

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.

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 abuse happens:

- victims tend to blame themselves or 'play down' the effect on them
- abusers tend to 'play down' what they do, or pretend it isn't happening. 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:

- not feeling safe
- having low self-esteem
- being harmed
- being split up through separation or divorce.

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All family members have the 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 harmed 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 that 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 Gateway on 1800 800 098 to find out where to get help, or contact other services in this Guide.

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 immediate 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
- to know where they can get help in an emergency, for example call the Police, or have a safe place or person they can go to.

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.

Want more information?

Police

Phone 000 if there is immediate danger
Phone 131 444 for Police attendance

Family and Community Services

Domestic Violence Legal Advice
Phone 1800 656 463. 24hrs. Free Call

Child Abuse Report Line

Phone 132 111, 24 hours If you are worried a child is being abused or neglected

1800 RESPECT

Phone 1800 737 732, 24 hours National Sexual Assault Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service. Information, support, telephone and web counselling for people experiencing domestic and family violence or sexual assault
www.1800respect.org.au

Kids Helpline

Phone 1800 55 1800
Phone, web or email counselling, resources and activities for children and young people 5 to 25 years.
www.kidshelp.com.au

Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52
Advice on child health and parenting

Raising Children Network Information on raising children
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Mensline Australia: Phone 1300 789 978, 24 hours. Speak to someone about relationships or family concerns
www.mensline.org.au

Beyond Blue: Phone 1300 224 636
24 hours Speak to a mental health professional about how you feel no matter how big or small the problem
www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline: Phone 13 11 14, 24 hours Crisis support and suicide prevention
www.lifeline.org.au

Local Services

Lismore Women and Children's Service

Phone 02 6621 2685
Email lismorerefuge@norwacs.org.au
PO Box 619, Lismore 2480

Women's Health and Domestic Violence Service, Lismore

Phone 0428 400 880

Refer to Service Listing for contact details of other local services