

Information leaflet

Managing the impact of domestic violence

Many children living with a special guardian will have experienced some form of domestic violence or abuse. Exposure to domestic abuse can be as damaging for a young person as experiencing it first-hand.

Domestic violence includes psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse. It is more common than many people realise with one in four women in the UK and one in six men experiencing domestic violence in their lifetime. It can be an act or series of acts used to punish, humiliate, harm or frighten the victim.

How domestic violence and abuse affects children

A child who has experience of domestic violence may develop severe anxiety or trauma. They might form coping strategies to manage their feelings. They may be prone to triggers, meaning they might mistake your actions for abusive behaviour and gravitate outside the home towards people who behave in coercive or inappropriate ways that are familiar to them.

Children can feel guilty because they think they've done something wrong. They can feel confused as they still love the abusive parent but worry a great deal about how their parents and siblings are now without them.

Traumatic memories they've repressed while they were very young may result in them not being able to feel physical or emotional reactions. A child may not be able to recognise their body's reactions: if they have eaten, if they are hot or cold, or feel as if they do not have a conscience.

It is very important to allow your child to express their feelings when they are ready and equally to acknowledge if they're not yet able to talk about it. Let your child know it is okay to feel anger and love towards someone, that they can dislike the behaviour but love the parent and this doesn't make them bad.

You have a key role in giving your child a second chance at learning what a healthy, safe and stable family feels like and if you have a partner, what a healthy relationship looks like.

Practical ways to help your child

- Let them know you will keep them safe. Stability, predictability and consistency are important. Children need authoritative, loving parenting and plenty of one-to-one time and affection.

- In many cases children will have no safe memories of physical contact so steps should be taken tentatively – but don't be afraid to display affection.
- Encourage openness. Your child needs to know they can speak to you about anything. You could leave jars around the house that they can put their thoughts into or have regular family time when you check in with how everyone is feeling.
- Children need to hear from you that domestic violence and abuse is not okay and that they don't deserve to have this happen in their family. Tell them that it's not their fault and that there is nothing they could have done to stop the violence.
- Encourage wider family not to have discussions about the situation in front of the child.
- It may be hard for you to hear your child speak about their experiences especially if the perpetrator is a relative or your own child. Share your worries with an adult who you trust. This may help you feel more comfortable about talking about it with the child.
- Help your child regain a sense of control by finding areas in their lives where they can make plans and decisions and support them to take action. Making daily routines that provide structure and stability will also help address feelings of powerlessness.
- If you are in a relationship try to find time for each other. If you have a loving relationship your child will feel safe, secure and stable.
- Having a support system of wider family or friends will also help.
- In some cases a child who has experienced domestic violence may demonstrate sexualised behaviour such as repeatedly exposing their genitals. Put boundaries in place, clearly explaining what is acceptable and what is not. If significant sexualised behaviour is displayed contact your GP and ask for a referral to the local Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Where to get help if you are in an abusive relationship

If you are in an abusive relationship you should accept that you are not to blame and seek help and support. This might mean you need to leave your home, ask the person causing you harm to leave or take legal action.

If you are unsafe at home try and leave and stay with friends or family, at a women's refuge or you can apply to your local authority for emergency housing. The housing charity [Shelter](#) offers further information about housing options for those in abusive relationships. You can also contact the organisations listed below for further information and advice.

Call 999 if you are in danger.



Key points

- Allow your child to express their feelings when they are ready but acknowledge that this might take time.
- You have a key role in giving children a second chance at learning what a healthy, safe and stable family feels like.
- Let your child know that you will keep them safe. Stability, predictability and consistency are important.
- If you are in an abusive relationship, you should accept that you are not to blame and seek help and support.

Useful organisations

ADVA

www.resourcesorg.co.uk

This resource from Devon Against Domestic Violence and Abuse Partnership provides direct and useful ways to speak to your child about domestic violence and abuse.

Broken Rainbow

www.galop.org.uk

Helpline: 0300 999 5428

Support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic violence.

Men's Advice Line

www.mensadvice.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 801 0327

The Men's Advice Line is a confidential helpline for male victims of domestic violence and abuse. They offer emotional support, practical advice, and information on a wide range of services for further help and support.

National Domestic Violence Helpline

www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 2000 247

This a free helpline run in partnership with Women's Aid and Refuge. The helpline provides confidential support and information and can help women find safe, emergency accommodation in refuges across the UK.



NSPCC

www.nspcc.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 800 5000

Children's charity NSPCC is dedicated to preventing abuse and helping those affected to recover. The website provides advice on domestic abuse including signs and effects of domestic abuse, how you can protect children from domestic abuse and a guide to laws, policy and guidance.

Shelter

www.england.shelter.org.uk

Tel: 0808 2000 247

Shelter provide advice, support and legal services for people struggling with housing or homelessness. The website gives practical advice on how to stay safe if you have to leave your home because of domestic abuse.

Women's Aid

www.womensaid.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (24 hours)

This campaigning federation of over 200 grassroots organisations has a directory of local domestic abuse and refuge services. This website provides a choice of resources to help women and young people. Women's Aid also has a website which offers support to children and teenagers who may be living in a home affected by domestic violence, or who may be in a violent relationship themselves.

Young Minds

youngminds.org.uk

Hotline: 0808 802 5544

Young Minds is a leading charity that provides information, advice and support for young people about their mental health and wellbeing. Their website includes information aimed at young people on how to deal with anger and abuse, and a parent's survival guide with tips for those worried about children that have experienced abuse.

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