

Choosing Positive Paths

Parenting, violence and your safety

Who can help

Everyone has the right to feel and be safe, yet family violence is still very common. According to Australian statistics (2012), women are most likely to experience violence from a male partner or ex-partner. Three quarters of women who experience family violence are mothers or care for children. Almost half said their children had seen or heard the violence. People caring for a child who has experienced

family violence are often worried about how the child is affected.

For children, experiencing family violence means knowing about, seeing or hearing violence in their home. It also means the child themselves can be hurt, abused or controlled. All forms of violence in the family affect children and are types of child abuse. A child's ability to cope can depend on many things.

You can do a lot to help.

This brochure can help you understand and support children who have experienced family violence. Most family violence is directed at women so the language used here is for mothers ('you').

However, the information is also helpful for other primary carers – fathers, grandparents, aunts, family friends and foster parents.

The phrase 'your child' means 'a child in your care'; 'dad' or 'father' refers to the child's other parent.

This brochure contains tips and information about:

- What is family violence
- Safety and talking to your child about staying safe
- Who to call and good questions to ask

Brochures 9 and 10 provide further information about parenting and law.

Everyone has the right to live free from violence

Violence is against the law. There are state and federal laws that are relevant for victims of family violence. Family violence involves a family member doing any of the following things:

Kicking, hitting, punching, pushing or choking (physical assault)

Forcing or pressuring you into sex, touching or watching pornography (sexual assault)

Saying he will kill or hurt you and/or your loved ones; saying he will take, not return or prevent you from seeing your children (threats)

Punching walls, throwing or smashing things, breaking your telephone (property damage)

Saying you are a bad mother, criticising or undermining your parenting (emotional abuse)

Following, repeatedly contacting you or tracking you and/or the children using technology (stalking)

Threatening to report you to child protection, immigration department,

mental health services, Centrelink, courts, police, or taking important documents (emotional/psychological abuse)

Name calling, insults, racial or cultural slurs,

homophobia, using sexist or sexualised abuse in words, text messages or images (emotional/psychological abuse)

Refusing to let you see friends and family; disconnecting or taking your phone, monitoring your movements, calls, texts and emails (social abuse)

Controlling money, food, medication (financial abuse)

Threatening to commit suicide if you end the relationship or leave (emotional/psychological abuse)

A child being harmed, seeing, hearing or being aware of any of the acts above is also family violence.



There is generally a pattern to men's use of violence. You or your children might recognise the cycle in the picture, or your situation could be different.

Make a safety plan

You and your children are not responsible for the violence or abuse you experience. You can do things that might keep you safer, but if the violence continues it is not your fault.

There are many steps to becoming safe and happy again, and it can help to take it slowly... but some things can't wait. Plan for your safety today.

1. Call 000 if you or your children are in danger
2. Tell the police if your children are present during a family violence incident or are at risk. Police may take out an intervention order for you, or you can apply for one. Keep copies of intervention orders with you and give copies to your support people
3. Plan the steps you can take to get out of an unsafe situation. Regularly review your plan
4. Get support from people you trust. Talk to them about how you would make contact if you were in trouble
5. Choose trusted people for your child to call in an emergency. Tell them what you want them to do if your child calls
6. Keep emergency phone numbers close, e.g. in a notebook or your phone
7. Hide an emergency pack of clothes, licence, identification, healthcare card, medication, phone numbers and money, or leave with a friend. Include a familiar object for your child, e.g. a soft toy
8. Think about your child's safety when they're not with you. Tell teachers or other carers about your intervention order if it protects your children and give them a copy
9. Think about your safety outside the home, separation and divorce do not guarantee your safety. For some women the violence can continue, change or become worse
10. Think about whether it is safe to keep information like this brochure at home
11. Contact the family violence service in your region for ongoing support

This brochure is not a substitute for legal advice from a lawyer. If you or your children have experienced violence, it is important to get legal advice. See brochures 9 and 10 for more information.

Safety planning with your child

Every child will respond to family violence differently. You understand your child best, but it might help to get advice from a family violence service about the best ways to talk about safety with your children.

All children need some safety skills for emergency situations. These skills can also be useful for families living with violence.

- Teach your children their phone number and address
- Give them phone numbers to call when they feel unsafe like an aunty or grandmother or Kids Helpline
- Trace your child's hand and write the name of a trusted adult on each finger. Decorate and stick it on the fridge
- Talk about what is and isn't an emergency and make sure they know safe places or people to go to for help
- Make sure your child knows how to use a phone
- Practice calling 000 (triple zero) and asking for the police and ambulance. Remind them not to hang up

If your child is protected by court orders that limit their father's time with your children:

- Talk to them about what to do if they see their dad at school or childcare
- Discuss who should answer the home phone or the front door



Staying or leaving home

The most important thing is to make sure that you and your children are safe. You have a right to feel safe and stay in your home.

While some women stay at home with a court order that says the person who used violence can't come near them, others need to leave for a few days or go to a women's refuge. Leaving home can be difficult, but might be the best option for your family's safety.

In some situations you'll have time to plan what to do, or you might need to leave immediately.

Think about:

- Where you and your children would feel safest (e.g. your parents' house)
- Who could stay with you
- Your child's needs and what might comfort them when changes happen or if they're away from home

Family violence services can:

- Explain how to apply for an intervention order
- Discuss housing options with you, including women's refuges
- Offer emotional and practical support, direct you to legal services and help you to talk to police, courts or other agencies



Time with dad

Mothers and children often worry about how to have safe contact with the person who used violence.

If you think your children could be at risk:

- You may not have to arrange for them to spend time with their father. Talk to police, family violence service or a lawyer
- If there is no court order showing how much time your children must spend with their father, they don't have to spend time with him
- If there is a court order telling you how much time the children are to spend with their father, you could be in breach of the order if you do not send them. It is important to get legal advice if you want to go back to court to change the order

If you think seeing the child's father is safe, consider:

Do feel you safe? How could handover be easier for your child?

- Think of a safe, neutral and comfortable place for your children, e.g. local recreation centre

Look at the back page for services that can help.

Things you could say to your child

Children can be confused about what is going on. It's important for your child to talk about their feelings and for you to support them and respond in simple words. These ideas are only a start.

- Reassure your child that the grown ups are working out how they can spend time with both parents
- Let them know you understand the changes are hard for them
- Ask how they have been coping and what could make it easier for them
- Spend time with your children: at bedtime, reading, playing a game together

Cyber safety

Computer use can be monitored by someone who has been violent toward you.

If the person using violence set up your phone or computer or used them, consider changing your passwords and get advice on location settings on your phones and devices. You can also use a safer computer, for example, at a library or a friend's house.

Helpful specialist web sites on technology safety are:

www.smartsafe.org.au
www.safesteps.org.au
www.techsafety.org

It is important to keep your children safe if they are using the internet, see brochure 7 for some ideas.

Who can help

Talking things through with trusted family, friends, and/or other mothers may help. You could also talk to doctors, maternal and child health nurses, child care workers, social workers or counsellors. You can find these people and support groups for mothers and children at your local community health centre, local council or call **WIRE Women's Support Line** or **Parentline 13 22 89** (7 days/8am-12pm).

Some questions that you might like to ask any service include:

- How much does it cost? Can I get help to pay?
- Do you have an after-hours service?
- Who will you share my information with? (Many services are legally required to inform Child Protection Services if they believe your child is being hurt or is in danger of being hurt)
- Can I have an interpreter?
- Do you involve my child's father at any point?



Crisis services

If you are in immediate danger call:
Victoria Police 000

Safe Steps

1800 015 188
24hr family violence response line
for women

Men's Referral Service

1300 766 491
24hr family violence
support line for men

Women and children's services

If you think you are experiencing family violence contact the service in your region (Mon-Fri, 9-5):



Berry Street

Northern suburbs
(03) 9450 4700

Grampians
(03) 5330 5000

Women's Health West

Western suburbs
(03) 9689 9588



Referral services

Call these services to find the closest family violence service to you:

WIRE Women's Support Line

1300 134 130

1800 RESPECT

1800 737 732

Please photocopy any part of this parenting kit freely. For extra copies call Women's Health West or Berry Street, or download the kit from our websites: www.whwest.org.au or www.berrystreet.org.au

Women's Health West and Berry Street acknowledge the support of the Victorian Government

