Domestic and Family Violence

Edited by Justin Healey

ISSUES IN SOCIETY
## CHAPTER 1  UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

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## CHAPTER 2  DEALING WITH DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

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Domestic and Family Violence is Volume 365 in the ‘Issues in Society’ series of educational resource books. The aim of this series is to offer current, diverse information about important issues in our world, from an Australian perspective.

KEY ISSUES IN THIS TOPIC
Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur between people in an intimate relationship in domestic settings; family violence is a broader term referring to violence between family members as well as violence between intimate partners. These violent acts include physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse.

This book reveals the prevalence and causes of domestic and family violence, and explains ways of dealing with domestic abuse. Domestic violence is more than a crime, it is an abuse of power by someone in a position of trust. Are you safe in your own home?

SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Titles in the ‘Issues in Society’ series are individual resource books which provide an overview on a specific subject comprised of facts and opinions.

The information in this resource book is not from any single author, publication or organisation. The unique value of the ‘Issues in Society’ series lies in its diversity of content and perspectives.

The content comes from a wide variety of sources and includes:
- Newspaper reports and opinion pieces
- Website fact sheets
- Magazine and journal articles
- Statistics and surveys
- Government reports
- Literature from special interest groups

CRITICAL EVALUATION
As the information reproduced in this book is from a number of different sources, readers should always be aware of the origin of the text and whether or not the source is likely to be expressing a particular bias or agenda.

It is hoped that, as you read about the many aspects of the issues explored in this book, you will critically evaluate the information presented. In some cases, it is important that you decide whether you are being presented with facts or opinions. Does the writer give a biased or an unbiased report? If an opinion is being expressed, do you agree with the writer?

EXPLORING ISSUES
The ‘Exploring issues’ section at the back of this book features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book. The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

FURTHER RESEARCH
This title offers a useful starting point for those who need convenient access to information about the issues involved. However, it is only a starting point. The ‘Web links’ section at the back of this book contains a list of useful websites which you can access for more reading on the topic.
Domestic violence is a widespread though often hidden problem across Australia. It occurs in all parts of society, regardless of geographic location, socio-economic status, age, cultural and ethnic background, or religious belief, and its often devastating effects – psychological, social and economic, short-term and long-term – rebound on families, children, and the community as a whole.

What is domestic violence?
Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women in a relationship or after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate and control the other. Domestic violence takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation. Many forms of domestic violence are against the law. For many indigenous people the term family violence is preferred as it encompasses all forms of violence in intimate, family and other relationships of mutual obligation and support.

Domestic violence is generally understood as gendered violence, and is an abuse of power within a relationship (heterosexual or homosexual) or after separation. In the large majority of cases the offender is male and the victim female.

Children and young people are profoundly affected by domestic violence, both as witnesses and as victims, and there has been growing recognition and concern about this in recent years.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities prefer the term ‘family violence’. ‘Family’ covers a diverse range of ties of mutual obligation and support, including kinship, friendship and work relationships.

**HEALTHY OR ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

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Domestic or family violence may involve a wide range of behaviours, including:

- **Physical abuse** – including direct assaults on the body, use of weapons, driving dangerously, destruction of property, abuse of pets in front of family members, assault of children, locking the victim out of the house, and sleep deprivation.

- **Sexual abuse** – any form of forced sex or sexual degradation, such as sexual activity without consent, causing pain during sex, assaulting genitals, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly, criticising, or using sexually degrading insults.

- **Verbal abuse** – continual 'put-downs' and humiliation, either privately or publically, with attacks following clear themes that focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity as a parent and spouse.

- **Emotional abuse** – blaming the victim for all problems in the relationship, constantly comparing the victim with others to undermine self-esteem and self-worth, sporadic sulking, withdrawing all interest and engagement (e.g. weeks of silence).

- **Social abuse** – systematic isolation from family and friends through techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends, moving to locations where the victim knows nobody, and forbidding or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people – in effect, imprisonment.

- **Spiritual abuse** – denying access to ceremonies, land or family, preventing religious observance, forcing victims to do things against their beliefs, denigration of cultural background, or using religious teachings or cultural tradition as a reason for violence.

- **Economic abuse** – complete control of all monies, no access to bank accounts, providing only an inadequate ‘allowance’, using any wages earned by the victim for household expenses.

**NOTES**

Are you happy? Abuse and violence

There are steps you can take and services to get help, according to this advice from the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

Are you worried about how you are being treated by your partner or husband, boyfriend or girlfriend, a family member or a carer? It can be difficult to recognise the signs of abuse.

Abuse in relationships, which is also called ‘domestic violence’, is any behaviour that causes physical, sexual or emotional damage, or causes you to live in fear. Non-physical forms of abuse can be just as damaging as physical violence.

Emotional abuse is when someone:
- Constantly puts you down or criticises you
- Threatens to stop you from seeing your children, or
- Threatens to commit suicide if you leave the relationship.

Social abuse may include:
- Preventing you from seeing your friends and family
- Making you feel guilty about going to work or socialising
- Constantly checking up on your whereabouts.

Abuse in relationships, which is also called ‘domestic violence’, is any behaviour that causes physical, sexual or emotional damage, or causes you to live in fear. Non-physical forms of abuse can be just as damaging as physical violence.

Financial abuse is when your partner or another family member takes control of your financial affairs when you don’t want them to, or prevents you from having access to money.

Sexual abuse is making you do sexual things that you don’t want to do. Forcing you to have sex is a criminal offence, even if you are married.

Stalking is when a partner, ex-partner, or someone else follows you around, or repeatedly tries to contact you, even if you’ve said you don’t want this.

Physical abuse includes pushing, hitting, throwing objects, driving dangerously to frighten you, or threatening to physically harm you, other people, or pets.

Can this be happening to me?

“I kept pretending to myself that it wasn’t that bad. It took a long time for me to admit I was being abused.”

Abuse can be difficult to identify, because an abusive person doesn’t always act this way. Sometimes they may be loving and kind. But if you
often feel afraid of upsetting the other person, and you change what you do to avoid their anger, then this is a sign that you are being abused. See also Quiz: Are you being abused? on page 5.

How might this be affecting me?
All forms of abuse have damaging consequences. Your confidence can become worn down by abuse.

If you have been in an abusive relationship you may feel:
- Afraid to tell anyone
- Worried that it’s your fault
- Depressed and alone
- Confused
- Scared of coping on your own
- Scared it will get worse if you leave
- Worried about what others will think
- Afraid that no one will believe you
- Frustrated and sad because you’ve tried everything.

Children are also affected if they live in a home where there is abuse. Remember, you’re not to blame for the abuse. You have a right to feel safe and to live a life free from intimidation.

Common ideas about why violence occurs
- ‘They had a sad or difficult upbringing’
- ‘They drink too much’
- ‘They have a stressful job’
- ‘They can’t control their anger’
- ‘Something about you causes them to abuse you’.

At times, we all experience stress, trauma, anger and fear. An abusive person may use these things as excuses for their behaviour, but really they behave this way to try to control what you do.

How have you coped until now?
You may have:
- ‘Tiptoed’ around their moods
- Seen less of your friends and family
- Changed your behaviour according to what they say they want
- Tried hard to protect the kids from seeing or hearing the abuse
- Attempted to talk to them about their behaviour
- Tried to fight back against the abuse.

Give yourself credit for everything you tried. But in the end, only the abusive person can change their own behaviour and treat you with respect.

What can I do?
No one likes, asks for or wants to live with abuse or violence, but working out what to do, or whether to stay or leave can be hard.

Maybe you love the person who is treating you like this. Maybe you feel trapped or scared of what they might do if you leave or what might happen to you if you are on your own.

Remember that abuse can, and usually does, get worse.

Some of the things you can do
The first thing is to understand that the way you are being treated is not okay. The quiz (on the next page) can tell you if there are warning signs that you are being abused. The most important warning sign is how you feel – do you feel happy, safe, respected or cared for? If you don’t always feel like this, there’s something wrong. Trust your instincts.

Remember, abuse is not your fault. Don’t blame yourself.

Talk to someone you trust. You don’t have to go through this alone. Finding the strength to talk to someone else can be hard, but many people who have experienced abuse say that the most helpful thing was getting support from someone else. Talking about the abuse and how you feel can help you decide what to do. Talk to a friend, a family member or a counsellor. Whoever you talk to shouldn’t judge you.

See our services page at www.dvrcv.org.au for more information. The counsellors at these services are experienced in helping people to deal with abuse. They won’t pressure you to leave, or to take any action unless you are ready.

Understand that abuse and family violence affects children. If abuse or violence is happening to you, your children will most likely be aware of it, even if they don’t witness it directly. There are things you can do to help your children. For information on how to help protect children, see Family Violence Hurts Kids Too on the DVRCV website, www.dvrcv.org.au. Teenagers can read the Bursting the Bubble website, www.burstingthebubble.com

Protect yourself. Everyone, regardless of their age, ability, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or culture, has the right to live free from abuse, fear and threat. It’s against the law for someone to physically hurt you, threaten you, or to coerce or force you into sexual contact. You also have the right to equal treatment before the law.

Your safety is important
It’s important to think carefully about your safety and prepare yourself in case you or your children are placed in physical danger.

It’s against the law for someone to physically hurt you, threaten you, or to coerce or force you into sexual contact. If you are in immediate danger, or if you have been physically or sexually assaulted, threatened or stalked, you can call the police on 000. If there’s sufficient evidence, they should lay criminal charges.

If you need legal protection from further violence, you can apply for an Intervention Order (in Victoria),
**QUICK: ARE YOU BEING ABUSED?**

*Our relationships and families should provide us with the things we all need: like love, being cared for, support and safety. But sometimes this is not our experience, according to the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria*

Does your partner, your boyfriend or girlfriend, your friend, your carer, or a family member:

- Make you feel uncomfortable or afraid?
- Often put you down, humiliate you, or make you feel worthless?
- Constantly check up on what you’re doing or where you are going?
- Try to stop you from seeing your own friends or family?
- Make you feel afraid to disagree or say ‘no’ to them?
- Constantly accuse you of flirting with others when this isn’t true?
- Tell you how the household finances should be spent, or stop you having any money for yourself?
- Stop you from having medical assistance?
- Scare or hurt you by being violent (like hitting, choking, smashing things, locking you in, driving dangerously to frighten you)?
- Pressure or force you to do sexual things that you don’t want to do?
- Threaten to hurt you, or to kill themselves if you say you want to end the relationship?
- Have your children heard or seen these things or been hurt themselves?

If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of these, then there are signs that you are not being treated right, or that you are being abused.

If you don’t feel safe, respected and cared for, then something isn’t right.

- Abuse happens when one person tries to control or hurt another.
- Abuse may be physical, such as hitting, pushing or choking.
- Abuse can also be other things, like putting you down and making you feel worthless, or being possessive and jealous to stop you from speaking to friends or family. Forcing or tricking someone into doing sexual things is also abuse.
- These things can be just as hurtful as physical violence.

**RELATED LINKS**

- Stories from people who have experienced abuse – www.dvrcv.org.au/stories


This is a court order that can say the abuser is not allowed to hurt or threaten you, or is not allowed to come near you. If the abuser disobeys the Intervention Order, he can be charged with a criminal offence. Contact the services listed for more information on your legal rights.

See Legal Protection and Safety Ideas on the DVRCV website, [www.dvrcv.org.au](http://www.dvrcv.org.au)

**Who can I talk to?**

Family and friends can be supportive, but sometimes they don’t understand the seriousness of abuse.

If you have any concerns about being abused, you can contact a counselling or outreach service to talk, or just to get information on what you can do.

They won’t judge you, and they’ll take all forms of abuse seriously. They’ll respect your choices, including whether you leave or stay with your partner.

**RELATED LINKS**

- Many people who have experienced domestic violence have sent us their stories and advice. See Stories at [www.dvrcv.org.au](http://www.dvrcv.org.au)
- Family violence hurts kids too – a guide to helping children
- Abuse in lesbian relationships
- Guide for women with disabilities – getting free from abuse
- When love hurts – a guide for young people on relationships. It has safety plans, helpful ideas, a relationship quiz and other advice
- Bursting the Bubble – a guide for young people on abuse in families
- Men who have been abused by female partners can read stories and advice from other men who have been abused
- To order a pamphlet on domestic violence, see Publications [www.dvrcv.org.au](http://www.dvrcv.org.au) for an order form.


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MYTHBUSTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA BUSTS SOME OF THE MORE COMMON MYTHS ASSOCIATED WITH VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

“I choose to dress like this so I should expect to be sexually assaulted one day.”

“Well, he did pay for dinner so, in a way, I could have expected that he would rape me.”

These statements are two of many commonly held myths about violence against women, myths that minimise the seriousness of the crime and the responsibility of the attacker. They affect the way women feel about themselves when they have experienced violence and the way they are treated by other people.

The myths help perpetuate violence against women by making the abuser’s actions seem acceptable, which stops women from seeking help and stops others from helping.

The first step towards challenging the violence is to understand the reality behind the myths, enabling women to come to terms with what is really happening to them and exposing violence for what it really is – a social concern, not just an individual problem.

Myth – Violence against women isn’t that widespread

The statistics speak for themselves. Violence against women is alarmingly prevalent.

In Australia, one in three women who have been in a relationship have experienced violence by a partner.

Domestic violence contributes to more ill health and premature death for women aged 15 to 44 than any other single factor.

In Australia, one in three women who have been in a relationship have experienced violence by a partner.

Myth – Most of the time, violence against women is committed by strangers

Women face the greatest risk of violence from men they know, not from strangers.

Of the women who are assaulted, more than two-thirds are assaulted by men known to them: dates, boyfriends, marital partners, friends, family members or neighbours. Most women can avoid being alone at night in dark alleys, but they still won’t be safe. When a woman knows the man who sexually assaults her, it is less likely that it will be recognised as a crime, even by her. But these sexual assaults are not a matter of miscommunication – they are just as much a crime as a sexual assault committed by a stranger.

Myth – Violence only happens in poor and uneducated families

The belief that women are more often assaulted by working-class men or men of particular ethnicities is a stereotype rooted in racism and prejudice. Abusers come from all walks of life, all backgrounds and anyone can be abused. Wives of judges, teachers, doctors and politicians suffer from domestic violence. Violence happens in all types of families, in urban and rural communities, in all ethnic groups, in rich, poor and middle-class families to people of any age. Violence crosses all boundaries.

Older women and women with disabilities are often dependent on their family for support, shelter and daily living requirements, such as medicine and meals. Abuse may be physical or it may come in the form of neglect by a family member withholding assistance or food. This type of abuse goes largely unreported. Even when they are pregnant, women suffer from domestic violence.

There is no specific type of home in which violence happens. For this reason, it is often called the most ‘democratic’ of all crimes.

Myth – She asked for it. She deserved it. She provoked it.

No one deserves or asks to be beaten or emotionally abused. Perpetrators often blame women for provoking
them and women often blame themselves because they have been consistently told that violence is all their fault. No behaviour justifies a violent response. There is no excuse for violence.

There is only one person who is responsible for violence – the abuser. The abuser makes the choice to abuse.

**Myth – Everybody knows what kind of girl she is ... She wasn’t wearing much ...**

Rape is never the victim’s fault. No one asks to be raped and no one deserves it. Rape is not caused by women’s choice of clothes or women’s behaviour. It happens because perpetrators choose to commit a crime.

There is only one person who is responsible for violence – the abuser. The abuser makes the choice to abuse.

**Myth – Things can’t be that bad if she hasn’t walked out**

There are many reasons why women stay with someone who has been violent towards them. The most compelling reason is that it can be safer to stay. Research has shown that violence often escalates and becomes more unpredictable when women leave. Leaving can be dangerous. Staying can enable women to have some control, however limited.

There are other reasons why a woman does not just leave a violent situation, such as:

- Dependence on her partner’s money or earnings
- Fear, shame, guilt
- Family pressure to keep the marriage intact
- Children
- Fear of being socially isolated
- Hope that the husband really will change.

The fact that a woman is unwilling or unable to leave does not excuse the violence committed against her.

**Myth – Violence is in men’s nature**

Violence is not built into men’s genes – using violence is a choice men make to exercise power and control.

Many men are not violent towards their partners or families. Of those who are, most who assault their partners confine the violence to the privacy of their home. Violent husbands are not likely to attack their bosses or any member of the public because they are frustrated.

“Often prolonged exposure to violence has the effect of making the woman believe that she deserves to be hurt. It distorts your confidence and some women may start to rationalise their partner’s behaviour. Often, the only provocation has been that she has simply asked for money or food, or not had a meal ready on time, or been on the telephone too long.”

Women’s Aid Federation of England

Do something about violence against women today

You can take action to stop violence against women now on our Stop violence against women campaign page www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/. You’ll also find more information on the campaign, some great resources, news and blogs.

Domestic violence is widespread throughout the Australian population and is a gendered crime. However, estimates of the prevalence of domestic violence vary depending on the definition used.

The two surveys most commonly quoted in Australian research are the Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005 conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006), and the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). The Australian Institute of Criminology monitors the rate of homicide in Australia, including domestic homicide (Virueda & Payne 2010).

**Prevalence of domestic violence**

- The nationally distributed Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005 found that 15% of Australian women had experienced physical or sexual violence from a previous partner and 2.1% from a current partner since the age of fifteen. In contrast, 4.9% of Australian men had experienced violence from a previous partner and 0.9% from a current partner since the age of fifteen (ABS 2006, p.11).
- The above survey estimated that 35% of men and women had experienced physical assault since the age of fifteen, with 10% of men and 4.7% of women experiencing physical violence in the previous twelve months alone. However, where men were typically assaulted by a stranger, women most often experienced physical assault in the context of domestic violence. Overall, 31% of women who experienced physical violence in the past twelve months were assaulted by an intimate partner, compared to 4.4% of men (ABS 2006, p.9).
- The Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005, also found that 1.6% of women had experienced sexual violence in the previous twelve months, with 81% of those experiencing sexual assault. In 21% of the sexual assault incidents, the violence was perpetrated by a previous partner. Of the 1.6% who experienced sexual violence, 28% experienced a threat of sexual assault (ABS 2006, p.11).
- In the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey, over a third of women (34%) who had a current or former intimate partner reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence since the age of sixteen (Mouzos & Makkai 2004, p.44).

**Domestic violence is widespread throughout the Australian population and is a gendered crime. However, estimates of the prevalence of domestic violence vary depending on the definition used.**

- Of those in a current relationship, 9-11% reported experiencing physical or sexual violence from their partner at some point in their lifetime (Mouzos & Makkai, p.46). In addition, 37-40% reported experiencing at least one type of controlling behaviour, most commonly name calling, insults, put downs or behaviour that made the woman feel bad (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004, p.48).

**Children affected by intimate partner violence**

- Children may also be negatively affected by violence between intimate partners. In the Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005, 61% of women who had experienced violence by a previous partner reported that they had children in their care at some time during the relationship. Over a third of women (36%) who had experienced violence by a previous partner said that their children had witnessed the violence (ABS 2006, p.11).
- The Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005 also found that 59% of women who had experienced violence by a previous partner since the age of fifteen were pregnant at some time during the relationship. Of these women, 36% reported that violence had occurred during a pregnancy and 17% had experienced violence for the first time when they were pregnant (ABS 2006, p.11).

**Reporting and help seeking**

- Many victims of domestic violence do not report the incident to police. In the Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005, 63.2% of women who experienced physical violence at the hand of a male partner (current or previous), boyfriend or date in the previous twelve months did not report the most recent incident to the police (ABS 2006, p.21).
- The survey found that 82% of women who had experienced violence at the hand of a current partner in the past twelve months did not report it to the police. This figure dropped to 38.9% for women who had experienced violence by a previous partner in this same period (ABS 2006, p.21).
- In many cases, violence continues despite women’s attempts to seek legal protection. The Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005...
found that 10% of women who had experienced violence by their current partner had successfully sought a violence order against them. Despite this, 20% of women who had violence orders issued said that the violence was ongoing (ABS 2006, p.11).

Homicide

- In a worst case scenario, domestic violence can result in homicide. In 2007-08, most of the 260 incidents of homicide were domestic homicides involving the death of a family member (n=134) (Virueda & Payne 2010, p.7).
- Of the 134 domestic homicides, intimate partner homicides made up 60% (Figure 4). Of these, women made up the majority of victims (n=62, 78%) (Virueda & Payne 2010, p.19).

REFERENCES


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82% of women who had experienced violence at the hand of a current partner in the past twelve months did not report it to the police.

The Clearinghouse is linked to the Centre for Gender-related Violence Studies, based in the University of New South Wales, School of Social Sciences and International Studies.

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Violence against women: 
a summary of key statistics

FACTS AND STATISTICS FROM THE OFFICE FOR WOMEN

The focus of the Don’t Cross the Line website is on the development of respectful relationships. Therefore, information provided on this page focuses on an analysis of community attitudes, as well as prevalence data.

Formally released in April 2010, the National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women supports the need for community education campaigns that focus on how to develop respectful relationships. The key findings of the survey are outlined below.

National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women (NCAS) (2009)

The National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009 (NCAS) focuses on community attitudes towards interpersonal forms of gender-based violence as they affect women. The survey conducted by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and funded by the Australian Government, involved approximately 13,000 men and women from across Australia and included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally diverse communities and a sample of 16 and 17 year old respondents.

There were three key components to the national survey:

- Telephone interviews with over 10,000 people across Australia about their attitudes towards violence against women, with a minimum of 1,000 interviews conducted in each state/territory. The 2009 survey included 16- and 17-year-old respondents (where a parent consented).
- Telephone interviews with an additional 2,500 first and second generation members of the Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian communities (known as the ‘selected culturally and linguistically diverse’ or ‘SCALD’).
- Face-to-face interviews with 400 Indigenous Australians conducted in nine metropolitan and regional locations across Australia.

The results were compared with an equivalent national survey conducted in 1995 (Office of the Status of Women 1995, Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women: detailed report, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, AGPS, Canberra) to examine changes in attitudes over time.

In examining community attitudes towards violence against women, NCAS uses the term ‘violence against women’ and a range of other terms including ‘domestic violence’, ‘family violence’, ‘rape’ and ‘sexual assault’, and ‘sexual harassment’. This was done both to examine attitudes towards particular forms of violence against women and to reflect the diversity of terms in use in communities and scholarly circles.

A copy of the report is available from the VicHealth website: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

The main findings as identified in the fact sheet are provided below:

- Most people in the community have a broad understanding of domestic and sexual violence and its impacts, and do not condone it.
- Since 1995, there have been some significant and positive shifts in the general community’s attitudes and beliefs towards violence against women.
- This overall trend is encouraging and provides the impetus for continuing to improve preventive programs that will contribute to the elimination of violence against women.
- Despite improvements, attitudes that condone, justify or excuse violence against women persist.
- That some progress has been made:
  - The vast majority of the community agrees that physical and sexual assault, and threats, are domestic violence (between 97% and 98% compared with between 91% and 97% in 1995).
  - The community is more likely in 2009 to recognise the spectrum of domestic violence behaviours as ‘very serious’ than they were in 1995.
  - 98% of people today say that domestic violence is a crime, compared with 93% in 1995.
  - 93% of people agree that forced sex in an intimate relationship is a crime.
  - Very few people believe that ‘women who are raped ask for it’ – one in twenty people believe this in 2009 compared with one in seven people.

Violence against women and their children was estimated to cost the Australian economy $13.6 billion in 2008-09.
- The majority of the community (85%) disagrees that violence and harassment against women should be dealt with privately.
- Eight in ten people agree they would intervene in some way in a situation of domestic violence.
- That there are still challenges ahead:
  - Fewer people in 2009 believe that slapping and pushing a partner to cause harm or fear is a ‘very serious’ form of violence than in 1995 (from 64% in 1995 to 53% in 2009).
  - 22% of people in 2009 believe that domestic violence is perpetrated equally by both men and women compared with 9% in 1995.
  - 34% believe that ‘rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex’.
  - One in four people (26%) disagrees that ‘women rarely make false claims of being raped’.
  - 13% of people still agree that women ‘often say no when they mean yes’ and roughly one in six (16%) agrees that a woman ‘is partly responsible if she is raped when drunk or drug affected’.
  - One in five people (22%) believes that domestic violence can be excused if later the perpetrator regrets what they have done.
  - Eight in ten people in the general community say it is hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships and more than half believe a woman could leave a violent relationship if she really wanted to.

**South Australian statistics**

Data sourced from the Office for Crime Statistics and Research (OCSAR) in the Attorney-General’s Department shows that:
- Between July 2001 and June 2009 there were 45 domestic violence-related homicides reported in South Australia, of which 39 involved female victims and six involved male victims.

**Australian statistics**

- Violence against women and their children was estimated to cost the Australian economy $13.6 billion in 2008-09. Without appropriate action to address this issue, an estimated three-quarters of a million Australian women will experience and report violence in the period of 2021-22, costing the Australian economy an estimated $15.6 billion.¹

**Personal Safety Survey (PSS) (2005)⁵**

On August 10 2006 the Australian Bureau of Statistics released the results of the first national Personal Safety Survey (PSS) presenting information about women’s and men’s experiences of violence.

The PSS defines violence as ‘any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault. Physical assault involves the use of physical force with the intent to harm or frighten. An attempt or threat to inflict physical harm is included only if a person believes it is likely to be carried out. Sexual assault includes acts of a sexual nature carried out against a person’s will through the use of physical force, intimidation or coercion, or any attempts to do this. Unwanted sexual touching is excluded from sexual assault. Sexual threat involves the threat of an act of a sexual nature which the person believes is likely to be carried out.’

The survey found that since the age of 15:
- 2,243,600 women experienced physical assault
- 1,293,100 women experienced sexual assault
- 2,499,100 women experienced inappropriate comments about their body or sex life
- 1,931,100 women experienced unwanted sexual touching.

The survey also found that young women experience sexual assault at higher rates than older women. Of all women who reported experiencing sexual violence in the year previous to the study 28.2% were aged between 18-24, 29.2% were aged 25-34, 25.4% were aged 35-44 and 17.2% were aged 45 and over.

**National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSIISS) (2002)⁶**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSIISS) between August 2002 and April 2003. The survey provides information about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations of Australia for a wide range of areas of social concern including health, education, culture and labour force participation.

The 2002 survey found that:
- One-quarter of indigenous people in 2002 reported that they had been a victim of physical or threatened violence in the previous 12 months.


A total of 6,677 women aged between 18 and 69 years participated in the telephone survey between December 2002 and June 2003, and provided information about their experiences of both physical and sexual violence.

The IVAWS defines physical violence to ‘include both physical assaults, which refer to the use of physical...
force with the intent to harm or frighten a woman, and physical attempts or threats, which refers to the verbal, and/or physical intent to inflict harm which the woman believed was able and likely to be carried out.’ Sexual violence includes ‘any form of non-consensual or forced sexual activity or touching including rape. It is carried out against the woman’s will using physical or threatened force, intimidation or coercion. Includes sexual touching.’

The survey found that:

- Compared to the non-indigenous women in the sample, this group of indigenous women reported higher levels of physical, sexual and any violence during the 12 months preceding the IVAWS.
  - During this period, about seven per cent of non-indigenous women reported experiencing physical violence (4% RSE), compared to 20 per cent of indigenous women (21% RSE).
  - Three times as many indigenous women reported experiencing an incident of sexual violence, compared to non-indigenous women (12%; 28% RSE versus 4%; 6% RSE).

**Interstate statistics**

- Intimate partner violence is responsible for more ill-health and premature death in Victorian women under the age of 45 than any other of the well-known risk factors, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking.

- Women with physical and cognitive disabilities experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than those without disabilities, and those with cognitive disabilities are particularly vulnerable.

**International statistics**

- Overseas studies have found that women with disabilities, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or class are assaulted, raped and abused at a rate of between two and twelve times greater than women without disabilities.

- Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to intimate partner violence, especially where the abuser is also a carer and can exercise control over access to medication, or restrict mobility and access to external supports.

**REFERENCES**


**FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT:**

- *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women – Time for Action*
- *The Cost of Violence Against Women and their Children*
- *National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women*
- *Women’s Safety Survey*
- *Personal Safety Survey*
- *Sexual Assault in Australia: A Statistical Overview*
- Department of Social Services – Research and Data
- White Ribbon Australia

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Sometimes in relationships dominance or control or jealousy can be mistaken for love. This topic from the Women’s and Children’s Health Network is about hurt, power, control and feeling bad in a relationship. It is written for people who are on the receiving end of violence. It will bust myths about relationships and look at how to keep as safe as possible.

In heterosexual relationships, women are more often hurt by men, however, relationship violence also happens in gay and lesbian relationships or is done by women to men. If you are hurting other people, have a look at the Violence topic at www.cyh.com.au

In several sections below ‘he’ is used to identify the person who is violent. This may not be your situation and we apologise if that is the case, but we do that to make the points simpler to write.

**Warning!**

If you need emergency assistance, call the police immediately (000 in Australia).

There is information in languages other than English on the site of the Migrant Women’s Support Service, www.migrantwomenservices.com.au/resources.wt

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### RELATIONSHIP CHECKLIST

You may find some of these sound familiar.

- Do you do things to avoid your partner getting angry because you are nervous about what might happen?
- Have you been told, “you drive me to hurt you” and “you should change” for the abuse to stop?
- Does your partner say you are useless, stupid and wrong?
- Is your partner always checking every detail of what you do or feel?
- Have you been made to think you are not good enough?
- Has your partner embarrassed you and your friends so your friends don’t hang around any more?
- Does your partner threaten suicide or say “I can’t go on without you”?
- Has your partner yelled at you, punched holes in the wall, lost it or hit you?
- Have you been accused of being with others?
- Are you told that it’s because of “the drugs or alcohol”, “my terrible childhood” or because “I can’t control my temper”?

A healthy relationship needs more than love. It lets you feel loved, respected and able to be yourself. You may see some of the warning signs, but still think “it’s not that bad”. Feeling scared, embarrassed or pressured does not let you feel OK about being yourself. Noticing the warning signs early and protecting yourself (maybe leaving the relationship) can prevent the cycle (see the Cycle of violence on page 14) going on and on and on and on, each time getting harder and harder and harder for you to leave!

### WHAT VIOLENCE IS

Violence or abuse is when someone uses power or control or anger to make someone else feel hurt, scared or humiliated. In a relationship there can be a pattern of this behaviour that is used to get someone to do what another person wants. Control or manipulation or jealous or possessive behaviour can be confused with love. Love is not any of these things.

Abuse, violence or control can happen in different ways:

**Physical abuse**

Physical acts that hurt or scare you are abuse, whether they cause injury that you can see or not.

- This can be things like holding, shoving, pushing, restraining, torturing, driving a car dangerously to scare you, punching, biting, threatening, kicking, burning, throwing or smashing personal objects, punching holes in walls or doors, hurting or killing pets, breaking things or using a weapon.

**Emotional or verbal abuse**

Using threats or put-downs to get what they want, or to make you feel bad about yourself is emotional abuse.
• This can be things like calling you names, talking in a scary way, threatening to hurt or kill you, giving you scary ‘looks’, telling you you’re crazy, stupid or useless, or purposely making you feel bad about yourself.
• Emotional abuse can hurt as much as physical abuse. It can actually be very destructive.

**Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse can be things like forcing you to have sex, demanding or tricking you into doing sexual things, having sex with you when you have been drinking or taking drugs, or when you were asleep or unconscious and not aware of what was going on, using objects or treating you like a sex object.
• Sexual relationships should always be by choice of both partners.
• Any form of rape or sexual assault is a criminal offence.

**Social abuse**

Using your social life to control you or make you feel bad about yourself is social abuse.
• You might have to do everything together, not be allowed to choose your own friends, have to stop seeing your family or friends, or have them feel unwelcome when they’re around.
• You might not be allowed to go out, or have to tell every detail about what you have been doing.
• You may be wrongly accused of ‘getting on’ with other people or be put down in public.
• Social abuse is a form of control.

**Financial abuse**

Money can be used as a way of getting power over someone.
• This means things like making you dependent for money, forcing you to beg or do other things for money, keeping control of all money matters, stopping you from getting a job, gambling or selling your things without your permission.

**Spiritual**

Your partner might use religion, faith or cult beliefs as a form of control or to hurt you.
• You might be prevented from keeping your own faith, forced to participate in beliefs or ceremonies you don’t want to, scared or hurt by the use of certain beliefs.
• This can be a very powerful form of control and make you do things you don’t want to do.

**CYCLE OF VIOLENCE**

If you are in a violent relationship, you might begin to notice a certain way that events happen. Relationship violence can sometimes feel confusing. You might notice a pattern to the violence that might be something like this:
1. **Build-up** – Things are tense. You might notice stress. You might see the build up of stress without any discussion about this. You might just sense there is something wrong.
2. **Explosion** – Danger time! Violence or threats occur.
3. **Remorse** – Your partner says “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it”, “I couldn’t control it”, “it won’t happen again”. He might buy gifts or do other things to try and “make up”. Sometimes he might blame you and say stuff like “you pushed me to it”.
4. **Honeymoon** – Things seem calm again and may even seem better than they have been for a long time. He might deny that it happened, how serious it was or that he had any control. You might think he has changed for the better. Nothing actually changes and in fact the cycle begins all over, the build-up, explosion ... and it all happens over again. This might happen over a few days or within just a few minutes.

**WHAT VIOLENCE CAN DO**

Relationship violence can do all sorts of things to the way you feel, act or what you do. Here are some things people have said. (Again we know that although we use the words ‘he’ or ‘him’ this is not the situation for all relationships.)
• I felt on edge all the time, like I had to be really wary.
• I lost heaps of confidence in myself.
• I was scared. Scared of him and what he might do to himself or me or the kids.
• I constantly did what I thought he wanted. I need to please him all the time.
• I was unhappy. Unhappy with myself and unhappy with my life. I had never thought my life would be like this.
• I lost who I was, what I liked and my own opinions. I lost my life!
• I never knew what mood he’d be in. I tried to be nice so I didn’t upset him.
• I thought it was my fault. I thought I deserved it.
• I felt like I wasn’t good enough for him. Or for any one else for that matter.
• I was too embarrassed to tell anyone because they’d think I was weak or stupid.
• I didn’t think people would believe me and that they would think I was just making a big fuss about nothing.
• I felt alone. He’d driven my friends away and told me bad things about them.
• My work at uni and work really started to take a dive.
• I made excuses for him. The day after, it was always less bad than when it was happening. I started to wonder whether I was just making a big deal out of nothing.
• I got drunk all the time and smoked tonnes of pot.
• I couldn’t sleep; I got headaches and felt sick all the time.
• I avoided saying what I really thought in case he got angry.
• At first I could not believe it, that this had happened to me! Then I got angry.

YEAH RIGHT! MYTHS
A myth is a mistaken idea about violence. Your situation is yours and you know best. This is a way of getting as much information as possible for you to make your own choices about your own life.

Myth 1 – Someone who gets hit did something to deserve it!
Violence is never a way to sort things out. Saying you “deserved to get hit” is an excuse for violence. “If you stopped your nagging” or “did what I said” are ways of blaming you and making you feel like violence is your fault. Violence is never your fault. It is up to the person who uses violence to find other ways to deal with stress or to work out problems. No one deserves to be abused.

Myth 2 – You should be ashamed if your partner is violent to you
It is said one in three women will be hit by a partner at some time and one in eight will experience ongoing abuse!
Many people have experienced a similar situation to you. You do not need to be ashamed of what someone else does. Violence aimed at you is not your fault and you do not have to cover it up for someone else. Your safety and happiness are most important. You have the right to feel safe and to not live in fear.

Myth 3 – But he hasn’t ever hit me!
Violence is not only what is done to you physically. Emotional and verbal abuse slowly make you feel worthless and like there is something wrong with you. Other kinds of violence can make you feel alone, stupid or that you “should do as you are told”.

When you feel this way it might make you think that you have no choice but to ‘take it’. Remember, you always have a range of choices, it may just not seem that way! You’ve got the right to be treated with respect, enjoy your youth and fulfil your dreams.

Myth 4 – Drugs or alcohol cause someone to become violent
Lots of violence happens when someone is drunk or on drugs. Lots of people become drunk or use drugs and do not become violent. Drugs and alcohol do not cause violence; they are an excuse for violence. Violent behaviour is a choice. It is based on someone’s belief that violence is an OK way to sort things out.

Myth 5 – Women who become involved in violent relationships should stand up for themselves and they are weak if they don’t
Many people think women “should just leave – I would”! On average, it takes seven tries for a woman to leave a violent relationship. There are reasons why they stay. Being a woman can mean, “caring for others”. Being a man can mean being tough and “ruling the roost”. This combination of caring and ruling can mean the relationship goes on. Feeling “in love”, thinking of children’s needs, constant “sorry” or promises to change, or getting threats like “I can’t go on without you” can lead to choices to stay in a relationship. It can be very scary to step out on your own and leave. Your rights and needs are important. You are the one to stick up for them.

WHAT MAKES SOME PEOPLE VIOLENT?
Violence in relationships is different in every situation. Some things in society make it worse.

In western culture (not just from parents but also in movies, school systems, magazines ...):
• Men are taught, role modelled and expected to be superior, in control and tough.
• Women are taught, role modelled and expected to be caring, comforting and forgiving.

This culture can mean men expect women to “do as they are told”, to “look after their man” or they may treat women like an object or possession. Women sometimes feel that having a partner is the most important thing to them and without one they mean nothing. They might try to look after and nurture them, please them or be what they want them to be. This pattern can lead to violence. For more information on this, read the topic Violence on www.cyh.com.au

Some things in individuals can contribute to violence, e.g. growing up in a violent home, jealousy or possessiveness, even feeling inadequate. Whatever the cause, the person who is violent needs to deal with it, not the other partner.

RELATIONSHIP RIGHTS
RR – relationship rights
An equal relationship that allows you to grow and be
yourself will have respect. This means your partner will:

- Let you feel good about yourself.
- Understand and accept it when you say no to things you don’t want to do.
- Accept it if you change your mind or have your own opinion.
- Admit he’s wrong and talk honestly and openly to sort out fights.
- Negotiate and compromise.
- Let you feel safe when you are around him.
- Value and respect you and your rights as a human being.

You have the right to feel respected! Many people say trust is also very important in an equal relationship. Where do you see these fit in your relationship? How might you make abuse become less in your life (remembering you can’t change someone else)? How might you make respect become a big part of your life?

KEEPING SAFE

Your safety is of utmost importance. Think of things you can do to protect yourself.

If you require emergency assistance call the police immediately 000. You can not stop the violence. Violence is unpredictable.

Here are some other tips

- Tell people. Tell your family and friends and get them to help protect you. Tell the police. Tell your employer or school counsellor.
- Surround yourself with people you feel safe with.
- Have things written down so if he does anything else you have the history. You can have things documented by the police without having to take any action. Or you can keep your own log with dates and things that occurred (this can be used as evidence in court).

- Try to avoid situations where you might be alone with him.
- Take as much control as possible. Think ahead about your safety and situations where he could come into contact with you alone. Make plans so you aren’t alone.
- Ring or speak to someone for advice. Some places have a special phone line for violence. See Resources on page 17.
- Get as much information as you can.

Safety plan

- If you are living with a violent partner and you want to leave, have a safety plan worked out. You might hide some money away, have clothes packed in a suitcase, or organised somewhere to stay. Think about things like bank accounts, credit cards, marriage or birth certificates and passports. Crisis and domestic violence services can help you.
- Organise somewhere safe to stay – a friend or relative, someone he doesn’t know. There is also a range of temporary housing available.
- Try and cut any way he can contact you. Change phone numbers or email address. Get other people to answer the phone or take messages. The less options he has the less he can contact you.
- Make arrangements for children or pets if you are scared for their safety.
- If you want to break it off and you are worried about his reaction, do it over the phone or when other people are around.
- Get legal advice. You can take out a restraining order or charge for any criminal offences.
- Write out your safety plan.

YOU AND THE LAW IN AUSTRALIA

The law is there to protect you. If you are in immediate danger you can call the police (000). If you want to feel
safe there are a number of choices you have.

- You can make a report and the police can charge for assaults, threats or harassment.
- You may also take out an order that is intended to prevent the person who has been violent toward you from having contact with you. This alters depending on your age and where you live.
- Contact your local police or domestic violence helpline for more information.

**HOW TO HELP**

If you know someone who is in a relationship and you are worried that it is violent, your support could be vital. Many people find supporting someone in this situation frustrating or draining, so it can be useful to also have your own support.

Here are some tips:

- Talk to her about your concern – “I am worried because …”. Tell her you care.
- Listen to her – try not to make judgements like “Why do you take it” or “Why don’t you just break up with him?”
- Help her understand that abuse is not her fault. Don’t make excuses for him “he’s not a violent man, he is just under a lot of pressure at the moment”.
- Believe her. Tell her you believe it.
- Help her understand the abuse and take it seriously.
- Think about her safety and offer to help protect her, as long as your own safety is not put at risk.
- Be patient and let her make her own decisions – don’t tell her what to do.
- Be encouraging and supportive. Try not to criticise her or her partner. Point out what abuse is and how it works.
- Help her to see a counsellor or talk to the police. Go with her if she wants you to.
- Find your own support; check out legal or other information.

**RESOURCES**

**Australia**

- Centrelink
- Family Court of Australia
- Family Relationships Online
- Mensline Australia
  1300 78 99 78
  [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)
- Human rights
  Human rights covers many very important issues. Human rights are about respect, justice and equality for everyone. This site has heaps of information on the history of human rights, human rights in Australia, and human rights issues around the world
- Kids Helpline
  Ph: 1800 551 800 (24 hours)
- Non-English Speaking Background Domestic Violence Action Group
- Youth Say No!
  A website from Western Australia that looks at date violence

**General**

- ‘Keep safe stay cool’
  Peer education program which provides Interaction, Education and Information to young people about domestic violence and healthy relationships. Southern Adelaide Health Service (South Australia)
- Bursting the Bubble
  A web site for young adults about family violence
  [www.burstingthebubble.com](http://www.burstingthebubble.com)
- 10 facts about violence prevention from the World Health Organisation
  [www.who.int/topics/violence/en](http://www.who.int/topics/violence/en)

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- Friedman, B (1996). *Boys Talk — A program for young men about masculinity, non-violence and relationships*, Men Against Sexual Assault.

This information should not be used as an alternative to professional care. If you have a particular problem, see a doctor, or ring the Youth Healthline on 1300 13 17 19 (local call cost from anywhere in South Australia).

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DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES IN SOCIETY

Can also involve control of finances. Emotional and physical abuse, and relationship can include sexual, to physical violence. An abusive different ways and isn’t just limited never to blame for another person’s behaviour. Reach Out Australia explains behaviour is your fault is a common feeling, but it’s important to know that you’re the signs of an abusive relationship can give some perspective. Thinking that abusive working out whether you’re in an abusive relationship isn’t always easy. Learning SIGNS OF AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

• Blaming you for all the problems
• Constantly comparing you unfavourably with others
• Insults you in public or private
• Makes you feel confused or like you are going ‘crazy’
• Threatens violence against you, your pets, or people you love
• Makes you feel scared.

What is an abusive relationship?
Abuse is experienced in heaps of different ways and isn’t just limited to physical violence. An abusive relationship can include sexual, emotional and physical abuse, and can also involve control of finances.

Key signs of an abusive relationship
Possessiveness
• Checking on you all the time to see where you are, what you’re doing and who you’re with
• Trying to control where you go and who you can see and getting angry if you don’t do what they say.

Jealousy
• Accusing you without good reason of being unfaithful or flirting
• Isolating you from family and friends, often by rude behaviour.

Put-downs
• Putting you down, either publicly or privately, by attacking your intelligence, looks, mental health or capabilities
• Constantly comparing you unfavourably with others
• Blaming you for all the problems in the relationship, and for the times they are out of control or violent.

Threats
• Yelling, sulking and deliberately breaking things that you value
• Threatening to use violence against you, your family, friends or even a pet
• Saying things like ‘no one else will want you’.

Physical and sexual violence
• Pushing, shoving, hitting, grabbing, making you have sex or do things you don’t want to do
• Harming you, your pets or your family members.

Things you might feel in an abusive relationship?
‘My partner isn’t violent all the time – they love me’
A violent relationship may not be violent all the time and the person who is violent may seem very loving at other times and sorry for their behaviour. This can make it hard to stay angry and upset with them. However, the chance of their violent behaviour continuing is quite high. Abusers are often very charming and sweet with other people, especially if they are trying to manipulate other people’s view of them.

‘Things will get better – they don’t mean it’
After a violent event, it’s common for both of you to try and make it ok by making excuses, apologising, or promising to change. Sometimes the violent person may even blame you – saying things like “it wouldn’t have happened if you didn’t ...”. Things might settle down for a little while but it’s often only a matter of time before the build-up to violence starts again.

‘It’s so confusing – I’m sure it’s a one-off’
If you are experiencing violence in a relationship, things can feel very confusing, especially if it’s your first relationship. You might not be sure what behaviour to expect. Abusers often work on your sense of what is real to make you feel confused or even that you are going crazy. Statistically though, if someone is violent once they are far more likely to be violent a second time.

‘Maybe it’s my fault’
You might begin to think that the violence is your fault. The abuser will probably tell you that it is. The truth is that no matter what you do, another person’s behaviour is never your fault.

‘I’m scared of what will happen if I leave them’
In an abusive relationship, it’s not unusual to be afraid of leaving the person you are with. This can be for a number of reasons, such as fearing for your own safety, or being fearful of what the person might do to themselves. You might also be afraid of not being able to make it on your own. But it’s important to remember that you’re not on your own and there are people who can help you every step of the way.

What to do if this sounds like you
No one deserves to be in a relationship where they don’t feel safe. If you are in a relationship that you think might be abusive, find out more about what you can do.


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Domestic and Family Violence | Issues in Society | Volume 365
Domestic violence support

There are a number of services available for you regardless of where you live in Australia. National services like 1800RESPECT can support you no matter what state or territory you are in. But there are also state and territory-based services in Victoria, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia.

YOU CAN FIND OUT MORE ABOUT...

- Domestic violence services
- Relationship support services.

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 000 immediately. Help is available from many services in Australia. The following Domestic Violence Lines are gateway services that can put you in touch with the service right for your needs, or provide a listening ear. They are all available 24/7 so regardless of the time you can get support.

NATIONAL SERVICES

1800RESPECT OR 1800 737 732
The National Sexual Assault, Family Domestic Violence Counselling Line is a free telephone and online confidential service for any Australian experiencing or who has experienced domestic or family violence and/or sexual assault. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING SERVICE
National Call 13 14 50 and ask them to contact 1800RESPECT

NATIONAL RELAY SERVICE (for callers who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment)
TTY/Voice Calls – phone 133 677 and ask them to contact 1800RESPECT or 1800 737 732
Speak and Listen – phone 1300 555 727 and ask them to contact 1800RESPECT

INTERNET RELAY USERS
Visit the National Relay Service website and ask them to contact 1800RESPECT or 1800 737 732

ACT
Domestic Violence Crisis Service ACT
02 6280 0900
www.dvcs.org.au

NSW
Domestic Violence Line
1800 65 64 63
www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au

QLD
DV Connect Women’s Line
1800 811 811
www.dvconnect.org

VIC
Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service
1800 015 188 or 03 9322 3555
www.wdvc.org.au

WA
Women’s Domestic Violence Helpline
08 9223 1188 or 1800 007 339

SA
Domestic Violence Crisis Service
1300 782 200

Domestic Violence and Aboriginal Family Violence Gateway Service (including Domestic Violence Help Line)
1800 800 098

TAS
Family Violence Response Referral line
1800 633 937
www.safeathome.tas.gov.au

NT
Dawn House
08 8945 1388

WHAT CAN I DO NOW?

- Contact 1800RESPECT to find out more information and get support.
- If you are in immediate danger, call 000.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel you are in an abusive relationship, you have every right to leave.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – WHY MEN ABUSE WOMEN
A FACT SHEET FROM THE BETTER HEALTH CHANNEL

The causes of domestic violence include deeply held beliefs about masculinity. Men who abuse members of their family also tend to blame other people, alcohol or circumstances for their violent outbursts.

Domestic violence is an under-reported crime, so it is difficult for agencies to keep accurate statistics. However, the perpetrators of this crime are usually men and the victims are usually women and children. Researchers believe that around one in four Australian women will experience domestic violence at some time in their life.

Although domestic violence can affect anyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status or their racial and cultural background, women who are young, indigenous, have a disability, or who live in rural areas are at greater risk.

Common factors

There is no such thing as a ‘typical’ perpetrator of domestic violence. However, researchers have found that men who abuse family members often:

- Use violence and emotional abuse to control their families.
- Believe that they have the right to behave in whatever way they choose while in their own home.
- Think that a ‘real’ man should be tough, powerful and the head of the household. They may believe that they should make most of the decisions, including about how money is spent.
- Believe that men are entitled to sex from their partners.
- Don’t take responsibility for their behaviour and prefer to think that loved ones or circumstances provoked their behaviour.
- Make excuses for their violence: for example, they will blame alcohol or stress.
- Report ‘losing control’ when angry around their families, but can control their anger around other people. They don’t tend to use violence in other situations: for example, around friends, bosses, work colleagues or the police.
- Try to minimise, blame others for, justify or deny their use of violence, or the impact of their violence towards women and children.

Some men who use violence have grown up in an abusive household themselves, but the majority have not. Some come from lower socioeconomic groups and some have problems with alcohol. However, this is not the case for all men who use domestic violence.

The alcohol myth

It is commonly assumed that domestic violence is caused by alcohol abuse. This isn’t true. The perpetrator is sober in about half of domestic violence cases where the police are called. Also, not all alcoholics or binge drinkers resort to violence when angered or frustrated.

It is how the perpetrator sees himself and his rights that lead to the violence. If a man abuses his family and also tends to have difficulty with controlling his alcohol consumption, he needs to recognise that he has two separate problems.

Men resist seeking help

Research suggests that while some men who are violent may think about getting help, the majority of them don’t. Some of the reasons men do not seek out help include:

- Acceptance of violence – a man who thinks that he is entitled to dominate family members, and that it is okay to solve problems with violence, may not believe that he needs help. He may blame the victim for ‘provoking’ his behaviour.
- Notions of masculinity – the idea of what it means to be a man, for many men, includes silence and strength. A man may avoid seeking help because he doesn’t want to look ‘weak’ or feminine.
- Ignorance – about half of the men who get help or counselling for their violent behaviour report that they had tried unsuccessfully in the past to find help but didn’t know where to go.
- Fear – most men who don’t seek help report that feeling ashamed stops them from seeking help.

Getting help

Regular counselling with a trained counsellor can help men who use violence towards family members to understand and change their behaviour. Counselling and behaviour-change programs focus on examining and addressing the man’s deeply held beliefs about violence, masculinity, control of others, the impact of...
their use of violence towards others, self-control and responsibility for one's actions.

The man is encouraged to examine his motivations for the violence and is taught practical strategies, including:

- Learning that violence and abuse is not caused by anger, but the desire to hurt or dominate others
- Learning how violent behaviour damages his relationship with his partner and children, and how he can behave in more respectful ways
- Self-talk and time out – the man is taught how to recognise individual signs of anger, and how to use strategies like self-talk and time out. A man can use self-talk messages, such as ‘Anger will not solve this problem’, to remind himself to remain calm. A trained counsellor can help a man find his own effective self-talk messages. Time out means walking away from the situation until the man feels calmer. Time out must be discussed with the man’s partner so that both parties understand how and why to use it. However, time out is not an avoidance technique and the man must try and work out the problem at a later opportunity.

**It will take time**

Women and children who live with violent men live in a constant state of anxiety and fear. A man who is undergoing counselling for his violent behaviour needs to recognise that regaining the trust of his family, and the behaviour-change process, will take time. He also needs to accept that his partner has a right to end the relationship if she wishes.

**Where to get help**

In an emergency:
- Call the police in an emergency. Dial triple zero. Tel. 000.

For men:
- Men’s Referral Service Tel. (03) 9428 2899 or 1800 065 973 (free call within Victoria) – a confidential and anonymous telephone service for men who want to stop their violent or abusive behaviour towards family members, 9am to 9pm Monday to Friday.

For women:
- Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service (WDVCS) is the Victorian statewide service for women experiencing violence and abuse from a partner or ex-partner, another family member or someone else close to them. Crisis Line Tel. (03) 9322 3555 or 1800 015 188 (24 hours).
- To find out about local support services, contact the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria Tel. (03) 9486 9866 – 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.
- National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service (Australia) Tel. 1800 737 732 – free telephone counselling hotline (24 hours, 7 days).
- 1800RESPECT – for real-time online counselling.

**Things to remember**

- The causes of domestic violence include deeply held beliefs about masculinity.
- Men who abuse loved ones tend to blame other people, alcohol or circumstances for their violent outbursts.
- Men often minimise, blame others, justify or deny their use of violence or the impact of their violence towards women and children.
- A man who is undergoing counselling for his violent behaviour needs to recognise that regaining the trust of his family will take time, and that his partner has the right to end the relationship if she chooses to.

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Are you experiencing violence or abuse in your relationship?

A tip sheet from MensLine Australia with advice for men who are victims of relationship violence and abuse

Men also experience family and domestic violence

Violence and abuse in intimate relationships can occur without the use or threat of personal violence, although these behaviours are usually the most obvious signs. Violence and abuse can take many forms but the most common include physical violence and threats, emotional abuse, social and financial control, and persistent demeaning comments.

Violence and abuse in intimate relationships includes

- Physical assault – slapping, hitting, scratching
- Emotional and psychological abuse – belittling remarks, yelling, screaming, put-downs, being ignored, constant criticism
- Limited decision making – having all decisions relating to finances, purchases, lifestyle and living arrangements made for you
- Social isolation – being unreasonably restricted from your family or friends
- Dominating behaviour – behaviour designed to deliberately frighten, harm or control you e.g., threatening to harm you, themselves or someone else.

No one person’s experience is typical. Violence and abuse in intimate relationships have many different combinations of controlling behaviour and can also change over time.

Questions to ask yourself

- Do you feel safe in your current relationship?
- Are you insulted, demeaned or criticised in public by your partner?
- Is living with your partner like ‘walking on eggshells’?
- Does your partner prevent you from doing things that are important to you? e.g. seeing family or friends
- Does your partner threaten you?
- Do you feel like you are in an abusive relationship?
- Are your partner’s needs the only ones allowed to be met in the relationship?

There is now far greater understanding of the frequency of men as victims of violence and abuse in their intimate relationships, and greater likelihood that a complaint will be positively received.

Impact of violence and abuse

Even experiencing violence and abuse over a short time can lead to long-standing changes in a person, including:

- Feelings of helplessness, depression, worthlessness, powerlessness and isolation
- Feelings of shame, guilt and despair
- Chronic health problems (including psychological problems), physical injury and shortened lifespan
- Difficulty in functioning in other parts of your life – in particular at work, but also among your friends and social group.

Will I be believed?

There is now far greater understanding of the frequency of men as victims of violence and abuse in their intimate relationships, and greater likelihood that a complaint will be positively received.

It is important to remember:

- Men, like everyone, are entitled to the full protection of the law
- If you are at risk of injury, it is better to report it to the police than do nothing or act out physically
- You are also entitled to be treated with respect. If you are not satisfied appropriate action is being taken to protect you, report it again until your situation is understood and your safety is being addressed.

What can I do?

Report it – Let someone else know what is going on. Talk with a person in a position of authority (police, lawyer, doctor) who will know your rights and responsibilities or who can put you in contact with a professional for expert advice. When contacting police, in some circumstances they will be required to take action if your safety is at risk.

Get support – It is important that you find someone you can confide in about your situation. Talking about what is happening is very important and can undo some of the feelings of isolation and helplessness that are common in men who are the victims of violence and abuse. This person can have specialist skills such as counselling, but that is not essential; it needs to be someone who will listen to you carefully and...
be available as you move through the process of working out how to manage the situation.

Call MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78 for support and to discuss your options.

Develop a safety plan – Develop a safety plan if you believe your safety, or the safety of others, could be at risk. The safety plan is a predetermined course of action to use when you decide there is an imminent risk of violence or psychological harm (children can be harmed psychologically when witnessing repeated abuse).

The safety plan is designed to create distance and remove the likelihood of an incident happening, and may include things such as:
- Under what circumstances will you leave the family home? Where will you go that is safe? What is your long-term plan?
- Will you take the children with you? Do you have the right to take the children with you?
- Who needs to know that you have activated your safety plan?

Keep a journal of incidents – This could be useful if you need legal protection or police intervention.

Will your partner change?
- A change in your partner’s behaviour is unlikely to occur without them obtaining professional assistance.
- Your partner may feel remorse after an abusive incident, but the abuse is unlikely to stop unless they seek help or you remove yourself from the situation.
- The decision to stay or leave a relationship is yours alone. However, talk through your decision with trusted others beforehand.
- Understand what you lose or gain from staying in a relationship, or from leaving.

Develop a safety plan if you believe your safety, or the safety of others, could be at risk.

RESOURCES
- Contact MensLine Australia for professional support around men and relationship concerns on 1300 78 99 78.
- Visit oneinthree.com.au – this website raises public awareness of the existence and needs of male victims of family violence and abuse.
- Read Breaking the Silence: A practical guide for male victims of domestic abuse, Dr Elizabeth Celi for practical information about men as victims.
- Visit heart-2-heart.ca/men – a support network and self help database for men in violent and abusive relationships.

As a mother, carer or relative, you may find that your child is using violence or abuse to intimidate and control you and perhaps other family members as well. It has gone beyond ‘acting out’ and you feel something’s not right.

You may find it difficult to accept that what your child is doing is abusive. Perhaps you feel like it’s your fault that your child has ‘turned out’ this way. Feeling stressed, guilty and ashamed, you may just try and put up with it.

You are not responsible for the abusive behaviour, but you are very important to the solution. By accepting the seriousness of the situation and seeking support, you may find the confidence and skills you need to regain control and heal your relationship with your child.

You and your family are entitled to be respected and to live in safety.

Abuse is any act that creates fear and is intended to cause physical, emotional, psychological, financial or property damage to gain power and control over another.

WHAT IS ABUSE?

Adolescence is the stage in between childhood and adulthood – our brains keep developing right up to the age of about 25. During this time it is normal for young people to challenge authority and rules as they prepare to become independent and to run their own lives. So how do you know what is healthy anger and conflict and what is abusive behaviour? You know when something’s not right – listen to your own thoughts and feelings.

EXAMPLES OF ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Most abusive young people use a combination of verbal and emotional abuse, threats and property damage, as well as physical violence. This behaviour generally gets worse as the young person grows bigger and stronger.

Physical
- Hitting, punching, shoving, kicking, spitting, throwing things
- Breaking things, punching holes in walls
- Abusive and bullying behaviour to siblings
- Cruelty to pets.

Emotional
- Verbal abuse, swearing, yelling, put-downs
- Playing mind games – trying to make you think you’re crazy
- Making threats to runaway, call child protection, hurt or kill themselves in order to control you or get their own way.

Financial
- Demanding money or purchases you can’t afford
- Stealing money or possessions
- Incurring debts you have to pay.

Sexual
- Viewing or making internet pornography
- Engaging siblings in sexual behaviour
- Excessive or public masturbation.

Is it my fault?

Mothers often blame themselves for their children’s behaviour. They may even feel their children are punishing them for being a bad mother. This can leave mothers feeling like failures, and feeling they can’t manage the situation. This is not helpful. Young people may behave violently for a variety of reasons. Whatever the reason, behaving violently or abusively is not healthy or respectful. Young people must be responsible for their own behaviour and actions.

WHO ABUSES?

Many toddlers show aggression. Although most grow out of this, some slowly escalate as they get bigger and stronger. Although violence can start at any age, it often becomes a major problem between the ages of 12 and 17 years. In 2010/11, Victoria Police was called to 3,252 family violence incidents where the offender was under 18; the majority of these incidents (2,244) involved 15-17 year olds.

Of all adolescent offenders, two thirds (1,895) were male and a third (932) were female. Current statistics suggest that girls are less likely to be physically abusive than boys and are more likely to use emotional abuse.

Risk factors

The following factors may make abusive behaviour more likely, more severe or harder to control. It’s important to remember that none of these things ‘cause’ violence.

Substance misuse – Young people may be more aggressive and show less remorse when they are using drugs and/or alcohol.

Mental illness – Youth mental health services can support you to learn about the mental health issue and how best to both support yourself and ensure your family’s safety and wellbeing.
Trauma and loss – War, migration, death, family separation, illness and grief affects how a child develops, copes with stress or conflict, makes decisions or handles emotions. This can lead to abusive and violent behaviour.

Experiencing family violence – Children who experience family violence may be more ‘at risk’ of using violence themselves, particularly if they are male children. They may begin to see violence as a normal and acceptable way of communicating or resolving conflict. Like adults, they use violence to gain a temporary sense of control and power in an out-of-control situation where they feel powerless and worthless.

Men’s violence toward women teaches children to be disrespectful to their mother and undermines her authority. Children who grow up with these abusive attitudes unchallenged are more likely to abuse and use violence against their mother.

Sexist attitudes – Common attitudes in our society allow males, including young men, to feel they are entitled to control women and the household. Physical strength and dominance are seen as defining qualities of being a man. Such attitudes and peer pressure can encourage macho behaviour in boys.

Attitude of over-entitlement – Parents sometimes put their energy into giving their children whatever they want at the expense of instilling them with a sense of responsibility. Some children see it as their parents’ job to make them happy – at any cost!

Temperament – Sometimes there is just one ‘difficult’ child in a family who has personality traits such as being stubborn, impulsive and combative.

**MYTH:** “They’re also victims themselves”
**REALITY:** Abusive young people may have suffered trauma, grief or loss – but this is an explanation, not an excuse. By helping them learn to handle their feelings better you will be doing them a big favour.

**MYTH:** “They’re just letting off steam, they can’t help it”
**REALITY:** Abusive young people can control their behaviour. They choose to use violent or abusive behaviour to control and disempower you.

In 2007/8, 74% of parents who sought an intervention order against their child were mothers.

**WHO IS ABUSED?**

Family violence and abuse perpetrated by adolescents is a problem that cuts across all types of families from all backgrounds. However, for many reasons, mothers are more likely to be abused. In 2007/8, 74% of parents who sought an intervention order against their child were mothers (Department of Justice 2009, p.45).

Women are still primarily responsible for parenting and so mothers may be the ones in charge of ‘laying down the law’ while at the same time feeling more protective of the children. This is particularly the case for women who have left their partners – sole and separated mothers are the most frequent victims of violence and abuse from their children.

There is no evidence single parenting itself leads to abuse by children, unless there has been past family violence. However, sole parents may lack support to respond to their children’s violence, be more isolated and find it harder to deal with abuse from their children.

Young people may also abuse younger brothers and sisters, who may consequently suffer developmental problems, and long-term emotional and relationship difficulties where the abuse is serious. It is important that you intervene. For more information visit the Siblings Abuse Survivors Information and Advocacy Network website [www.sasian.org](http://www.sasian.org)

If your child is being cruel to pets or animals, take this seriously, as it can be a sign of very serious issues. For more information see the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) Victoria website at [www.rspcavic.org/services/education/children-and-animal-cruelty/](http://www.rspcavic.org/services/education/children-and-animal-cruelty/). Child Protection will also respond to severe cases of animal cruelty to pets or animals.
REGAINING CONTROL AND HEALING THE RELATIONSHIP

Abuse thrives in silence and isolation. Parental abuse is still a taboo subject, like domestic violence was twenty or thirty years ago. Although it may be difficult and embarrassing, it is very important to let others know what is happening.

Breaking the silence by finding a safe place to talk about what's going on at home, whether it be with trusted family and friends or support services, can be the first step on your journey of regaining control and healing the relationship with your child.

It is usually the mother who recognises this problem and seeks help. Gaining the support and agreement of other adults in your child's life to follow a consistent approach to discipline is very important. This could include your spouse, your ex-partner, and your child's teachers at school – the school's welfare officer may be a helpful contact for this.

It is very common for the abusive child to blame you and refuse to take responsibility for their behaviour and refuse counselling or other supports. Don't be discouraged. By getting help for yourself and working on your own behaviour and responses, the situation at home can improve.

Much as they push the limits, young people need clear rules and consistent consequences to feel safe and secure.

Although an abusive child may appear to enjoy their power, they are usually far happier when their parents take control and provide guidance and leadership. By holding them accountable for their actions you are not violating their rights – you are teaching them how to behave appropriately.

It is extremely difficult to remain calm and act appropriately in the heat of the moment – they really know how to 'push your buttons'. You might benefit from learning different ways of relating to your children and dealing with negative emotions and conflict. Getting outside support will help you to reflect on your own responses.

Gathering information and getting support will also help you regain confidence, stay in control, follow through and negotiate what is a long-term process. There is no quick fix, but the sooner you take action, the sooner the situation will improve, and you may avoid having to take more drastic actions later.

MYTH: “It is because his father was violent”
REALITY: Violence is not biologically inherited – it results from learned attitudes and behaviours.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF AND MY OTHER CHILDREN?

If your child is using physical violence, you should create a safety plan. This involves thinking about what you are already doing to protect yourself and others, and what works.

Sometimes you may be able to tell when a situation with your child is escalating towards an abusive confrontation. At other times young people seem to just 'go off' without warning. There is a limit to how much you can try to reason with someone while they are in a rage. Sometimes the only way to de-escalate such situations is simply to remove yourself and stop interacting altogether.

Have a plan for how you and your other children will leave the house and where you will go. Make sure your other children know how important it is for them to stick to the plan. Keep your wallet and car keys handy and in the same spot.

Inform yourself about legal options

It is important to learn about your legal rights and the rights of your child so that you are clear about the full range of options available to you, even if you choose not to take legal action.

Physical abuse, threats, having weapons, theft and damage to property are criminal offences. For your safety and the safety of others it may be necessary to consider police involvement. A visit from the police will deal with the immediate emergency and may also help your child realise the severity of their actions. However, it is not the job of the police to provide long-term solutions.

It is possible to take out an intervention order to protect yourself from your child's abusive behaviour. You can do this even while your child is still living at home.
While an intervention order may serve as a ‘wake up call’ for your child, you must be willing and able to enforce the order. If you make threats and don’t follow through on them, your child can end up feeling more powerful.

For more information see the Victoria Legal Aid booklet Safe at Home.

**Asking them to leave – the last resort**

Removing the abusive child from the home for a short time until you feel they have changed their behaviour may work. Unfortunately, in some circumstances, the removal of the abusive child from the home on a more permanent basis may be the only solution to ending the abuse and/or violence. If they are not ready or able to strike out on their own, they may be able to access support through government programs.

It is also important to get support for yourself at this time. It is common for mothers to experience a range of mixed and conflicting emotions – relief, grief, guilt, freedom and failure.

**MYTH:** “It’s because I’m a bad mother”

**REALITY:** This is more than a parenting problem. There are many complex reasons why young people are violent at home. You can help protect family members and support them to change, but ultimately they are responsible for their own behaviour and choices.

**TYPES OF SUPPORT**

Anonymous support through a phone service like WIRE or Parentline is a good place to start. They offer a safe place to talk things through, explore options and put you in touch with further support.

Individual counselling can offer a supportive space to explore what’s happening at home. Different counsellors have different areas of expertise; look for someone who has a family focus in their work.

Family counselling treats the family as a whole, but may not be appropriate if your child is intimidating.

Support groups offer understanding and learning from others in a similar situation. There is a small but growing number of support groups specifically for parents with abusive children. You can read about mothers’ experiences of support groups in Anglicare’s booklet Adolescent Violence: Women’s Stories of Courage and Hope. You can also find parenting services and support groups in your local area – visit the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website www.education.vic.gov.au

Family violence services generally specialise in partner violence. However they may be able to offer assistance and support in understanding your situation, especially if there is a history of violence in your family.

Parenting education teaches valuable skills such as setting boundaries and handling conflict. Look for resources geared specifically towards parenting abusive young people, as more generalised advice might not suit your situation. Specialised publications available online such as Adolescent Violence To Parents – A Resource Booklet For Parents And Carers (Inner South Community Health Services, 2008) give you practical information and tips on dealing with the problem, www.ischs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Adolescent_Violence_to_Parents.pdf

Support for young people struggling with abusive behaviour is available through peer support groups and programs. Giving young people the opportunity to talk to adult friends, family, sporting coaches or mentors can be very helpful. You can also access specialist services and support if you need to address related issues such as drug and alcohol problems, mental health issues, or a history of family violence.

Other support services you may find useful are community health centres, family services and support agencies, local police Youth Liaison Officers, the Youth Support Service, school welfare officers and your local GP.

WIRE gratefully acknowledges those who helped develop the original version of this information booklet: Wendy Bunston, Rosemary Paterson and Helen Landau, Trish Parker and Eddie Gallagher, and thank you to Jo Howard and Lisa Abbott who helped to update this information booklet.

Every effort has been made to ensure the information contained in this sheet is accurate and current at the time of printing – August 2012. However, no responsibility will be taken for the accuracy or reliability of the information, or for any loss that may arise from errors, omissions, or changes to government policy or the law.

**WHERE DO I GO FOR HELP?**

In an emergency call the police at 000. Otherwise, call Victoria Police Centre 03 9247 6666 to speak to the Family Violence Liaison Officer at your nearest local police station.

Call WIRE 1300 134 130 to find the contact number for your local child and family services (Child FIRST).

**Child Protection Crisis Line** 131 278

**Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria** www.dvrcv.org.au

**Family Relationship Advice Line** 1800 050 321

**inTouch (Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence)** 03 8413 6800 1800 755 988 www.intouch.asn.au

**Kids Helpline** 1800 551 800 www.kidshelp.com.au

**Men’s Line Australia** 1300 789 978 www.mensline.org.au

**Nurse-On-Call** 1300 606 024

**Parentline** 13 22 89 www.education.vic.gov.au/earlychildhood/parentline/

**Stepfamilies Australia** 9663 6733 www.stepfamily.org.au

**Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria** 03 9322 3555 / 1800 015 188

**Youth Support Service** 1800 339 897 www.ysas.org.au

**FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE**

**Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria)** www.communitylaw.org.au

**The Law Handbook** www.lawhandbook.org.au

**Victoria Legal Aid** 03 9269 0120 / 1800 677 402 www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

**Women’s Legal Service Victoria** 03 9642 0877 / 1800 133 302 www.womenslegal.org.au


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HOW DOES DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AFFECT CHILDREN?

When children live with domestic and family violence, they are experiencing trauma. The effects of this trauma can be ongoing and long-lasting. The effects build up over time, and can impact on every aspect of their life, cautions 1800RESPECT, the National Sexual Assault and Family Domestic Violence Counselling Service.

**DFV can affect children in many ways**

Children are affected if they:

- Witness the violence against their mother or carer, or see their fear.
- Hear it in another room, or have to hide or run from abuse.
- Have to tippy-toe around an abuser to try to prevent outbursts.
- Have to comfort, clean up or take additional responsibilities for siblings/carers following violence.
- Are victimised for supporting their mother or carer.
- Are encouraged to join in with verbal abuse or contempt for their mother or carer.
- Cannot be cared for properly as the abuse is either directly preventing it, or is causing poor mental health and exhaustion for the carer.
- Experience disrupted attachment with their mother or primary carer as infants, or the normal co-regulation of emotions between a mother and infant is disrupted.
- Are abused themselves. People who abuse their partners or ex-partners often abuse their children as well.
- Have an acquired brain injury from physical abuse.
- Are forced to have ongoing contact with someone whom they are scared of or whose presence is a ‘trauma trigger’, following previous incidents where the children have been traumatised.

**Harm caused by DFV is complex**

When children are harmed by domestic and family violence, it can affect their:

- Behaviours – they can act out, over-react, be hostile, impulsive, aggressive or defiant. They can also withdraw or dissociate or run away. All these behaviours can be normal to children who have been traumatised by family domestic violence, and do not mean the children have ‘disorders’. Drug and alcohol use can be a problem with older children.
- Development – normal development can be impaired. They can look like they are regressing or acting younger than their age. This can be a subconscious way of trying to get to a state where they are safe and secure.
- Relationships – they may avoid closeness and push people away. Children may also attach to peers or adults who may be unsafe for them, to try to develop an alternative secure base, if home feels insecure.
- Emotions – children often feel fearful, stressed, depressed, angry, anxious or ashamed. Emotional security is the foundation of healthy relationships later in life. This security can be damaged if attachment between the mother/carer and baby is disrupted by domestic violence.
- Learning – they may not be able to concentrate at school because they are constantly on the lookout for danger. This can be subconscious. Detentions, missed school and frequent changes of schools can also affect learning.
- Cognitions – children may have low self-esteem, and think negatively about themselves or people around them. (For example, they may think, “everyone hates me”.)
- Physical health – a range of illnesses may be related to domestic and family violence. Headaches, stomach aches, stress reactions (e.g. rashes or immune system related illnesses) and sleep disturbances (e.g. nightmares, insomnia or bedwetting) are common.

**Helping children recover**

How quickly and completely children recover from the effects of domestic and family violence depends on whether:

- They can be kept safe from violence and from reminders of previous trauma – known as ‘trauma triggers’.
- They are supported and comforted within a ‘protective cocoon’ of care after they experience trauma.
- The schools and childcare centres they attend provide an understanding and supportive environment to help with healing and recovery.
- They can have security, safety and care in their everyday lives.
- They have access to specialised trauma-informed therapies or help, if they need them.
- They can rebuild a safe and secure attachment with their mother or a protective carer, if they have been exposed to violence in their early years.
- Other disadvantages impact on the child’s life, such as poverty, isolation or school bullying.

Recovery can also depend on individual personalities and strengths.

**Important:** In an emergency – if anyone is in immediate danger – please call 000.

1800RESPECT is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Many families argue at times but domestic violence, or family violence is more than just arguing. It is actions or words that hurt, scare, control or bully others. This fact sheet advice is from Parenting SA

Everyone in the family is harmed by violence, especially children. Living with the stress of violence affects children’s brain development even if they are not the victim. It can lead to problems with emotions and behaviour, and make it harder for them to learn.

Family violence hardly ever goes away without help. It often gets worse unless the person using violence changes their thinking and how they behave.

**WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?**

Many people think family violence is about hitting. This is only part of it. Abuse or violence happens when someone tries to control, scare, hurt or bully others.

It might be:

- **Physical**, when someone tries to hurt you, your children or pets. They may hit, kick, push, choke, burn, shake you or throw things at you.
- **Verbal**, when they threaten, yell or swear at you, call you names or ‘put you down’.
- **Emotional**, when they do things to scare, worry or upset you. They might drive badly when you’re in the car, follow you, break things, or come into your house when you don’t want them to.
- **Sexual**, when you are raped or have any unwanted sexual behaviour forced on you against your will.
- **Social**, when they stop you having contact with friends and family or other people outside the home.
- **Financial**, when they control the money. They might not give you enough to run the house, or stop you from working and having your own income.
- **Technological**, when they use mobile phones, email or social media to harass or stalk you.

Most violence towards women and children happens at home. Whilst most violence is from men, women can be violent too. At times, young people can be violent toward parents and siblings.

Violence can happen between couples of all ages whether dating, living together, married, separated or divorced. It happens between men and women as well as same sex couples. It happens regardless of income, culture or religion.

*There is never any excuse for bullying, abuse or violence in a family. It is not OK in any community or culture.*

When people abuse others they tend to ‘play down’ what they do. Victims tend to blame themselves or ‘play down’ the effect on them. They can even pretend it isn’t happening. At times drugs and alcohol can play a part but they are never an excuse for violence.

Abuse and violence is often shown on TV, in movies and computer games. Some people wrongly think violence is a normal part of relationships.

Arguing is not family violence. Disagreeing with someone and being angry is normal. Arguing can be one of the ways people work out problems. Arguing and disagreeing can be done without anyone being scared or hurt.
Children learn about relationships and how to handle disagreements by watching how others do it, especially their parents.

**WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?**
It might be hard to believe that people could harm those they love. Family violence is about someone using power and control to get what they want, even when it hurts others.

We might think that someone who uses violence in the family can’t control their anger. However, they are not usually violent to others outside the home. They restrain themselves with others but use violence to control family members.

**HOW DOES IT START?**
There is often a pattern or a ‘cycle of violence’. It gets worse over time and happens more often. In most cases it doesn’t stop without help.

- **Build-up**
  In the build-up phase, the person gets upset or angry at small things, no matter how much you try to keep the peace.
  Build-up can take weeks, days or only minutes before the person explodes.

- **Explosion**
  An explosion can be yelling, cruel language, threats or physical violence. In this phase, the victim may get injured or leave because they fear for their life.

**Feeling sorry**
After the violence the person may say ‘sorry’ and feel very guilty. They may make promises to change, and if you have left, beg you to come home.

Some make excuses because they don’t see that the violence is their fault. They may blame you, stress, alcohol or drugs or deny that anything happened.

- **False honeymoon**
  During this stage, things often seem better than they have for a long time. Unless the person accepts that they are responsible for the violence and makes some real changes, the build-up will start again.

**EFFECTS ON FAMILY LIFE**
Violence can result in family members:
- Being harmed
- Being split up through separation or divorce.

*All family members have a right to feel safe. You are not to blame for someone else’s violence or abuse.*

**EFFECTS ON PARENTS**
A parent who is abused may feel:
- Confused by the abuser’s mood swings and behaviour changes
- Scared, stressed and unable to relax as they try to keep things calm
- Numb and alone
- Ashamed or to blame for the violence
- Helpless and depressed.

They may feel less able to cope with parenting and with life.

**EFFECTS ON CHILDREN**
Babies and children are affected by violence, whether they are the direct victim or not. The stress of violence affects their growing brain and can delay normal childhood milestones. Even before a baby is born, it can be affected by the mother’s stress during violence.

On-going violence makes home life unpredictable for a child. It can make them anxious and affect how they think and learn. It can affect how they relate to others. It can also increase their aggression and make it harder for them to learn how to control their own feelings and actions.

The effects on children can include:
- Feelings of self-blame, fear, sadness, mistrust, shame, anger and low self-esteem
- Signs of stress such as headaches, stomach aches, sleeping problems, nightmares or wetting the bed
- Believing that violence in families is normal
- Learning that force and violence are the way to get what you want
- Missing school to stay near a parent or other family member who is hurt or at risk
- Not doing well at school
- Running away from home
- Using drugs and alcohol
- Being aggressive
- Not having friends and becoming withdrawn
- Becoming a bully at school or at home.

Note: There may be other reasons that children behave in these ways.

**CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**
In families where there is violence there is often more child abuse and neglect. This can be by both men and women.

Children may see or hear violence, be beaten, or they may be hurt during a violent outburst. They may be...
harm as a way of ‘getting at’ the other adult. A child’s needs may be neglected because family life is so disrupted. Some families hit children to ‘discipline’ them. Hitting children mostly teaches them to fear the adult rather than how to behave. It is best to show children what you expect and to calmly repeat lessons until they learn. Hitting children may cross the line and become child abuse when a parent is angry. In South Australia, harsh punishment of children is against the law and regarded as child abuse.¹

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO
If violence is happening in your home then you need to get help.

**The family member who abuses**
- If you bully or abuse others in the family, or find it hard to control your anger, you can learn other ways to deal with your feelings. Family violence is about power and control not about anger
- There is never an excuse. You are the only one who can stop it
- Talk to someone who knows about family violence, or contact a service who can help.

*If you think you could be a danger to your family, leave until you are calm. Make sure children are safe first. Call the Domestic Violence Helpline on 1800 800 098 to find out where to get help.*

**The family member who is abused**
- Some time away from the situation can help you see things more clearly
- Talk to someone who can help you sort out what to do
- If you are scared, you need to ensure you and your children are safe
- Ring the Police Family Violence Investigation Unit in your area to seek an Intervention Order. This will stop the person contacting or threatening you, or coming to your home or work.

*If you or your children are in danger phone the Police on 000.*

**HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN**
Children need:
- To feel safe in their own home at all times and for you to protect them from abuse
- To know that bullying, abuse and violence is not OK
- To know they are loved and that the violence is not their fault
- A chance to talk about their feelings and worries
- Extra support from a trusted adult
- Support with schooling
- Help if they are having problems with their feelings or behaviour

Don’t wait in hope that the violence will end by itself. It hardly ever stops without help.

*Family violence is not acceptable. Many abusive behaviours are against the law.*²

**ENDNOTES**

**EMERGENCY CONTACTS**
- Police
  Phone 000 for emergencies.
- Domestic Violence Helpline
  Phone 1800 800 098
  24 hour service for people experiencing family violence.

Issued in Society | Volume 365
Are you using violence or abuse in your family or intimate relationships?

Family violence is any abusive behaviour in a family or intimate relationship where one person attempts to gain and maintain control over another. Violence is usually the most direct means chosen to have power and control over another person. The following advice is courtesy of MensLine Australia

Family violence can take many forms including physical violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse, social or financial control and it is important to remember that abuse does not have to be physical or sexual to be considered family violence. Whereas both men and women can use abusive behaviour and violence in their relationships, most family and intimate partner violence is perpetrated by men.

How will you know?

Do you:
1. Use any form of physical violence, intimidation or assault – including unwanted sexual activity?
2. Use emotional and psychological means to control another’s behaviour – name calling, belittling, continuous criticism, or exclusion?
3. Threaten and put pressure on another – threatening to leave, to harm yourself, or not support the family?
4. Restrict another’s behaviour – going everywhere with them, questioning what they have been doing, stopping them from contacting family or friends, isolating them from support, dictating what they can or cannot do?
5. Exhibit negative behaviour when faced with stress in your life, including family disagreements, or when you have been drinking or using drugs?

Family violence can take many forms including physical violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse, social or financial control and it is important to remember that abuse does not have to be physical or sexual to be considered family violence.

Justify your violent and abusive behaviour by:
1. Denying its occurrence – ‘I wasn’t being abusive’
2. Minimising its impact – ‘I only pushed her, she wasn’t hurt’
3. Justifying your actions – ‘If she stopped annoying me, I wouldn’t have had to do it’
4. Blaming others – ‘It’s not my fault’ or ‘I’m under a lot of pressure at the moment’
5. Deflecting responsibility – ‘I didn’t know what I was doing’ or ‘I was drunk’
6. Avoiding the issue – ‘I don’t know why I hit her’.

If you identify yourself in the statements above, it is time to take responsibility for your actions and control your behaviour.

What problems can it lead to?

There is no justification for using violence and abuse in your family or intimate relationships.

The consequences for you and the other person can be significant and include:
1. Suffering physically, emotionally, psychologically and with significant and lasting impact
2. Breakdown and loss of important relationships, including access to children rights, and financial loss
3. Legal action, with long-term impact on freedom, lifestyle and employment
4. Loss of social networks and exclusion from your friends and community.

Common questions and concerns

"Is the violence affecting my children?"

Family violence has severe impacts for children who witness it. It is now known that witnessing family violence is as harmful as experiencing it directly. Parents often believe that they have shielded their children from spousal violence, but research shows that children see or hear some 40% to 80% of it. Children who witness family violence can experience feelings of fear, anger, depression, anxiety and shame. They may experience physical symptoms such as stomach cramps, headaches and sleeping problems. Children who witness the violence suffer the same consequences as those who are directly abused. In other words, a child who witnesses spousal violence is experiencing a form of child abuse.

"Will I go to jail?"

Violence is a criminal offence, and some other forms of abuse and control are similarly viewed as illegal activities. Your chances of going to jail or being in trouble with the law increase if you do not take responsibility and change your behaviour.

"It feels hopeless. I’m not sure I can overcome it."

You may feel your behaviour can’t be changed, especially when you are in the middle of a crisis. Overcoming the problem is not easy, but with the right support, you can start to do things differently. Your future can be different if you reach out for help now.
What can you do?

Accept that you have a problem – Own your problem of violence and abuse. It is your responsibility to do something to stop the violence and abuse. Calling on other people and resources for support is important, but unless you understand that you must commit to changing, the likelihood of fixing the problem will be greatly reduced.

Stop using violence and abuse – If you can’t do this, then you must ensure that you are no longer in a situation where it can occur. This may mean temporarily leaving the environment where you are causing damage to others, restricting your contact or only being in that environment when there are other people around other than your intimate family or intimate relationship.

Take proactive steps – Usually the best time to start to fix a problem is when things in your relationship are settled and stable, not at a time of crisis or in the middle of an argument. When things are settled, conversations with everybody involved are usually more helpful.

Put in effort – Changing long-term patterns of behaviour can take considerable time and effort. Be prepared to work on the problem for a while to reduce its impact on your relationships and be ready for challenging times when your commitment will be tested.

Get assistance – Few men are able to change these patterns of behaviour and thinking without ongoing support. It is important to find someone who has an understanding of the issues you are facing and can help you think through reasons for your behaviour and plan strategies for managing it in the future. Call MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78 for information, support and services in your local area.

Develop strategies – Gain understanding of situations and circumstances when violence and abuse has occurred in the past. Find ways to avoid or better manage these situations and create positive strategies to deal with arguments or conflict. Learn the right time to step away from a situation to give yourself time and space to think clearly so the situation doesn’t get worse.

Work on associated issues – Make a commitment to understanding and working on all of the factors that led to the behaviour occurring, not just the immediate signs.

Whereas both men and women can use abusive behaviour and violence in their relationships, most family and intimate partner violence is perpetuated by men.

Support and resources

There are programs, groups and telephone services that specifically deal with family violence issues.

MensLine Australia offers 24/7 professional non judgemental and anonymous support for any family violence concern. MensLine Australia offer telephone anger management and behavioural change programs alongside a call back service which can provide professional ongoing support. You can also book an online counselling appointment through the MensLine Australia website, www.mensline.org.au

What to do if someone you know is in an abusive relationship

It can be a difficult step to make for someone who is experiencing family violence to tell someone about it and seek help. There are several ways that you can support a family member or friend who is experiencing family violence, according to Be the Hero! website.

It is important to remember that family violence is not always obvious and there are some key signs to look out for.

**Signs to look out for**

- The person is often put down or humiliated in front of others.
- The person looks very uncomfortable or afraid around their family member or partner.
- The person is stopped from seeing their family and friends.
- The person is being forced or pressured to do sexual things.
- The person is physically hurt or scared of being hurt by their family member or partner.

(above from Office of Women’s Policy NSW and ReachOut website)

**HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP**

**Listen, believe, support and don’t blame**

As part of its ‘Stop Violence in the Home’ program, the Body Shop has also published a booklet Let’s Air it Out – Break the silence on relationship abuse. The booklet contains a list of Do’s and Don’t’s on how to support someone in an abusive relationship:

**DO**

- Approach them about the abuse in a sensitive way. For example, “I’m worried about you because…”
- Believe what they tell you. It will have taken a lot for them to talk to you and trust you.
- Take the abuse seriously. Abuse can be damaging both physically and emotionally, and is very destructive to someone’s self-confidence. Their partner could be placing them in real physical danger.
- Focus on their safety. Talk to them about their safety and how they could protect themselves.
- Help them to recognise the abuse and understand how it may be affecting them. Recognise and support their strength and courage.
- Help them to understand that the abuse is not their fault and that no one deserves to be abused, no matter what they do.
- Listen to them and help them think about their relationship, whether they want to break up or stay, and how they can protect themselves from any more abuse.
- Offer to help protect them but only if you are not putting your own safety at risk. For example, you could offer to be around when the abuser is there, or give them lifts home, take phone messages from the abuser.
- Encourage them to talk to a counsellor, or talk to a counsellor yourself about what you could do to support them.

**DON’T**

- If you feel overwhelmed or frightened yourself, get help. Talk to someone, or ring a support service for support.

**WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP**

**Get the help you need**

*If it is an emergency in Australia call 000 for the police or for an ambulance.*

Talking to someone can be helpful.

- You can get support from an adult you trust and together you can work out the best way to improve your situation.
- This could be a parent, another relative, a teacher, a school counsellor, a friend’s parent.
- It is best not to discuss your own situation in a school setting; it is better to speak privately with the right person.

You can call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 to speak with a counsellor.

There are excellent websites with good practical information:

- **Bursting the Bubble** is helpful if there is abuse within the family.
- **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly** is helpful if there is abuse in your relationship.
- **Kids Helpline** is helpful for many types of abuse including cyber abuse and sexting.
- **The Australian Government Department of Human Services** has a guide for teenagers who are experiencing family separation.

(Infos adapted from Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria)

Family and domestic violence is common in Australia – in fact, one in four teenagers have seen physical violence by one parent towards another.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ (2005) Personal Safety Survey found that of the women who had experienced family and domestic violence, 59 per cent reported that the violence had been witnessed by their children.1

WHAT IS FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Family and domestic violence is different to family fights or arguments. In every family it is natural to have disagreements with one another. However when this happens all the time and one person abuses others by hitting, throwing things or threatening to harm them, it becomes family and domestic violence. This can be your parents doing it to each other, or doing it to you.

You don’t have to go through this alone!

Witnessing abuse
When abuse is happening between your parents or adults who are caring for you it can be hard to deal with. This is called witnessing abuse. You might be afraid something bad will happen to your mum or dad and not know what to do.

It is important to know you can talk to someone about what is happening at home, someone who will understand what you are going through.

Every time you read the words ‘mum and dad’ this also means ‘any other adult that is caring for you’.

WHAT IS ABUSE?
The types of abuse that could be happening in your family:

Emotional abuse:
- Name calling
- Yelling/screaming
- Saying hurtful things
- Being jealous all the time
- Threatening to harm.

Physical abuse:
- Hitting/slapping
- Punching
- Pushing
- Shoving
- Choking
- Kicking
- Pinching
- Throwing, wrecking or breaking stuff
- Using weapons
- Hurting/killing pets
- Threatening to do any of these things.

Social abuse:
- One parent not allowing the other to have friends
- Making people feel uncomfortable when they visit
- One parent blaming the other
- Refusing to talk to the other
- Preventing the other from going out
- Not letting the other come home
- Preventing the other from using the phone
- Not letting the other have friends
- Making the other feel uncomfortable
- Hurting/killing pets

Financial abuse:
- One parent not being allowed any money for food and other household items
- One parent blaming the other for financial losses.

Sexual abuse:
- Being forced to do sexual things
- Unwanted touching or kissing.

When living with family and domestic violence you can feel:
- Uncomfortable and embarrassed about bringing friends back to your house – so you avoid inviting them over.
- Scared to be away from home because you’re worried something bad may happen to your mum or other family members.
- Afraid to go home therefore you avoid it as much as possible.

Ryan’s story
“I can’t seem to do anything right around my parents. Mum hits me all the time, especially when she gets home from work and she’s running around getting dinner ready and stuff. If I try to help out, then I get slapped and yelled at for getting in the way and making a mess, but if I try to stay out of her way then she lays a guilt trip on me for not helping.

As soon as dad gets home, mum always tells him how useless I am. Then dad yells at me for upsetting mum and tells me what a good-for-nothing kid I am. Sometimes, he gets so mad, he hits me too. I try so hard to do things right but it just doesn’t get any better. Sometimes I lock myself away in my room but I can still hear them talking about me like I’m just a nobody.”

Danny’s story
"Mum gets very nervous before dad comes home. She acts all weird and keeps telling us to keep quiet and not upset dad. But it doesn’t matter what we do, even if everything is perfect he still finds something to pick on mum or us about.

One night he asked my sister how she was going at school. My sister got nervous and started stuttering when she tried to talk. Mum tried to help her by telling dad she wasn’t feeling well. Dad stood up and threw his glass across the room, which broke against the wall. Then he towered over us yelling that we were all useless, especially mum, and that it was all her fault, that she had raised us as weak and good for nothing.

My sister and I were really scared, and mum started to cry which made dad even madder so he yelled more ... That’s just a normal night in our house.”
Lonely when you compare your family with other families that seem so happy.
- Distracted and find it hard to concentrate on your school work – you may also avoid getting involved in school activities.
- That your sense of belonging is lost.
- Angry toward the abusive parent or family member, or sometimes you may feel angry toward the person who is being abused and blame them for what is happening.
- That it is your fault and that it must be something you’re doing to cause this to happen – sometimes your parents may say you are to blame and you believe them.
- Scared, worried or anxious not knowing how bad the next fight will be, or when it will happen.
- Like you want intervene and try to stop the fights from happening.
- Like you want to call the police or your neighbours for help but you fear the consequences of doing that.
- Frustrated and alone because you don’t know how to fix the problem.
- Angry at yourself for not being able to fix the problem.

It may be confusing to know if your parents are being abusive or putting rules in place to protect you. If you are unsure, you can contact one of the services listed in the back of this resource. They will be able to help you. Remember – no one deserves to be abused. You can do something about it.

**WHY IS THIS HAPPENING IN MY FAMILY?**

Family and domestic violence can be very hard to understand because there is no one single reason why it happens – it is a combination of lots of things.

Excuses are often used as a reason why one person abuses another like ‘it’s your fault, you shouldn’t have done that’ or ‘you know I’m under a lot of pressure from work and you just keep putting more onto me until I snap’.

Unfortunately, in most families that don’t get some help, the cycle of violence just keeps going around and around – from good times to walking on eggshells, fighting again, then back to the good times again. There is also a strong chance the fights will get worse over time.

**HOW CAN I CHANGE MY SITUATION?**

Know you’re not alone and you’re not causing this to happen. Other people are going through very similar things. There are people out there who understand what you’re going through.

If you think it’s safe, then you could try writing down the things that are happening to you in a diary or journal. Sometimes it helps to write down how you are feeling. Having stuff locked inside you can make you feel pretty bad. It’s important if you keep a diary or journal to make sure it’s kept in a safe place so that no one can read it except you.

**Cycle of violence**

*This is how it works*

Some people have described living in a family and domestic violence situation as though they are walking on eggshells, never knowing when the next fight will happen or how bad it will be. They say that during the good times after the fight mum and dad would say they were sorry and promise it wouldn’t happen again, that things would change this time.

**There are NO excuses for being violent – it is wrong.**

**Safety planning**

- Make a list of important telephone numbers or save them in your mobile phone contacts in case you need to ring someone in an emergency.
- Keep credit on your mobile phone in case you need to buy a bus or train ticket, or even catch a taxi.
- Try working out a code word you can use with a trusted friend or relative to let them know you may need some help – perhaps this code could be sent via SMS.

For more information on having a safety plan go to: www.youthsayno.wa.gov.au

**Things you should try to avoid**

Try not to stop your parents fighting. Run to a neighbour’s house and get help or call the police. Don’t put yourself in danger.

Try not to keep this a secret because things may only get worse. If someone else becomes involved, like a family friend or relative or even the police, things have a better chance of changing. Your safety and the safety of your family are the most important things to consider. Everyone has the right to live free from fear so you don’t have to live like this. It might take time but things can change for the better.

**HOW MIGHT THINGS CHANGE IN MY FAMILY?**

You might be thinking that if you ring the police or another service that this will make things worse – you may think your family will be split up. The police have been specially trained to deal with family and domestic violence situations and they will make sure you and your family are safe.

This might mean you and your mum and/or other members of your family will have to go to a refuge or stay somewhere else until you are safe, or that the person who is abusing you will go away for a time.

[For more information on having a safety plan, go to www.youthsayno.wa.gov.au]
while and get some help to deal with
the problem.
Change is not always bad – it
can be scary but it can also be a
good thing.
Talk to an adult you trust like a
relative, youth worker, school coun-
sellor/chaplain, or teacher about
what you are going through. You
could also call one of the services
listed at the end of this article and
talk to someone who can help.

Remember – you don’t have to deal
with this stuff by yourself.

WHAT DOES A HEALTHY
FAMILY LOOK LIKE?
Healthy families trust, support
and show respect for one another.
Family members communicate with
each other, and most importantly,
listen to one another.

Non-threatening behaviour:
• Talking and acting so that
family members feel safe and
comfortable doing and saying
things.

Respect:
• Listening to members of your
family in a non-judgemental
way
• Being supportive of your family
• Respecting your family’s rights
to their own feelings, friends,
activities and opinions.

Honesty and shared
responsibility:
• Accepting responsibility for the
things you do as a member of the
family
• Admitting being wrong when
you are
• Everyone agreeing to share the
household jobs
• Making family decisions
together.

CONTACTS
If you feel unsafe you can call
one of the numbers listed below for
help. When you call they will help
protect you, which means they may
need to act without your consent if
they feel you are in danger. Working
to make sure you are safe is the most
important thing.

Debbie’s story
“Mum and dad had a fight last night.
Dad hit mum so hard that she couldn’t
get up off the floor. I was so scared
I ran next door and told them what
had happened. Dad has hit mum lots
of times before and he always used
to tell us to go to our bedroom and
not to tell anyone, but this time was
different, it was worse than ever.
Our neighbour came back to our house
and saw mum lying on the floor. He
called the ambulance and the police. I
can’t remember what happened next,
I just know it was bad and I couldn’t
stop crying. The police woman came
and put her arms around me and it
made me feel a bit better.
Mum went to the hospital overnight.
They took dad away in a police car and
I was so scared that I would never see
him again. We went to stay in a place
called a refuge for a while. The people
there were really nice and understood
what had happened. I soon knew we
were not the only family that this stuff
happened to. There were lots of other
kids in the refuge who were going
through the same thing.
Dad is getting help now and we see
each other once a week. It’s hard not
to be together as a family but it’s also
a good feeling not to have to worry
when the next big fight will happen
and if mum would get really hurt
again. I don’t know if we will ever
all live together as a family again, it
might happen if dad gets better, but
we do see each other and I’m not so
scared anymore.”
Domestic and Family Violence Issues in Society

www.burstingthebubble.com
Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Victoria
Advice and stories about dating and relationships for young people to help them work out where their relationship is at, from the personal experience of other young people who have been in a similar position.

www.aboutdaterape.nsw.gov.au
NSW Department of Community Services
This site has been set up by the NSW Attorney General’s Department (Crime Prevention Division) to provide information and resources about date rape to girls who may have been assaulted, and for their friends and family.

www.keepsafestaycool.com.au
South Australian Government
Information about family and domestic violence and respectful relationships.

www.theline.gov.au
www.facebook.com/theline
Commonwealth Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
The Line campaign’s interactive website and Facebook site both provide information and assistance, and enable young people to talk about healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviours and how to have and maintain a respectful relationship.

www.sexloveandothertuff.com
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
Information for young people on respectful relationships.

www.burstingthebubble.com
Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Victoria
Provides information and assistance for teenagers living in homes where there is violence or abuse.

Language services
Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) 13 14 50
24-hour national service for people who do not speak English or for English speakers communicating with them. Available to any person or organisation in Australia, offering access to 1750 contractors who speak over 170 languages and dialects.

National Relay Service 13 36 77
24-hour national service for people with a hearing impairment or are deaf.

WEBSITES
www.youthsayno.wa.gov.au
Department for Child Protection, Family and Domestic Violence Unit
A Western Australian website that provides information and support for young people experiencing abuse.

www.theline.gov.au
www.facebook.com/theline
Help, information, stories and support for children and young people experiencing violence in their family or relationship.

Nicki’s story
"Sometimes I don’t think my family understands me, especially my mum. We often argue about who I can go out with and how much makeup I can wear. I think I am old enough to look after myself and make these sorts of decisions on my own, but mum is always on my case.

Then there’s dad, who gets angry when I get bad marks at school – but it’s not my fault! I don’t understand algebra! And my annoying little brother is always coming into my room and taking my things.

I just get sick of my family sometimes! But then the other day my best friend Kelly told me that her dad hits her mum and that he often threatens Kelly and her little sister.

I couldn’t believe it when she told me … I always thought her dad was nice enough. But when Kelly told me what had been happening she was shaking and obviously really scared. I want to help her get through this. Hearing about Kelly’s life, I’ve realised that my family can be annoying, but that’s mostly because mum and dad are just trying to look after me and help me make the right decisions. I’m pretty lucky really …"

www.aboutdaterape.nsw.gov.au
NSW Department of Community Services
This site has been set up by the NSW Attorney General’s Department (Crime Prevention Division) to provide information and resources about date rape to girls who may have been assaulted, and for their friends and family.

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www.sexloveandothertuff.com
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
Information for young people on respectful relationships.

www.burstingthebubble.com
Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Victoria
Provides information and assistance for teenagers living in homes where there is violence or abuse.

http://au.reachout.com
Initiative of the Inspire Foundation and sponsored by state government and corporate business.
An interactive site that inspires people to help themselves through tough times, with fact sheets and stories on safety in a relationship and in families.

www.kidshelp.com.au
National web based counselling and information service for Kids Helpline aimed at young people aged 5 to 25 years.

www.cybersmart.gov.au
Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)
The national cybersafety and cybersecurity education program managed by ACMA designed to provide information to keep children and young people safe online.

www.thehideout.org.uk
Help, information, stories and support for children and young people experiencing violence in their family or relationship.

REFERENCE

Government of Western Australia
Department for Child Protection.
Domestic violence – tips for children

Children who live in a home where there is abuse and violence can feel very frightened, worried and upset. Abuse or violence in the home is always wrong and it’s never a child’s fault. These tips from the Better Health Channel may help children learn more about how to stay safe, types of violence, what to do, where and how to get help if they or someone they love is being abused.

If you are a child living in a home where there is a lot of yelling and swearing, throwing things, pushing or hitting – this is called family violence. Witnessing family violence can be very upsetting and frightening. Violence in the home is always wrong and it is never the child’s fault. These tips may help you learn more about types of violence, how to stay safe, what to do, where and how to get help if you or someone you love is being hurt or threatened.

Violence at home can make you feel bad

The violence at home may be directed at a parent, a brother or sister, you or another family member you care about. You may see or hear the abuse happening or it may happen to you. When the violence used is towards you or a brother or sister, this is called child abuse. Violence at home can make you feel really sad, helpless and confused.

Often children think they have done something to cause the violence in their family. This is not true, but sometimes you might:
- Blame yourself for the violence
- Feel frightened, sad, ashamed, confused, or unhappy
- Feel sick, have stomach pains or headaches
- Stop eating or not feel like eating
- Cry a lot
- Sleep badly, have nightmares or wet the bed
- Find school difficult
- Lose interest in your school work or your friends
- Have trouble concentrating
- Feel like running away
- Feel angry and want to hurt yourself or somebody else or to smash something
- Have trouble talking – for example, you might stutter
- Worry about the safety of someone in your family who is being abused
- Take drugs or alcohol to cope.

Types of violence

Family violence can mean lots of different things – it’s not just being hit. There are different kinds of violence that can happen in the home. The violence may be directed at one of your parents, at you or your sisters and brothers or at other people who may be living with you.

Some examples of violence that may affect you are
- Physical violence – someone hurting you or a loved one by hitting, slapping, pushing, biting, kicking or burning you or another. Someone throwing or breaking things in your home or hurting your pets.
- Verbal violence – someone hurting you or another family member by yelling mean and nasty things at you or them, calling you or other family members rude names, or shouting or talking to you or them in a scary or threatening way.
- Sexual violence – someone scaring you or hurting you by touching private parts of your body when you do not want them to, touching you in a sexual way or them making you touch their private parts, or forcing you to have sex or watch sexual acts.
- Neglect – someone hurting you by not giving you adequate care, food, clean clothes, safety, attention, affection and love.

If you think you or someone in your family is being abused

There are important things you should remember if you think that you or someone in your family is being abused. These include:
- The person who is being violent may try to make you feel responsible, ashamed or guilty about what is happening at home. You are not to blame for their actions – what they have done is wrong. It is not your fault and it's not a special secret. Family violence is a crime.
- Don’t believe them if they say something bad will happen to you if you tell someone about what is happening at home. There are people who will listen and can help you.
- Keeping family violence a secret is unsafe. It’s okay to tell someone and it will help you and your family to become more safe.
• Nothing is so awful that it can’t be talked about.
• Help is available.

Tell someone about family violence and abuse at home
You can report family violence at home and get help in many ways:
• Find someone who you feel comfortable talking to and trust to tell (perhaps a neighbour, a teacher, a friend’s parents or another family member).
• Tell a trusted adult who can help keep you safe and help put a stop to the abuse at home.
• Take your time and try to explain how you or someone in your family has been abused or hurt. It may be very difficult or scary for you to tell and it may be hard for you to find the right words to explain. Take your time and just do the best you can to explain.
• Try using the phone, writing things down, drawing a picture or sending an email or letter – lots of people find talking face-to-face very difficult, not just kids.
• If the person hurting you or someone in your family is a family member, you may feel safer if you tell someone outside your family – like your teacher, school welfare officer, nurse or counsellor, a trusting sporting coach or a Kids Helpline counsellor (see Where to get help).

Staying safe
There are ways that you can stay safe including:
• Talk to people – find someone you can trust and who will listen to you. It might be someone in your family, your friends’ parents, a counsellor, your teacher, the police or another trusted adult. They will help protect you.
• Keep on telling different people – if you feel you are not being heard or your problem is not being fixed, keep telling people until someone takes some action and you feel safe. Don’t stop telling because you have not yet been listened to.
• Remember that your body belongs to you – no one should touch any part of your body in a way that makes you feel scared or confused or hurt. This includes your private body parts. It is okay to firmly tell someone to STOP if they are touching you in a way that hurts or makes you feel confused or uncomfortable.
• Know the difference between safe and unsafe touching – some touching is friendly and helpful such as hugging friends and family members, holding hands with a friend, play wrestling with your brother or giving your sister a shoulder massage.

What to do if someone you know is being abused
If a friend tells you that abuse is happening to them or you suspect they are experiencing family violence:
• Listen and believe your friend and offer them comfort, understanding and support
• Try not to appear shocked
• Encourage them to tell an adult they trust or to report it to the police and let them know you will accompany them if they want
• Don’t keep it to yourself – tell an adult you trust. It is important that your friend is made safe and that the abuse does not continue to happen
• Give your friend phone numbers of services who can help and details of online resources such as the Bursting the Bubble website, www.burstingthebubble.com
• Help your friend to keep on telling until they feel reassured and are safe.

Where to get help
• Kids Helpline counsellors, Tel. 1800 55 1800
• Police, Tel. 000
• Child Protection Crisis Line, Tel. 131 278 – 24 hrs, 7 days a week
• Trusted family member or friend
• Teacher, school counsellor or trusted adult.

Things to remember
• Family violence is never your fault
• Family violence is a crime
• Get help to stay safe by telling someone about the problem
• Help is available for the person who is being abusive.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TELLING SOMEONE

This advice from the Bursting the Bubble website explains how teens can identify violence and abuse within the family, and what can be done to help

Q. Is it worth telling someone what’s going on, or is it better to keep it to myself?

“Having been abused myself, I’d say if it’s happening in your family, find someone you can tell. It takes a while to find the right person, but keep trying ‘cos you feel a lot better if you don’t have to deal with it on your own.”

Talking to someone who cares about you can really help. It’s OK to feel nervous about telling someone about the abuse.

For example, you might feel:

• Embarrassed
• Guilty that you’re telling a family secret
• Scared of not being believed or of being blamed
• Afraid of getting someone in your family in trouble
• Worried about making the situation worse.

But there are good things about telling someone, like:

• Feeling less alone
• Getting someone else’s advice and ideas
• Getting safer
• The person might help you to make the abuse stop.

Telling friends ...

A good friend that you trust can give you support, and maybe help to work out what you can do. But if you think that you need help to protect yourself, you should probably also think about telling an adult or a professional. If you want support, maybe your friend could go with you to tell a counsellor or a teacher, or could contact a hotline to get information for you.

Sometimes friends don’t know how to react – if a person you tell doesn’t help, don’t let that stop you from telling someone else!

Telling trusted adults ...

Adults are often more confident about getting help for you so that the abuse stops. Perhaps they could provide a safe place for you to stay, or they could contact a helping service for you, or they could talk to other family members about what’s happening. There’s lots of ways you could bring the subject up with them. For example, you could say ‘there’s something happening at home that’s stressing me out – can I talk to you about it?’ You have a right to know what an adult will do if you tell them about the abuse, so you might want to ask what will happen to the information that you give.

Adults you could tell might be your mum or dad (if they’re not the one doing the abusing), friends’ parents, family friends, aunts or uncles, grandparents, older brothers and sisters, or any other adult you trust. If the first adult you tell doesn’t help, try another, or talk to a counsellor, helpline, teacher or doctor.

Q. How can a counsellor, a teacher or a helpline help me?

A professional (like a counsellor, a teacher, a school student welfare co-ordinator, or a doctor) is there to listen to you, and help you work out what’s going on and how you can get safe. They shouldn’t judge
you. You could talk to a professional over the phone (like a helpline service) and they can organise for you to see someone in person if you want. Or you could talk to a counsellor through email if you want to (Kids Helpline does this, see www.kidshelp.com.au). A doctor can also help if you’ve been injured.

“I didn’t think there was any point in counselling. But I gave it a go because I got talked into it. It doesn’t make everything better straight away, but it does help you to work out your problems, and the counsellor won’t judge you.”

Q. What do I say if I tell a teacher or contact a counselling service?

It can be hard to know how to tell someone else about abuse. If you want to tell a teacher or another adult, one way to bring it up might be to say, “Can I talk to you about something that happened to me/something that’s happening at home?” Or perhaps you can write it down first to practise what you would say. If writing is easier for you then perhaps you could even give what you wrote to the teacher or another adult.

Many people feel a bit nervous ringing a helpline. The counsellor who answers the phone will understand if you don’t know where to start or what to say. One idea is to start asking about their service first before you talk about yourself (e.g. “I just want to find out what your service does”); another idea is to just say, “I want to talk to someone about what’s happening at home” and the counsellor will take it from there. If you feel more comfortable communicating in writing, you can email a helpline (see Services on www.burstingthebubble.com).

Or maybe you can tell a friend about it and ask if they can ring a service for you, or go with you to tell a teacher.

Remember that you have a right to get support and help, and that abuse isn’t your fault. For more information on how services will respond see Services on www.burstingthebubble.com.

Q. What will happen if I tell a teacher or a counselling service – will they keep what I tell them private?

It can feel like you lose some control over things once adults know what is happening. However scary or difficult it might seem, getting help will probably be better than feeling alone or afraid.

If you tell a counselling service or a teacher about abuse, they will want to make sure you are safe – so they might have to do something to stop the abuse from happening again. Professionals (i.e. counsellors, teachers, doctors, nurses, helplines etc.) have to keep what you tell them ‘confidential’ (i.e. they will keep it private), except if they believe that there is a serious risk to your own or someone else’s safety. Under the law, if these people think that a child or young person is in danger and needs protection from getting hurt, they might have to tell someone who can take action to protect you – this could be a parent (NOT the one who is doing the abusing), Child Protection services (a government welfare department) and/or the police.

If you’re worried about whether a professional will keep what you tell them private, you could try:

• Asking them questions first, like ‘what does your service do?’ or ‘will you keep any info I tell you private? If not, what will you do with any info I tell you?’
• Asking questions over the phone can be easier – you don’t have to give your name. Or you could email Kids Helpline to talk to them on email (www.kidshelp.com.au).
• If you tell a professional about the abuse but you don’t want your situation to be reported to Child Protection, tell them why and talk through your fears. They may still say that they have to report it, but at least they’ll know how you feel about it! They should listen to you, tell you what is going to happen, and talk to you about your rights. The main reason a professional would have to tell Child Protection would be because they’re worried about your safety – it’s not to ‘dob you in’!
• Remember – you are not to blame for the abuse and you have a right to feel safe. Counselling services and teachers are there to help you.
• Check out the list of helpful Services on www.burstingthebubble.com.

Q. What if I tell the government Child Protection services about the abuse, or what if someone else tells them?

Every State government has a section called Child Protection. This department is there to protect children and teenagers from harm. It gives advice about, and in some cases gets involved to protect people under 17 years old who are not safe at home. Being exposed to abuse or domestic violence between your parents can also be considered an unsafe situation.

Anyone can ring Child Protection and talk to one of their workers. You can contact them yourself if you’re worried about things that are happening in your family. (If you ring them to get information, you don’t have to give your name if you don’t want to)! They’re there to protect you from living with abuse and to help you get safer. If you don’t want to speak to them directly, call a service like Kids Helpline and they could help you to talk to a child protection worker.

If a child protection worker is contacted by you, or by someone else, it’s possible that they’ll investigate what’s happening to see if you’re safe in your family, and to see if there’s anything that should be done to protect you from abuse. They look at whether or not your parents can protect you from violence and abuse. In the first instance, they’ll try to help your family to stay together and be safe from abuse. If this doesn’t happen, Child Protection has to take further steps to protect you. If they believe that your home is not a safe place for you, they may do something to remove the abusive person, or
remove you from the abusive person. This could mean getting the police to charge the abusive person with a criminal offence, removing the abusive person from your home, or getting you to stay somewhere else (like with other family members or friends, or with another family).

Q. What might happen if I ring the police? How can the law help?
If you are in danger or if you think someone else is about to get hurt, call the police for help on 000. They can come to you any time, day or night. Police have the authority to stop the abuse. They might talk to the person who is abusive. They could warn them, or ask them to leave the house. If there’s enough evidence, they could arrest the person and charge them with a crime. The person probably would then be released on bail, with conditions that they don’t contact family members.

There are also court orders that can protect family members who are being abused. For example, if one parent is being abused by their partner, the police may suggest that the parent should apply to a court for a protection order (they’re called different things in different states – in Victoria they’re called ‘Intervention Orders’, in NSW they’re ‘Apprehended Violence Orders’, in Queensland they’re ‘Domestic Violence Orders’, in WA and NT they’re ‘Restraining Orders’, in ACT they’re ‘Protection Orders’, in SA they are ‘Domestic Violence Restraining orders’, in Tasmania they are ‘Restraind orders’).

Or the police may apply for a protection order on behalf of the person who is being abused. The order can say, for example, that the abusive person must not be abusive again, and/or that they must not come near family members. If the abusive person disobeys the order, they’re said to be in ‘breach’ of the order and they can be charged with a crime.

In some cases, young people who are being abused can apply for their own protection orders from a court (or otherwise an adult or police can apply for one you). The order might say that the person has to stop abusing you, or is not allowed to come near you. Talk to one of the services listed for info on this.

You can contact the police to report abuse that has been happening to you any time, even if it happened some time ago. Abuse and violence (including sexual abuse) is against the law. It might be a good idea to take a trusted adult with you when you talk to the police, because they can help you when you make a report. The police may investigate what happened, and if it’s a criminal offence, and they could charge the person who abused you.

If the police are worried about your safety or believe that members of your family can’t protect you from the abuse, they’ll also report your situation to Child Protection (see previous page).

WANT MORE INFO ABOUT THE LAW OR POLICE?
- To ask someone for advice, see What services can help me? on www.burstingthebubble.com or you could see the Lawstuff website to email a legal expert for confidential advice on what the law can do to help protect you, www.lawstuff.org.au (it takes about 10 days to get an answer back).
- Read the True Stories on www.burstingthebubble.com to find out more about what other young people did.
- Also see Legal Quiz on www.burstingthebubble.com

Victims of domestic violence

This Australian Institute of Criminology summary paper extract outlines the groups of people who are most vulnerable to becoming victims of domestic violence.

VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The prevalence, severity and form of domestic violence, access to services and capacity to leave violent relationships differs within a community, with certain groups more vulnerable than others. Domestic violence is more prevalent within certain communities, such as in rural Australia and some indigenous communities (Carrington & Phillips 2006). The severity of offences also appears to differ between socioeconomic, age and cultural groups (NCRVWC 2009b; WA Department for Communities 2006; WESNET 2000). Some women may be more vulnerable to becoming victims and less capable of exiting violent relationships based on certain factors such as age, location, ethnicity, indigenous status and their English language abilities (KPMG Management Consulting 2009). These issues are described below.

Indigenous women

Indigenous women are over-represented as victims of domestic violence, with victimisation rates estimated to be much higher than those of non-indigenous women (Indermaur 2001; Mouzos & Makkai 2004; NCRVWC 2009a). In 2002, 20 per cent of Indigenous women reported that they had been a victim of physical violence in the previous 12 months, compared with seven per cent of non-indigenous women (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Indigenous women are as much as 35 times as likely to sustain serious injury and require hospitalisation as a result of violence committed by a spouse or partner and are more likely to access emergency accommodation or refuge (Al-Yaman, Van Doeland & Wallis 2006). However, efforts to develop reliable estimates as to the extent of domestic violence in indigenous communities have been limited by methodological issues (Mouzos & Makkai 2004; Schmider & Nancarrow 2007).

The likelihood that an indigenous woman will be a victim of violence can be understood as resulting from a confluence of risk factors relating to alcohol and substance use, social stressors, living in a remote community, measures of individual, family and community functionality and the resources available to the person (Bryant & Willis 2008). Indigenous women are more likely to report being a victim of physical or threatened violence if they are young, have been removed from their natural family, have some form of disability, have experienced a higher number of recent stressors and have financial difficulties (Al-Yaman, Van Doeland & Wallis 2006).

A key issue preventing indigenous women from accessing counselling, legal and medical support services is the closeness and breadth of kinship groups. This can impact on an individual’s anonymity and their decision to disclose offences for fear of social and physical repercussions, alienation and upheaval within the community and the family (WA Office for Women’s Policy 2005). In addition, many indigenous communities are not adequately resourced to deal with domestic violence issues, resulting in a lack of support for victims (Memmott et al. 2001).

Women living in rural and remote areas

Research found that women living in remote and rural areas of Western Australia experience higher rates of reported violence than those living in metropolitan areas (WESNET 2000). For both indigenous and non-indigenous women in remote and rural areas, access to independent services can be limited due to their geographical isolation and the limited availability of resources in local areas (NSW Office for Women’s Policy 2008). The remoteness of some areas attracts only few trained professionals which limits the availability of important services and inhibits service delivery. It also raises issues with respect to maintaining confidentiality and safety (NCRVWC 2009a). These factors compound the isolation victims already experience as part of the abuse.

Women from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds

Studies have produced mixed findings with respect to the nature and prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women from culturally and linguistically different (CALD) backgrounds. Some studies have found that women from non-English speaking backgrounds experience higher levels of violence (O’Donnell, Smith & Madison 2002), whereas others suggest the rate of physical violence is lower than, or similar to, the rate among those women from English speaking backgrounds (Bassuk, Dawson & Huntington 2006; Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Drawing conclusions regarding the precise nature and extent of domestic violence in these communities is therefore difficult. What is clear is that immigrant and refugee populations should not be treated as a single homogenous group.

Research has shown that women from CALD backgrounds are less likely to report domestic violence victimisation to police or to access mainstream services because of a perception that these services would not understand their particular situation and respond appropriately (WA Department for Communities 2006). Besides perceptions of being misunderstood, other factors may prevent victims from CALD backgrounds from accessing important services. The limited availability of culturally sensitive translator and interpreter support services can prevent victims with English as a second language from seeking help and removing
Health, wellbeing and lifestyle (O’Reilly 2007). There is also an increased risk in the period immediately after birth outcome and the health of their baby (Taft 2002). Impact upon a woman’s health during pregnancy, the abuse while a woman is pregnant can include stress, drug and alcohol use and physical injuries, which can further impact upon a woman’s health during pregnancy, the birth outcome and the health of their baby (Taft 2002). There is also an increased risk in the period immediately after a baby is born, due to the additional stress that may be placed on a relationship and each partner’s mental health, wellbeing and lifestyle (O’Reilly 2007).

Pregnant women

The ABS (2006) Personal Safety Survey identified that women may be at increased risk of domestic violence during pregnancy. Almost 60 per cent of women who had experienced violence perpetrated by a former partner were pregnant at some time during the relationship; of these, 36 per cent experienced the abuse during their pregnancy and 17 per cent experienced it for the first time when they were pregnant. In addition, the frequency and severity of violence has been found to be higher among pregnant women and the onset of pregnancy has been found to increase the rate of psychological abuse among those women who had previously reported being abused (Burch & Gallup 2004; Martin et al. 2004). The risk to pregnant women has found to be greatest among those women with lower levels of education, from disadvantaged communities and with unintended or unwanted pregnancies (Taft 2002). The consequences of abuse while a woman is pregnant can include stress, drug and alcohol use and physical injuries, which can further impact upon a woman’s health during pregnancy, the birth outcome and the health of their baby (Taft 2002). There is also an increased risk in the period immediately after a baby is born, due to the additional stress that may be placed on a relationship and each partner’s mental health, wellbeing and lifestyle (O’Reilly 2007).

Older women

Older women experience violence and abuse at a rate two and a half times higher than older males (Boldy et al. 2002). Between one-fifth and one-quarter of elderly abuse incidents are committed by the victim’s spouse or partner (Boldy et al. 2002). Evidence suggests that the majority of older people who are victims of physical, sexual or financial abuse are long-term victims of abuse, often perpetrated by a partner who is in a duty of care relationship with the victim (WESNET 2000). Decision-making disabilities and physical disabilities are common among those people who are a victim of abuse (Boldy et al. 2002; Peri et al. 2008). Supportive families and community connectedness have been identified as important protective factors that reduce the risk of violence against older women (Peri et al. 2008).

Women living with a disability

Women with a physical or intellectual disability are more likely than women without disability to experience intimate partner violence and the violence they experience is also likely to be more severe and extend for longer periods of time (NCRVWC 2009a). Research has shown that many women with physical disabilities who experience domestic violence do not seek help, have limited access to appropriate support and fewer opportunities to leave violent relationships (Milberger et al. 2003).

Dating and relationship violence

Adults are the traditional demographic group most commonly associated with domestic violence, however the prevalence of violence in adolescent relationships has received more attention in recent times. Dating and relationship violence is common in adolescent relationships and within school-age communities (Indermaur 2001). Younger women are more likely to experience physical and sexual violence than older women, controlling for other factors (Mouzos & Makkai 2004; Roman et al. 2007). Young people’s vulnerability to intimate partner violence is increased by sexist and traditional gender role attitudes, peer culture, inexperience and attitudes supportive of violence that can be shaped by the media, pornography and early exposure to aggressive behaviour by parents or role models (Flood & Fergus 2008).

Young women are more likely than young males to be subjected to psychological, sexual and physical violence perpetrated by their boyfriends or friends. An Australian survey of 5,000 young people aged 12 to 20 years revealed that of the 70 per cent of respondents who had had a boyfriend or girlfriend at some stage, one-third reported incidents in their intimate relationships that involved some form of physical violence (Indermaur 2001). The same study also reported that 42 per cent of young women aged 19 to 20 years admitted to being the victim of some form of physical violence from a boyfriend at least once (Indermaur 2001). Research has also found that dating violence, including both psychological and physical violence, is common among adolescent girls with a history of child sexual abuse, and was related to the severity of the abuse they had suffered as a child (Cyr, McDuff & Wright 2006).

However, support services and long-term solutions may be less readily available to young people who are victims of domestic violence. Leaving an abusive relationship can be more difficult for young people due to age-related eligibility criteria for public housing and difficulties associated with accessing private rental accommodation or unemployment benefits (WESNET 2000). As a result, younger victims may be left unassisted, forced into homelessness or elect to remain in abusive relationships.

RISK FACTORS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

THERE IS NO SINGLE CAUSE OR FACTOR THAT LEADS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, ACCORDING TO RESEARCH FROM THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY

There is no single cause or factor that leads to domestic violence. A number of risk factors have been identified as associated with perpetrators of domestic violence. These include age, low academic achievement, low income or exclusion from the labour market, social disadvantage and isolation and exposure to, or involvement in, aggressive or delinquent behaviour as an adolescent (Flood & Pease 2006; NSW Office for Women’s Policy 2008). Many of these same risk factors have been linked to an increased likelihood of aggressive behaviour and offending generally. Mouzos and Makkai (2004) found that, among those women who had experienced current intimate partner violence, the most commonly reported aspects of the male perpetrator’s behaviour (and therefore risk factors for violence) were drinking habits, general levels of aggression and controlling behaviour. These issues are also common risk factors for violence in indigenous relationships (Bryant & Willis 2008).

This section of the paper discusses the role of attitudes towards violence, situational factors, early exposure to domestic violence and the lack of access to support services in increasing the risk of domestic violence.

A number of risk factors have been identified as associated with perpetrators of domestic violence. These include age, low academic achievement, low income or exclusion from the labour market, social disadvantage and isolation and exposure to, or involvement in, aggressive or delinquent behaviour as an adolescent.

Attitudes toward violence

It is important that strategies are developed to continue to influence community attitudes towards violence against women. Research shows that men are more likely to engage in violence against women if they hold negative attitudes towards women and hold traditional gender role attitudes that legitimise violence as a method of resolving conflict or as a private matter (Flood & Pease 2006; NCRVWC 2009b). Violence-supporting attitudes are also more common among males who exhibit low levels of support for gender equality (VicHealth 2009). Similarly, women with traditional gender role attitudes are less likely to report violence.

The risk of violence varies across different communities. There is a greater risk of violence against women in communities where the following attitudes or norms exist:

- Traditional ‘macho’ constructions of masculinity
- Notions that men are primary wage earners and the heads of the household whereas a woman’s place is in the home
- Standards encouraging excessive consumption of alcohol, and
- Standards that facilitate peer pressure to conform to these notions of masculinity (NCRVWC 2009b).

Negative attitudes towards women are different across cultural groups and are influenced by culturally-specific norms and social relationships. However they are:

- More commonly expressed among adolescent males than older males
- Stronger in particular masculine contexts, such as sporting subcultures, and are facilitated by group socialisation
- Influenced by exposure to pornography as well as television, music and film, and
- More likely among children who witness or are subjected to violence (Flood & Pease 2006).

Australian research suggests that while there have been improvements, attitudes condoning or trivialising violence against women persist (Taylor & Mouzos 2006). In addition, while the majority of people do not believe that physical violence against women is justified under any circumstances, around one in five respondents to a national survey were prepared to excuse physical and sexual violence where they believed that perpetrators had temporarily lost control or truly regretted what they had done (VicHealth 2009).

Situational factors

Various situational factors, while not direct causes, may increase the risk of domestic violence. Some of these factors include family or relationship problems, financial problems or unemployment and recent stressful events or circumstances, such as the death of a family member (Memmott et al. 2001).

Alcohol is a significant risk factor for domestic violence, with research suggesting that women whose partners frequently consume alcohol at excessive levels are more likely to experience violence (Marcus & Braaf 2007; Mouzos & Makkai 2004). The involvement of alcohol in domestic violence is an even bigger issue within indigenous communities (Dearden & Payne 2009; Memmott et al. 2001). The risk of an indigenous person becoming a victim of actual or threatened violence increases with high risk alcohol use and alcohol is the factor most strongly associated with the risk of...
victimisation among indigenous people, controlling for other factors (Bryant & Willis 2008). Alcohol use is also prevalent among victims of domestic violence (Nicholas 2005; White & Chen 2002).

There is strong evidence of a relationship between heavy drinking and aggression (Wells & Graham 2003). However, not all people who consume alcohol become violent. One explanation for the role of alcohol in domestic violence is that the consumption of alcohol may facilitate an escalation of an incident from verbal to physical abuse because it lowers inhibitions and increases feelings of aggression (Nicholas 2005). There is also research that suggests that because of its impact on aggression the consumption of alcohol, either by the offender or victim, may increase the seriousness of a domestic violence incident, the severity of injuries and risk of death, with almost half of all intimate partner homicides found to be alcohol-related (Dearden & Payne 2009).

Research has attempted to link seasonal changes, calendar events and major sporting events to the rate of reported incidents of domestic violence (Braaf & Gilbert 2007).

Australian research suggests that while there is some variation across states and territories:

- There is a higher number of reported incidents in December and January
- There is a higher number of reported incidents on certain calendar events and holidays, including New Year’s Day, the Christmas period and other public holidays, and Melbourne Cup Day, and
- Some states experience higher rates of reported incidents coinciding with significant sporting events, but the findings are inconsistent and not as strong as those from international research (Braaf & Gilbert 2007).

Explanations of this relationship have focused on the increased contact between victims and perpetrators during holiday periods, increased issues associated with child contact arrangements for estranged families and increased consumption of alcohol.

**Early exposure:**  
**Children and domestic violence**

Research has found that, after controlling for other factors, there are higher rates of domestic violence in those households in which there are children present (Romans et al. 2007). According to the ABS (2006) Personal Safety Survey, 49 per cent of men and women who reported experiencing violence by a current partner had children in their care at some time during the relationship and approximately 27 per cent reported that these children had witnessed the violence. Sixty-one per cent of victims of violence by a previous partner also reported having children in their care at some time during the relationship and 36 per cent said that these children had witnessed the violence (ABS 2006).

These findings are concerning because exposure to domestic violence has been associated with a higher likelihood of the following problems among young people:

- Issues related to cognitive, emotional and social functioning and development which can lead to behavioural and learning difficulties
- An increase in the risk of mental health issues, including depression and anxiety disorders
- Issues related to education and employment prospects
- More accepting of or willing to excuse the use of violence against women
- Involvement in violent relationships with peers and conflict with adults and other forms of authority
- Increased risk of becoming perpetrators or victims themselves, and
- A detrimental impact on their future parenting capacities (Flood & Fergus 2008; Tomison 2000; VicHealth 2006).

It has been recognised that exposing a child to domestic violence is a form of abuse in itself, regardless of whether the child is the target of such violence or not (Flood & Fergus 2008), and that such exposure is related to the intergenerational transmission of violence (Tomison 2000). Exposure to violence in the
home can lead young people to develop inappropriate norms concerning violence and aggression, and to model the behaviour and attitudes to which they have been exposed, increasing the risk that an individual will enter into an abusive relationship in adulthood, either as the perpetrator or victim (Flood & Fergus 2008, Tomison 2000).

Experience of abuse during childhood also increases the likelihood of being assaulted or harmed as an adult. One study found that young people who had been exposed to violence in the home when they were growing up were twice as likely to have been forced to have sex and four times as likely to have admitted that they had forced a partner to have sex later in life (Indermaur 2001). According to the ABS (2006) Personal Safety Survey, around one in ten males and females reported having experienced physical abuse before the age of 15 years, while 12 per cent of women and 5 per cent of men reported having been sexually abused. This is an important finding, as research has shown that women who reported experiencing some form of physical or sexual abuse during childhood are one and a half times more likely to report experiencing some form of violence in adulthood (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).

Access to support networks and services

Problems accessing important support networks or services can also increase the risk that someone will become a victim of domestic violence, or continue to experience violence because they are unable to leave a violent relationship. Research suggests that more than four in five women who experience domestic violence do not contact a specialised support agency, but are more likely to contact family and friends (Marcus & Braaf 2007; Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Further, young women who are connected to school or peer networks and who have links with supportive adult family members or friends also experience lower rates of violence (NCRVWC 2009a); while there is also evidence that men with strong social networks are less likely to be perpetrators of domestic violence (NCRVWC 2009a).

While these informal support networks are important they are not always able to meet the needs of victims or offenders, and there are a range of potential barriers that can prevent a victim from seeking help from service providers, including:

- A lack of available services
- The cost or limited availability of transport
- Limited awareness of available services
- A lack of culturally appropriate services
- A perception that services will be unsympathetic or judgemental
- Shame or embarrassment
- Fear that they will not be believed
- Fear of the perpetrator and the potential for retribution, and
- A perception that services will not be able to offer assistance (Marcus & Braaf 2007; Taft 2002).

Strategies to overcome these barriers are necessary to ensure that victims, particularly those within the most vulnerable groups, are able to access support services to reduce the risk of violence. For example, women who receive shelter services have been shown to experience shorter periods of violence than women who experience violence but do not access support shelters (Panchanadeswaran & McCloskey 2007). Improving service provision and support for victims is an important factor in reducing the impact of geographic or social isolation (NCRVWC 2009a). Similarly important is the need for services that work with perpetrators to reduce the likelihood of reoffending, particularly voluntary programs.

How can the law or police protect me?

Abuse and violence is against the law. If a person in your family is abusing you or other family members, the police and the law can protect you, reassures Bursting the Bubble

Q: If someone is abusing me or a family member, is it against the law?

Under the law, everyone has a right to be safe from violence or abuse. Violence between parents (also called ‘domestic violence’) is against the law. For example, if one parent hits or physically hurts another, they can be charged with assault. Other examples of criminal offences include threatening to hurt someone, stalking them (following or constantly contacting someone), or forcing someone to do sexual things. In most states, if a parent/family member is being hurt, harassed or abused by another parent/family member, they can apply for an Intervention Order/a protection order from a court to protect them from any more abuse.

Some forms of domestic violence are not crimes, but they are still wrong because they are hurtful (e.g. telling a partner what they can and can’t do, where they can go and who they can see).

In every state of Australia, there are laws to protect children/young people from abuse by parents/family members or other adults. In most states these laws say that parents/family members/other adults should not subject children to physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect or sexual abuse, or to domestic violence in their homes. Some forms of child abuse are criminal offences (such as physically injuring a child, or sexual abuse. Other forms of abuse are not criminal, but they are still wrong – such as a parent humiliating you or screaming at you regularly.

In most states, the government has a department (in Victoria this is called ‘child protection’) which investigates reports of child abuse and takes action to make sure children are protected from abuse. How the police or child protection services react to child abuse depends on the situation. In some cases of child abuse (such as when a parent deliberately injures a child, or involves a child in sexual activity), the police can charge parents/family members with a crime. In other cases, the child protection department works with parents/family members to make sure they stop abusing children. In some cases the department might stop the abusive parent/family member from seeing their children for a while, so that the children can be safe.

Q: What might happen if I ring the police about abuse/violence?

If you are in danger or if you think someone else is about to get hurt, call the police for help on 000. They will ask where you are, and if anyone is hurt. They can come to you any time, day or night. Police have the authority to stop the violence, and they will stay at the house until everyone is safe. They might talk to the person who is abusive. They could warn them, or ask them to leave the house. They will talk to the victim of the violence and other people present to find out what happened. If there’s enough evidence to show that a criminal offence has been committed, they could arrest the person and charge them with a crime. The person probably would then be released on bail, with conditions that they don’t contact family members. The police can also assist the victim of violence to take out a court order to protect them.

If the police are worried about your safety or believe that members of your family can’t protect you from the abuse, they may also report your situation to Child Protection, which is the government department that investigates child abuse and makes sure children are safe.

You can contact the police to talk to them about abuse or violence any time – even if the abuse happened a long time ago. Their role is to investigate crimes and to make sure people are safe.

Q: What can the law do to protect me or other family members from abuse?

You/family members can still get protection from violence even if the abuser is not charged with a crime.
For example, if one parent is experiencing domestic violence from their partner, they can apply to a court for a protection order (they’re called different things in different states – in Victoria they’re called ‘Intervention Orders’, in NSW they’re ‘Apprehended Violence Orders’, in Queensland they’re ‘Domestic Violence Orders’, in WA and NT they are ‘Restraining Orders’, in ACT they are ‘Protection Orders’, in SA they are ‘Domestic Violence Restraining orders’, in Tasmania they are ‘Restrain orders’).

Or the police may apply for a protection order on behalf of the person who is being abused. The order can say, for example, that the abusive person must not be abusive again, and/or that they must not come near family members. If the abusive person disobeys the order, they’re said to be in ‘breach’ of the order – and then they can be charged with a crime.

In some cases, young people who are being abused can apply for their own protection orders from a court (or otherwise an adult or police can apply for one for you). The order might say that the person has to stop abusing you, or is not allowed to come near you. Talk to one of the services listed on www.burstingthebubble.com for info on this. For more info on the law see Getting Help – True or False quiz on www.burstingthebubble.com

Q: Can I call the police to report abuse that happened a long time ago?
Yes, you can contact the police to report abuse that has been happening to you any time, even if it happened some time ago. Abuse and violence (including sexual abuse) is against the law. It might be a good idea to take a trusted adult with you when you talk to the police, because they can help you when you make a report. The police may investigate what happened, and if it's a criminal offence, and they could charge the person who abused you. Your local police can be found in your local phone book. If you need more info, you could call a youth legal service or email a lawyer on the Lawstuff website (www.lawstuff.org.au).

Q: Do young people have rights under the law?
In theory, the law is there to protect everybody from harm. Every person has individual rights and young people have rights just like everybody else, not just as their parents' children or as part of a family, but as people with their own interests, needs and situations. What your parents need from the law might be completely different to what you need from the law because you are separate person with separate needs. When the law is applied correctly, it should protect YOU.

In international law too it is recognised that young people need specific things, whether it's legal protection or help with asserting their rights. In 1989 the United Nations developed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (covering people up to 18 years of age) which has helped governments across the world recognise that young people have their own rights and their own particular needs.

Q: If a young person goes to a lawyer or legal service for help, could they get in trouble for drinking or taking drugs?
No they can't get in trouble for that. Any discussion that you have with a lawyer is confidential – a lawyer can't use any of your information or pass it on without your permission. They might be able to help you get support for what you're going through, but only if you ask for it. A lawyer can only act on information about you if you give them instructions to do so.

Q: Are there legal services or lawyers specifically to help young people?
Yes, in most states there are youth legal services just for young people. If you are in Victoria, there is YouthLaw, or if you are in another state, go to the Lawstuff website (www.lawstuff.org.au) and find out what's available in your state, or ring one of the services listed on our site. Or you can email a legal expert on the Lawstuff website, which has info for all Australian young people. A legal expert can email you for confidential advice on what the law can do to help protect you (it takes about 10 days to get an answer back). On that website you can also find info about laws and services in your state.

In Victoria there is YouthLaw, which is a service for people up to 25 years old. It’s probably the best place to start if you have a legal problem or legal questions – we provide legal advice, information and also we can help you find private lawyers if it's needed. Young people can contact YouthLaw directly – you don't need to go to a lawyer first.

There is the Youth Legal Service in the Children’s Court Section of Victoria Legal Aid, but that's for criminal or child protection issues only. There are also people called ‘Children’s Representatives’ in the Family Court. Children’s Representatives are lawyers who are appointed by the Judge in family law disputes (e.g. if your parents have gone to court to decide where the children should live or who they should live with). The Children’s Representative is there to represent ‘the best interests of the child’ but they do not actually take instructions from children or young people. They make their case based on information and evidence, not necessarily what the child or young person asks for.

Lawyers at YouthLaw, on the other hand, will almost always act on the instructions of young people. That's what all lawyers are paid to do.

If you are a young person in need of free legal advice, you can call YouthLaw to make an appointment or drop in on Monday to Friday between 2pm and 5pm. See YouthLaw's website at www.youthlaw.asn.au

Thanks to Youth Law staff for assistance with answers to some of these questions.

MANAGING DIFFERENCES AND CONFLICT

Differences of opinion are normal and can be enriching for a relationship. Some conflict in relationships is inevitable, but there are ways to handle conflict so that it is not destructive to you individually or as a couple, according to this guide from Relationships Australia Queensland.

People often get emotional and angry when they see their partner has different values, beliefs or expectations from them. We all need to understand and accept that between any two people there will be differences in ideas and expectations and, at times, conflict and strong expression of feelings.

Relationships usually become stronger if partners talk about these differences. Differences will be part of relationships, but they may be resolved through respectful communication.

All couples experience problems in one form or another – it’s part of sharing your life with another person. The difference between relationships that flourish and those that don’t is how well couples deal with the challenges and problems they face in their life together.

WHAT DOES CONFLICT IN A RELATIONSHIP INDICATE?

Conflict, most commonly expressed as anger, can indicate that all is not well for a couple, that some change is needed to keep their relationship healthy.

If conflict has a purpose, then instead of asking “how can we avoid conflict?” we should ask, “how can we manage not to hurt each other or our relationship when we have a row?” and “how can we learn from the conflict?”

Avoiding conflict could mean avoiding important issues which would be better faced and sorted out.

Conflict is a symptom – treating the symptom by patching things up without finding out its cause is unwise in the long term.

ANGER

Anger is, for many people, a negative feeling and one that can be frightening because of its intensity and possible consequences.

There are four ways of responding when we feel angry:
- Expressing our anger
- Denying our anger
- Acknowledging our anger
- Acting on our anger.

Expressing anger

Anger can be expressed by attacking the person we are angry with, doing a lot of shouting and screaming and perhaps using physical force by hitting, pushing or punching the other person. Other ways of expressing anger include withdrawing or using controlling behaviours.

Expressing anger in these ways will often leave a wound in the relationship that is harder to heal than the original cause of the anger. It may make you feel justified temporarily, but can also leave you feeling guilty (because of the effects of your behaviour) even if you are convinced you were in the right.

Those who deal with their anger by expressing it without restraint often claim that their anger takes over, and that they can’t help their actions.

It may feel as if anger is beyond our control, but in reality everyone can learn to control their response to anger.

Denying anger

A second way of dealing with anger is to bottle it up and deny it. Some people become so good at denying their anger that they even fool themselves and become unaware that they are angry, even if it is obvious to those around them.

Bottling up anger and refusing to deal with it may solve a problem for a while, but it will create worse problems in the future. Facing up to conflict, whilst sometimes painful and confronting, can improve a relationship.

Ignoring anger means ignoring the warning signals that all is not right in the relationship. It also leaves the other person in the conflict feeling frustrated because they sense that something is wrong, but cannot get things out into the
Acknowledging anger and acting on your anger

The most constructive way of handling anger is to resolve conflict as quickly and as constructively as possible.

A verbal attack on your partner when you are angry is unhelpful, as is trying to score points by pointing out past failures.

When conflict arises and you feel angry with your partner, the following steps may be useful:

• Admit that you are angry. Try using ‘I’ statements such as, “I feel angry and let down that you are so late for dinner and didn’t call me” rather than “You make me angry because you’re always late”.

• Admitting your anger lets your partner know how you are feeling. It helps to get problems into the open so that both partners can do something about them.

• Ask for ‘time out’. This is essential if either you or your partner feels too angry to talk about the problem – “I’m too angry now; let’s talk about it later”. Ask for time out if you need it, but time out shouldn’t be used to avoid issues. It is important that you come back later and try to sort things out.

• Explore your feelings. There is nearly always another feeling underneath your anger like sadness, hurt, disappointment, or a sense of being let down or taken for granted. Let your partner know how you feel. The underlying feeling will usually be a clue to the real issue that you and your partner need to face up to and talk about. For example, you may say that you’re angry with your partner for spending so much time with his/her friends, but underneath you feel hurt and want him/her to spend more time with you.

• Listen to your partner’s point of view. There may be an angle on the situation that you haven’t considered.

• Be prepared to acknowledge your part in the problem. Saying sorry does not mean that you are accepting all the responsibility.

• Ask what can be learnt from the conflict. This will improve your relationship and lessen the chances of a similar conflict happening again.

• Be prepared to forgive and make up. Do this when you are ready, but it’s best not to make your partner wait as a punishment. A row between two people who love each other is like a short separation. Reunion after separation can lead to a deepening of closeness and intimacy in the relationship.

When your partner is angry

When your partner expresses anger with you:

• Listen to their complaint

• Show genuine interest

• Acknowledge your partner’s anger

• Take time out if necessary – look after yourself

• Be prepared to change what you do

• Apologise if appropriate.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Physical violence in intimate and family relationships is a serious criminal offence and is never acceptable as a response to conflict or provocation.

Once physical violence occurs in a relationship, it can easily become a pattern. It often becomes more frequent, and usually becomes more serious the longer the relationship continues. It can ultimately lead to serious injury, or even death.

Violence in an intimate or family relationship is a sign that the relationship is in crisis. It should be taken seriously and assistance should be sought. If you feel unsafe or in danger you can contact a domestic violence support service in your state or territory, or the police.

Warning signs of a relationship breakdown

Noticing early warning signs of relationship breakdown can help a couple resolve conflicts.

Some early warning signs are:

• Abandonment of joint activities – just living parallel lives

• Recurring arguments that are never resolved

• Feelings of ongoing dissatisfaction and unhappiness

• Preoccupation with interests and activities outside the relationship by one partner leading to the other partner feeling neglected

• Complaints of loss of feeling – one or both partner/s speaking of no longer being in love

• An affair – becoming emotionally and/or sexually involved with a person outside the relationship

• Increased fatigue and reduced ability to meet responsibilities at work

• Arguments over parenting.

When is a good time to get professional help?

Professional guidance and extra skills can often assist. If your relationship has some of the above warning signs, it may be time to seek help. Counsellors can help you identify underlying problems and may be able to help you find ways to mend your relationship. Family dispute resolution practitioners (family mediators) can work with you to define practical issues and identify present and future needs.

The sooner that you act on issues, the easier they may be to resolve.

It is beneficial for couples to learn new ways of relating, communicating and resolving conflict.

WORKSHEETS AND ACTIVITIES

The Exploring Issues section comprises a range of ready-to-use worksheets featuring activities which relate to facts and views raised in this book.

The exercises presented in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond. Some of the activities may be explored either individually or as a group.

As the information in this book is compiled from a number of different sources, readers are prompted to consider the origin of the text and to critically evaluate the questions presented.

Is the information cited from a primary or secondary source? Are you being presented with facts or opinions?

Is there any evidence of a particular bias or agenda? What are your own views after having explored the issues?

CONTENTS

BRAINSTORM 54
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Brainstorm, individually or as a group, to find out what you know about domestic and family violence. Complete your responses on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

1. What is domestic violence, and what are some of the other terms used for it?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

2. What are some of the key signs of abuse and violence in a relationship?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

3. What impacts can family violence have on children and young people?

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__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

4. What are some of the ways in which the law can protect people in a domestic violence situation?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
Complete the following activity on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

Identify and list six different forms of domestic violence. Provide a description and a scenario for each response and suggest possible options for seeking help.

1. ____________________________

   _Description_ ____________________________

   _Scenario_ ____________________________

   _Possible options for seeking help_ ____________________________

2. ____________________________

   _Description_ ____________________________

   _Scenario_ ____________________________

   _Possible options for seeking help_ ____________________________

3. ____________________________

   _Description_ ____________________________

   _Scenario_ ____________________________

   _Possible options for seeking help_ ____________________________

4. ____________________________

   _Description_ ____________________________

   _Scenario_ ____________________________

   _Possible options for seeking help_ ____________________________

5. ____________________________

   _Description_ ____________________________

   _Scenario_ ____________________________

   _Possible options for seeking help_ ____________________________

6. ____________________________

   _Description_ ____________________________

   _Scenario_ ____________________________

   _Possible options for seeking help_ ____________________________
Complete the following activity on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

Form pairs or small groups and compile a list of points with which to discuss the following situations. Explore whether or not these scenarios are examples of domestic violence, what effects they may have on those involved, and what assistance is available.

Consider the following:

a. Signs of domestic violence
b. Types of abuse
c. Reasons a victim may have for not getting help
d. What can be done to help
e. Types of help available.

Angela and Lachlan are dating. Angela has started making excuses not to see her friends since she’s been dating Lachlan. When they do go to social functions, Lachlan stays at her side all the time and will often get angry in front of everyone and blame her for small things going wrong, and will even accuse her of flirting when she isn’t. Angela appears to have changed, she is now very quiet and often looks sad, she was always such a happy and talkative person.

David has been married to Emma for five years. David has started to feel quite anxious, depressed and has intense feelings of worthlessness. Every day when he is coming home from work he begins to feel afraid and worries that Emma will be angry at him. He is constantly trying to please Emma but she always yells at him, puts him down in front of their children and friends and often tells him he is a terrible father. David believes he must be able do something to make things better.

“... the other day my best friend Kelly told me that her dad hits her mum and that he often threatens Kelly and her little sister. I couldn’t believe it when she told me … I always thought her dad was nice enough. But when Kelly told me what had been happening she was shaking and obviously really scared. I want to help her get through this ...”. (extract from ‘Nicki’s story’ on page 38)
Non-physical forms of abuse can be just as damaging as physical violence. (p.3)

It’s against the law for someone to physically hurt you, threaten you, or to coerce or force you into sexual contact. (p.4)

Domestic violence contributes to more ill health and premature death for women aged 15 to 44 than any other single factor. (p.6)

In Australia, 1 in 3 women who have been in a relationship have experienced violence by a partner. (p.6)

Of the women who are assaulted, more than two-thirds are assaulted by men known to them: dates, boyfriends, marital partners, friends, family members or neighbours. (p.6)

15% of Australian women have experienced physical or sexual violence from a previous partner and 2.1% from a current partner since the age of 15. (p.8)

4.9% of Australian men have experienced violence from a previous partner and 0.9% from a current partner since the age of 15. (p.8)

31% of women who experienced physical violence in the past 12 months were assaulted by a current and/or previous partner, compared to 4.4% of men. (p.8)

Over a third of women (36%) who had experienced violence by a previous partner said that their children had witnessed the violence. (p.8)

82% of women who had experienced violence at the hand of a current partner in the past 12 months did not report it to the police. (pp.8-9)

Of the 134 domestic homicides reported for 2007-08, intimate partner homicides made up 60%. Of these, women made up the majority of victims. (p.9)

The majority of the community (85%) disagrees that violence and harassment against women should be dealt with privately. (p.11)

Violence against women and their children was estimated to cost the Australian economy $13.6 billion in 2008-09. (p.11)

One-quarter of indigenous people in 2002 reported that they had been a victim of physical or threatened violence in the previous 12 months. (p.11)

About 7% of non-indigenous women reported experiencing physical violence (4% RSE), compared to 20% of Indigenous women (21% RSE). (pp.12, 44)

Women with physical and cognitive disabilities experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than those without disabilities, and those with cognitive disabilities are particularly vulnerable. (p.12)

In heterosexual relationships, women are more often hurt by men, however, relationship violence also happens in gay and lesbian relationships or is done by women to men. (p.13)

1 in 3 women will be hit by a partner at some time and 1 in 8 will experience ongoing abuse. (p.15)

On average, it takes 7 tries for a woman to leave a violent relationship. (p.15)

A violent relationship may not be violent all the time and the person who is violent may seem very loving at other times and sorry for their behaviour. (p.18)

Domestic violence is an under-reported crime, so it is difficult for agencies to keep accurate statistics. (p.20)

Although domestic violence can affect anyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status or their racial and cultural background, women who are young, indigenous, have a disability, or who live in rural areas are at greater risk. (p.20)

Current statistics suggest that girls are less likely to be physically abusive than boys and are more likely to use emotional abuse. (p.24)

In 2007-08, 74% of parents who sought an intervention order against their child were mothers. (p.25)

Parents often believe that they have shielded their children from spousal violence, but research shows that children see or hear some 40-80% of it. (p.32)

Domestic violence is more prevalent within certain communities, such as in rural Australia and some indigenous communities. (p.44)

Indigenous women are as much as 35 times as likely to sustain serious injury and require hospitalisation as a result of violence committed by a spouse or partner. (p.44)

Almost 60% of women who had experienced violence perpetrated by a former partner were pregnant at some time during the relationship; of these, 36% experienced the abuse during their pregnancy and 17% experienced it for the first time when they were pregnant. (p.45)

42% of young women aged 19 to 20 years admitted to being the victim of some form of physical violence from a boyfriend at least once. (p.45)

A number of risk factors have been identified as associated with perpetrators of domestic violence. These include age, low academic achievement, low income or exclusion from the labour market, social disadvantage and isolation and exposure to, or involvement in, aggressive or delinquent behaviour as an adolescent. (p.46)

It has been recognised that exposing a child to domestic violence is a form of abuse in itself. (p.47)

Around 1 in 10 males and females reported having experienced physical abuse before the age of 15 years, while 12% of women and 5% of men reported having been sexually abused. (p.48)

Women who report experiencing some form of physical or sexual abuse during childhood are one and a half times more likely to report experiencing some form of violence in adulthood. (p.48)

In every state of Australia, there are laws to protect children and young people from abuse by parents or family members or other adults. (p.49)
**Abusive relationship**
Common patterns in an abusive relationship are controlling behaviour and abuse, which can happen before the relationship becomes physically violent. These include possessiveness, jealousy, put-downs, menace and threats.

**Conflict resolution**
Methods of addressing conflict and of finding ways of resolving it or of continuing it in less hurtful or violent ways. Disagreements are normal in any relationship and there are ways to respond to, minimise and resolve conflict. It is helpful to try to understand and consider the other person’s point of view. Winning an argument is not good if it makes the other person feel hurt or embarrassed.

**Cycle of violence**
In a violent relationship, you may begin to notice a pattern to the violence that might be something like this: Build-up – you might see the building up of stress; Explosion – violence or threats occur; Remorse – your partner says “I'm sorry, I didn't mean it”, buys gifts or does other things to try and “make up”; Honeymoon – things seem calm again and may even seem better than they have been for a long time. You might think things have changed for the better, but nothing actually changes and in fact the cycle begins all over, the build-up, explosion, etc. This might happen over a few days or within just a few minutes.

**Domestic violence**
A situation where one partner in a relationship is using violent and abusive behaviour in order to control and dominate the other partner.

**Economic abuse**
When a partner or another family member takes control of financial affairs when you don't want them to, or prevents you from having access to money.

**Emotional abuse**
Situations where a partner blames the victim for all of the problems in the relationship, constantly comparing the victim with others to undermine self-esteem and self-worth, sporadic sulking, withdrawing all interest and engagement (e.g. weeks of silence).

**Family violence**
Any type of abusive behaviour in a family or relationship where one person attempts to gain and maintain control over the other. It can take many forms including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or social or financial control.

**Family violence order**
A family violence order is generally made under a prescribed law of a state or territory to protect a person from family violence. Family violence orders are called different things in different states: Protection Order (QLD, ACT); Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (NSW); Intervention Order (VIC); Restraining Order (NT, SA and WA); and Restraint Order (Tas).

**Physical abuse**
Includes both physical assault, which refers to the use of physical force with the intent to harm or frighten a person, and physical attempts or threats, which refers to the verbal, and/or physical intent to inflict harm which the victim believed was able and likely to be carried out.

**Relationship violence**
Sometimes in relationships dominance, control or jealousy can be mistaken for love and can involve hurt, power, control and feeling bad in a relationship. Most relationship violence happens to women and is done by men, however, relationship violence also happens in gay and lesbian relationships or is done by women to men.

**Sexual abuse**
Includes any form of non-consensual or forced sexual activity or touching, including rape. It is carried out against your will using physical or threatened force, intimidation or coercion. Forcing you to have sex is against the law, even if you are married.

**Social abuse**
Systematic isolation from family and friends through techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends, moving to locations where the victim doesn't know anyone, and forbidding or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people – in effect, imprisonment.

**Spiritual abuse**
When a partner or family member denies access to ceremonies, land or family, preventing religious observance, forces victims to do things against their beliefs, denigration of cultural background, or uses religious teachings or cultural tradition as a reason for violence.

**Stalking**
When a partner, ex-partner, or someone else follows you around, or repeatedly tries to contact you, even if you've said you don't want this. Stalking is against the law and you should notify someone if this is occurring.

**Verbal abuse**
Continual ‘put-downs’ and humiliation, either privately or publicly, with attacks that can focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity as a parent, partner, person or spouse.
Websites with further information on the topic

Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse  www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au
Be the Hero  www.bethehero.com.au
Bursting the Bubble  www.burstingthebubble.com
By Choice Not Chance  www.bychoicenotchance.com.au
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria  www.dvrcv.org.au
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs  www.fahcsia.gov.au
Don’t Cross the Line  www.dontcrosstheline.com.au
Family Relationships Online  www.familyrelationships.gov.au
Family & Relationship Services Australia  www.frsa.org.au
Kids Helpline  www.kidshelp.com.au
Love: the good, the bad and the ugly  http://lovegoodbadugly.com
MensLine Australia  www.mensline.org.au
National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service  www.1800respect.org.au
One in Three Campaign  www.oneinthree.com.au
Relationships Australia  www.relationshihs.org.au
Stop Family Violence  www.stopfamilyviolence.nt.gov.au
The Line  www.theline.gov.au
White Ribbon Australia  www.whiteribbon.org.au

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