



## The impact of family violence on children

This fact sheet provides information about family violence and its harmful effect on children.

### What is family violence?

There are a raft of different definitions of family violence. The *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) defines family violence as:

'..... violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family..... or causes the family member to be fearful' (s 4AB)

Family violence behaviours include violence of different forms including:

- Physical violence
- Psychological/emotional violence
- Sexual violence
- Financial violence
- Cultural and religious violence

Common to all forms of family violence is the use of power and control by one family member over one or more other members of the family.

### What are some examples of family violence behaviours?

Behaviours that may constitute family violence include (but are not limited to):

- Physical assault
- Impeding access to medical care
- Destruction of property
- Making comments that are intimidating or humiliating
- Unwanted sexual acts
- Threats to harm pets
- Denying access to money or essential items
- Preventing participation in religious or cultural activities
- Stalking, either in-person or using technology
- Using, or threatening to use, systems (including the legal system) to cause financial and/or psychological harm

The Family Law Act (s 4AB) also provides a number of examples of family violence behaviours.

## What impact does family violence have on children?

Growing up in an environment where family violence is perpetrated can have a profound impact on a child's life. In addition to risks of physical harm, family violence can impact a child's wellbeing in a number of areas:

- Behavioural
- Emotional
- Social
- Developmental
- Educational

## How do children experience family violence?

Children can experience family violence both directly and indirectly. The ways in which family violence is perpetrated can often involve behaviours that directly target children as a means of inflicting harm on the victim parent. Family violence behaviours directed at a child's parent also have serious consequences for children.

Family violence is not just an adult-to-adult form of violence. The decision to perpetrate family violence is also a decision about what type of parent a person is going to be.

## How does family violence effect parenting?

Parents who perpetrate family violence commonly have parenting styles that:

- show a lack of warmth
- use coercive and manipulative tactics
- are inconsistent with discipline
- use harsh discipline
- involve regular expressions of anger towards the children
- lack involvement in routine parenting tasks
- attribute blame on others rather than taking responsibility for their own behaviour
- undermine the other parent

Family violence can also impact the parenting behaviours of the parent to whom the violence is directed, including by:

- changing the way they parent in order to appease the perpetrator
- causing them to be less available to meet a child's needs due to demands placed upon them by the perpetrator
- causing them to experience depression, anxiety, substance misuse and other mental health problems that may impede their parenting capacity

It is important to understand that sometimes parents that are victims/survivors of family violence may behave in ways that can initially appear to be inconsistent with good parenting practices, but when looked at more closely these behaviours are actually serving the important purpose of protecting a child from serious harm.

## Are there other ways in which children can be impacted by family violence?

In addition to a child being exposed directly to trauma and risks to their physical safety, and to the effects that FV has on parenting behaviours, family violence can also have an impact on a child's life through indirect outcomes of the violence such as:

- financial insecurity
- housing instability
- loss of contact with extended family
- educational disruptions

## What factors help protect children from the impacts of family violence?

Not all children are effected by family violence in the same way. A range of factors have been identified as being 'protective' for children, such as:

- a non-violent parent that provides structure, warmth, emotional support and positive reinforcement
- positive support from other adults outside their immediate family, such as relatives, family friends and teachers
- close and supportive sibling relationships
- a child's unique characteristics (e.g. personality, resilience), and
- being able to maintain regular routines such as attendance at school and extracurricular activities.

Providing children with an environment in which they feel both physically and psychologically safe is an important priority.

## Does family violence stop impacting children after parents separate?

The risks to children do not necessarily stop following the separation of the parents. Family violence can continue to be perpetrated after parents separate, and for many families separation is a time at which family violence can escalate. In some families, separation is the time at which family violence can commence.

## Assistance or further information

### ***National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Line***

- Phone: 1800 737 732
- Website: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

### ***Police or ambulance***

- Call 000 at any time if you are worried about you or your children's safety.

### ***LifeLine***

- Phone: 131 114
- Website: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

### ***Translating and interpreting***

Phone to gain access to an interpreter in your own language.

- Phone: 131 450
- Website: <https://www.tisnational.gov.au/>

### ***Kids Help Line***

Telephone counselling for children and young people.

- Phone: 1800 551 800
- Website: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

### ***Australian Childhood Foundation***

Counselling for children and young people affected by abuse.

- Phone: 1800 176 453
- Website: <https://www.childhood.org.au/>

### ***Family Relationship Advice Line***

The Family Relationship Advice Line has a range of fact sheets and other information on family law services, including: children's contact services; counselling; family dispute resolution; parenting orders program; post-separation cooperative parenting; and supporting children after separation.

- Phone: 1800 050 321
- Website: <https://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/>