

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 7

Parenting a teenager who has experienced violence



5 to 12 years

This section contains tips and information about:

- The impact of family violence
- How to talk about respectful relationships.
- Staying safe online.
- Stages of development.

Due to someone's use of family violence, your teenager will probably be feeling a huge mix of emotions. It is common for teenagers 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 how someone's use of violence has impacted other parts of the teenager's life.

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 someone's use of violence can be confused about their family member's use of violence and may blame one or both parents for what has happened, or themselves.

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 on teenagers

You might worry that the experience of family violence will affect your 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 online bullying).
- 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 teen 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.

The 1800 RESPECT website has lots of information about how to talk to teenagers about your experience of family violence, including what you can do if they don't want to talk. Visit bit.ly/talking-to-teens.

Relationships

In the teen years, relationships with parents often come second to those with friends and romantic partners. The best way for your teenager to discover who they are and how to connect with others, is to be surrounded by adults 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.

Your teenage children will be experiencing a lot of changes in their lives. This includes changes to their body and hormones, as well as developing new relationships and understanding their sexuality.

What your teenager learns about relationships now will be important for forming respectful, non-violent relationships later in life.

There are more tips in [section 8](#).

It can help to talk openly with your teenage children about feelings, friendships and family relationships. Be honest about your experiences of someone's use of family violence, and encourage them to think about what a respectful, and positive relationship looks like.

You could talk to your teen about other relationships in your life and what makes them respectful – for example, with your friends or family members. You could talk about what is and isn't a respectful relationship.

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 about disagreements together.
- You can both spend time with other people.

In disrespectful relationships:

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

For more information about talking to teenagers about respectful relationships, consent and sexuality, visit the ReachOut website: bit.ly/reachout-respect.

See also GenWest's 'Consent, Empowerment and Respect' resources at bit.ly/CEandR, and visit minus18.org.au for information and resources for LGBTIQ+ (or same sex attracted or gender diverse) young people.

Staying safe online

You can help your teenage children to stay connected online while also promoting their, and your own, safety. You might like to speak to a family violence support service before making changes to your online accounts, to talk through what options might be the safest, in consideration of the person's use of violence.

Talk with your teenage children about what rules you can all follow to stay safe online (for younger children, you can set the rules).

Online safety rules should consider the behaviour used by the person choosing violence. Some online safety rules you could consider:

- Turn off location services on your phones. This might mean some apps or games don't work. Keeping safe is the most important thing, and you can turn them back on when things are safer.
- Don't post about your location online, or share your location with anyone. That includes your address, suburb, school, and the location of friends and family you visit.
- Don't post photos online for now. Photos often contain lots of information that can tell people where you are.
- Don't tag or '@' family members in posts until things are safer.
- Check your privacy settings on all your accounts and make sure your accounts aren't public.

The eSafety Commissioner has an online safety checklist you can do with your teen: bit.ly/esafety-check-2023.

GenWest's 'My Safety Plan' also has tips about staying safe online: bit.ly/genwest-mysafetyplan.

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 people 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, people in your community and/or other parents.

You could also talk to doctors, maternal and child health nurses, child care workers, family violence support workers or counsellors.

Services for teenagers include Kids Helpline, for children and young people. They can be contacted on 1800 55 1800. They also have a live webchat counselling service which can be accessed at kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-help/web-counselling.

The 'What's OK at Home' website (woah.org.au/) contains information for young people about what family violence is, why it happens, where to get help and how to help others.

See also 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:

