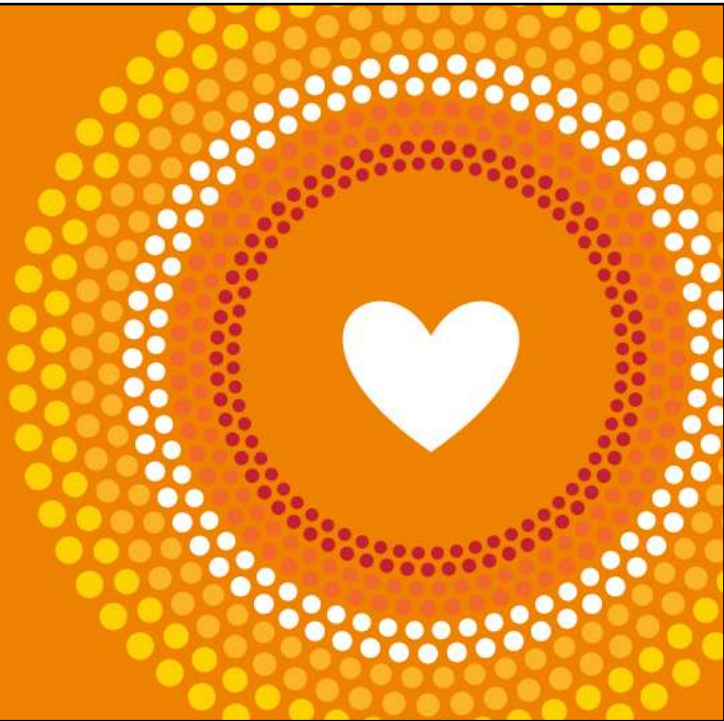



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Supporting children after Family Violence



 Australian Childhood Foundation

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The Australian Childhood Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of this land and we pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future.

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Learning outcomes

- What is family violence
- Understand the impact of family violence on children and young people
- Discover support options for those who experience family violence
- Know how to help children exposed to family violence to recover from trauma



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What is Family Violence?



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What is family violence?

Family violence is deliberate behaviour where a perpetrator uses coercion and control to intimidate and cause fear to a victim.

Family violence is categorised as:

- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Financial Abuse
- Verbal Abuse
- Spiritual and Cultural Abuse

Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence WA



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Children “Witnessing” family violence

”Witnessing” family violence includes when a child or young person is exposed to:

- Seeing the impact of the violence (bruising, distress, damaged property etc.)
- Witnessing their mother/father lying about how the mothers injuries occurred
- Sensing their mother’s fear
- Living with the effects of violence on the health and parenting capacity of their mother
- Having their favourite possessions destroyed. (*The Lookout.org.au*)



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When we talk about physical violence- towards children

Tissue damage:

- Holding them against their will.
- Pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, punching, kicking, twisting limbs.
- Using weapons

Sexual

- From unwanted touching of private parts through to sexual abuse

Object:

- Seeing the throwing of crockery; throwing of furniture and smashing doors and walls and cruelty to family pets

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When we talk about violence- towards children

Verbal

- Put downs such as “*use your brains*”
- Comparing them negatively with other children
- Criticising their work; grooming; figure; schooling ability.
- Shouting abuse and threats

Economic

- Keeping them poor
- Not giving them pocket money
- Controlling money they earn

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When we talk about social violence- towards children

Isolation

- Constantly criticising and being suspicious of their friends
- Not allowing them to choose their own friends
- Keeping them isolated-geographically, socially and developmentally.

Smothering

- Frequently checking up on what they are doing
- Doing everything for them so they have no life of their own.

Put downs

- Making comments about them in company through to verbal attacks in public



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Children are affected by violence and abuse if they:

- Witness or hear the violence
- Have to hide or run from abuse because they're afraid
- Have to constantly watch themselves around an abuser
- Have to comfort, clean up or take extra responsibilities for the family after the violence
- Are victimised for supporting their parent or primary carer

1800respect.org.au



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“Family Violence is not a series of isolated incidents or a result of a momentary loss of control, it is a deliberate pattern of behaviour. The perpetrator is not Out of Control, but they Take Control.

Perpetrators anticipate that their victim will resist violence & abuse, therefore they take deliberate steps to suppress the victim’s resistance”.

Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence WA

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The statistics...

- Over 400,000 women in Australia had experienced violence by a partner during pregnancy.
- Close to 750,000 women had children in their care when they experienced violence by a former partner they lived with.
- More than three-quarters of these women (78%) said their children saw or heard the violence.

Cox, 2015

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Aboriginal Family Violence

- Family violence is not a part of Aboriginal culture.
- Family violence is a major contributor to children being removed from their families.
- Family violence has been shown to contribute to poor educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

(Our watch.org.au)



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Tactics used by perpetrator

A child or young person may be used by the perpetrator as a way to maintain power and control. Tactics include:

- Using the child as a hostage or as a means of ensuring the mother returns home
- Forcing a child to watch or participate in assaults
- Interrogating or involving the child in spying on mother
- Undermining the mother by encouraging negative opinions of her abilities and appearance.

(The Lookout.org.au)



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Impacts of family violence on children

Behaviours: fight, flight, freeze or submit activation can lead to a range of behaviours.

Development: developmental delays

Relationships: impacts on attachment to primary caregiver

Emotions: heightened fear response and poor attachment to secure base can impact on child's sense of self, their emotions and mental health

Learning: heightened fear response impairs a child's ability to learn

Cognitions: impaired when in a constant state of fight or flight.

Physical health: psycho-somatic (Brain-body) symptoms caused by stress response can lead to physical ailments as well as potential injury from exposure to violence.

Cultural identity: fractures connections to family and culture

1800Respect.org.au



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Outcomes on young people

- Depression and/or anxiety
- Violent outbursts
- Low academic achievement
- Eating disorders
- Absconding from home/school
- Risk taking behaviours
- Substance use.
- Violence in their own intimate relationships.



The Lookout.org.au



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Beliefs a child or young person may hold as a result of family violence

- My needs are not important
- This is what relationships look like
- I have to look after others
- It's mum's fault – she is crazy (Maternal alienation)
- This doesn't happen to anyone else
- I must be bad (Its my fault)
- I can't get close to anyone or I will get hurt



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Impacts of family violence during pregnancy

- High levels of toxic stress in pregnant mothers
- Elevated cortisol is transmitted across the placenta mimicking stress in the foetus.
- The foetus is then born with an altered stress response.
- Low birth, premature labour and miscarriage
- Maternal substance abuse and smoking
- Maternal depression/anxiety/post-natal depression

Impact on parent – child bond

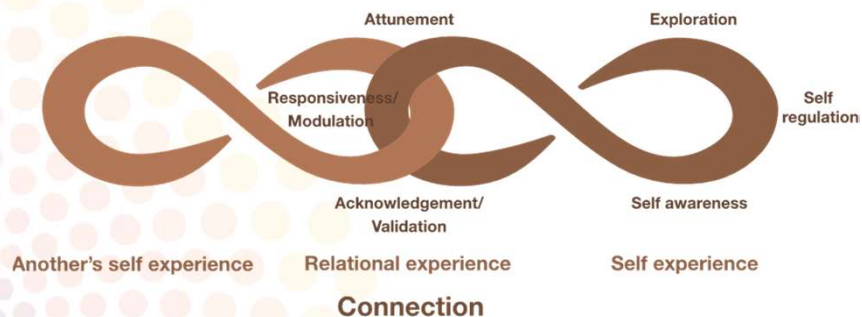
- Diminishes capacity for mother to be present for her child
- Often preoccupied with the perpetrator
- Little capacity to provide nurturing or strengthen attachment with child
- Mother likely to have a diminished sense of self
- Perpetrator often sabotages relationship with the child
- Perpetrating parent, who should be their source of safety is their source of fear



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The right hemisphere in infancy

Normatively develops in an integrated fashion through healthy attuned, co-regulatory relationships in the primary years of life.

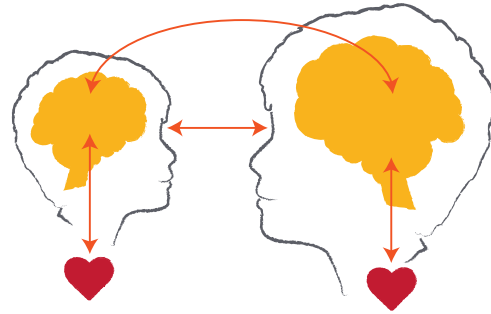


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The right hemisphere in relationship

These primary relationships contribute to:

- stored internal working models of primary relationships recorded in the right hemisphere
- the perception of emotion in self and others, enabling empathy and humour.



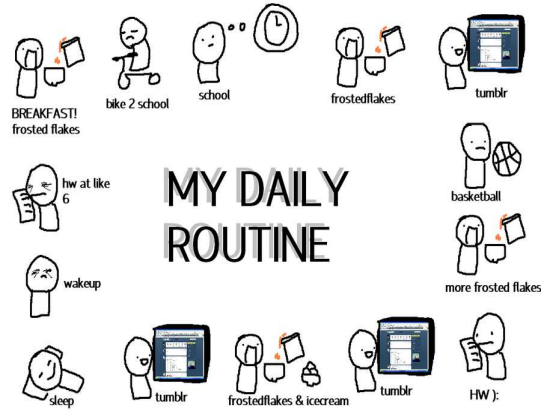
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What children and young people need

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Safety (Kim Golding 2007)

- **Free from source of violence**
- Basic needs met
- Safe and attuned care giver
- Daily routines
- Predictability
- Boundaries and limits
- Consistency in caregiver response
- Environment that's not too stressful



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PYRAMID OF NEED (Kim S Golding 2007)



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Boundaries and limits

- Boundaries set the tone for an improved relationship
- Know your own limitations and triggers
- Talk with your case manager limit setting
- Maintain consistent and predictable routine
- Modelling of safe and predictable relationships
- REPAIR after ruptures



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Developing relationships (Kim Golding 2007)

- Caregiver to manage big emotions
- Caregiver understands impacts of trauma
- To provide opportunities for social development (community, school, friendships)
- Ongoing connection to biological family (non offending family members)



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Importance of male relationships

- Role of the male carers in parenting the child should be nurtured and supported
- Provide active participation by positive male role models in children lives
- Male role models demonstrating respectful relationships with females
- Children who have experienced family violence need to experience healthy male relationships



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Comfort and coregulation (Kim Golding 2007)

- Is the child feeling safe and trusting enough to express their needs and seek support?
- Are caregivers available and attuned?
- Active listening
- Collaborative responses to problems – seeking solutions to problems with children (developmentally appropriate)
- Caregivers able to match the child's affect but able to stay within their own window of tolerance
- Repairing any ruptures

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Co-regulation strategies

- **Calm zone in house**
 - With fidgets
 - Stress balls
 - Rocking horse/chair/swing
 - Soft blanket and pillows
 - Feathers/bubbles
- **Slow down breathing**
 - Feather blowing
 - Bubbles blowing
 - Mindful taste touch and movement



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Empathy and reflection

- Help the young person understand their own feelings and the feelings of others
- Change can happen when a child receives empathy and connection from their caregiver
- They require repeated role modelling of empathy and compassion
- Attunement and co-regulation builds connection and safety
- Once child is regulated, helping child to put words to their emotions
- Understanding of self leads to understanding of others

Resilience and resources (Kim Golding 2007)

- Child starting to accept being seen and heard positively?
- Caregiver is confident in their capacity to respond?
- Child feels safe enough to reach out for comfort and support
- Caregiver responds appropriately and consistently role modelled?
- Child connected to social resources that are safe, positive and supportive of the child's developmental needs?



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Exploring trauma, mourning loss

- Exploring trauma will likely bring up intense emotions and feelings of loss.
- Trauma based 'Behaviours' may increase in this time
- Important for carers to remain the stronger, wiser, kinder adult and remember to see what's under the behaviour
- Caregiver being present and available when child/young person wants to talk about their experiences
- Counselling, play therapy, art therapy, youth programs
- Utilise supports where possible
- **Self care** – for caregivers and for child/young person

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What you can do



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What you can do to support children and young people

- **Take care of yourself!**
- **Don't give up.** The brain has plasticity, all hope is not lost!
- **Manage challenging behaviour in healthy ways.** Try to set clear limits for unacceptable behaviour and implement logical consequences.
- **Respect** a child's cultural background.
- **Be a role model.** Show children how you deal with stress in your own life, and set an example of healthy, self-care behaviour.
- **Seek out** community resources

The Child Witness to Violence Project (CWVP) at the Department of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics at Boston Medical Centre.



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What you can do to support children and young people

- **Just be with them.** Its quality over quantity!
- **Check in regularly.** Kids who have been exposed to trauma need social support.
- **Let the child lead.**
- **Listen.** Active listening can help you connect with children
- **Be honest.** Answer a child's questions honestly but age appropriately
- **Don't make promises you can't keep**
- **Reduce stress and build coping skills.** Ask a child, "What has helped you feel better in the past?"

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What you can do to support children and young people

- **Link children with things they love.**
- **Help children manage their emotions.** Model emotions and behaviours yourself
- **Encourage friendships**



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Where you can go for support

- Raising Children Network: <http://raisingchildren.net.au/>
- 1800 Respect: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/> 1800 737 732
- Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria: <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/1800-respect> 1800 737 732
- Kids Helpline: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/> 1800 551 800
- For adolescents: <http://lovegoodbadugly.com/>
- The Line (Youth violence): <https://www.theline.org.au/>
- Safe Steps (Crisis support) <https://www.safesteps.org.au/> 1800 015 188
- Carer Gateway: <www.carergateway.gov.au> 1800 422 737
- Mensline: <https://mensline.org.au/>
- InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence 1800 755 988, www.intouch.asn.au
- Relationships Australia (Victoria), 1300 364 277, www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au
- Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA) 9635 3610 (Counselling and support line), www.thewomens.org.au/SexualAssault



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Where you can go for support (Location specific)

- **Morwell:** Quantum Support Services: <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/quantum-support-services> (Baw Baw, Latrobe and Wellington Shires)
- **Dandenong:** <http://www.greaterdandenong.com/document/29264/family-violence-support-services-and-organisations>
- **Ballarat:** Centacare: <https://www.centacareballarat.org.au/services/counselling-family-relationship/specialist-family-violence/> (03) 5051 0000
- **Horsham:** Grampians Community Health: <http://grampianscommunityhealth.org.au/service/family-violence/men/>
- **Wangaratta:** Centre against Violence: <https://centreagainstviolence.org.au/> 1800 806 292
- **Footscray:** Women's Health West: <http://whwest.org.au/>



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In summary

- Family violence has a major impact on children and young people, affecting brain development, their relationships and how they understand their world.
- Family violence impacts on a parent's (usually the mother's) capacity to be responsive and attuned to her children, which impacts on the attachment relationship
- Children who have experienced violence don't trust that their needs will be met or that relationships are safe
- Freedom from violence, safety, predictability, consistently attuned relationships and experiences of positive relationships are essential to healing
- Attuned connection and co-regulation will help the child to feel safe and start to understand their experiences

References

- Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence WA:
<http://www.womenscouncil.com.au/>
- The Lookout: www.thelookout.org.au
- 1800 RESPECT: www.1800respect.org.au
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- Elizabeth Warner, PsyD. SMART Program. Jane Koomar, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA, Anne Westcott, LICSW, Certified Sensorimotor Therapist, Boston 2009
- http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/319754/dv_paper.pdf
- The Child Witness to Violence Project (CWVP) at the Department of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics at Boston Medical Centre.
- Commonwealth of Australia -Working with Fathers guide.



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- Department of Health and Human Services
- Foster Care Association of Victoria
- Kinship Carers Victoria
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance

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