

Choosing Positive Paths

Pregnancy and violence

Everyone has the right to feel and be safe, yet family violence is still very common. According to Australian statistics (2012), women are most likely to experience violence from a male partner or ex-partner.

Three quarters of women who experience family violence are mothers or care for children. Almost half said their children had seen or heard the violence. People caring for a child who has experienced family violence are often

worried about how the child is affected.

For children, experiencing family violence means knowing about, seeing or hearing violence in their home. It also means the child themselves can be hurt, abused or controlled. All forms of violence in the family affect children and are types of child abuse. A child's ability to cope can depend on many things.

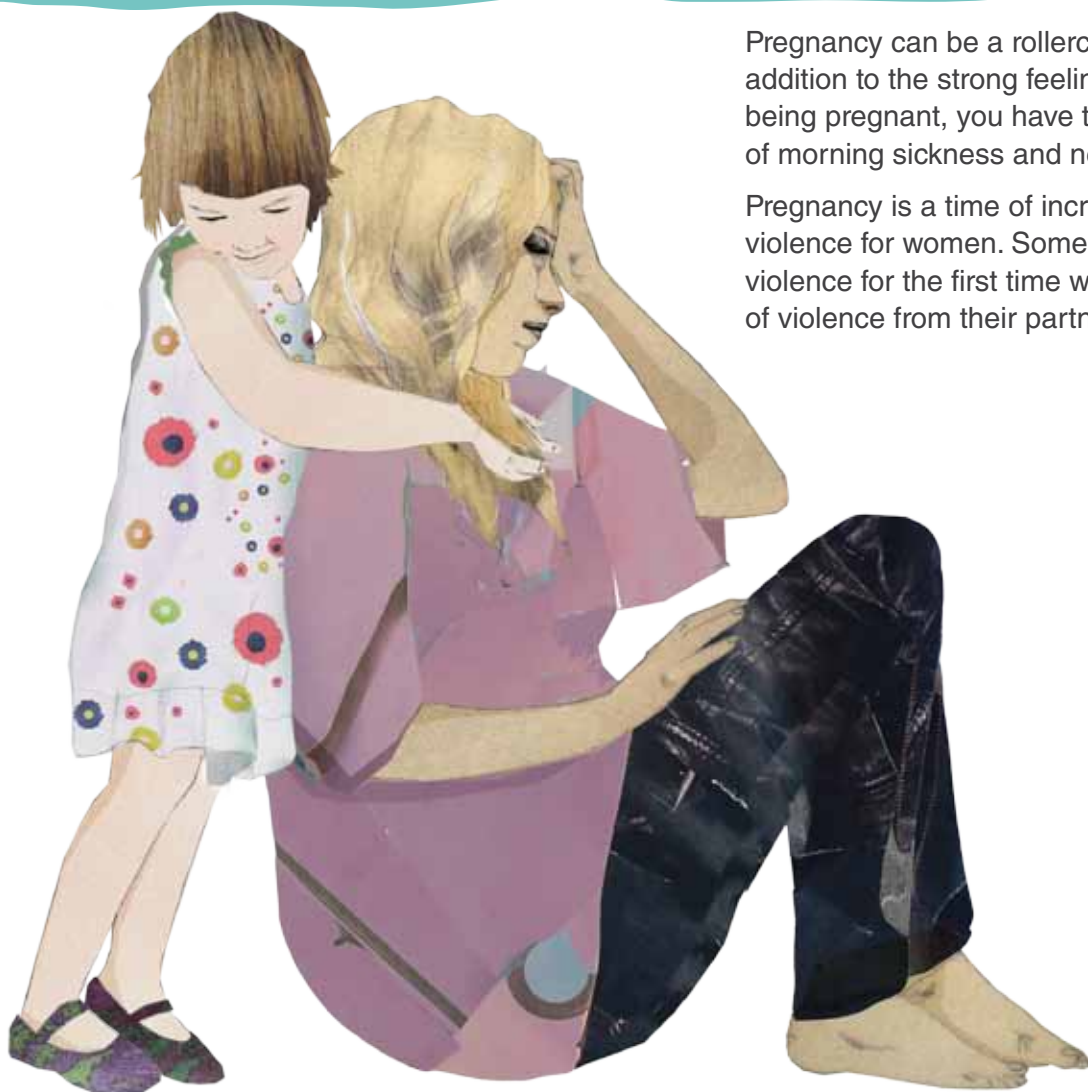
You can do a lot to help. This brochure can help you understand and

support children who have experienced family violence. Most family violence is directed at women so the language used here is for mothers ('you').

However, the information is also helpful for other primary carers – fathers, grandparents, aunts, family friends and foster parents. The phrase 'your child' means 'a child in your care'; 'dad' or 'father' refers to the child's other parent.

This brochure contains tips and information about:

- The impact of family violence on you and your unborn baby
- Planning your safety
- Looking after yourself
- Services that can help
- Activities you can try



Pregnancy can be a rollercoaster of emotions. In addition to the strong feelings you may have about being pregnant, you have to manage the challenges of morning sickness and new health issues.

Pregnancy is a time of increased risk of family violence for women. Some women experience violence for the first time when pregnant, or the level of violence from their partner gets worse.

The impact of family violence

Experiencing family violence can mean that, at times, your pregnancy can feel less joyful than society leads you to expect. Combined with other daily stresses, it can feel overwhelming.

During pregnancy and after having the baby you can be at your most vulnerable. You might worry that your baby will be hurt physically or psychologically. The violence you experience can increase the risk of miscarriage, pre-term delivery or low birth weight.

You might worry about money and having a baby and what that means for your relationship with your partner. Family violence can also include being controlled, so you can't access the medical care, nutrition, rest or support that you need.

Experiencing violence may also impact on the capacity for you and the baby to bond and that can increase your risk of post natal depression.

Make a safety plan

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

There are many steps to being safe and happy again, and it can help to take it slowly... but some things can't wait.

Plan for your safety today.

1. Call the police on 000 if you are in danger
2. Tell the police you are pregnant and, if you have other children, ask that they are included on an intervention order if you or the police apply for one (see brochures 9 and 10)
3. Plan the steps you can take to get out of an unsafe situation. Regularly review your plan
4. Ask for support from people you trust. Talk to them about how you would make contact if you were in trouble
5. Think about whether it is safe to keep information like this brochure at home
6. If possible, have emergency or other contact numbers close by, for example, in a notebook or on your mobile phone
7. Keep copies of intervention orders with you at all times and give copies to your support people
8. If possible, hide or leave an emergency pack with a friend. It should include clothes, copies of identification, licence, healthcare card, medication, phone numbers and money
9. If you are separated or divorced, think about your safety outside the home, especially where your ex-partner could find you. Separation and divorce do not guarantee your safety; the danger can continue, change or become worse
10. Contact the family violence service in your region for ongoing support about how to become safe



Looking after yourself

During or after an experience of family violence, you will feel a mix of emotions including fear, sadness and worry. Your unborn baby will be sensitive to these strong emotions.

If you are stressed, your unborn baby will be stressed too. Chemicals produced in your body when you are stressed can potentially affect your baby's development.

The best solution is for the violence to stop, but this is up to the person who is using violence. Leaving the relationship can also be difficult and stressful. There are things that you can do to minimise the effects of stress on you and your unborn baby while you're working out what to do.

The most important thing is to make time for yourself and your unborn baby. Make sure you get enough sleep, eat a nourishing diet, do some gentle exercises and keep your medical appointments.

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

- What is worrying me most?
- What is most important? How would I like it to be?
- What could I do to get there?
- Who could help me along the way?

Things you can do

- Talk to a trusted friend or a counsellor
- Ask someone to look after your children or help out with chores for a little while. This might be hard, but taking time out for yourself is important
- Exercise (walking, swimming, yoga) is one of the quickest ways to relax. Moving around also helps you focus on your body and clear your mind
- Give yourself a hand or foot massage to relieve aches and pains
- Eat healthy food
- Write in a diary
- Sing or dance
- Listen to music
- Draw, doodle, colour in, paint or make something
- Join a social group
- Phone a friend or a relative
- Have a rest (e.g. take a bath or read a book)
- Take a walk with your child or a friend
- Listen to relaxation tapes before you go to sleep or when your child is playing or resting

Activities you can try

Breathing exercise

To relieve tension and increase oxygen in your blood, count backwards from 27 in your head while focusing on long slow breaths:

I am breathing in 27
I am breathing out 27

I am breathing in 26
I am breathing out 26

I am breathing in 25
I am breathing out 25...

If you forget the number you're up to, go back to 27.

Feeling good about yourself

If your confidence in yourself has been affected by family violence, you could try some of these positive statements. Say them or write them down:

- My baby and I have a right to be safe
- I deserve to be treated with respect
- I am doing the best I can
- I have a right to aim for my dreams
- This is going to be hard but I know I can handle it
- I have made important and hard decisions, I can get through this
- I can do this one step at a time
- I know I am a capable person
- I can ask for help

Where to get help

Services for pregnant women and new mothers

If you are pregnant and experiencing family violence, there is help available.

Talk to your:

- GP or obstetrician
- Maternal and child health nurse
- Family and friends you trust
- Counsellor or social worker

These services are also helpful for pregnant women and new mothers:

Maternal and Child Health Nurse Health Line

13 22 29
24 hrs / 7 days

Tweddle Child and Family Health Service

03 9689 1577
tweddle.org.au

PANDA

(Post and Antenatal Depression Association)
1300 726 306
panda.org.au

Caroline Chisholm Society

1800 134 863
carolinechisholmsociety.com.au

Services for new fathers

Becoming a parent is a major life change. There are special parenting programs for new families, and also counselling for men to assist their transition to fatherhood.

Men can seek help and referral from their family and friends they trust, their GP, or find about support groups from council or community health centres.

Parentline

13 22 89 (7 days, 8am-12pm)

Relationships Australia

1300 364 277

Men's Referral Service

1300 766 491
mrs.org.au



Crisis services

If you are in immediate danger call:
Victoria Police 000

Safe Steps

1800 015 188
24hr family violence response line for women

Men's Referral Service

1300 766 491
24hr family violence support line for men

Women and children's services

If you think you are experiencing family violence contact the service in your region (Mon-Fri, 9-5):



Berry Street

Northern suburbs
(03) 9450 4700

Grampians
(03) 5330 5000

Women's Health West

Western suburbs
(03) 9689 9588



Referral services

Call these services to find the closest family violence service to you:

WIRE Women's Support Line

1300 134 130

1800 RESPECT

1800 737 732

Please photocopy any part of this parenting kit freely. For extra copies call Women's Health West or Berry Street, or download the kit from our websites: www.whwest.org.au or www.berrystreet.org.au

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