

Family violence



INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

What is family violence?

Family violence, also known as domestic violence, is an ongoing act or series of actions designed to apply power and control over a family member.

A violent act can be physical where somebody deliberately causes or threatens bodily harm to another person, a pet or a much-loved possession. A violent person doesn't always have to direct their anger towards a person but could also put a fist through the wall or smash household objects to express their rage.

Most people recognise physical acts as violence. However, violence can also take many other forms, for example, verbal abuse, that leads someone to believe they are useless, fat or lazy; or emotional violence, where the silence is suffocating or the anger intimidating.

Types of family violence

Violence under the *Victorian Family Violence Act* is seen to take the following forms:

- physical abuse
- verbal abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional abuse
- financial abuse
- social abuse – this is controlling how you are seen and who you can see
- spiritual abuse
- stalking.

Basically, abusive people don't behave fairly. They can create fear, guilt and shame as a way of making sure you behave the way they want you to behave.

For more information about family violence, visit www.rav.org.au/resources and select 'Family violence' from the 'Resource topic' menu.

Who commits family violence?

Although family violence is most often perpetrated by a male partner toward a female partner, it can also be women or children who are violent toward each other, and/or towards their children or parent/s.

If you feel unsafe and need help right now, call 000 (triple zero).

Family violence is unfortunately really common. If you are affected by family violence, it's important to know that you are not alone. Find support services on page 2.

Reacting to family violence

Some common reactions can include:

- feeling as though the violence is your fault (This is never true!) or that your parents are monsters, and that you have to behave really well so that you don't don't cause any more trouble
- feeling like you may as well behave really badly, because the people who are meant to love you the most are behaving badly.

Most young people act somewhere between these two extremes and can change from being really 'well-behaved' to being really oppositional or confrontational. Although both these behaviours are understandable, neither of them will solve the issue of the violence, so it's important to reach out for support (see page 2) if you're affected by family violence.

Remember that violence committed against you (or others in your family) is never, ever your fault. No matter how you behave, violence is never justified.

Impacts of family violence

Family violence can affect you in lots of different ways. The younger you are when you experience abuse, the greater the impact. This is because your brain is being conditioned or learning to respond to people based on fear and anxiety. This plays a big role in how you develop relationships both within your family and with friends as well.

You may feel as though you can't live without the abusive person and will do anything to gain that person's approval, including copying their behaviour.

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Some young people get tricked into thinking the only way they can feel secure is by having power over somebody all of the time. When this happens, you might behave in a threatening manner and can bully others as a way of gaining power.

The cycle of family violence

Family violence can become a vicious cycle where an adult bullies a child who may respond by bullying a sibling. People who behave violently have often grown up in an environment where adults have been violent to other adults, kids have been violent to parents/carers and/or siblings have been violent to other siblings.

Young people may freeze when they witness or experience abuse and learn to 'zone out' whenever they are anxious about the possibility of conflict or violence. They may become really watchful, assuming that violence is likely to take place at any moment. These young people can learn that taking a risk is too dangerous so they stop asking questions or engaging with the many adventures that the world offers.

Young people may decide that it's too risky to develop intimate relationships, not trusting people enough to form friendships, let alone anything more.

Young people who have grown up with family violence find it hard to stay focussed, to sit still or to concentrate on anything for long. When they experience nightmares, or get into trouble for acting impulsively they can self-medicate with alcohol or other drugs, self-harm or, engage in other risky behaviours that attempt to relieve the trauma of family violence.

Research has shown that young people who have been exposed to family violence are at greater risk of dropping out of school, and experiencing depression, anxiety and homelessness.

Please note: These examples are at the extreme end of the scale. It's important to know that, if you are witnessing or directly experiencing violence, there are places you can go to for help before things get really bad.

The good news

You have a chance to break the cycle of family violence and discover different ways of being in the world.

Research shows that, no matter how good, bad or okay your experiences were in your family, spending some time trying to understand these experiences can help you feel better about yourself and open up your responses to future relationships.

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Where can I get help?

Remember that you don't have to deal with things on your own. Deciding to get help is a sometimes-tough but brave first step in dealing with family violence.

It can be a good idea to talk to someone that cares about you, or to a trusted adult such as a parent, carer, family member, teacher or school counsellor and tell them how you're feeling.

School counsellors are trained in how to assist their students to seek help safely. For example, if you are planning on speaking out about family violence, it is important to make a plan to stay safe.

Crisis support

The following organisations are available 24/7:

- Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800
- 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732
- Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre (Victoria) on 1800 015 188
- Lifeline on 13 11 14

To make an appointment to chat to one of our counsellors, visit www.rav.org.au/counselling

To find other organisations that can help, visit www.rav.org.au/resources/youth-services

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.