

Introduction

About this resource

This resource can help you understand the impact of family violence on your children. It provides practical tips to help you support your children to heal and recover from their experiences.

This resource is for parents/carers who have been targeted by someone choosing to use family violence. It is also for professionals working to support victim survivors and their children.

This resource aims to be inclusive of all parents experiencing family violence.

The language used throughout this document ('you') refers to any parent or carer of children who have experienced family violence. 'Person using violence' refers to the child's other parent or carer.

The phrase 'your child' means a child in your care. The information here will also be helpful for other primary carers – step-parents, grandparents, extended family, friends or foster carers.

We also acknowledge that family violence is a gendered issue. Women are nearly three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner, and this violence is most often perpetrated by men¹. As a result, the language used will at times reflect this.

The resource makes the assumption that parents and carers who have experienced family violence have contacted a support service and are receiving help from a case manager or equivalent.



¹Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics – bit.ly/abs-personal-safety

What is family violence?

Family violence is a pattern of behaviour where a partner or family member hurts you or tries to control what you do.

Family violence includes physical things like hitting, pushing, smashing things or locking you in.

Family violence isn't just physical assault. It can also be:

- Stopping you seeing family or friends.
- Pressuring, tricking or forcing you to do sexual things.
- Threatening to hurt you, your kids, family members or a pet.
- Calling you names or deliberately making you feel bad.
- Stopping you having any money.
- Constantly checking where you are, what you're doing and who you're talking to.

These things can hurt you just as much as physical violence.

Many forms of family violence are against the law.

Family violence and your children

For children, experiencing family violence means knowing about, seeing or hearing a family member's use of family violence.

It also means the child themselves can be hurt, abused or controlled.

You might be really worried about how the person using family violence has affected your kids and what impact it will have on them as they grow up.

All forms of violence in the family will affect children. A child's ability to cope and the impacts of family violence will depend on many things. It is not your fault that someone is choosing to use these family violence tactics to cause harm to you and your children.

Everyone has the right to feel and be safe, yet family violence is still very common.

According to Australian statistics (2023), one in every three women experience family violence.

In Australia, it is estimated that around 2.3 million adults witnessed violence towards a parent by a partner before the age of 15.

Section 1

Parenting, violence and your safety



Make a safety plan

You and your children are not responsible for the violence or abuse you experience.

We know you are already doing things to promote your children's safety and wellbeing and that your plan is specific to the person using violence's behaviour pattern. There might be other things you can try to promote your safety and wellbeing, but if the violence continues it is not your fault.

There are many steps to becoming 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 **000** if you or your children are in danger and ask for **police** or **ambulance help**.
2. Tell the emergency services if your children are present during a family violence incident or are at risk. Police can take out an intervention order for you if one is needed, or you can apply for one. An intervention order is a court order that can help to keep you and your family safe from anyone who is using violence. Read more about what an intervention order is at bit.ly/ivofactsheet.
3. Keep copies of intervention orders with you and give copies to people you trust, like a family friend or relative.
4. Plan the steps you can take to get out of an unsafe situation. Regularly review your plan.
5. Get support from people you trust. Talk to them about how you would make contact if you were in trouble.
6. Choose trusted people for your child to call in an emergency. Tell them what you want them to do if your child calls.
7. Keep emergency phone numbers close, e.g. in a notebook or in a note in your phone.
8. Hide an emergency pack of clothes, your driver's licence, identification, healthcare card, medication, phone numbers and money, or leave these things with a friend. Include a familiar object for your child, e.g. a soft toy.
9. Think about your child's safety when they're not with you.
10. Tell teachers or other carers about your intervention order if it protects your children and give them a copy.
11. Think about your safety outside the home. Separation and divorce do not guarantee your safety. For some people the violence can continue, change, or become worse after separating.
12. Think about whether it is safe to keep information about family violence and your safety (like this book) at home.
13. Contact the family violence service in your region for ongoing support. This book is not a substitute for legal advice from a lawyer. If you or your children have experienced violence, it is important to get legal advice. See section [9](#) and [10](#) for more information.

**Download the resource
'My Safety Plan'**

from the GenWest website at
bit.ly/genwest-mysafetyplan

Safety planning with your child

Children have a right to be protected from harm. A safety plan can help children know what to do in unsafe situations as well as who they can turn to for support.

You understand your child best, but it might help to get advice from a family violence service about the best ways to talk about safety with your children.

Safety planning with children needs to consider the age of your child. A safety plan for a young child will be different to a plan with an older child or teenager. It is important for all children to know that violence and abuse is never OK and what is happening is not their fault.

Safety planning should consider the pattern of behaviour of the person choosing violence. You might like to consider:

- Helping your child to understand when a situation or a person's behaviour isn't safe and how that might make them feel. Talk about what is and isn't an emergency and make sure they know safe places or people to go to for help.
- Practicing your safety plan can be helpful.
- Teach your children your phone number and address.

- Give them phone numbers to call when they feel unsafe like an aunty or grandparent or Kids Helpline.
- Make a safety drawing. Draw around your child's hand and write the name of a trusted adult on each finger. Decorate and stick it on the fridge so they remember who to go to if they need help.
- Show your child how to call **000** (triple zero) and remind them to ask for the police and ambulance. Remind them not to hang up / end the call.

If your child is protected by court orders that limit their time with the person using violence:

- Talk to them and the school or childcare about what to do if they see the person using violence at school or childcare.
- Discuss who should answer the phone or the front door.

Staying or leaving your home

You will be best placed to make an assessment about if it is safer to stay or leave the family home.

You have a right to feel safe and stay in your home.

While some people stay at home with a court order that says the person who used violence can't come near them, others need to leave for a few days or go to a refuge.

Leaving home can be difficult but might be the best option for your family's safety.

You might have time to plan what to do or you might need to leave immediately. Think about:

- Where you and your children would feel safest (e.g. your parents' house).
- Who could stay with you so you feel safer at home.
- Your child's needs and what might comfort them when changes happen or if they're away from home.

Family violence services can:

- Explain how to apply for an intervention order.
- Discuss housing options with you, including emergency accommodation like a refuge.
- Offer emotional and practical support, link you to legal services and help you to talk to police, courts or other agencies.

Safe contact with the person using violence

You might worry about how your children can have safe contact with the person using violence. If you think your children could be at risk:

- You may not have to arrange for them to spend time with the person using violence. Talk to police, a family violence service or a legal service.
- If you don't have a court order that states how much time your children must spend with the person using violence, they do not have to spend time with them.
- If there is a court order telling you how much time the children are to spend with the person using violence, consider applying to change this because you could be in breach of the order if you do not send them. It is important to get legal advice if you want to go back to court to change the order. Free support to do this is available, see the 'services and support' section at the back of this resource.

If you think seeing the person using violence is safe, consider:

- Do you feel safe?
- How could handover be easier for you and your child?
- Think of a safe, neutral and comfortable place for your children, e.g. a busy playground or a shopping centre.

Talking to your child about what's happening

Children can be confused about what is going on. Some children might find it hard to talk about this or not want to. It is important that your child knows they can turn to you for support or comfort. You might start with some of these ideas.

- Reassure your child that you are working out how they can spend time with both parents (if applicable).
- Let them know you understand the changes are hard for them and it's normal to have lots of different feelings.
- Ask how they have been feeling about what's happening.
- Ask your child what could make it easier for them.
- Spend time with your children: at bedtime, reading books or playing a game together.

Staying safe online

It is important to stay safe when using the internet via your phone or another device. Things that you do on the internet can be monitored by the person using violence, and people experiencing violence are often harassed or abused by phone or message. Some things you can do to stay safe:

- Use a safe device, like a computer at a library, to plan for your safety.
- Set up a new email address and use it for things like correspondence with family violence workers or setting up a new bank account.
- Change your passwords and use a secure password storage site to generate and keep track of strong passwords.
- Be careful about what you share on social media. Update your privacy settings.
- Add passcodes or passwords to all of your devices.
- Use multi-factor authentication, where you receive a code to your mobile before you can log into any accounts.
- A family violence support worker can get a new phone and number for you, if you need one.

Who can help

Talking things through with trusted family, friends, and/or other parents may help.

You can also talk to doctors, maternal and child health nurses, child care workers, social workers or counsellors.

You can find these people and support groups at your local community health centre, local council or call WIRE Women's Support Line on 1300 134 130 or Parentline 13 22 89 (7 days/8am-12pm).

Some questions that you might like to ask any service include:

- How much does this service cost?
Can I get help to pay?
- Do you have an after-hours service?
- Who will you share my information with? (Many services are legally required to inform Child Protection Services if they believe your child is being hurt or is in danger of being hurt).
- Can I have an interpreter?
- Do you involve the person using violence at any point?

See also the information in the '[services and support](#)' information on the back cover of this book.

Services and support

If you are in immediate danger, call 000 for police or ambulance help.

GenWest

1800 436 937

genwest.org.au

Family violence support service for Melbourne's western metro region.

Berry Street

Northern suburbs - 03 9450 4700

Central Highlands (Western Victoria/Grampians)

03 5331 3558

berrystreet.org.au

Family violence support for Melbourne's north and Western Victoria.

Safe Steps

1800 015 188

safesteps.org.au

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Family violence crisis response line.

The Orange Door

Family violence support services under one roof.

Visit bit.ly/genwest-TOD

InTouch

1800 755 988

intouch.org.au

Free and confidential support services or migrant and refugee women.

Rainbow Door

1800 729 367 or text 0480 017 246

10am to 5pm, 7 days a week

For LGBTIQ+ people and their friends and families.

Men's Referral Service

1300 766 491

ntv.org.au

24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Family violence support line for men.

Women's Legal Service Victoria

1800 133 302

womenslegal.org.au

Kids Helpline

1800 551 800

24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Free, private, and confidential counselling for young people aged 5 to 25.

WIRE

1300 134 130

wire.org.au

Free support, referrals & information on any issue for women, non-binary & gender diverse people in Victoria.

Djirra

1800 105 303

djirra.org.au

Culturally informed family violence legal and support services, predominantly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Read this publication online:

