

Young People



DEVELOPING STRONG, RESILIENT ADULTS

If young people see their parent or primary caregiver being physically or psychologically abused, they may either experience or use violence in their own adult relationships.

Adolescence is a time when young people start to decide what values they need to guide their lives. They are at a stage where they want to test the beliefs and values that have been passed on to them by parents and teachers and find their independence by changing their style of clothes, hair, friends and the activities they take part in. To help them journey safely through this developmental stage and grow into strong, respectful and confident adults, they need people around them who they can trust, respect and depend upon; who not only provide emotional and physical security, but also help them to understand their limitations.

Whilst you are watching your adolescent child grow into a young woman or man they are also watching you, and learning what it looks like to be an adult. As a parent or carer you provide the most important influence in their life.

Young people are often strongly affected by domestic and family violence. They may have been living with violence since their childhood, and an increasing desire for independence makes them less likely to want to continue to be in an unsafe home environment. Many young people in youth accommodation services report domestic violence in their families.

Domestic violence can have a worse effect on young people's development than separation or divorce. Whether you decide to stay in your relationship, or leave, your daughter or son will, in most cases, still have contact with the person using the violent behaviour. This fact sheet is about the effect that domestic and family violence has on young people and provides strategies for you to protect them against its consequences.

Young people can blame themselves for the violence at home, especially if the perpetrator draws them into belittling or intimidating their mother.



Even if the young people in your family don't see you being abused, they can experience the abuse in a range of ways - overhearing arguments, seeing the aftermath of violence such as bruises or broken bones, or sensing the fear and tension that their mother is feeling.

If you are experiencing physical, psychological or sexual abuse, your daughter/son may experience:

- Anger – either at you for not leaving the abusive relationship, or at the abuser.
- Shame – wanting to keep their family 'secret' away from their friends.
- Care-taking – wanting to protect their mother and siblings.
- Fear – of the consequences of violence, for themselves and their siblings.
- Depression – unable to see how their lives will ever improve.
- Aggressive and anti-social behaviour – to vent their anger or frustration, or simply modelling the behaviour they have seen in their home.
- Substance abuse – to escape what they are experiencing at home.
- Using violence in their own relationships – believing that violence toward their partner is acceptable.
- Reduced school performance – due to exhaustion, lack of motivation or absenteeism.

Normal adolescent risk-taking behaviour can be increased by stresses associated with violence in the home.

Young people are facing very important issues in life, such as:

- Their identity – what it means to be male or female.
- Finding work and financial independence.
- Their sexuality – forming intimate relationships.
- Making and keeping friends.

To do this they need a positive view of themselves – a sense of meaning, direction and self worth, to help them move into the adult world of independence and responsibility. Young people need:

- Safety.
- Predictability in their environment.
- Positive role models.
- To be cared for.
- Unconditional love.
- A home environment free from domestic violence.

WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK WHEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS HAPPENING AROUND THEM?

- I want to do something to make the violence stop.
- I can't concentrate at school because I'm worried about what it will be like when I get home.
- I feel like I'm invisible. When the violence stops no one talks about it. It's like nothing has happened.
- Why can't I have a 'normal' family like my friend's?
- I don't want to go home at night. At least at school I know what to expect.
- I just want someone to love me, to be my friend.....to help me.
- I hope that no one at school finds out what happens in our house.
- I'm worried that I will turn out to be an abuser/abused person too.

Young people need support inside and outside of their family to help them see that they have a choice about the type of adult they become. Growing up in a violent home does not automatically mean they will become a violent or abused adult.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Violence is the sole responsibility of the person who uses it; it's not your fault. However, there are things you can do to support your daughter/son and lessen the impact of being exposed to violence. Be aware that your daughter/son has also been subjected to domestic violence and talking to you, or a professional counsellor about how they feel, can help them overcome its damaging effects.

How to help your daughter/son:

- Talk to them about their feelings, worries, hopes and dreams.
- Support them to make reliable and positive relationships with extended family, friends, teachers and others in their social world.
- Show them respect and talk to them about respectful behaviour to others.
- Show an interest in what they are doing – sport, art, music, friendship groups.
- Reassure your daughter/son that it is normal to feel angry sometimes; however, anger should not be confused with violent behaviour.
- Support and celebrate your daughter/son's achievements in and out of school.
- Tell them that you love them and you are proud of them.

WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR YOURSELF?

There are people who can provide confidential counselling to help you consider your options and increase your safety, whether you decide to stay in an abusive relationship, or leave. The priority is your, and your children's, safety.

Call DVConnect, for free confidential assistance on 1800 811 811 (24 hours).

Read *Everyone has the right to feel safe in their own home* fact sheet, which includes questions women who are subjected to domestic and family violence commonly ask. It is available at: <http://www.noviolence.com.au/public/factsheets/factsheetforwomen.pdf> or www.noviolence.com.au and click on 'resources' and then 'fact sheets'.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT WHAT YOU'RE EXPERIENCING IS ABUSE? ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS.....

- Does my partner regularly shout or swear at me and/or my children?
- Am I sometimes afraid of my partner?
- Does my partner hurt or threaten to hurt me or my children?
- Does my partner force me to have unwanted sex?
- Am I constantly trying to keep the peace to manage my partner's behaviour?
- Am I worried that my partner's behaviour will affect my child's development?

If you have answered 'yes' to any of these questions, contact a domestic violence support service. They will provide you with free, non-judgemental, confidential help and advice to keep you and your children safe.

FIND YOUR CLOSEST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICE

A list of domestic violence services in Queensland is available at:

www.noviolence.com.au/supportservices.html

or, if you do not have access to the Internet:

Call Womensline, DVConnect's 24 hour domestic violence telephone service on 1800 811 811.

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