

# Young People

## AND THEIR FATHERS



### DEVELOPING STRONG, RESILIENT ADULTS

If a young person witnesses a parent being physically or psychologically abused, they may either experience or use violence in their own adult relationships.

Adolescence is a time when young people start to decide what values they need to guide their lives. They are at a stage where they want to test the beliefs and values that have been passed on to them by parents, carers and others and find their independence by changing their style of clothes, hair, friends and the activities they take part in. To help them journey safely through this developmental stage and grow into strong, respectful and confident adults, they need people around them who they can trust, respect and depend upon; who not only provide emotional and physical security, but also help them to understand their limitations.

Young people are often strongly affected by domestic and family violence. They may have been living with violence since their childhood, and an increasing desire for independence makes them less likely to want to continue to live in an unsafe home environment. Many homeless young people report domestic violence in their families.

**Whilst you are watching your adolescent child grow into a young woman or man they are also watching you, and learning what it looks like to be an adult. As a parent or carer you provide the most important influence in their life.**

Domestic violence can have a worse effect on young people's development than separation or divorce. Whether the relationship ends or not, in most cases children will still have contact with both parents. It is important that fathers model behaviour that will make their children feel proud of them, happy to introduce them to their friends and confident that they are always going to be there for them.

Acknowledging and taking responsibility for the use of domestic violence provides fathers with the opportunity to reinvent their relationship with their daughter or son, based on mutual respect. It also gives them a chance to break, what could become, a pattern of abuse in their family.

This factsheet is designed to assist fathers to build a positive relationship with their child or children, to reassure them that they love them and that they want to do what is best for them as they move into adulthood.



**"I'm included in my family's life now, they actually want to spend time with me".**

Even if young people in the family don't see the abuse that is happening in their home, they can experience the abuse in a range of ways - overhearing abusive arguments, seeing the aftermath of violence such as bruises or broken bones, or sensing the fear and tension that their mother is feeling.

If a young person is exposed to physical, psychological or sexual abuse, they may experience some of the following:

- Anger – either at the person using the violence, for hurting someone they love or at the partner for not leaving.
- Shame – wanting to keep their family 'secret' away from their friends.
- Care-taking – wanting to protect their mother and siblings.
- Fear – of the consequences of violence, for themselves and their siblings.
- Depression – unable to see how their lives will ever improve.
- Aggressive and anti-social behaviour – to vent their anger or frustration, or simply modelling the behaviour they have seen in their home.
- Substance abuse – to escape what they are experiencing at home.
- Using violence in their own relationships – believing that violence toward their partner is acceptable.
- Reduced school performance – due to exhaustion, lack of motivation or absenteeism.

**Normal adolescent risk-taking behaviour can be increased by stresses associated with violence in the home.**



Young people go through important milestones in their journey to adulthood, such as:

- Their identity – what it means to be male or female.
- Finding work and financial independence.
- Their sexuality – forming intimate relationships.
- Making and keeping friends.

To do this they need a positive view of themselves – a sense of meaning, direction and self worth, to help them move into the adult world of independence and responsibility. Young people need:

- Safety.
- Predictability in their environment.
- Positive role models.
- To be cared for.
- Unconditional love.
- A home environment free from domestic violence.

### **WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK WHEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS HAPPENING AROUND THEM?**

- I want to do something to make the violence stop.
- I can't concentrate at school because I'm worried about what it will be like when I get home.
- I feel like I'm invisible. When the violence stops no one talks about it. It's like nothing has happened.
- Why can't I have a 'normal' family like my friend's?
- I don't want to go home at night. At least at school I know what to expect.
- I just want someone to love me, to be my friend.....to help me.
- I hope that no one at school finds out what happens in our house.
- I'm worried that I will turn out to be an abuser/abused person too.

Parents play different roles and bring their own strengths to their children's lives. Good relationships between fathers and teenagers provides young people with building blocks towards their own family relationships.

## **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 you to using domestic violence and reduced your family's confidence in your ability to care for them. The priority is the safety and wellbeing of your children, partner and yourself.

Contact DVConnect Mensline on 1800600636 (9am-midnight, 7 days a week) or Mensline Australia on 1300 789 978 (24hrs) for free, non-judgmental, confidential help and advice to help you stop your violent behaviour.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO GIVE YOUR CHILD CONFIDENCE IN YOUR LOVE AND CARE**

- Understand that even though your son/daughter may not see or hear the violence directly they will still be very aware of the tension, anxiety and fear in their home.
- Tell your son/daughter stories- about your life before you met your partner, great moments in sport, or anything else that will capture their interest and show them you enjoy spending time with them.
- Show an interest in what they are doing- take them to the football or a concert. Find out what type of music they like.
- Talk to them about their friendship groups.
- Support and celebrate your daughter/son's achievements in and out of school.
- Tell them that you love them and you are proud of them.



**Young people need support inside and outside of their family to help them see that they have a choice about the type of adult they become. Growing up in a violent home does not automatically mean they will become a violent or abused adult.**

## 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)



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