

Domestic violence - tips for children

If you are a child living in a home where there is a lot of yelling and swearing, throwing things, pushing or hitting – this is called family violence. Witnessing family violence can be very upsetting and frightening. Violence in the home is always wrong and it is never the child's fault. These tips may help you learn more about types of violence, how to stay safe, what to do, where and how to get help if you or someone you love is being hurt or threatened.

Violence at home can make you feel bad

The violence at home may be directed at a parent, a brother or sister, you or another family member you care about. You may see or hear the abuse happening or it may happen to you. When the violence used is towards you or a brother or sister, this is called child abuse. Violence at home can make you feel really sad, helpless and confused.

Often children think they have done something to cause the violence in their family. This is not true, but sometimes you might:

- Blame yourself for the violence
- Feel frightened, sad, ashamed, confused, or unhappy
- Feel sick, have stomach pains or headaches
- Stop eating or not feel like eating
- Cry a lot
- Sleep badly, have nightmares or wet the bed
- Find school difficult
- Lose interest in your school work or your friends
- Have trouble concentrating
- Feel like running away
- Feel angry and want to hurt yourself or somebody else or to smash something
- Have trouble talking – for example, you might stutter
- Worry about the safety of someone in your family who is being abused
- Take drugs or alcohol to cope.

Types of violence

Family violence can mean lots of different things – it's not just being hit. There are different kinds of violence that can happen in the home. The violence may be directed at one of your parents, at you or your sisters and brothers or at other people who may be living with you.

Some examples of violence that may affect you are:

- **Physical violence** – someone hurting you or a loved one by hitting, slapping, pushing, biting, kicking or burning you or another. Someone throwing or breaking things in your home or hurting your pets. Physical violence also includes threats to hurt you or another family member in any of these ways.
- **Verbal violence** – someone hurting you or another family member by yelling mean and nasty things at you or them, calling you or other family members rude names, or shouting or talking to you or them in a scary or threatening way.
- **Sexual violence** – someone scaring you or hurting you by touching private parts of your body when you do not want them to, touching you in a sexual way or them making you touch their private parts, or forcing you to have sex or watch sexual acts.
- **Neglect** – someone hurting you by not giving you adequate care, food, clean clothes, safety, attention, affection and love.

If you think you or someone in your family is being abused

There are important things you should remember if you think that you or someone in your family is being abused. These include:

- The person who is being violent may try to make you feel responsible, ashamed or guilty about what is happening at home. You are **not** to blame for their actions – what they have done is wrong. It is not your fault and it's not a special secret. Family violence is a crime.
- Don't believe them if they say something bad will happen to you if you tell someone about what is happening at home. There are people who will listen and can help you.
- Keeping family violence a secret is unsafe. It's okay to tell someone and it will help you and your family to become more safe.
- Nothing is so awful that it can't be talked about.
- Help is available.

Tell someone about family violence and abuse at home

You can report family violence at home and get help in many ways:

- Find someone who you feel comfortable talking to and trust to tell (perhaps a neighbour, a teacher, a friend's parents or another family member).
- Tell a trusted adult who can help keep you safe and help put a stop to the abuse at home.
- Take your time and try to explain how you or someone in your family has been abused or hurt. It may be very difficult or scary for you to tell and it may be hard for you to find the right words to explain. Take your time and just do the best you can to explain.
- Try using the phone, writing things down, drawing a picture or sending an email or letter – lots of people find talking face-to-face very difficult, not just kids.
- If the person hurting you or someone in your family is a family member, you may feel safer if you tell someone outside your family – like your teacher, school welfare officer, nurse or counsellor, a trusting sporting coach or a Kids Helpline counsellor (see **Where to get help** below).

Staying safe

There are ways that you can stay safe including:

- **Talk to people** – find someone you can trust and who will listen to you. It might be someone in your family, your friends' parents, a counsellor, your teacher, the police or another trusted adult. They will help protect you.
- **Keep on telling different people** – if you feel you are not being heard or your problem is not being fixed, keep telling people until someone takes some action and you feel safe. Don't stop telling because you have not yet been listened to.
- **Remember that your body belongs to you** – no one should touch any part of your body in a way that makes you feel scared or confused or hurt. This includes your private body parts. It is okay to firmly tell someone to STOP if they are touching you in a way that hurts or makes you feel confused or uncomfortable.
- **Know the difference between safe and unsafe touching** – some touching is friendly and helpful such as hugging friends and family members, holding hands with a friend, play wrestling with your brother or giving your sister a shoulder massage.

What to do if someone you know is being abused

If a friend tells you that abuse is happening to them or you suspect they are experiencing family violence:

- Listen and believe your friend and offer them comfort, understanding and support.
- Try not to appear shocked.
- Encourage them to tell an adult they trust or to report it to the police and let them know you will accompany them if they want.
- Don't keep it to yourself – tell an adult you trust. It is important that your friend is made safe and that the abuse does not continue to happen.
- Give your friend phone numbers of services who can help and details of online resources such as the Bursting the Bubble website.

- Help your friend to keep on telling until they feel reassured and are safe.

Where to get help

- Kids Helpline counsellors Tel. 1800 55 1800
- Police Tel. 000
- Child Protection Crisis Line Tel. 131 278 – 24 hrs, 7 days a week
- Trusted family member or friend
- Teacher, school counsellor or trusted adult

Things to remember

- Family violence is never your fault
- Family violence is a crime
- Get help to stay safe by telling someone about the problem
- Help is available for the person who is being abusive

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria – DVRCV

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