

# 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 men<sup>1</sup>. 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.



<sup>1</sup>Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics - [bit.ly/abs-personal-safety](https://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 2

# Pregnancy and violence



This section contains tips and information about:

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

**Pregnancy can be a difficult time when you can feel very up and down emotionally. In addition to the strong feelings you may have about being pregnant, you might also be feeling sick or having to manage new health problems.**

## The impact of family violence in pregnancy

**People using violence may escalate their behaviour when you are pregnant. Some people experience family violence for the first time while pregnant.**

Family violence that happens during pregnancy impacts both you and your unborn baby. When parents are unsafe and stressed during pregnancy this can lead to the baby also feeling stressed.

People who are pregnant and experiencing family violence are 10 times more likely to experience depression and anxiety.

Experiencing someone's use of family violence means that pregnancy can be a more difficult time than you were expecting. Combined with everything else going in your life, it can feel overwhelming.

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. When a person uses physical violence towards you while you are pregnant, this is a significant indicator of future harm towards you and your baby.

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 someone's use of family violence may also impact on how you are able to bond with your new baby and that can increase your risk of post-natal depression.

## Making a safety plan when you're pregnant

Alongside [the information in section 1](#) about making a safety plan, there are a few extra things to consider when you're pregnant.

- If you are in danger, **call 000 for police or ambulance help.**
- If you call 000, tell them you are pregnant.
- If you have other children, ask that they are included on an intervention order if you or the police apply for one (see sections [9](#) and [10](#)).
- Plan the steps you can take to promote your safety.
- Regularly review your plan.
- Ask for support from your doctor or midwife if you need it. Talk to them about how you would contact them if you were in trouble.
- You can mark people as emergency medical contacts in your phone. You can search the internet for information about how to do this.
- Keep copies of intervention orders with you at all times and give copies to your support people.
- 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.
- 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 person's danger can continue, change or become worse.
- Contact the family violence service in your region for ongoing support about how to increase safety.

## Looking after yourself

### It is important to look after yourself when you are pregnant.

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.

Stress is a normal response to family violence. There may be some things that you can do to minimise the effects of stress on you and your unborn baby.

The most important thing is to make time for yourself and your unborn baby. Try to get enough sleep, eat a nourishing diet, do some gentle exercise, 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 might like to try

- Talk to a trusted friend, someone in your family or community, a counsellor or someone at your place of worship.
- Ask someone to look after your other children or help out with chores for a little while.
- Exercise (e.g. going for a walk) 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.
- Listen to music or sing and dance.
- Draw or make something.
- Join a social group. Look up your local library or Neighbourhood House who will run social groups and low cost evening classes.
- Have a rest when you can.
- Take a walk with your child or a friend.
- Listen to relaxing music, a podcast or a meditation App 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 a person's use of 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.
- What is happening is not my fault.

## Where to get help

See the back of this book for family violence support services you can contact. There are also specific services you can contact for help if you are pregnant and experiencing family violence.

Talk to your:

- Doctor or a midwife at the hospital.
- Maternal and child health nurse.
- Family and friends you trust.
- Counsellor or a family violence service support worker.

These services are also helpful for pregnant people and new parents:

### Maternal and Child Health Nurse Health Line

- Ph 13 22 29 (24 hrs/7 days)

### Tweddle Child and Family Health Service

- Ph 03 9689 1577
- [tweddle.org.au](http://tweddle.org.au)

### PANDA (Post and Antenatal Depression Association)

- Ph 1300 726 306
- [panda.org.au](http://panda.org.au)

### Caroline Chisholm Society

- Ph 1800 134 863
- [caroline.org.au](http://caroline.org.au)

### Parentline

- 13 22 89 (8am to midnight)

## 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 from family or friends that they trust, or from their doctor. Relationships Australia also has the Support for Fathers website which includes a lot of information to support you. Visit [supportforfathers.com.au](http://supportforfathers.com.au)

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](http://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](http://berrystreet.org.au)

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

## Safe Steps

1800 015 188

[safesteps.org.au](http://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](http://bit.ly/genwest-TOD)

## InTouch

1800 755 988

[intouch.org.au](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://djirra.org.au)

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

Read this publication online:

