

# DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE

# Young People

Young people need safe environments to grow into healthy and well-adjusted adults.

- ... **Environments** where there is violence, intimidation, uncertainty and fear are not safe.
- ... **These environments** are not good for children.
- ... **Ongoing and abusive** parental conflict has a worse effect on children's development and adjustment than separation or divorce (*Jaffe et al 1990*).

- ... **Some people feel** they do not have a choice to leave a violent relationship.
- ... **Even if they do leave** the relationship, the children will, in most cases, continue to have contact with the person using violence.
- ... **This very often results** in the abusive person continuing to exert some control and violence through their contact with the children.

This factsheet talks about the **effects of domestic and family violence on young people.**

It talks about **strategies** to help **protect** young people **against these effects.**

**Many people don't understand** the deep emotional harm children and young people can suffer when domestic and family violence is part of their lives.

The emotional scars might be harder to see, but they can affect children and young people for the rest of their lives.

**Children and young people need strong, positive and reliable relationships where they can find:**

- safety
- soothing
- reassurance
- comfort
- predictability in their environment

"Living in the house with my step-father, you just didn't know either when he was going to explode or when things would be calm or they'd get out of control. So it was very much on edge. You didn't know from one day to the next what was going to happen." (16 year old female) (*Irwin et al 2002 p113*)

**A reliable and positive relationship is vital to helping children and young people manage the stress and trauma in their lives.** Ongoing domestic and family violence can stop parents from providing these things (*McIntosh 2000; Knowlton & Schultz 1999*).

Looking after the needs of your children when you are in an abusive relationship is extremely difficult. It's very important to take good care of yourself - find ways to keep contact with friends and family; make sure you *have a safety plan* if, for whatever reason, you remain in the relationship; **ask for help.**

## CONTACTS LIST

If you are in immediate danger  
call 000

**dvconnect (24 hrs)** - Ph: 1800 811 811  
Domestic and family violence telephone  
service for women, children and young  
people

**dvconnect Men's Line**  
Ph: 1800 600 636  
(Mon – Fri 9am – 5pm)

**Kids Help Line (24 hrs)**  
Ph: 1800 551 800

**Parentline** - Ph: 1300 30 1300  
(8am – 10pm 7days/week)  
Confidential support, information and  
referral for parents

**If you are worried that a child is being  
abused, contact the Department of  
Families:**

**General enquiries**  
Ph: 1800 811 810, or  
(07) 3224 8045 (Brisbane)  
**After hours & emergencies**  
Ph: 1800 177 135, or  
(07) 3235 9999 (Brisbane)

*For a list of area offices look in your White  
Pages under Department of Families*

**Community Child Health Service –**  
Telephone Information & Advisory Service  
Ph: 1800 177 279 (outside Brisbane)  
Ph: 07 3862 2333 (Brisbane)

**Lifeline (24 hrs)** - Ph: 13 11 14

**Men's Line Australia (24 hrs)**  
Ph: 1300 789 978  
Information, support and referral

**Disability Information & Awareness  
Line** - Ph: 1800 177 120 or (07) 3224  
8031 (Brisbane)

**Immigrant Women's Support Service**  
Ph: (07) 3846 3490 (Brisbane)  
Website: [www.iwss.org.au](http://www.iwss.org.au)

**Kinections**  
Counselling line  
Ph (07) 3435 4300 (Brisbane)  
Parenting courses  
Ph: (07) 3435 4343 (Brisbane)  
Website: [www.kinections.com.au](http://www.kinections.com.au)

**Relationships Australia**  
Ph 1300 364 277

**Legal Aid Queensland**  
Women's Legal Aid - Ph: 1300 651 188  
Domestic Violence Unit  
Ph: 1300 651 188 (men and women)

**Women's Legal Service**  
Ph: 1800 677 278 or  
(07) 3392 0670 (Brisbane)

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Women's Legal and Advocacy Service**  
Ph: 1800 442 450

Local Contact:

**REMEMBER:** There are people who can help you and your children confidentially, regardless of whether you want to leave the relationship or stay. The priority is the safety of you and your children (see the Contacts List for details).

## Young People

### Adolescence is the launching pad for adulthood.

...Young people need a strong and positive view of themselves and a sense of meaning, direction and power to help them move into the adult world of responsibility and independence.

...Young people are facing very important life issues such as:

- ...identity ; what it means to be male or female
- ...finding work and financial independence
- ...sexuality; intimate relationships
- ...finding meaning in their lives
- ...keeping friendships

"I couldn't deal with the fact of everything that happened. Um, so I think it was about three months after he left I tried to commit suicide." **(16 year old female)** (Irwin et al 2002 p116)

Living with domestic and family violence often interferes with a young person's progress into healthy adult relationships.

Both young women and men's reactions to living with domestic and family violence often show in behaviours, thoughts and feelings.

#### **Behaviours like:**

...Risk taking, impulsiveness, aggression, blaming the parent who is being abused, using violence in their own relationships, sexual violence, abusing alcohol or other drugs, suicide.

#### **Thoughts like:**

...Violence is a natural part of a relationship and an acceptable way to get what you want; women ask for the abuse.

#### **Feelings like:**

...Depression, stress, worrying, loss of confidence, feeling worthless, frightened, cautious or distrusting of people, showing no emotion about anything.

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By the age of 12 years, differences in young people's attitudes to violence begin to show.

... Boys often place the blame for the violence on the person being abused (*Malos 2000.*)

... Society often expects men and women to act in certain ways – *but there is no excuse for violence.*

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**...Some young men who have lived with domestic and family violence mistakenly learn that:**

- *'Real men'* use intimidation and force to get their way
- Expressing sadness and fear or talking about problems or worries is a sign of weakness
- Men have a right and a duty to oversee, direct and judge a woman's activities
- Men have the authority to punish a woman if he thinks she has failed to meet his standards or predict his needs.

**These young men learn to believe their needs are more important than anyone else's.** (*Dobash & Dobash 1998*)

"We need people who will listen to us and who will believe us. And kids have got to learn that it's not right. A lot of kids think that it's right... I didn't know what he was doing was wrong. I knew I didn't like it."

(13 year old female) (*Irwin et al 2002*)

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**...Some young women who have lived with domestic and family violence mistakenly learn that:**

- *She should be able to predict, interpret and fulfil her partner's needs*
- *His judgement is more valuable than hers*
- *She should be punished for disappointing her partner*
- *She should answer to her partner.*

**These young women learn to believe their needs are less important than their partner's.** (*Dobash & Dobash 1998*)

"I just thought it was the normal part of the household routine. Give the woman a couple of smacks to the head, and everything was OK"

(16 year old female) (*Irwin et al 2002 p115*).

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## WHAT CAN I DO?

**Get support for yourself** – find ways to keep in contact with family, friends, professional help. Kids look to parents for reassurance, security and certainty – getting support and help for yourself is an extremely important way to help your child.

**Make a decision to keep you and your children safe** – there are people who can help you.

- ... Work at keeping a close and supportive relationship with your young person
- ... Encourage relationships with respectful and non-violent role models – eg: friends, parents of friends, teachers, other family, neighbours, celebrities, sports people
- ... Remember that adolescence can be a stressful time where young people swing between wanting comfort from you and seeking distance from you
- ... Remind yourself that adolescence is also a time when young people are striving to separate their identity from their parents or family. They often test out their own beliefs and may disagree with and challenge you
- ... Remember - Your words, thoughts, suggestions and actions *are* important to young people – even if they don't show it
- ... Talk about violence as being a destructive way to solve upsets and explore consequences of violence in relationships
- ... Be clear – *using violence is a choice*. The person who uses violence is always responsible their choice
- ... Acknowledge the young person's feelings and encourage/show them ways to safely express these feelings
- ... Support the young person in feeling successful and strong without violence – eg: schoolwork, sport, music, art, employment, friendships
- ... Encourage the young person to dream and make plans about their future
- ... Remind them they can *choose* to behave non-violently.

"Music has been a big influence on, in how I express myself. Some of the different moods I get in relate to the different styles of music I listen to. Sometimes heavy metal music I listen to that a lot. When I need to calm myself down and rap and R&B music I listen to a lot of that too depending on what mood I get into. Just some of the music helps me to let out my expressions, it helps a lot."

(17 year old male)  
(Irwin et al 2002 p121)

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