

About this brochure

People caring for a child who has experienced violence are often very worried about how that experience will affect the child. Children – regardless of their age – do respond to what's going on around them. However, **the effect** on children and their recovery **can depend on many things**. You can do a lot to help.

This is one of a **set of brochures** to help you understand and respond to some of the effects of violence on a child.

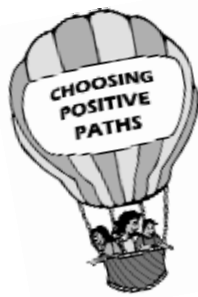
The main focus of the brochures is domestic violence – that is, intimate partner violence – and its effects on children. We also touch on issues of child abuse and other violence experienced by children, usually included in the term family violence.

The brochures talk about children who have experienced violence. This means knowing about, seeing or hearing violence against someone else. It also means being assaulted or abused by family members. All forms of violence in the family affect children.

Mostly the language in the brochures is directed at mothers. However it will also be helpful for other people who are taking on the role of primary carer – fathers, grandparents, aunts, family friends and even foster parents. In this brochure, the phrase 'your child' means 'a child in your care'.

This brochure contains tips and information about:

- the impact of domestic violence
- activities for babies
- stages of development



Parenting violence & your safety



Everyone has the right to feel and be safe, yet domestic violence is still very common. One in four women (25 percent) experience violence from a partner or close family member at some point in their lives.

Often these women are **mothers**, and often their **child experiences the violence too**. This means knowing about, seeing or hearing violence against someone else. It also means being the target of hurt or abuse. All forms of violence in the family affect children. Research statistics show that many children who experience domestic violence also experience sexual abuse from someone in their family.

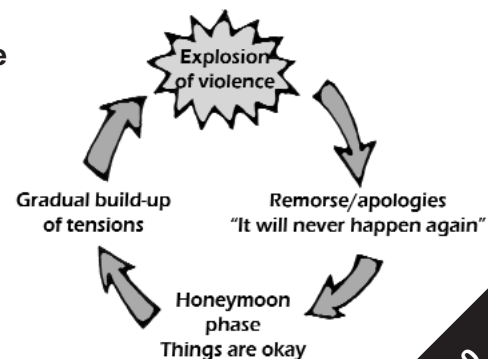
Many forms of violence are **against the law**, such as rape and assault. Rape in marriage is a crime. Child assault, including child sexual abuse, is also a crime.

Domestic and family violence can include a person doing any of the following to someone they live with, or have previously lived with:

- Kicking, hitting, punching them (**physical assault**)
- Calling them names, insulting them (**verbal abuse**)
- Pressuring them into unwanted sex, raping them or touching them in a sexual way when this is not wanted (**sexual assault, or in the case of a child, incest**)
- Refusing to let them see friends and family, disconnecting the phone, watching their movements or monitoring their phone calls (**social abuse**)
- Making them think they are crazy, threatening to kill them or to commit suicide (**emotional/psychological abuse**)
- Controlling all the money (**financial abuse**)
- Tearing or burning clothes, smashing things (**property damage**)
- Following or repeatedly contacting them against their wishes if they are separated (**stalking**)

Often there is a pattern to domestic violence. You might recognise the cycle in the picture below, or your situation might be a bit different. Regardless of how you experience violence, it is never okay for anyone to harm you or your child in any way.

If you think you might be **experiencing violence** or would like to **talk to someone about your safety**, contact the Domestic Violence Outreach Services in your region. They can provide you with **ongoing support, information and referral**. Telephone: **Northern Suburbs (03) 9458 5788 Western Suburbs (03) 9689 9588** or for other regions call the Victorian Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service **(03) 9373 0123 or 1800 015 188**.



Make a safety plan



Many women whose partners have been violent or

abusive feel as if there is no way out of their situation.

There are often many steps to **becoming safe and happy again**, and lots of women find it helpful to take it one day at a time.

There are some things though that **shouldn't be put off** till tomorrow. **Planning for your safety** (and that of your child) is something that you need to think about today.



Domestic violence is a crime.

You have the right to

report your experiences to the police.

You also have the right to apply for an **intervention order** against someone who is hurting threatening you. This is a court order made by a magistrate to protect you from violence or the threat of violence.

See the Legal Issues Brochure in this kit for more information about Intervention Orders and taking legal action.



Women and children are never responsible for the violence or abuse they experience. There are things that you can do that might make you and your child safer, but if any of you do experience any kind of harm, it is not your fault.

Taking steps to make things safer takes courage and planning. These are some of the suggestions that women experiencing violence have made:

- 1 **If you are ever in immediate danger call the Police on 000.**
- 2 **Make a safety plan** for you and your child about how to get out of an unsafe situation. This could **outline step by step** what you and your child would do if you needed to leave immediately. A safety plan needs to be checked and reviewed from time to time.
- 3 **Enlist the support of people you trust** to help you get out if you need to. Talk to them about how you would contact them if you are in trouble. The more people who know about your situation the better.
- 4 Ask yourself whether it is **safe to keep information** like this brochure at home.
- 5 If possible have **emergency or other contact numbers close by**, for example in a personal note book or in your mobile phone.
- 6 Help your **child to identify people they trust** to call or talk to. Give them **phone numbers to call** at times when they feel unsafe.
- 7 If possible, have an **emergency pack** ready with things you might need when leaving. This might include clothes, a familiar object such as a soft toy for your child, identification, licence, healthcare card, medication, phone numbers and some money.
- 8 If you are separated or divorced, **think about your safety outside the home**, especially at places where your ex-partner could find you. Separation and divorce do not guarantee your safety; for some women the danger can continue or become even worse.
- 9 If you have any **Court Orders** that cover your child, inform their teachers or other carers.
- 10 **Contact the Family Violence Outreach Services** in your region. They can provide you with **ongoing support and information** about how to become and remain safe.



If you are ever in immediate danger call police on 000

Leaving home



You may need to leave your family home to become safe. This is often very difficult emotionally and practically and it might also seem very unfair.

For now though, your safety needs to be your first concern.

Whether or not you are in danger now, if you think you might **need to leave your family home**, contact the **Victorian Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service (WDVCS)** on **(03) 9373 0123 or 1800 015 188.**

Calling this service is a good idea, because they might be able to suggest other **options you didn't know about.** For example, they might be able to help you find a way to stay at home and have the person who is hurting you removed.

If you decide to leave, there are **women's refuges** across Victoria. Each refuge has a secret address and workers who can assist you to plan a new, safe life for you and your children.

You could also choose to leave and stay in another place you know is safe. If you do this, it would still be helpful to **contact a Family Violence service** for information and extra support.

Domestic Violence workers can give you support with **emotional, practical and legal issues**, regardless of what you decide to do.

Support is very important at a time like this.



TIPS for contact



One really big issue for people who have separated from a violent person is contact between their child and their child's other parent.

Before you make arrangements, there are some things you may want to consider.

- **Is it safe** for you or your children to see the other parent?
- Do your children **want to see** their other parent? If yes, for how long and how often would be appropriate?
- Even if it is safe for your child, **do you feel safe?** If you **don't feel safe** or **don't want to see their other parent**, your child could see them at the home of someone you all trust or at a Contact Centre (these are special safe places set up for families for contact visits; ask a Domestic Violence Outreach Worker how to contact one)
- **If you and the children feel safe** seeing their other parent, where would be a good place to meet? You could meet in a place that is **neutral and safe** (for example, McDonalds, local park, local outdoor/indoor playgrounds).
- If contact stopped but is **starting again**, how could you help your child with this change? Perhaps you could take things slowly by having some short visits first.
- Is there is a chance that you and your child's other parent might **argue or fight**? Is it likely that your child **might feel upset or worried** about arguments when they see the two of you together? Having a Contact Centre or mutual friend to do the handover can sometimes be less confusing and scary for your child.

Very young children will not really **understand what is going on.** As they get older, your child will probably start to see and talk about issues around contact visits. It's important to give your child lots of chances to **talk about their feelings** and to support them and **respond to their worries** in simple words.

These ideas are only a start. It's very important to get further legal advice and/or counselling if you are concerned about your or your child's safety.

Looking after yourself

If you are feeling overwhelmed right now, you could ask yourself these questions:

- What is worrying me most? (identify your priorities)
- How would I like it to be?
- What could I do to get there?
- Who could help me along the way?

Talk to a trusted friend or a counsellor

Take some time out for yourself

Ask someone to look after your children for a little while. This might be hard, but time for yourself is important

Exercise (walk, swim, yoga) – it helps you focus on your body and clear your mind

Eat well

Write poems, songs, a diary

Sing or dance

Draw, doodle, paint or make something

Join a group

Phone a friend or a relative

Have a rest (for example take a bath or read a book)

Take a walk with your child

Listen to relaxation tapes before you go to sleep or when your child is playing or resting



Women who have experienced violence talk about having many different emotions. Often their feelings are mixed, for example they feel angry and guilty, sad all at the same time.

Worry is a very common feeling – worry about safety, about the future, and about the impact of the violence on their children's behaviour and wellbeing. For some women, their child's behaviour may remind them of the violence they have experienced. This might make them feel confused, angry or guilty.

You might feel that your limits and rules for your child are being **challenged or undermined** by other people, especially your child's other parent. It is important to **stay true to what works** for you and your child.

You may feel too **tired** to attend to your child's needs, particularly when they are quite demanding and you have other issues to attend to.

If you are experiencing these kinds of worries and concerns now, it's vital to remember that you don't need to be alone, and that your wellbeing is important.

You have a right to look after yourself and also to be cared for by other people if you want.

Your wellbeing and health are also very **important to your child**. When you feel okay, it's easier to take better care of them.

Feeling good about yourself

If your self-esteem has been affected by domestic violence or if you doubt your ability to cope, you could try **some of these positive** statements. Say them, write them, stick them on the mirror!

I am doing the best I can

I have a right to aim for my dreams

This is going to upset me but I know I can handle it

I have made important and hard decisions and I know I can get through this

I deserve to be treated with respect

I will take each day at a time

I am doing my best

I can do this one step at a time

I know I am a capable person

I am a loving parent

I can ask for help

