

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.

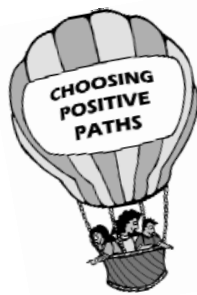
The main focus of the brochures is domestic violence – that is, intimate partner violence – and its effects on children. We also touch on issues of child abuse and other violence experienced by children, usually included in the term family violence.

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 a pre-schooler

4

who has experienced violence



During or after an experience of domestic violence, your pre-school aged child will probably be feeling a huge mix of emotions. **Common feelings** in pre-schoolers who have experienced violence in their family are:

- **Confusion** about what is happening and why
- **Fear** of being hurt, of you being hurt, of their other parent being 'taken away' by police, of losing their family
- **Sadness** about their parents fighting, about the separation, about their own losses
- **Anger** about what is happening

Like younger children, pre-schoolers will often pick up on the emotions and stresses of those around them. Generally at this age, children will show you how they are feeling through their behaviour. They could be teary or irritable if they are feeling unsafe or insecure. They are more likely to be confident and happy if they feel safe.

How Pre-Schoolers Think

Pre-schoolers are at the age when they are beginning to **test their independence** and their parents' **boundaries**. They usually still **think the whole world revolves around them**. They may believe that the problems or violence are their fault.

The ways **children see the world** might be **different** to the ways we see things as adults, so it's important to ask your child how they are going.

You and Your Child

You might find that experiences of violence have affected **your relationship with your child**. It might take time and patience to **rebuild trust** and communication between the two of you.

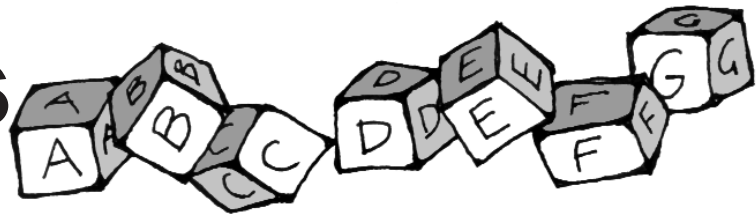
Getting through this experience

You are one of the people who knows what's good for your child. Your judgement and **instincts are valuable**, so listen to them and to your child.

It's also important to listen and learn from other people whose wisdom and experience you respect.



Activities



Give your child encouragement and props (old clothes, shoes and costume jewellery

are great) to **dress-up** and play **make believe**

Encourage your child to participate in **playgroups**, kindergarten. Pre-schoolers love to learn and play with other children their age

Use old boxes, coloured paper, non-toxic paints and other bits and pieces to **make things**. Pre-schoolers love to be creative

Encourage your child to **draw** and then **tell you** about their drawing. It's said that a picture can say a thousand words!

Praise and **display** your child's drawings to build their self-esteem

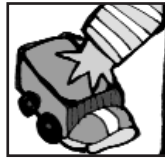
Go to the park and run around, play on the equipment, **explore nature** by pointing out birds and insects that you come across

Read to your child often and encourage your child to share their feelings about their story.

Discuss feelings including happiness, sadness and anger

Ask your child questions about their day

Help your child to **learn how to dress** by teaching them how to use buttons and zips, tie shoelaces and put shoes on the right feet. They will often still need help, but don't offer it immediately



Play is a fun, normal and very important part of growing up. Playing lets children learn and practice many different skills. It helps them to develop:

- Physical skills such as catching, throwing, holding and drawing
- **Imagination, creativity and problem solving skills**
- The ability to communicate and to play and share with others
- **The ability to know right and wrong, to take responsibility and understand the consequences of their actions**

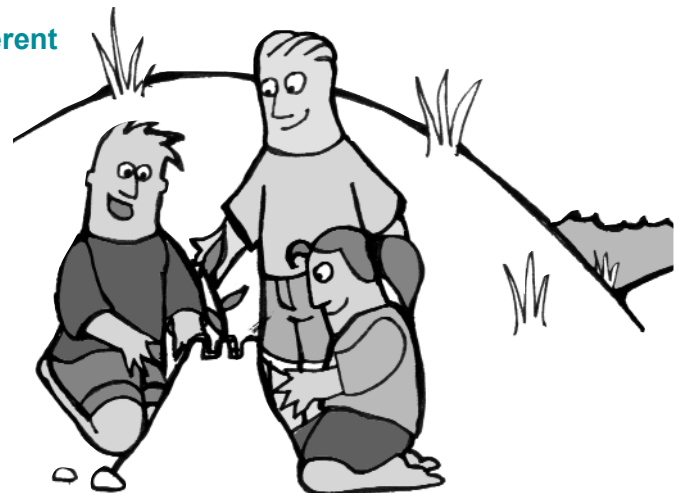
Children who have experienced violence usually have **mixed feelings** that are hard to talk about. They often have low self-esteem and **low self-confidence**, which might be shown by not wanting to try new things.

Play is one of the easiest and safest ways for children to express how they are feeling. Play can help them to develop their self-confidence and work through their worries.

Playing with your child can **strengthen your relationship**. It can also **help you to understand** how they see their world. For you, play can also be a great way to relax and to **have a good laugh**.

When you are playing with your child

- Follow their lead, but make sure the game is safe
- **Let them make the rules wherever possible**
- Listen to them
- **Talk with them about what they are doing**
- Be patient
- **Allow them to try different things and to make mistakes**
- Give them praise and encouragement
- **Be prepared to have fun!**



Parenting can be very stressful, especially in stressful circumstances. If you feel unable to protect your child or are worried that you are not coping or might harm your child in any way, call **ParentLine on 13 22 89**

The impact of domestic violence



Many women worry that the domestic violence will have an effect on their child forever. Children are just like anyone else. They need time and support to recover from traumatic situations. Like you, once the violence has stopped and they feel safe, your child can begin to heal from their experience.

If your child has experienced violence they might:

- **Feel responsible** for arguments they hear
- Be very **clingy** or unwilling to try new things
- Be **difficult to understand** or use baby talk
- Find it **hard to share**
- **Withdraw**, become quiet, not play much
- Have **difficult** behaviour (for example, doing the opposite of what is asked)
- Be **aggressive** towards other people – including you (for example, biting, kicking, hitting)
- Wet their bed, have bad dreams or trouble sleeping
- Be picky or not interested in food

Ways that **you can help your child**:

- Give them lots of affection, care and reassurance (using hugs, play and words)
- Give them simple and truthful explanations and responses
- Encourage them to make and act on choices

For other ideas, see Tips in the next column and Brochures 7 and 8.

Parenting Boys and Parenting Girls

Parents often get worried about how their child will grow up. They worry that they might behave like the parent who is the same sex as them.

All children need to learn to express their feelings and to know what behaviour is okay.

It's best for boys and girls to learn from people they can rely on, regardless of their gender. Safety, security and stability are more important than finding them same-sex role models.



TIPS



Communication

Tell your child that the violence is **never their fault**

Use play to help your child to show and talk about their feelings. Playing together is very important

Give your child **lots of affection** (hugs, cuddles, kisses)

Give **simple and truthful explanations** and responses that suit your child's age



Behaviour and Self Esteem

Teach your child what is **okay** and **not okay behaviour**. For example, it is not okay to hit or hurt anyone

Talk with staff at childcare or kindergarten about ways to help your child

Tell your child what they are good at. For example, 'That's great colouring in' or 'You are so helpful' or 'Well done'

If your child is **hurting themselves** in any way (for example, banging their head against a wall), call the Royal Children's Hospital on 1800 445 511 for advice



Feelings

Listen to your child and show that you **understand** that things are hard, scary, or frustrating for them.

Let your child **cry and be sad** if they need to

Talk with your child about ways of **showing feelings** ... especially about safe ways of showing anger


Reassure your child that it is **okay to be angry**, it's just not okay to hurt anyone!

Don't feel you have to always hide your own feelings but **let your child know that whatever you are feeling, you will be okay.**

Concerns about sexual abuse

If you think someone might be sexually abusing your child call The Gatehouse Centre on 9345 6391.

Ages & Stages



Every child is different and each develops at her or his own rate.

However, trauma or stress can mean that a child's development might be slower than **average**. Often your child will **catch up** when the violence has stopped and **they feel safe again**. The **ideas** mentioned in this brochure can help as well.

If you are **worried** about your child's development or if you would like some new ideas to help them out, it might be good to **talk with somebody** whose opinion and knowledge you value.

Talking things through might also help you to feel better. This is just as important.

Some people who might be able to help are:

- **Doctors**
- **Maternal and Child Health Nurses**
- **Social workers**
- **Children's workers**
- **Counsellors**

You can find these people at your local Community Health Centre, regional Parenting Service or local Council.

For other suggestions, see Brochure 10 – Who Can Help?

3 to 3½ years

- Becomes more comfortable being separated from familiar adults for a short time
- **Walks up stairs one step at a time**
- Jumps with two feet
- **Talks more and uses new words**
- Sometimes fights with other children over playthings
- **Recognises people and things in pictures**
- Says 'no' more often

3½ to 4 years

- Walks up and down stairs easily
- **Can throw and kick a ball, hop, skip and jump**
- Draws recognisable things and can write some letters
- **Can concentrate for longer**
- Can understand why and why not
- **Talks a lot, mostly 'when, how and why'**
- Begins to understand about sharing and waiting
- **Plays more happily with other children**

4 to 5 years

- Likes to be creative and adventurous
- **Likes to play make believe**
- Starts to learn to share
- **Shows a wide range of feelings**
- Uses parents and familiar adults as role models
- **Co-operates and wants to please adults**
- Wants to learn and increase knowledge
- **Becomes more independent and begins to be responsible**
- Explores their own body and what being a girl or boy is all about
- **Has boundless energy and is very active**