

CAGV Fact Sheet

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Impact of Exposure to Gun Violence on Children

Children's exposure to violence is pervasive...such exposure can cause them significant physical, mental, and emotional harm with long-term effects that can last well into adulthood — [U.S. Department of Justice](#)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood. ACEs include violence, abuse, bullying and growing up in a home with substance use problems. Adverse experiences related to violence are not limited to being an actual victim, they include merely being exposed to violence. Because gun violence afflicts communities of color far more often than others, Black and Hispanic children are routinely exposed to gun violence—they witness shootings, hear gunshots, and know friends, relatives and family members who have been shot or killed.

Toxic stress from being exposed to violence during childhood can change brain development and leads to a wide range of immediately harmful effects, especially related to learning. Toxic stress is also linked to lifelong consequences including chronic health problems, mental illness, substance abuse, forming healthy relationships and having stable employment.

There are short-term and lifelong consequences of childhood exposure to violence.

- Witnessing community gun violence has been linked to lower grades and more absences from school than other students.¹
- Youth who have been exposed to violence are more likely to engage in criminal behavior as adolescents.²
- Individuals who have faced potentially traumatic events have been found to be at a higher risk for impaired cognitive and social development, drug abuse, unintended pregnancy, depression, and PTSD³

Exposure to gun violence is pervasive, and children of color are especially at risk.

- An estimated three million children witness a shooting each year.⁴
- Children in communities of color are exposed to violence at an alarmingly high rate compared to white children. For example, in Chicago, Hispanic children had a 74% greater likelihood of being exposed to violence, and Black children had a 122% greater chance, than their white counterparts.⁵
- A study of 7-year-olds in an urban neighborhood found that 75% had heard gunshots, 18% had seen a dead body, and 61% worried some or a lot of the time that they might get killed or die.⁶

¹ Exposure to violence: psychological and academic correlates in child witnesses. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*. 2001; Community violence exposure and children's academic functioning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 2003

² Children's Exposure to Violence and the Intersection Between Delinquency and Victimization. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Oct 2013

³ Adverse Childhood Experiences, *Psychology Today* www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/adverse-childhood-experiences

⁴ Estimate by Everytown Research & Policy based on Prevalence of childhood exposure to violence, crime, and abuse: National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2015

⁵ *The Impact of Gun Violence on Children and Teens*, Everytown Research & Policy, May, 2019

⁶ Exposure to violence: psychological and academic correlates in child witnesses. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 2001