



Tip Sheet 9

Domestic and Family Violence and Children/Young People

Adults are not the only victims of family and domestic violence. Unfortunately children also witness and experience the toxic effects of abuse. The effects of this abuse are wide ranging, from learning and behaviour problems to homelessness and mental health concerns.

Some of these problems may include:

- Anxiety and depression
- Emotional distress
- Sleeping and eating problems
- Stomach aches and headaches and other physical symptoms such as insomnia
- Stress
- Self-harming behaviour
- Aggression
- Peer relational problems
- Guilt (blaming themselves for the violence in the home)
- Developing phobias
- Struggling academically
- Being bullied or being target of bullies
- Being less empathetic
- Engaging in risk taking behaviours
- Being homeless
- Abusing drugs

“Children described living with fear, anxiety and dread, and worried about the safety of their siblings, mothers and themselves. Children further conveyed feelings of shame about their home life, and thus lacked confidence and self-esteem, resulting in poor relationships.”
Australian Institute of Family Studies¹

Statistics indicate² that children who witness abuse are at least twice as likely to continue the cycle of abuse into adulthood. In fact, witnessing abuse from one caregiver to another is the strongest risk factor for the transmission of violent behaviour from one generation to the other.³ Children who have been abused are also 15 times more likely to be abused by others.⁴ These are just some of the many reasons why domestic and family abuse cannot be tolerated and must be acted upon.

Child protection is everybody's business and we all have a responsibility to ensure that children are safe.

¹ Campo, M. Children's exposure to domestic and family violence: Key issues and responses (CFCA Paper No. 36). Melbourne: Child Family Community Australia information exchange, Australian Institute of Family Studies. 2015.

² J. S. Holcomb, Lindsey. A. Holcomb. Is it my fault? Hope and healing for those suffering domestic violence. Chicago. Moody Publishers. 2014.

³ I. Frieze and A. Browne, Violence in Marriage, in family Violence, ed.L. Ohlin and M. Tonry. Chicago. University Press.1989.

⁴ J. S. Holcomb, Lindsey. A. Holcomb. Is it my fault? Hope and healing for those suffering domestic violence. Chicago. Moody Publishers. 2014.



► **What to do**

- If a child/young person discloses abuse, then listen, listen, listen, and do not add anything. Do not speak until the person finishes telling their story.
- Respond with concern and sympathy.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you and that the violence is not their fault.
- For further information on what to do see Tip Sheet 3 and Tip Sheet 8

Let them know that you will continue to support and look out for them. Pray for them, and their family. Pray for the Police and other support services.

If a child/young person *has not* disclosed violence in the home but you are **concerned that abuse may be occurring**, please raise your concerns with your Breaking The Silence representative, to the CPU or to church leadership.

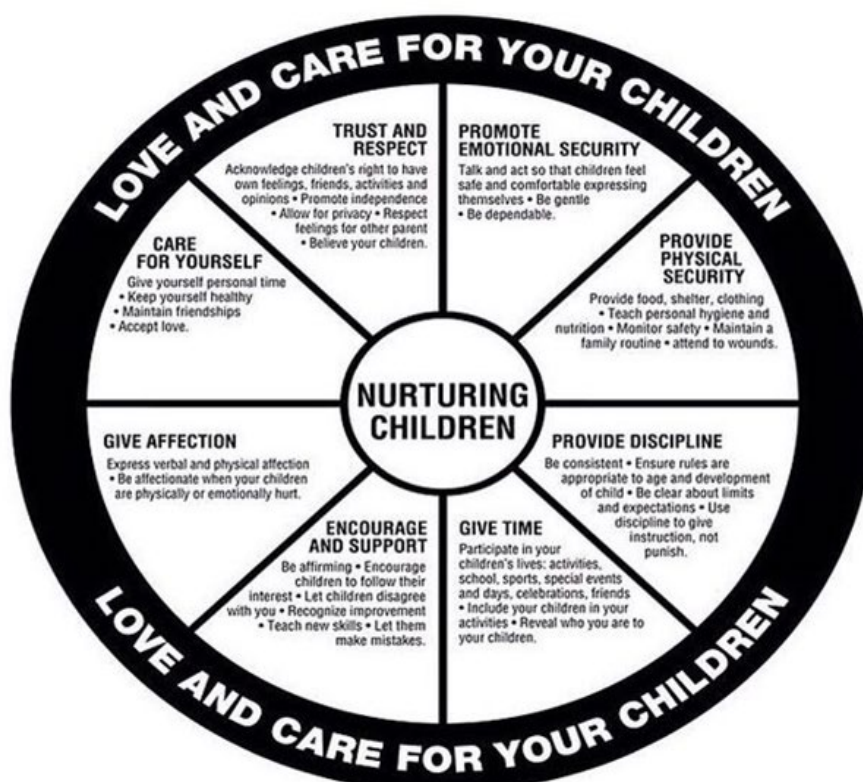
► **Support and Parenting**

One of the greatest factors that mitigate children’s/young people’s exposure to violence is support and connection. It is important to:

- Increase peer and social support
- Strengthen relationship with primary caregiver (usually the victim)
- Part of supporting a family who has been domestically abused is to provide education. It is imperative to help the victim to understand the effect abuse has on their children, and how to heal. The nurture wheel below gives some good examples of how to support children.

► **Nurturing Children wheel.**

Used with permission by Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre, Duluth, Minnesota.





► **For further information:**

For more information on the effects of abuse on children please visit:
<http://www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help/children>
<https://aifs.gov.au/>

Breaking the Silence Training Workbook

from <https://jerichoroad.org.au/breaking-the-silence/basic-training/>

Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU), Presbyterian Church of NSW

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www.breakingthesilence.org.au

NSW Domestic Violence Line

Phone: **1800 656 463**

24/7 support and referrals for victims.

www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help

Child protection Helpline

Phone: **132 111**