

## About this brochure

**P**eople 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.

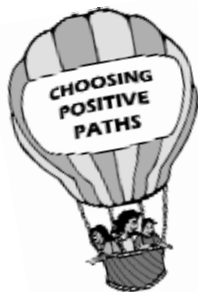
The main focus of the brochures is domestic violence – that is, intimate partner violence – and its effects on children. We also touch on issues of child abuse and other violence experienced by children, usually included in the term family violence.

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**
- **teenagers and relationships**
- **stages of development**



# Parenting a teenager

who has experienced violence



**D**uring or after an experience of violence, your teenager will probably be feeling a huge mix of emotions. **Common feelings** in teenagers who have experienced violence in their family are:

- **Anger** towards their aggressive parent, or towards the parent who has experienced the violence (often because they couldn't make the aggressive parent stop)
- **Confusion** about what is happening and why
- **Fear** of being hurt, of you being hurt, of their other parent being 'taken away' by police

## How Teens Think

The teenage years are a time for exploring who you are and thinking about who you'd like to be. Role models are very important at this age. Teenagers who have experienced violence may be very vulnerable and will need your support and understanding.

Teenagers often feel very **confused** about their family's experience of violence. They often feel a need to **blame** one parent for the situation. Often they blame the parent who has been abused, because it may feel easier or safer to take the side of the parent who seems to have the most power.

Some teenagers try to protect their abused parent. This is a huge responsibility, and one that many teenagers also resent.

**The way teenagers see things** may be **different** to the way we see things as adults, so it's important to ask your teenager how they are going.

## You and Your Teenager

You might find that experiences of violence or abuse have affected **your relationship with your teenager**. 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 teenager**. Your judgement and **instincts are valuable**, so listen to them and to your teenager.

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



# Relationships



Encourage your teenager to become **involved** in sporting or other groups (for example drama or art). These will help them to feel more connected with their community and to develop social networks

Encourage your teenager to **invite friends over** to your house or **visit friends'** houses. Other options may include letting your teenager go out with their friends to the shopping centre, movies, skate park or other agreed places

Try to spend some time with your teenager discussing what is important to them. Often the best times for these discussions are over a meal, driving in the car or at the end of the day

Take an interest in your teenager's likes and dislikes. Try listening to their music or watching their TV shows without being too critical. Watching your teenager play sport can also be a great way to show them that you are interested in their life

Provide the opportunity for your teenager to **decorate their room/space** as they wish to. This will help them to feel like the space is their own

Respect your teenager's **privacy** by giving them space and knocking before you enter their room. Don't go through their belongings without them knowing



## Relationships

Parents often find that their relationship with their child changes as their child grows older. In many cultures, the teens are a time when young people begin separating from their family.

Relationships with parents and siblings often come second to those with friends and boy/girlfriends. Fitting in and being accepted by peers is very important to most teenagers. Being different – for example, experiencing violence at home – is often a source of shame or embarrassment. Teenagers will often try to hide their family life from their peers.



## Sexuality

Most young people explore their sexual identity and sexual feelings during their teens, and many may begin to have sex. They might be sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex and/or of the same sex.

Sexuality is a normal part of being human, however not all forms of sexuality are valued equally. Teenagers who are attracted to someone of the same sex might experience violence, harassment, bullying or gossip about their sexuality. If they are not comfortable about their own sexuality, they might try to hide their sexual preferences or go to great lengths to prove they are not same-sex attracted. Even if they are comfortable and happy about their sexuality, they might still find it hard to be seen as 'different'.

Many parents of teenagers who have experienced violence worry that it will also be a feature of their teenager's intimate relationships. Teenagers need to know that being hurt or hurting the other person in a relationship is never okay. They also need a lot of encouragement about their worth and importance. Some teenagers might need support to develop and use skills that keep them safe, for example being able to say 'no'. Young people who have experienced sexual assault may experience difficulties when beginning to explore healthy sexual relationships. See page 3 for services that can give support to young people in this situation.

## Communication

Parents often find it very difficult to accept these changes in their teenagers' lives. Sometimes they fear for their teenager's safety, other times they might fear losing their relationship with their teenager.

Talking about issues such as friendship and sexuality can be difficult for parents and teenagers. Both might feel embarrassed or hurt or confused. It's important to try to get over those feelings and to keep the lines of communication open.



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

**M**any people worry that the domestic violence will have an effect on their child forever. Teenagers 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 teenager can heal from their experience.

If your teen has experienced violence they might:

- Find it hard to **express** feelings or to trust others
- Find it hard to **make or keep friends** or intimate relationships
- **Rebel** against authority figures such as parents or teachers
- Be **withdrawn** or **anti-social**
- Have **poor coping skills** (for example they might find it hard to cope with stress)
- Have **poor social skills** (for example talking to people they don't know)
- Experience **depression, stress** or **anxiety**
- Experience **eating disorders**
- Believe that females are **less important**
- Be at **higher risk** of drug or alcohol abuse
- Be at risk of **homelessness** and/or dropping out of school
- Be at risk of **suicide** or **self-harm**

## Parenting Young Men and Young Women

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

All children need to learn to express their feelings and to know what behaviour is okay and what is not.

It's best for young men and women 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 teenager that the violence is **not their fault**

Give your teenager **truthful explanations** and responses

**Ask your teenager** if they have any worries, for example at school, at home, with friends

**Listen to your teenager**



## Behaviour and Self Esteem

**Come up with simple ground rules together**

Name and praise positive behaviour

Give your teenager lots of affection, care and reassurance (without embarrassing them in public!)



## Feelings

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

Allow your teenager to **cry and grieve** if they need to. Let them know it's okay to feel mad, sad or scared. Also let them know that they don't have to show their feelings to you, but that talking about things is very important. Give them information about who else they could talk to.

Reassure your teenager 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 teenager know that whatever you are feeling, you will be okay.**

## Concerns about sexual abuse

If you think someone might be sexually abusing your teenager who is under 16 years of age, call The Gatehouse Centre on 9345 6391.

If your teenager is 16 or over, contact your regional Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASAs):

Western Region: West CASA 9687 5811

Northern Region: Northern CASA 9496 2240

After hours all regions: freecall 1800 806292.

# Ages & Stages

**E**very teenager is different and each develops at their

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

If you are **worried** about your teenager'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**
- **Social workers**
- **Youth 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?**

- **Prepares to separate themselves from their family**
- Can be rebellious (this is a common way of beginning separation from their family)
- **Starts to develop their own values**
- Can challenge rules and values as a way of creating their own individual sense of themselves. This is often done through conflict and confrontation
- **Experiences a huge variety of bodily and hormonal changes**
- Has mood swings marked by tearfulness, increased sensitivity, sudden outbursts and inappropriate laughing and giggling
- **May need more physical activity to deal with body changes**
- Begins to work out relationships with peers to find out how they fit in
- **Starts to explore romantic and sexual relationships in a different way.**
- Has an increased need for privacy and a new sense of control and autonomy.

