

Children 4 - 12

AND THEIR FATHERS



GROWING UP IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

If a child is exposed to their mother being physically or psychologically abused by her partner, it can have a serious impact on the child's development.

Children experience domestic and family violence in many ways. Not only do they see what is happening around them, but they hear the violence, sometimes from another room. Children can be involved in violence if they intervene or are in the way during a domestic violence incident. Sometimes they live with the results of what violence does to their family.

Whilst some people feel that leaving an abusive partner will deprive their child of a family relationship, there is strong evidence to suggest that domestic violence has a worse effect on children's development and adjustment than separation or divorce.

In most cases children will still have contact with both parents even if the relationship ends; it is important for fathers to show their children that they are able to consistently take care of them.

Children need safe, loving, secure environments to grow into strong, confident young people who are able to navigate the highs and lows of life. Environments where there is violence, bullying behaviour, fear and uncertainty are not safe. This fact sheet is designed to help fathers think about how their actions impact on their child. It provides tips on how to be a positive role model and to build a loving relationship.

Children's early life experiences influence how they develop. When children are young they develop trust, learn how to take turns and share, and practise how to solve disagreements using words. As they grow older they learn about making friends and making choices, they develop confidence in their achievements and learn how to manage their anger and frustration. One of the most common ways that children learn is by copying what they see around them.

Living with domestic or family violence teaches children that:

- Aggression and force is an acceptable way to get what they want
- No adult can be relied upon
- Showing disrespect to women is acceptable behaviour



"I don't want my kids growing up and turning into a younger version of me. It's up to me to make the change."

Children don't have to 'see' the violence to be affected by it. They are often still able to describe violent events, even while they are hiding in other rooms.

Most children who are living with domestic and family violence keep what is happening at home a secret because they are ashamed and are scared that their friends will find out. Children suffer deep emotional harm when they are exposed to physical or non-physical abuse.

When children see or hear violence around them they are at risk of developing behaviours which include:

- Difficulty in making or keeping friends
- Behavioural problems at home and school, including bullying
- Learning difficulties
- Temper tantrums and aggression
- Constant illnesses (headaches, stomach aches, inability to sleep, nightmares, bed wetting)
- Depression or anxiety
- Guilt
- Anger

CHILDREN SAY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS

- When the person who is hurt is someone they love
- When the violence happens in their home
- When the hurt is deliberate
- When the person who is using the violence is someone they trust
- When the children feel that it is their fault
- (Maxwell & Carroll-Lind, 1998)



WHAT CHILDREN ARE THINKING WHEN VIOLENCE IS HAPPENING AROUND THEM

- I try and make myself invisible – often I will hide under the bed or in a cupboard
- I'm worried about my mum. I'm worried that she'll be killed
- I feel helpless. I can't do anything to make it stop
- I love both my parents, but when I see one hurting the other I'm confused and hurt
- I'm worried that my school friends will find out about what happens in our house

PROVIDING SAFETY AND PROTECTION

Children rely on their families for safety and protection. They can see and feel the tension, terror and aggression that domestic and family violence creates.

Children need reliable and responsible role models who they can seek comfort and emotional safety from during times of stress and fear.

They need the violence to stop and to:

- Feel safe
- Be cared for and
- Know what is going to happen next in their lives

“I know now that domestic violence is an abuse of power. It's also an abuse of my family's trust in me”.

CHILDREN EXPOSED TO/ EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE MAY

- Feel torn between wanting to protect their mother and loving their father.
- Justify the abuse by blaming alcohol, stress or their own bad behaviour to help them deal with the idea that their parent is abusive.
- Worry about what they could have done to prevent the violence.

DO YOU RECOGNISE THE IMPACT OF YOUR ACTIONS AND THE EFFECT IT MAY BE HAVING ON YOUR CHILDREN?

Ask yourself these questions...

- Do I regularly shout or swear at my partner?
- Do I force my partner into having sex?
- Do I control my partner's spending, phone bills or who they talk to?
- Do I expect my partner to ask permission before spending any money or going out?
- Have I ever pushed, slapped or grabbed my partner?
- Do I prevent my partner from seeing friends or family?
- Are my children or my partner afraid of me?

If you have answered 'yes' to any of these questions, then you have used domestic violence in your relationship.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO CHANGE THE SITUATION?

There are people who can provide confidential counselling and referrals. There are programs that can help you change the behaviour which has led to you using violence in your relationship and reduced your family's confidence in your ability to care for them. The priority is the safety and wellbeing of your children, your partner and yourself.

Contact DVConnect Mensline on 1800 600 636 (9am-midnight, 7 days a week) or Mensline Australia on 1300 789 978 (24hrs) for free, non-judgemental, confidential help and advice to help you stop your violent behaviour.

FIND YOUR CLOSEST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICE

A list of domestic and family violence services in Queensland is available at:

<http://qlddomesticviolencelink.org.au>

or, if you do not have access to the Internet:

call DVConnect Mensline on 1800 600 636 (9am-midnight, 7 days a week) or Mensline Australia on 1300 789 978 (24hrs).

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAKE YOUR CHILD FEEL IMPORTANT AND WELL LOVED

- Talk to your child about school, their friends or what they want to be when they grow up.
- Support your child to make reliable and positive relationships with extended family, friends, teachers and others.
- Help your child learn to control their own behaviour by setting a positive example.
- Talk about your feelings; reassure your child that it is okay to have feelings and to express them in respectful ways.
- Play with your child – board games, ball games, walk together, sing songs together.
- Show your child respect and help them to show respect for others.
- Show your child that you are interested in them. Go along to school performances or sporting activities they are involved in.
- Spend time with your child doing something they enjoy; take them to the park or the movies.
- Tell your child often that you love them and that you are proud of them.

“By changing my responses from behaving angrily to responding calmly and respectfully, I have restored my family's trust in me. I can't believe how much better I know my family these days”



Sources:

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