they may have few friends and show little emotion. They may show decreased interest in activities. They may be afraid to ask for what they need.
- **Regression-** they may begin or resume thumb sucking, nail biting, or bed-wetting. They may become very needy and not want to be separated from a parent.

How children are affected:

- **Development-** there is evidence that brain development even in infants is affected negatively by living with exposure to violence. Children may appear nervous, anxious, have a short attention span, and may appear to be hyperactive.
- **Physical**- children may develop problems with eating and sleeping, causing them to suffer from inadequate rest and nutrition. Children may develop stress related illnesses, including headaches, stomachaches, ulcers, and rashes. They may be sick more often, have more colds, flu, etc.
- **Learning-** children who are worried about their own safety or the safety of a parent may worry most during school hours when they are away from home. This may lead to difficulty concentrating on schoolwork, following simple directions, or staying focused on simple tasks.

How children are at greater risk:

- **For child abuse**- more than half of children whose mothers are battered are likely to be abused themselves. 45 to 70% of victims in shelters report that their abusers have also committed some form of child abuse. Child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in families where domestic violence is present.
- **For injury-** children may be injured 'indirectly' when objects are thrown or weapons are used. Older children may be injured trying to protect a parent
- **For violent behavior**- 76% of all crimes against persons committed by juveniles are committed by juveniles from violent homes
- **For suicide-** children from violent homes are 7 times more likely to commit suicide than children from non-violent homes
- **For domestic violence in their adult relationships-** children who witness domestic violence between parents are up to 1000 times more likely to be in violent relationships themselves. Violence is learned behavior.

(2/05)