

Parents who use violence and want to change

Most parents want loving, respectful family relationships. At times, family life can be challenging, especially when there is also stress, strong emotions, relationship issues or past experiences of trauma. If you respond to difficulties by using hurtful, frightening, controlling or violent behaviour, this harms your whole family. Its impact on children can be long lasting.

The good news is that by recognising the impact of your behaviour and learning new ways to respond, positive change is possible.

Is my behaviour causing harm?

Family violence is any behaviour that makes a partner, child or family member feel afraid, unsafe or controlled. It is not just physical violence. It can also include shouting, threats, put-downs, controlling money, isolating someone from family and friends or trying to control what they do. Taking time to think honestly about your behaviour can be an important first step towards change.

The impact of violence

Children are affected by violence even when they don't see, hear or directly experience it. At all ages, living with violence can cause lasting effects on their mental health, development and wellbeing.



- Unborn children may be affected by stress, trauma or physical harm experienced during pregnancy, increasing the risk of preterm birth, low birth weight and developmental issues.
- Infants and babies are highly sensitive to family tension and violence. They can have difficulty settling or sleeping, cry more or become withdrawn.
- Toddlers and school-aged children may feel frightened, anxious or confused. They can become aggressive or withdrawn, have nightmares, wet the bed or copy the violent behaviour.
- Teenagers may experience emotional distress, trust issues and difficulties at school. Some may feel responsible for protecting family members, withdraw socially or engage in risky behaviours.

Recognising there is a problem does not mean you are a bad parent. It means you are willing to reflect and consider doing things differently.



Living with violence also affects your partner deeply.

- They can experience intense fear, loss of confidence, physical and mental health problems.
- It can be harder to be the parent they want to be. The stress of violence takes focus away from everyday life and children's needs.

In a healthy relationship parents treat each other as equals. They should be able to have different points of view or concerns and feel comfortable discussing them without fear of violence.



Ways to manage stress

When stress builds up, it can be harder to stay calm and respond to challenges in helpful ways. Learning to recognise stress and manage it early can make a big difference for you and your family.

- Take a break if you feel angry, stressed or overwhelmed.
- Recognise early warning signs such as tension, impatience or raised voices.
- Use calming strategies like slow breathing and stepping away from the situation.
- Look after your physical health through sleep, healthy eating and regular exercise.
- Talk to a trusted friend, family member or support person.
- Make time for activities that help reduce stress, eg walking, swimming, being in nature.

Change takes time, effort and honesty. It can be easier to stay focused and committed if you think about why you would like to change your behaviour. Is it to create a safer, more stable home, protect children, rebuild trust, strengthen family relationships or some other reason?

Seeking support

Seeking professional support, eg a counsellor or men's behaviour change program is an important step towards creating a safer, healthier and happier family life. It will:

- help identify your triggers and learn different ways of responding
- show your children and partner you are committing to change.

When violence, threats or controlling behaviour have been part of family life, trust can be damaged. Restoring trust takes time. This happens when family members see consistent changes over time.



Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people.

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