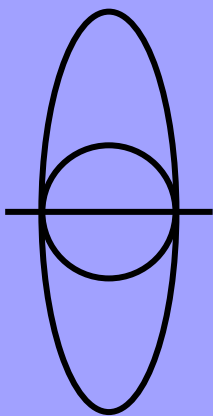


Summer 2022

# The Effect of Domestic Violence on Children

*A CASA Internship Presentation by Ashlyn Dickmeyer*



A look at how witnessing domestic violence affects the psychological and physical health of children and can alter their brain structures.

# Table of contents

01

## *Background*

What is domestic violence, who is involved, who's affected, and how prevalent is it.

02

## *Its Effect on Children*

Psychological and physical symptoms and short and long term effects.

03

## *A Scientific Approach*

A look at DV through the lens of neuroscience.

04

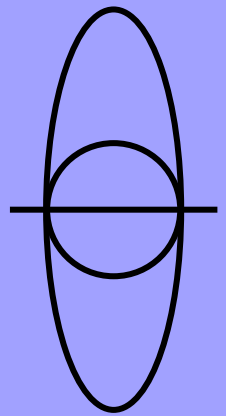
## *CASA's Role*

You can describe the topic of the section here



01

# Background Information



# What is Domestic Violence?

- Domestic violence is a **pattern of behavior(s) used by one partner in a relationship to establish and maintain power and control over the other.**

Behaviors that physically harm, intimidate, manipulate or control a partner, or otherwise force them to behave in ways they don't want to, including through physical violence, threats, emotional abuse, or financial control.

# The Many Faces of DV

Domestic violence has many names

- Domestic Violence (DV)
- Domestic Abuse
- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
- Dating Abuse
- Relationship Abuse

And can take on many forms

- Physical
- Emotional
- Stalking and harassment
- Sexual
  - Including reproductive coercion
- Economic/financial



# Characteristics of Domestic Abuse

## Physical Abuse

- Scratching, Biting, Grabbing, Shoving, Pushing, Slapping, Burning, Strangling
- Throwing objects
- Destroying property/possessions
- Hurting or threatening to hurt children or pets
- Affecting sleep patterns
- Attacking or threatening to attack
- Any threats or attempts to hurt or kill

## Emotional Abuse

- Name-calling, mocking, intimidation, humiliating, Yelling, interrupting, changing topics, not listening or responding, twisting words
- Manipulating and/or manipulating children
- Deciding what you can do/not do and say/not say
- Monitoring technology use
- Saying negative things about friends or family
- **Isolating from friends and family**
- Cheating
- Being overly jealous
- Avoiding responsibility for abusive behavior
- **Blaming the victim** for causing abusive behavior

# ● Characteristics of Domestic Abuse continued

## Economic/Financial Abuse

- Making the victim heavily or entirely dependent on the abuser for financial support
- Forbidding going to work or school
- Sabotaging or jeopardizing employment opportunities
- Harassing victim while they're at work
- Sabotaging or jeopardizing educational opportunities
- Withholding money
- Denying access to bank accounts
- Hiding or destroying assets
- Creating debt in the victim's name

## Stalking and Harassment

- Making unwanted visits
- Sending unwanted messages
- Following/tracking locations
- Refusing to leave when asked

## Sexual Abuse

- Any unwanted sexual act
- Reproductive coercion
- Can occur in committed relationships or marriages and non-committed relationships

# Causes of DV

**Domestic Violence is NEVER the fault of the victim.**

**Outside factors can impact rates of abuse** but they are never responsible for causing DV themselves.

Potential triggers for DV:

- Alcohol and substance use
- Accusations of infidelity
- Untreated mental health issues
- Other relationship stressors like financial hardships

DV stems from the **desire to gain and maintain power and control** over a partner.

The abuser makes a **choice** to abuse the victim.

These choices can be a **result of learned behaviors**, whether abusers witnessed it growing up, from friends, popular culture, or structural inequalities.

**There is no one cause of domestic violence. However, there can be certain triggers that can cause a violent incident.**





# Who is affected by DV?

***Both women and men of all races and sexual orientations***

## Racial Breakdown

### Non-Hispanic Black

- 45.1% of women
- 40.1% of men

### Non-Hispanic White

- 37.2% of women
- 30.3% of men

### Hispanic

- 34.4% of women
- 30% of men

### Asian or Pacific Islander

- 18.3% of women
- 13.7% of men

## Sexual Orientation Breakdown

- 43.8% of lesbian women
- 26% of gay men
- 61.1% of bisexual women
- 37.3% of bisexual men
- 35% of heterosexual women
- 29% of heterosexual men

# Numbers & Statistics

*1 in 3 women and  
1 in 4 men*

Will experience DV during their lifetime.

*More than 10 million*

Victims of DV in the US each year.

**38%**

Of all  
murders of  
women  
globally are  
committed  
by intimate  
partners.

**6x**

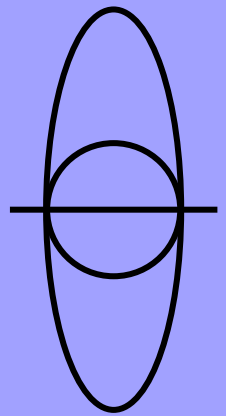
Increased  
rates a woman  
being killed in  
a domestic  
incident when  
a gun is  
present.

*48% of domestic  
incidents go unreported.*



02

# Its Effect on Children



# Numbers & Statistics

**15 million**

Children live in homes where domestic violence has occurred at least once in the past year.

Children who witnessed domestic violence were also victims of child abuse.

**1 in 3**

**10x**

Increased likelihood of a boy who witnessed his mother being abused growing up to abuse a female partner.

**6x**

Increased likelihood of a future sexual assault when a young girl who witnesses her father abuse her mother growing up.

Children have witnessed domestic violence in the past year.

**3.2 million**



# Psychological Effects

## Anxiety

Children who have witnessed DV can develop a **state of constant anxiety** while waiting for the next violent incident.

It is common for toddler-aged children to revert to the behaviors of younger children when in this state. These behaviors can include **thumb-sucking, bedwetting, crying, and whining**.

## Depression

**Depression** is more likely in children who have witnessed abuse.

Older children can develop **antisocial behaviors** and may **blame themselves for the abuse**, impacting their self esteem.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Children may develop PTSD as a result of witnessing the abuse. This can cause **nightmares, anger, irritability, and difficulty concentrating**.

# Physical Effects



## Health Problems

Witnessing DV as a child can impact their health when they are older. These health problems can cause anatomical changes in the brain system.

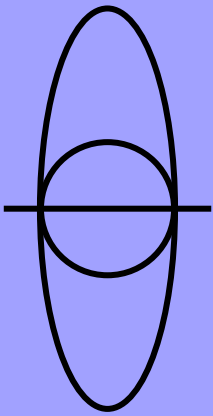
## Aggressive Behaviors

Older children or teenagers tend to act out in result of witnessing DV. This can include getting in fights, partaking in risky sexual behaviors, or using drugs and alcohol. These children are also more likely to have interactions with law enforcement and get in legal trouble.

## Physical Abuse

Due to the close proximity of the abuse, children who are witnesses to abuse are more likely to be victims of abuse, as well.





**03**

# **A Scientific Approach**

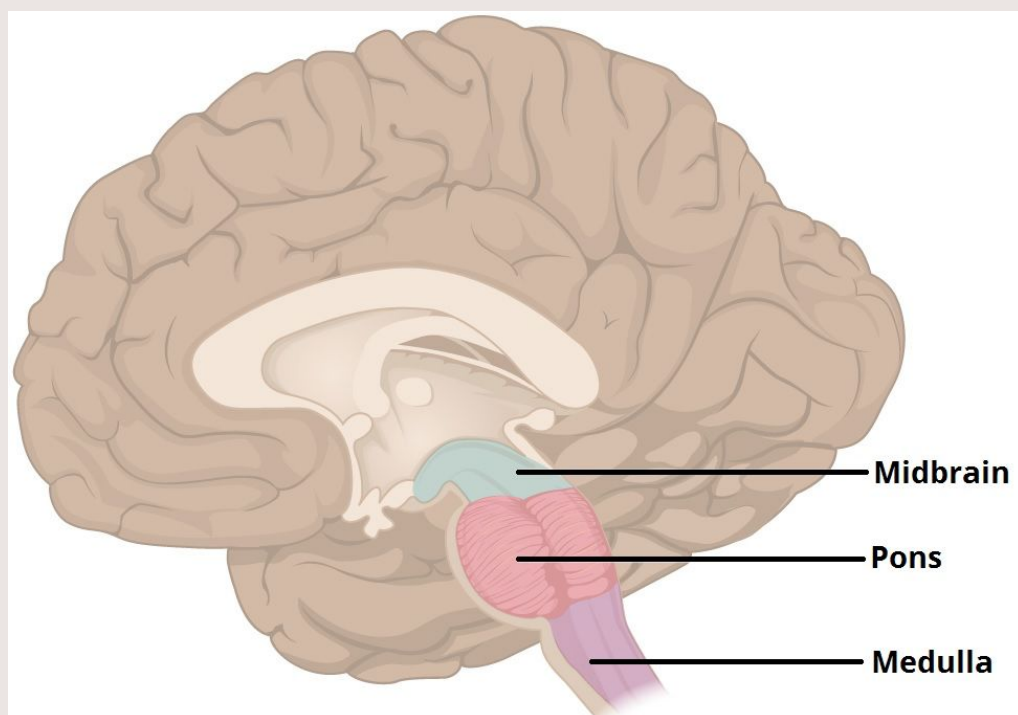


# The Neuroscience of witnessing DV

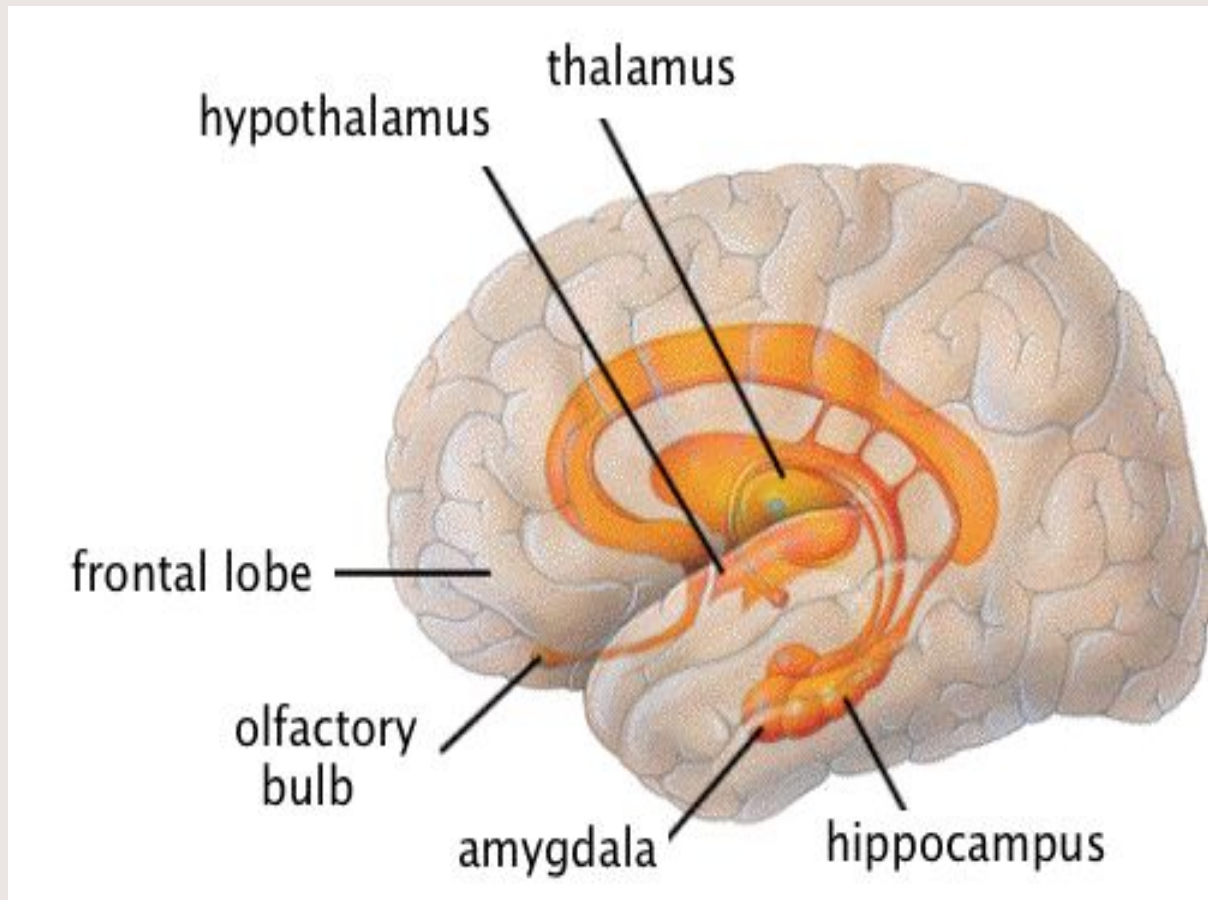
*Witnessing DV can cause anatomical changes to the brain structures of children.*

## *Midbrain*

The Midbrain is the **middle 'relay' point for visual and auditory messages**. Impairments here can cause the individual to become easily distracted and unable to pay close attention. As a result, attachment and attention disorders can ensue.



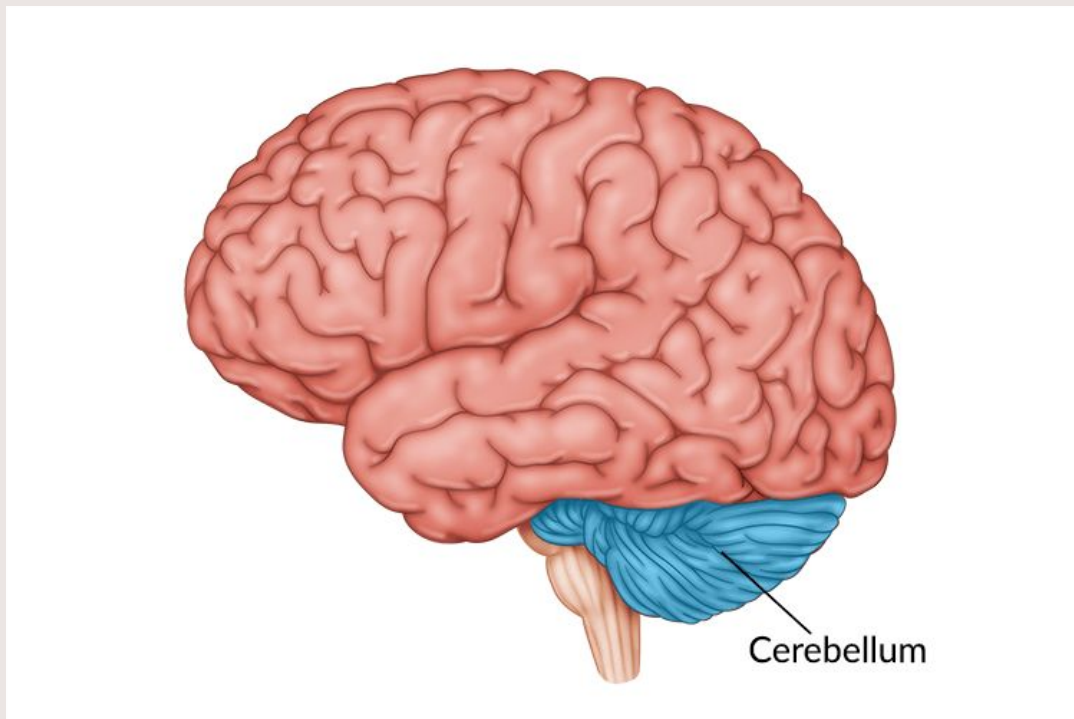




## *Limbic System*

The limbic system includes the amygdala, hippocampus, and hypothalamus. The **amygdala is responsible for emotion**, including fear and pleasure, the **hippocampus is vital for memory formation**, and the **hypothalamus works to maintain homeostasis**. These components also help to determine behavioral responses. There is some evidence that shows that witnessing DV can lead to hippocampal atrophy, leading to memory issues.



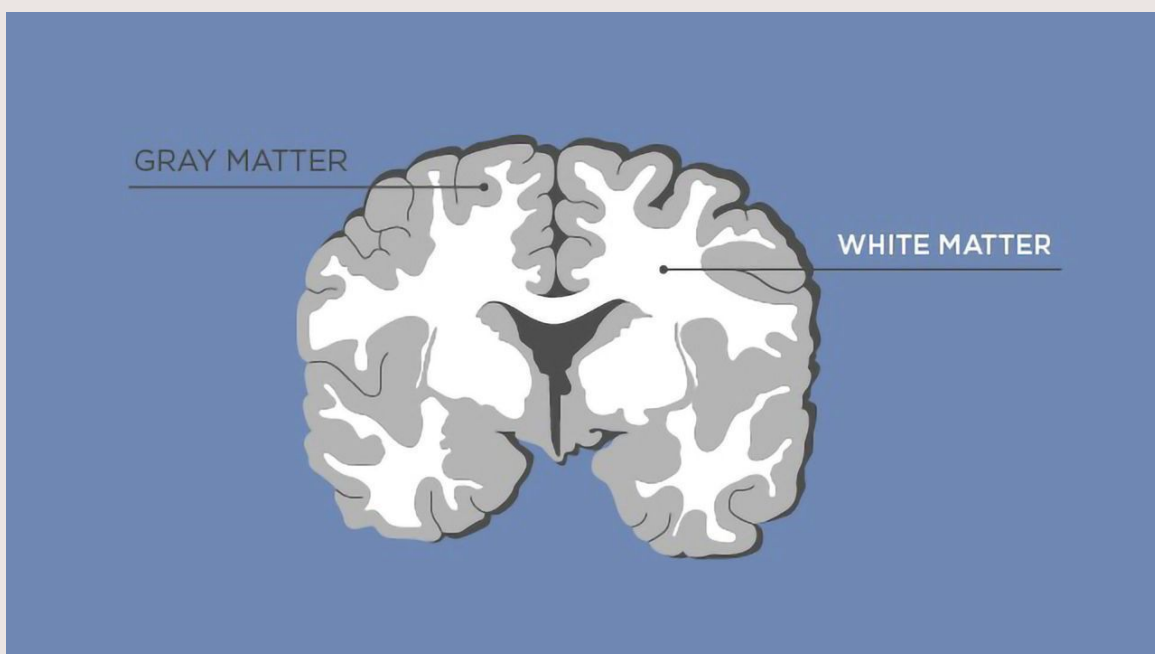
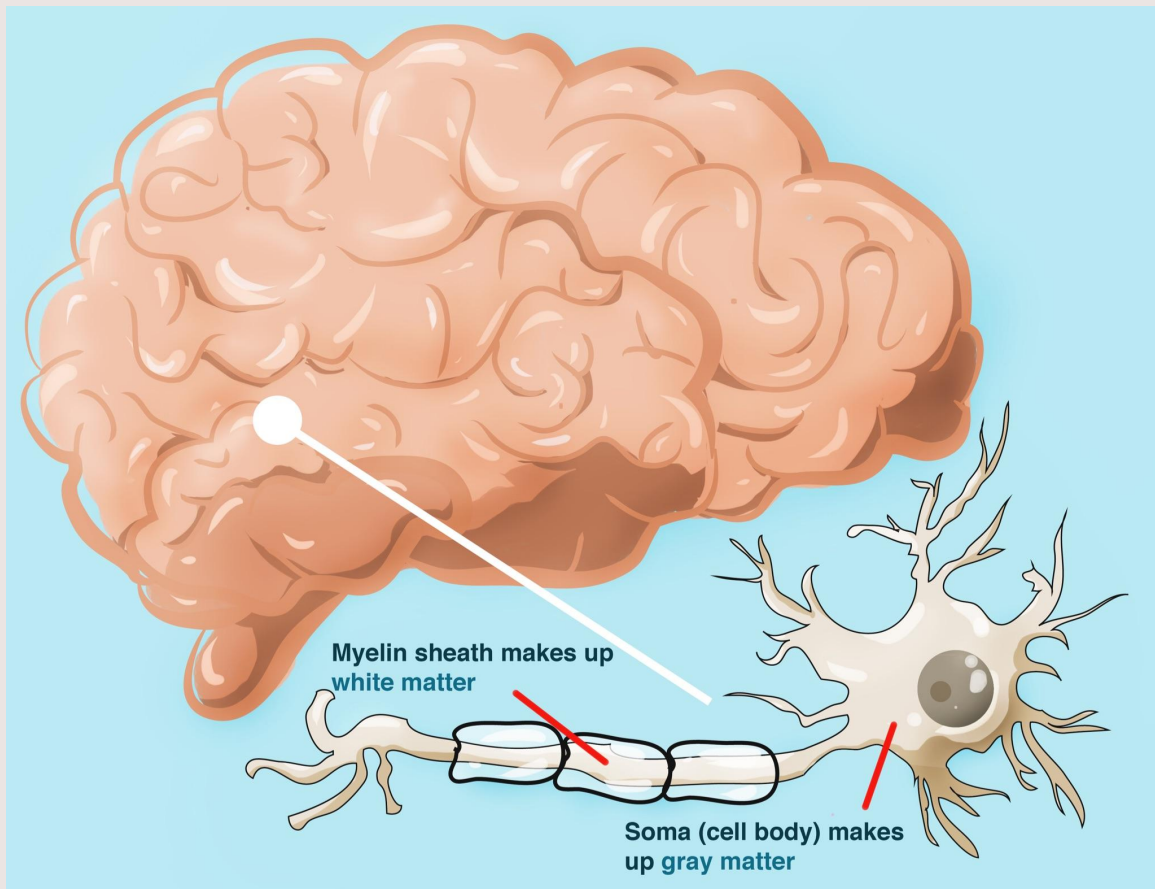


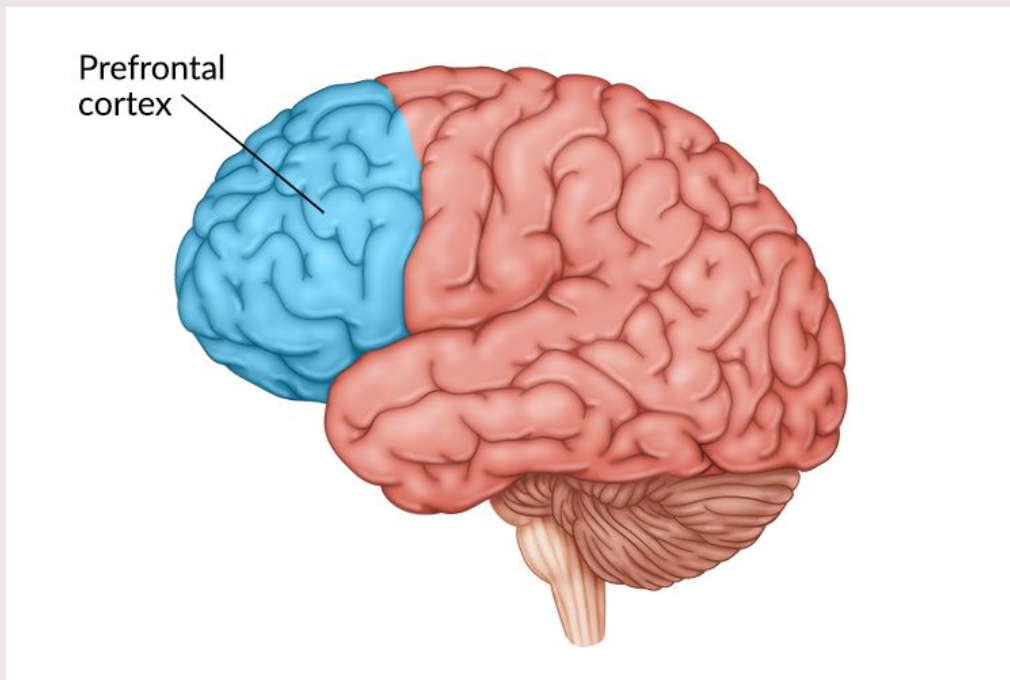
## *Cerebellum*

The cerebellum is involved in **balance**, **cognitive development**, and is highly connected to the prefrontal cortex which **controls behavior**. Children who have experienced maltreatment or witnessed abuse have smaller cerebellums. Not only does the decreased volume of the cerebellum impact the functions that it's involved in, but smaller cerebellums are also associated with an earlier onset of PTSD, which brings a whole other range of symptoms.



# Grey Matter versus White Matter

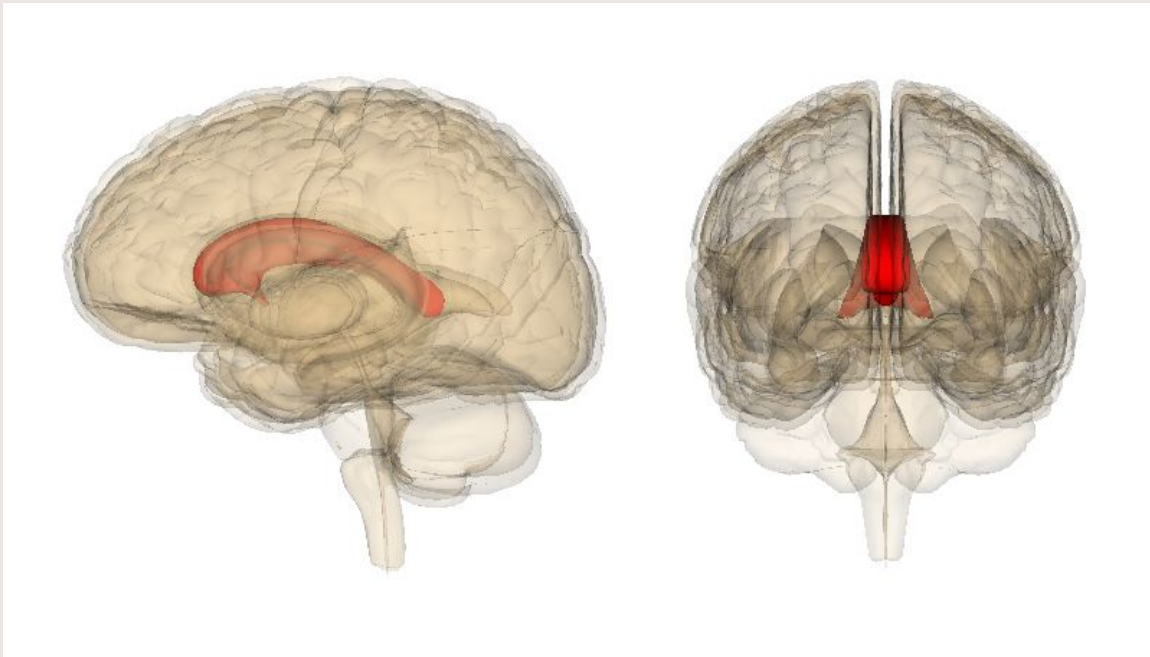




## ***Prefrontal Cortex***

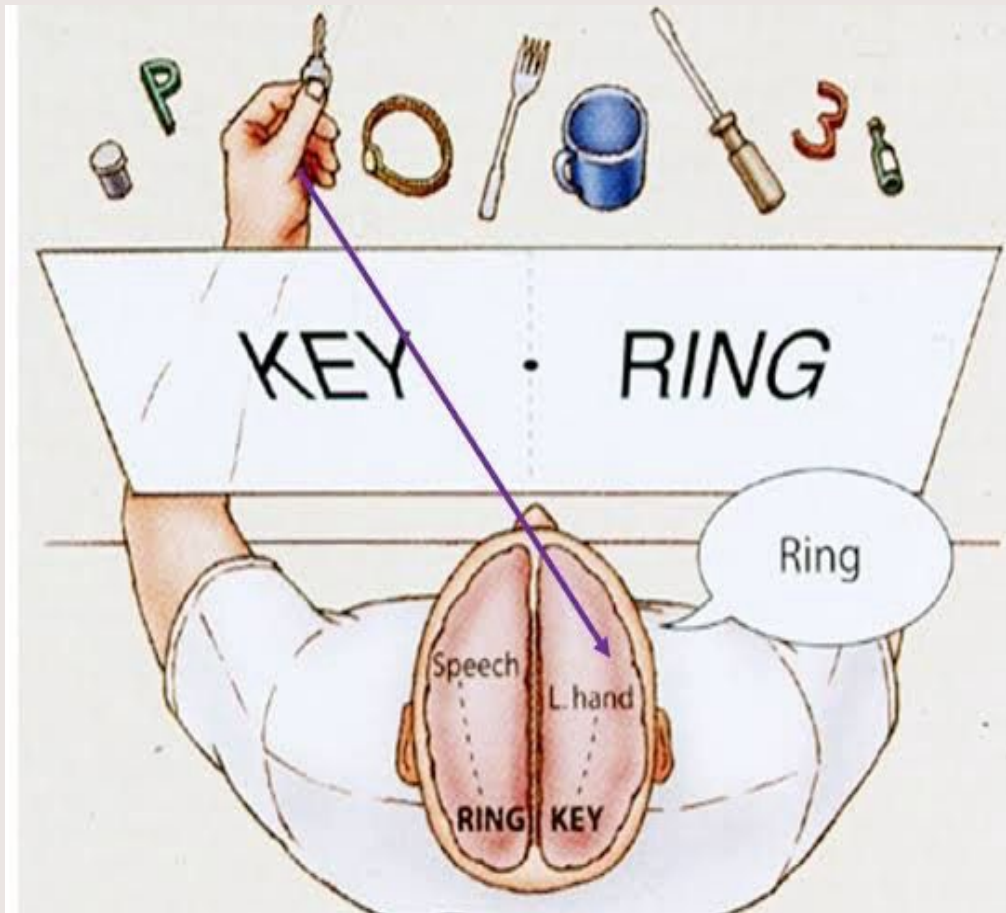
The prefrontal cortex is **responsible for executive function**, a fancy way of saying cognitive processes, including initiation, inhibition, mental flexibility, novel problem solving, planning, emotion regulation, and self-awareness. In children who have witnessed DV, the prefrontal cortex may contain smaller amounts of grey matter. **Grey matter is necessary for processing information.** Some children who have conduct issues, which may or may not result from witnessing violence, have a significantly increased presence of grey matter. Both too much and too little grey matter can cause serious behavioral and emotional issues.

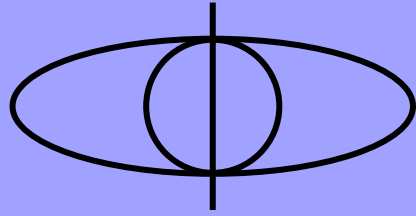




## *Corpus Callosum*

The corpus callosum is a large bundle of myelinated axons, or white brain matter, that **connects the left and right hemispheres of the brain**. The connection between the two hemispheres allows for the two hemispheres to communicate with each other and share visual, auditory, cognitive messages. Witnessing violence or experiencing abuse decreases the volume of the corpus callosum.





— 04 —

# CASA's Role

# How does DV Affect CASA's Advocacy?

**Many cases CASAs deal with involve domestic violence.**

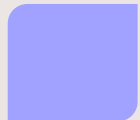
Witnessing domestic violence is incredibly traumatic for all children, regardless of age or gender. It can have serious long-term effects on the child's emotional development and alter the structure of their brains.

As a CASA, we must be knowledgeable about and remember the impacts that witnessing domestic violence has on a child in order to advocate for their best interests.

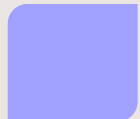




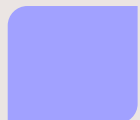
# How to Help Children Who Have Witnessed DV



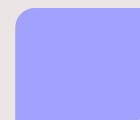
**Remind them that their safety is most important.**



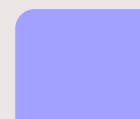
**Spend time with them or, if they're old enough, check in with them regularly.**



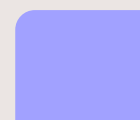
**Don't force the child to talk about what they may have seen.**



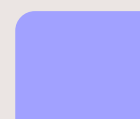
**Listen to them if they do tell you what they've witnessed.**



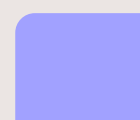
**Identify programs or supports that can help the child build healthy coping mechanisms.**



**Mention that the child may benefit from therapy or counseling in your court report, if it's in their best interest.**



**Talk to other parties involved in the case about the best ways to support the child.**



**Be a stable relationship and support person for them!**



# The end

---

## Any questions?

Credits: This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**, including icons by **Flaticon**, and infographics & images by **Freepik**.

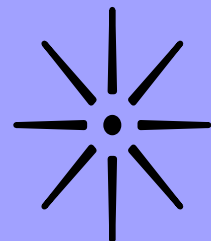


**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

---

CASA FOR LANCASTER COUNTY



# References

- <https://www.thehotline.org/identify-abuse/understand-relationship-abuse/>
- <https://centerforfamilyjustice.org/faq/domestic-violence/>
- <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-triggers-a-domestic-violence-attack-66536>
- <https://www.socialsolutions.com/blog/domestic-violence-statistics/>
- <https://usafacts.org/articles/data-says-domestic-violence-incidents-are-down-but-half-of-all-victims-dont-report-to-police/>
- <https://www.ctcadv.org/information-about-domestic-violence/national-statistics/>
- <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/effects-domestic-violence-children>
- [https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/children and dv.pdf](https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/children_and_dv.pdf)
- <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-impact-of-domestic-violence-on-children-5207940>
- <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2002/1201/p2052.html>
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/executive-function>
- <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2014.00178/full>

# References continued

- <https://www.simplypsychology.org/what-is-grey-matter-in-the-brain.html>
- <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/318966#What-is-white-matter?>
- <https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/childhood-domestic-violence/18-ways-to-support-children-who-witness-domestic-violence>