

# Family violence

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

Everyone in the family is harmed by violence. Children are harmed even if they don't see or hear the violence. The stress of violence can lead to problems with children's emotions, behaviour, brain development and learning. The impact can last a lifetime.

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### What is family violence?

Many people think family violence is about hitting. This is only part of it. Abuse or violence is 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 threaten to hurt the children or other people you care about. 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 mobile phones, email or social media to harass or stalk you
- cultural or spiritual, when they put you down because of your beliefs, prevent you carrying out cultural or spiritual practices or force particular practices on you.



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## What is family violence? *continued*

Most violence towards women and children happens at home. Although most violence is from men, women can be violent too. At times, young people can be violent toward parents and siblings.

Violence can happen between couples of all ages whether dating, living together, married, separated or divorced. It happens between men and women as well as same sex couples. It can be across generations and between extended family members. It happens regardless of income, culture or religion.

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

## When abuse happens

- Victims tend to blame themselves or 'play down' the effect on them.
- Abusers tend to 'play down' what they do, or pretend it isn't happening. Drugs and alcohol can play a part but they are never an excuse for violence.

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

Arguing is not family violence. Disagreeing with someone and feeling angry is normal. It can be one of the ways people work out problems, and 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.



## 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 can't control their anger. However, they are not usually violent to others outside the home. They restrain themselves with others but use violence to control family members.

## How violence happens

How violence happens in families can vary. It might happen constantly, or in 'cycles of violence' with regular 'explosions'. Whatever the pattern, violence usually gets worse over time and happens more often. In most cases it doesn't stop without help. A 'cycle' can include:

### Build up

In the build up phase, the person gets upset or angry at small things, no matter how much you try to keep the peace. Build-up 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 life.

### Feeling sorry

After the violence the person may say 'sorry' and feel very guilty. They may promise to change, and if you have left, beg you to come home. Some make excuses because they don't see that the violence is their fault. They may blame you, stress, alcohol or drugs or deny that anything happened.

### 'False honeymoon' or 'false calm'

During this stage, things often seem better than they have for a long time. However, you can still be 'on edge', fearing they will become violent again. Unless the person accepts they are responsible for the violence and makes some real changes, the build-up will start again.





## The effects...

### On family life

Violence can result in family members:

- not feeling safe
- having low self-esteem
- being harmed
- being split up through separation or divorce.

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

### On parents

A parent who is abused may feel:

- confused by the abuser's mood swings and behaviour changes
- scared, stressed and unable to relax as they try to keep things calm
- numb and alone
- ashamed or to blame for the violence
- helpless and depressed
- afraid others will blame them for the violence
- less able to cope with parenting and with life.

Their physical health can also be affected.

### On children

Babies and children are affected by violence, whether or not they see or hear the violence or it is directed at them. Even before a baby is born, it can be affected by the mother's stress. It affects children's growing brain and can delay normal childhood milestones.

Violence makes home life unpredictable for children. It can make them anxious and affect how they think and learn, and how they relate to others. It can increase their aggression and make it harder for them to learn how to control their own feelings and actions. They are also harmed by the stress and worry of people they love being hurt or upset.

When parents are stressed and worried they can have less energy for warm, loving relationships with children.

Some can become distant and withdrawn, and this can impact on children's development.

The effects on children can include:

- feelings of self-blame, fear, sadness, mistrust, shame, anger and low self esteem
- signs of stress such as headaches, stomach aches, sleeping problems, nightmares or wetting the bed
- believing that violence in families is normal
- learning that force and violence are the way to get what you want
- 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 at school or at home.

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

## Child abuse and neglect

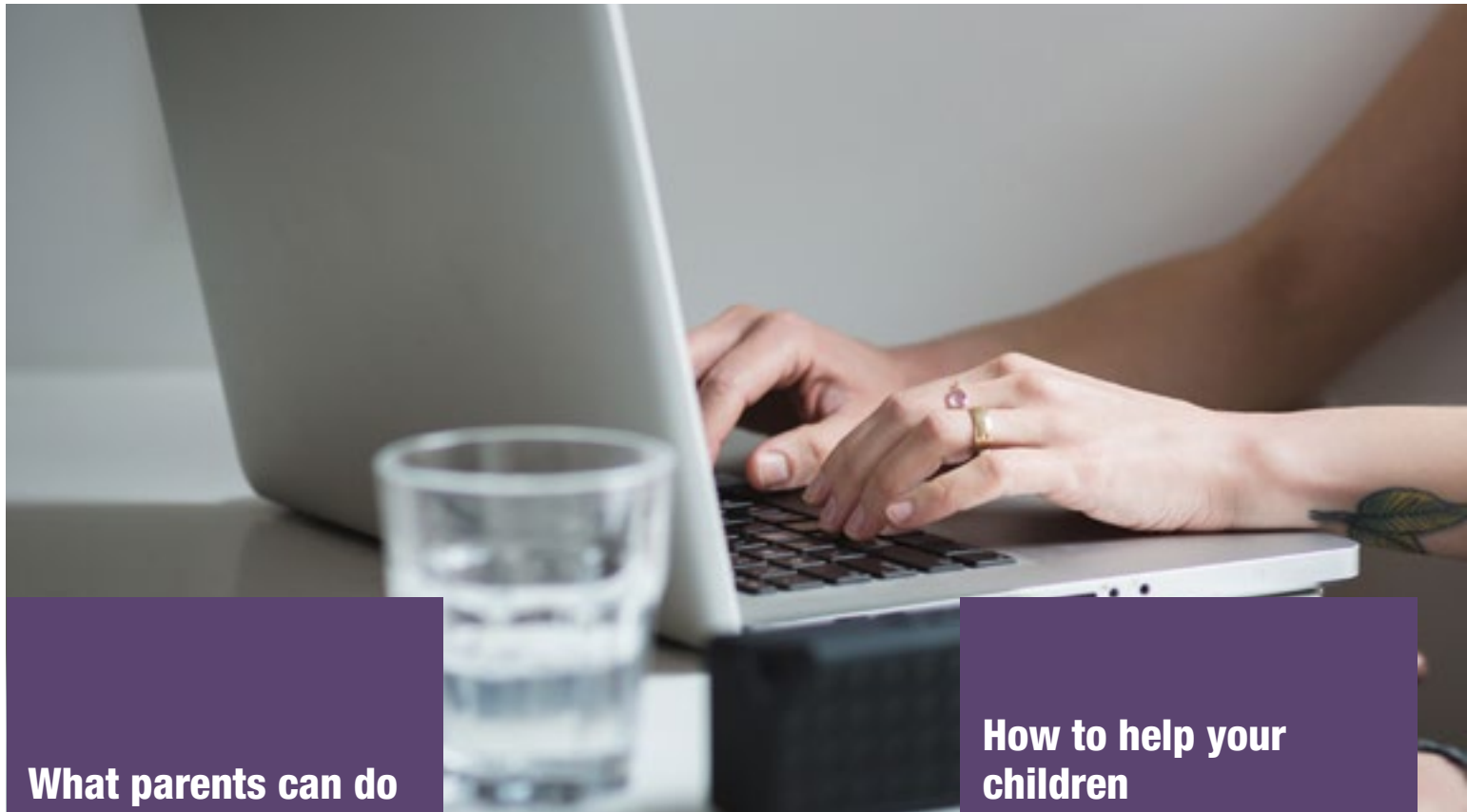
In families where there is violence there is often more child abuse and neglect. This can be by both men and women.

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 doesn't teach them 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Children and Young People Act 2008



## What parents can do

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

### If you think you are hurting your family

- If you bully or abuse others in the family, or find it hard to control your anger, you can learn other ways to deal with your feelings. Family violence is about power and control, not about anger.
- 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 that can help.

If you think you could be a danger to your family, leave until you are calm. Make sure children are safe first. Call the Domestic Violence Crisis Service crisis line on 6280 0900 to find out where to get help, or contact other services in this Guide.

### If you are being abused

- Some time away from the situation can help you see things more clearly.
- Talk to someone who can help you sort out what to do. There are many services that can assist you (see end of this Guide).
- If you are scared, you need to ensure you and your children are safe.
- Ring the ACT Policing Family Violence Intervention Team to seek a Domestic Violence Order. This will stop the person contacting or threatening you, or coming to your home or work.

If you or your children are in immediate danger 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 abuse
- to know that bullying, abuse and violence are 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
- help if they are having problems with their feelings or behaviour
- to know where they can get help in an emergency, for example call the Police, or have a safe place or person they can go to.

Family violence rarely goes away without help. It often gets worse unless the person using violence changes their thinking and how they behave. Many abusive behaviours are against the law.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Family Violence Act 2016





## Support services

### Police

- 000 — if there is immediate danger
- 131 444 — Police attendance

### 1800 RESPECT

- 1800 737 732 — 24 hours

National Sexual Assault Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service  
Information, support, telephone and web counselling for people experiencing domestic and family violence or sexual assault

**[www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)**

### Kids Helpline

- 1800 55 1800

Phone, web or email counselling, resources and activities for children and young people 5–25 years

**[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)**

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Published by ParentLink, Community Services Directorate  
GPO Box 158 Canberra ACT 2601

**e** [parentlink@act.gov.au](mailto:parentlink@act.gov.au)  
**t** 13 34 27

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