

ADULT ISSUES

Many families argue at times but family violence is more than just arguing. It is actions or words that hurt, scare, control or bully others.

Abuse and violence is often shown on television, in movies and computer games. Some people wrongly think violence is a normal part of a relationship.

Everyone in the family is harmed by violence, especially children. Living with the stress of violence affects children's brain development even if they are not the victim. It can lead to social, emotional and behavioural problems.

Family violence hardly ever goes away without help. It often gets worse, unless the person using violence changes their thinking and behaviour.

What is family violence?

Many people think family violence is physical. This is only part of it. Abuse or violence happens when someone tries to control, scare, hurt or bully others. It might be:

- **physical**—when someone tries to hurt you, your children or pets. They may hit, kick, push, choke, burn, shake you or throw things at you
- **verbal**—when they threaten, yell or swear at you, call you names or 'put you down'
- **emotional**—when they do things to scare, worry or upset you. They might drive badly when you're in the car, follow you, break things, or come into your house when you don't want them to
- **sexual**—when you are raped or have any unwanted sexual behaviour forced on you against your will
- **social**—when they stop you having contact with friends and family or other people outside the home
- **financial**—when they control the money. They might not give you enough to run the house, or stop you from working and having your own income
- **technological**—when they use mobiles, email or social media to harass or stalk you.

Family violence can happen in any relationship regardless of age whether dating, living together, married, separated or divorced. Young people can also be violent toward parents and siblings.

Family violence can occur regardless of income, culture or religion.

There is never any excuse for violence, abuse or bullying in a family. It is not OK in any community or culture.

When people are abusive to one another, they tend to 'play down' what they do. Victims tend to blame themselves or 'play down' the effects it has on them and the family. They can even pretend it is not happening. Drugs and alcohol can contribute, but they are never an excuse for violence or abuse.

Arguing or disagreeing is not family violence. Disagreeing with someone and being angry is normal. This can be one of the ways people work out problems. Arguing and disagreeing can be done without anyone being scared or hurt.

Children learn about relationships and how to handle disagreements by watching how others do it, especially their parents.

For further information please contact Domestic Violence Crisis Service 6280 0900.

This guide
and others
are available
online

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Why does it happen?

It might be hard to believe that people could harm those they love. Family violence is about someone using power and control to get what they want, even when it hurts others.

We might think that someone who uses violence in the family cannot control their anger or temper. However, they are not usually violent to others outside the home. They restrain themselves with others, but use violence to control family members.

How does it start?

There is often a pattern or a 'cycle of violence'. It gets worse over time and happens more often. In most cases it does not and will not stop without help.

Build up

A person gets upset or angry at small things, no matter how much you try to keep the peace. This phase can take weeks, days or only minutes before the person explodes.

Explosion

An explosion can be yelling, cruel language, threats or physical violence. In this phase, the victim may get injured or leave because they fear for their and their child(ren's) lives.

Feeling sorry

After the violence or abuse, the person may say 'sorry' and feel very guilty. They may make promises to change, and if you have left, beg you to come home.

Some make excuses because they do not see that the violence is their fault. They may blame you, stress, alcohol or drugs or deny that anything happened.

False honeymoon

During this stage, things often seem better than they have for a long time. Unless the person accepts that they are responsible for the violence or abuse and makes some real changes, the build-up will start again.

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Effects of family violence

Effects on family life

Violence or abuse can result in family members:

- feeling and being unsafe
- low or no self-esteem
- being harmed or threatened
- separation or divorce.

All family members have a right to feel safe. You are not to blame for someone else's violence or abuse.

Effects on an individual

A person who is abused may feel:

- confused by the abuser's mood swings and behaviour changes
- scared, stressed and unable to relax
- numb and alone
- ashamed or to blame for the violence
- helpless and depressed
- unable to cope with their responsibilities.

Effects on children

Babies and children are affected by violence or abuse, whether they are a direct victim or a witness. The stress of violence affects their growing brain and can delay normal childhood milestones. Stress and anxiety from family violence can also affect a pregnant woman's unborn child.

Family violence makes the home life unpredictable for a child. It can make them anxious and affect how they think, learn and relate to others. Exposure to family violence can also increase a child's aggression and make it difficult for them to learn to control their own feelings and actions.

The effects on children can include:

- a range of emotional responses including self-blame, fear, sadness, shame and anger
- a range of physical responses including headaches, stomach aches, sleeping problems, nightmares or bedwetting
- accepting violence in families is normal
- learning that violence or abuse is the way to get what you want

Effects of family violence *continued*

- missing school to stay near a parent or other family member who is hurt or at risk
- not doing well at school
- running away from home
- using drugs and alcohol
- being aggressive
- not having friends and becoming withdrawn
- becoming a bully.

Note: There may be other reasons that children behave in these ways.

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Child abuse and neglect

In families where there is violence there is often more child abuse and neglect. This can be by both men and women.

Children may see or hear violence, be beaten, or they may be hurt during a violent outburst. They may be harmed as a way of 'getting at' the other adult. A child's needs may be neglected because family life is so disrupted.

Some families hit children to 'discipline' them. Hitting children mostly teaches them to fear the adult rather than how to behave. It is best to show children what you expect and to calmly repeat lessons until they learn.

Hitting children may cross the line and become child abuse when a parent is angry.

In the ACT, harsh punishment of children is against the law and regarded as child abuse (*Children and Young People Act 2008*).

What parents can do

If violence is happening in your home you need to get help.

The family member who abuses

- If you bully or abuse others in the family or find it hard to control your anger or temper, you can learn other ways to express your feelings.
- There is never an excuse. You are the only one who can stop it.
- Talk to someone who knows about family violence, or contact a service who can assist you.

If you think you could harm your family, leave until you are calm. Make sure children are safe first. Call Domestic Violence Crisis Service on 6280 0900 to find out where to get assistance.

The family member who is abused

- Has the right to feel safe and is not responsible or to blame for the violent or abusive behaviour.
- If you or your children are scared, you need to all be safe.
- Talk to someone or contact a service who can assist and advise you.
- Some time away from the situation can help you see things more clearly.

If you or your children are at risk, please phone the Police on 000.

How to help your children

Children need:

- to feel safe in their own home at all times and for you to protect them from violence and abuse
- to know that violence abuse and bullying is not OK
- to know they are loved and that the violence is not their fault
- a chance to talk about their feelings and worries
- extra support from a trusted adult
- support with schooling
- to know where they can go to get help in an emergency.

ACT Laws

Which laws can help protect you from family violence?

There are laws in the ACT that help protect you from family violence including:

- The *Domestic Violence and Protection Orders Act 2008* lists all of the relationships which may be affected by family violence and describes which actions constitute family violence.
- The *Domestic Violence and Protection Orders Act 2008* also lists the offences that can be considered to be family violence offences.
- The *Victims of Crime Act 1994* which outlines the rights that victims of crime should expect from agencies in the ACT.

**Don't wait in hope that the violence will end by itself.
It hardly ever stops without help.**

Useful publications

ACT Policing

- *Are you a victim of crime?*
- *Family violence help card*

Community Services Directorate

Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

- *Keeping children and young people safe: A shared community responsibility*

Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

- *Family violence*

Victim Support ACT

- *What's love got to do with it*
- *Safety planning for people dealing with abuse or violence within their relationship or family.*

Reminders

If you are ever concerned that someone else might be experiencing family violence, you can help by contacting one of the agencies referred to in this guide, or contact Crime Stoppers 1800 333 000.

Contacts

Domestic Violence Crisis Service	24hrs	6280 0900
Lifeline	24hrs	131 114
Police (in an emergency)	24hrs	000
National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service	24hrs	1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)

Other contacts

Canberra Men's Centre	9am–5pm Monday to Friday	6230 6999
Family Relationships Advice Line	8am–8pm Monday to Friday; 10am–4pm Saturday	1800 050 321
Kids Help Line	24hrs	1800 55 1800
Legal Aid ACT (free helpline for legal advice)	9am–4pm Monday to Friday	1300 654 314
Victim Liaison Officer	9am–5pm Monday to Friday	6245 7441
Victims of Crime Commissioner	9am–5pm Monday to Friday	6205 0399

Websites

www.cyh.com	Parenting and child health information
www.dvcs.org.au	Domestic Violence Crisis Service
www.kidshelp.com.au	Telephone and online counselling service for young people 5 to 25 years
www.raisingchildren.net.au	Raising Children Network—covering topics for parenting newborns to teens

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Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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