

**HIGHLIGHTS**

# Preventing and Responding to **Children's Exposure** to **Intimate Partner** **Violence**

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Encyclopedia  
on Early Childhood  
Development



# What is **children's exposure to intimate partner violence**?

Children's exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs when a child is aware of abusive or threatening behaviours involving one or more of their caregivers or parents as victims.

It is a form of **child maltreatment**.

Violence between caregivers, on whom a child relies for protection and comfort, is extremely stressful for a child. It increases the risk of having psychological, social, emotional, and behavioural problems.

Children can be exposed to IPV in many ways and they do not need to directly see or overhear IPV occurring to be impacted by its presence in their lives.

**In Canada, over 1/3  
of child maltreatment  
investigations are specific  
to exposure to intimate  
partner violence.<sup>1</sup>**

**Intimate partner violence costs Canadians  
almost \$7.4 billion per year.<sup>2</sup>**

1. Wathen CN, MacMillan HL. Children's exposure to intimate partner violence: Impacts and interventions. *Paediatr Child Health*. 2013;18(8):419-422. doi:10.1093/pch/18.8.419

2. Public Health Agency of Canada. *The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2016: A Focus on Family Violence in Canada*. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; 2016:19.

# Why is it important to care?

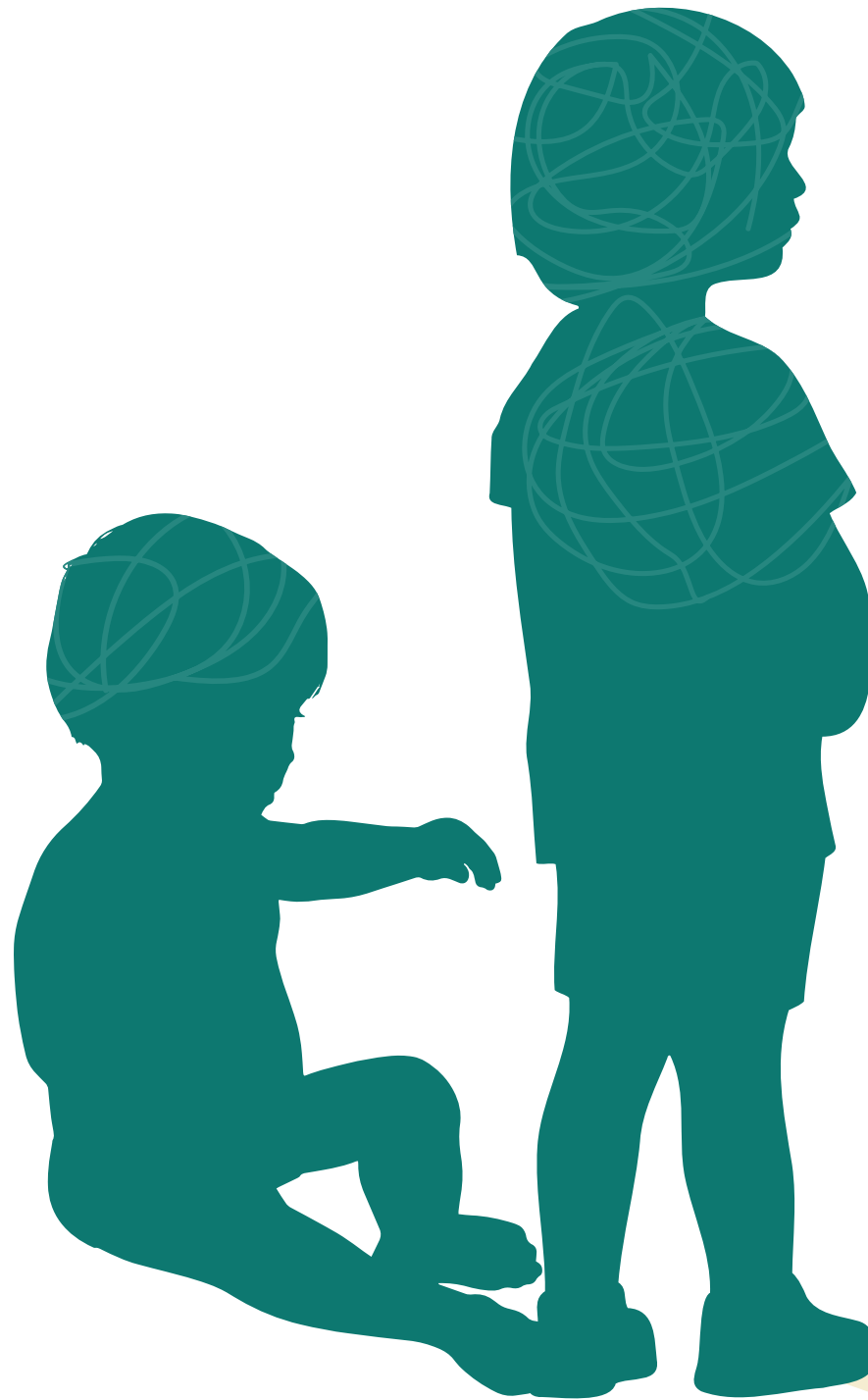
Children exposed to intimate partner violence are **2 to 4 times more likely to exhibit**



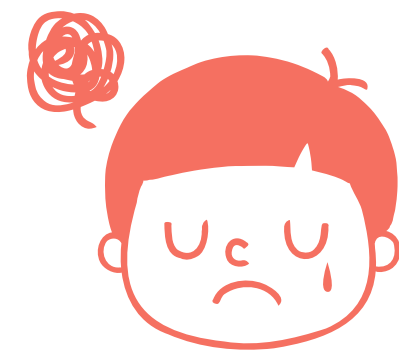
**mental health problems**



**externalizing behaviours**  
(e.g., aggression)



**trauma symptoms**



**internalizing symptoms**  
(e.g., anxiety, depression)

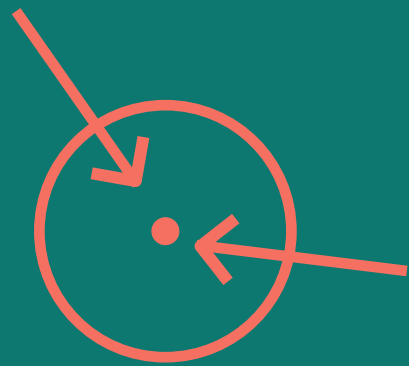
**The impact of violence on the development of a child's brain is particularly concerning.** Young children who are frequently exposed may have difficulty establishing trusting relationships necessary for their development.<sup>3</sup>

3. Guerra NG, Dierkhising C. The effects of community violence on child development. Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development website. <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/social-violence/according-experts/effects-community-violence-child-development>. Published November 2011. Accessed December 8, 2020.



# What does **research recommend**?

To avoid or reduce the distress and difficulties associated with exposure to intimate partner violence among caregivers, the following programs and interventions have demonstrated some effectiveness to date.



**Interventions targeting families experiencing or at risk of child maltreatment** (e.g., home visits via existing health services, health clinics, stand-alone interventions, parenting programs, group-based delivery in community settings or workplaces, child-parent psychotherapy or Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for children)



**Educational and skills-based programs to prevent adolescent victimization** (dating violence) that are delivered in multiple settings, which are longer in duration, and involve key adults in adolescents' lives (e.g., teachers, community leaders)



**Advocacy interventions aimed at adult victims** (mostly women) to prevent recurrence of intimate partner violence

# What can you do as a family service provider?

## Be alert to warning signs

Suggested best practice is to be alert to the warning signs that a child may be exposed to intimate partner violence.

### What might be these signs?<sup>4</sup>

- aggression
- anxiety
- depression
- difficulties with peers
- academic problems
- inappropriate attitudes about use of violence as a means of resolving conflict
- increased use of violence in interacting with others
- concern about safety of parent(s)

## Develop your knowledge

Participation in training programs<sup>5</sup> aimed at improving the response of professionals to children who have experienced intimate partner violence may improve participants knowledge, attitudes and clinical competence.

### What should these training programs address?<sup>4</sup>

- direct effects of exposure to intimate partner violence (e.g., helping children learn to cope with the stressors associated with family violence)
- indirect effects via disruptions in parenting (e.g., helping parents provide consistent nurturance and discipline, despite disruptions caused by violence)
- multiple social influences that increase or decrease risk among children exposed to intimate partner violence

4. Kitzmann KM. Domestic violence and its impact on the social and emotional development of young children. Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development website. <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/maltreatment-child/according-experts/domestic-violence-and-its-impact-social-and-emotional>. Updated February 2012. Accessed December 8, 2020.

5. VEGA Project. VEGA (Violence, Evidence, Guidance, Action) family violence education resources [Online]. Hamilton, ON: McMaster University; 2019. Accessed December 8, 2020. Available from: <https://vegaproject.mcmaster.ca/>



Let's work **together**



**Children's exposure to intimate partner violence** is a significant **public health problem.**

There is an urgent need for evidence-based approaches to know what works, for whom and under what circumstances and thus limit the negative consequences of intimate partner violence on children.

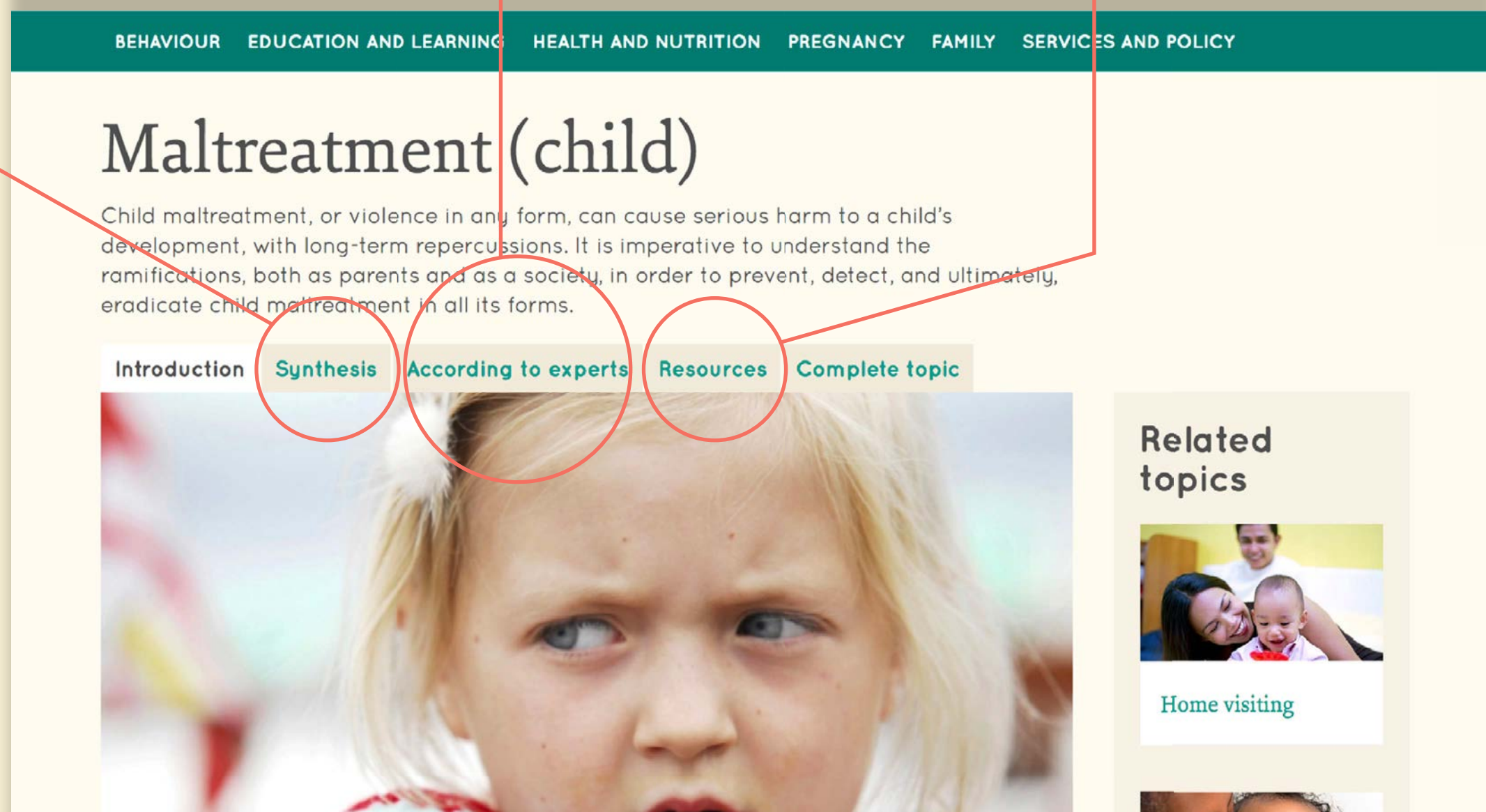


# The Encyclopedia

**The Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development has produced a complete chapter on the issue of child maltreatment of children aged 0 to 5 years.**

**This chapter includes:**

- a synthesis of the experts' articles
- articles written by judiciously selected internationally renowned experts
- resources developed for parents and practitioners



**Consult our chapter on child maltreatment**  
[www.child-encyclopedia.com/maltreatment-child](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/maltreatment-child)



# Bridging Knowledge to **Decision Making**

**The Encyclopedia on Early  
Childhood Development is the  
leading resource of the best and  
most up-to-date knowledge  
available on the development  
of young children (0-5).**



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