

The danger and lifelong repercussions of exposing a child to violence

Our world is beset by violence in all its forms. Yet we are all born with a natural instinct for empathy. Without empathy the development of human society could not have evolved because civilization depends on collaboration, cohesion, understanding and concern for each other. In other words human civilization is rooted in our natural instinct for empathy.

Empathy has two dimensions:

Cognitive empathy: the ability to understand the appropriate responses to someone's needs. Cognitive empathy is sometimes low in autism.

Affective empathy: the ability to emotionally feel the needs of others. Importantly, low affective empathy results in callous behavior towards others and denotes psychopathic tendencies.

Exposure of children to violence and abuse towards any living being – human or animal - causes an erosion of affective empathy resulting in a normalisation of abusive behavior. The victim of abuse becomes objectified. A need to control the victim is established. The erosion of affective empathy is underway and our very humanity itself is diminished.

**No longer should we wonder where all the violence comes from!
It is up to us to nurture empathy in our children, and it begins with those at our mercy... the animals.**