

# Choosing Positive Paths

## Parenting a teenager who has experienced violence

13 to 18 years

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.

Children respond to what's going on around them.

For children, experiencing family violence means knowing about, seeing or hearing violence in their home. It also means the child themselves being 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 teenagers
- Teenagers and relationships
- Stages of development

During or after an experience of family violence, your teenager will probably be feeling a huge mix of emotions. It is common for teenager to feel:

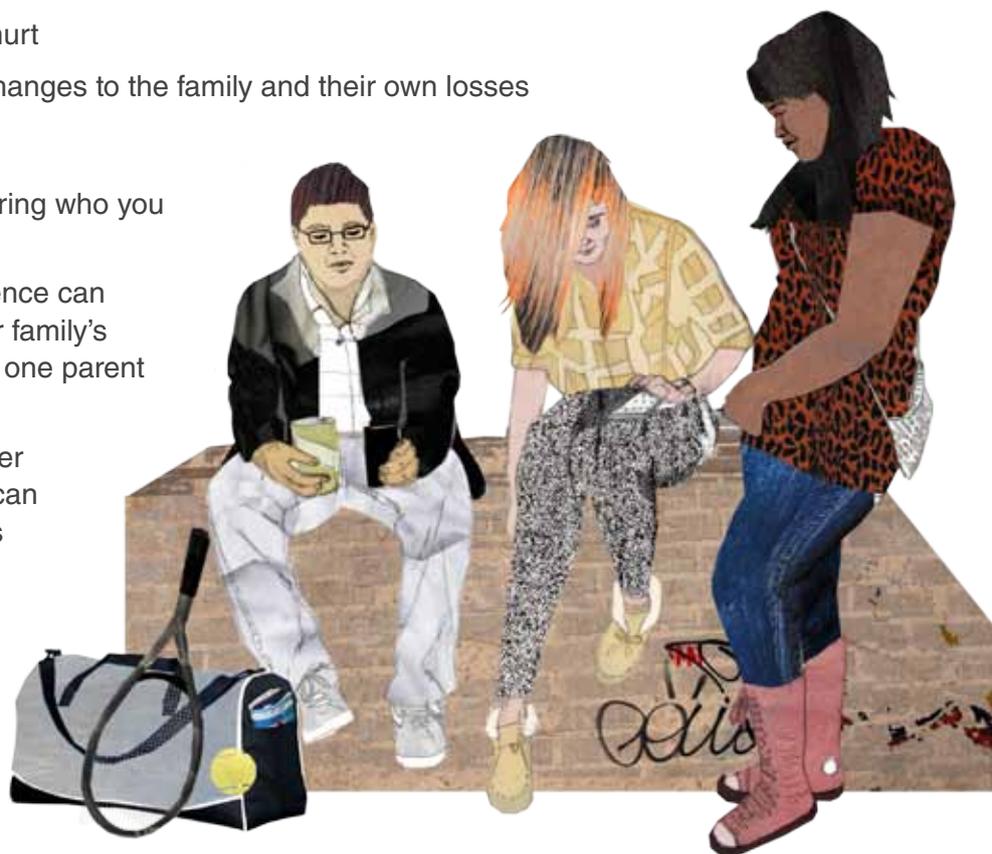
- Anger towards the parent who has used violence, or towards the parent who has experienced the violence (often because they couldn't stop it)
- Confusion about what is happening and why
- Fear of being hurt or of you being hurt
- Sadness about the violence, any changes to the family and their own losses

### How teens think

The teenage years are a time for exploring who you are and who you'd like to be.

Teenagers who have experienced violence can be vulnerable and confused about their family's experience of violence and may blame one parent for the situation.

Teenagers are more aware than younger children of how complex relationships can be. Teenagers might keep their feelings about the violence to themselves. It is important to find ways to help teenagers to safely express their thoughts and worries. They are more likely to share their feelings if you stay calm, open and non-judgemental in your tone and words.



# The impact of family violence

Many parents worry that the experience of family violence will affect their child forever. Teenagers need time and support to recover from traumatic situations. Like you, once the violence has stopped and they feel safe, your teenager can begin to heal. If your teenager has experienced violence, they might:

- Have difficulty showing feelings, trusting others, making or keeping friends or relationships
- Experience bullying or be bullies (including cyberbullying)
- Rebel against authority
- Take on adult roles e.g. protecting parents or siblings
- Be withdrawn or anti-social
- Have difficulty coping with everyday stress
- Be nervous about speaking to new people or jump into new relationships
- Experience depression, anxiety, develop eating disorders or be at risk of suicide or self-harm
- Believe that women and girls are less important
- Be at higher risk of drug or alcohol abuse
- Be at risk of homelessness and/or dropping out of school
- Return to younger behaviour

Your child could be acting like a typical teenager, or their experience of violence could be a factor. It's important to be curious and find ways to build relationships with your teenager and seek professional help if needed.

## Ways you can help your teenager:

Talking about things like family violence can be embarrassing, hurtful or confusing for both parents and teenagers, but it's important to:

- Listen
- Tell your teenager the violence is never their fault
- Give truthful explanations and responses
- Ask if they have any worries, e.g. at school, at home, with friends
- Use examples from TV or other situations to help discuss relationships or values
- Show that you understand if things are hard, scary or frustrating for them
- Explain that everyone has a choice about how we act. Help them to identify different feelings, so they can reflect and choose what to do next
- Encourage your teenager to contact a counsellor or youth service

## Tips

### Behaviour and feelings

All young people need to learn to express their feelings and to know which behaviour is okay and which is not.

For example, yelling, threatening or saying things that make someone scared are not okay; being honest and respectful, like saying, 'I feel like this... when you do that' is okay. It is important that you try to do this too as an example.

- Talk about ways of showing feelings, especially anger and or disappointment without hurting others or themselves
- Allow them to cry and grieve if they need to, and notice what makes them feel happy
- Come up with simple rules to make talking about feelings safe
- Name and praise positive behaviour and values
- Give your teenager lots of affection, care and reassurance
- Let them know that they can talk to other people who care and would like to listen, e.g. trusted family members, family friends, social workers
- Be aware that you don't always have to hide your feelings

There are more tips in brochure 8.

## Relationships

In the teen years, relationships with parents often come second to those with friends and boy/girlfriends. The best way for your teenager to discover who they are and how to connect with others, is to be surrounded by adults - men or women - who provide safety, stability and love.

It's important to encourage young people to participate in activities that safely build their independence and support your parenting.

- Encourage involvement in sport or arts groups to help develop social networks
- Encourage them to invite friends over or go to agreed places with friends
- Make time to discuss their concerns, this could be over dinner or in the car
- Take an interest in their likes and dislikes to show that you care about them
- Let them decorate their room
- Respect their privacy. Knock on their door. Don't look at their things without asking



## Sexuality

Most people explore their sexual identity and sexual feelings during their teens and many begin to have sex. One in ten young people will be attracted or sexually curious to people of the same sex. What your teenager learns about relationships now will be important for forming respectful, non-violent relationships later in life.

Young people can be exposed to many conflicting and often unhealthy ideas about sexuality and relationships. They need the help of adults to understand how to create respectful relationships through ideas about non-violence, equality, mutual consideration, and trust.

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. Young people who have experienced sexual assault may experience difficulties when beginning to explore healthy sexual relationships.

Things to discuss about relationships with your teen:

### In respectful relationships

- You feel confident to share your opinions
- You can say 'no' if you feel uncomfortable
- You can both compromise, say sorry and talk arguments through

### In disrespectful relationships

- You are often criticised or humiliated by the other person
- You feel pressured to do things just to please them
- They say they will kill or hurt themselves if you break up with them

For more ideas see [www.lovegoodbadugly.com](http://www.lovegoodbadugly.com)

## Cyber safety

Teenagers can be particularly vulnerable to cyber bullying, inappropriate content and identity theft. The internet is public space and young people need adult guidance to be safe in this space. Set safe internet rules with your child such as:

- Never post personal information (your phone number, home address or location) on social media, phone apps or online games
- Check with parents before you post pictures of yourself online or tag photos
- Don't send or share sexually explicit pictures
- Don't send or respond to rude or mean messages
- NEVER share your password with anyone but your parent
- Don't download anything without checking with your parent first

For more technology safety (see brochure 1) check the following sites:

Cybersmart

[www.cybersmart.gov.au/](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/)

Stay Smart Online

[www.staysmartonline.gov.au/kids\\_and\\_teens](http://www.staysmartonline.gov.au/kids_and_teens)

# Ages and stages

Every teenager is different and develops at their own rate. However, trauma or stress can mean that a teenager's development might be slower than average. Teenagers often catch up when the violence or abuse has stopped and they feel safe again.

## Teenagers

Start to develop their own identity and values

Prepare to separate themselves from their family

Challenge authority, rules and values to creating their sense of themselves

Experience a variety of bodily and hormonal changes

Have mood swings marked by tearfulness, increased sensitivity and sudden outbursts

May need more physical activity to deal with body changes

Begin to work out relationships with peers to find out how they fit in

Start to explore romantic and sexual relationships

Independence and privacy become increasingly important



## Who can help

Some women living with family violence find it hard to cope because they feel like they can't protect their child. The violence can affect your relationship and it can take time and patience to strengthen it again.

You are one of the people who know what is good for your teenager. Your judgement and instincts are valuable, so listen to them and to your teen. It's also important to listen to and learn from people whose wisdom and experience you respect.

If you are worried about your teenager or would like some new ideas to help them, talk things through with trusted family, friends and/or other mothers. You could also talk to doctors, maternal and child health nurses, child care workers, social workers or counsellors. Services for teenagers include the **Action Centre** on **1800 013 952**, **1800 MYLINE** on **1800 695 463**, **Reconnect** on **9611 2452** or **Kids Helpline** on **1800 55 1800**. Kids Helpline also has a web counselling service that connects young people online with a counsellor in real time [www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-help/web-counselling](http://www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-help/web-counselling)

### 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](http://www.whwest.org.au) or [www.berrystreet.org.au](http://www.berrystreet.org.au)

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