

# CHILDREN AND THE IMPACTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE.

Hume Region Integrated Family Violence Services work to enhance the capacity of organisations, service providers and the community. Its aim is to prevent violence against women and children and to work with men to ensure a violence free future.

Living with family violence is not an uncommon experience as a large number of children are affected by violence. Children living with violence are not just passive onlookers. They may see violence, they may hear it, they may witness the aftermath of violence or experience direct abuse.<sup>1</sup> Children actively seek to make meaning from their experiences and surroundings and can learn that violent behaviour is normal. Living with family violence harms children, as the constant threat of abuse affects their behavioural, cognitive and emotional functioning and social development.<sup>2</sup>

## FAMILY VIOLENCE STATISTICS

- Children and young people are present in approximately 60% of homes where family violence is occurring.<sup>3</sup>
- Almost 1 in 4 children have seen their father or stepfather use physical violence against their mother or stepmother.<sup>4</sup>
- 1 in 3 children and young people living with family violence have been hit by their father or stepfather when trying to defend their mother or stepmother or when attempting to stop the violence.<sup>5</sup>
- Family violence is a factor in half of substantiated child protection cases.<sup>6</sup>

*'He could have stuck a knife in her for all I knew, with the door shut. The worst thing for me was actually not knowing.'*<sup>9</sup>

*'I used to live in a house. It was scary because my step dad kept hurting me. I tried to stop him hurting my sisters but he told me to go away... or he'd hurt me again.'*<sup>7</sup>

*'I'm nervous all the time.'*<sup>8</sup>



## THE IMPACTS OF LIVING WITH FAMILY VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

Living with family violence has a clear and negative impact on children's health and development. Children exposed to violence are at increased risk of poor health, including physical harm, emotional detachment, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, phobias, aggressive behaviour and sleep disturbances.<sup>10</sup> Pre-school age children are especially vulnerable to blaming themselves for violence in the home.<sup>11</sup> For older children the uncertainty of being separated from a parent, having to change schools, move away from friends, or temporarily live in a refuge, also impacts on their wellbeing.

If you are experiencing family violence or hurting the people you care about, help and support is available.

**Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service:**  
1800 015 188

**Centre Against Sexual Assault:**  
1800 806 292

**Kids Help Line:**  
1800 551 800

**Women's Legal Service Victoria:**  
1800 133 302

**Men's Referral Service:**  
1800 065 973

**Centrelink Crisis Payment:**  
132 850

**Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service:**  
1800 105 303

**WIRE:**  
1300 134 130

**In the case of an emergency call 000**

## BEHAVIOURS THAT MAY INDICATE A CHILD IS AFFECTED BY FAMILY VIOLENCE INCLUDE:

- Separation anxiety
- Excessive screaming or crying
- Developmental delays, such as poor speech
- Very compliant behaviour
- Withdrawal and nervousness
- Aggressive or bullying behaviour
- Regressive behaviour, such as bedwetting or soiling

## COPING WITH THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Living with family violence can leave children with feelings of sadness, anger, shame, guilt, helplessness and despair. It is necessary for children affected by violence to be able to talk through their fears, be listened to and believed. Allowing children to be heard is important as it breaks the silence around family violence and provides them with a better understanding that:

- What they have experienced is confusing and frightening
- While it's okay to get angry, violence is never okay
- Violence is not their fault
- They have the right to be loved and cared for
- Their safety and wellbeing is a key priority.

## WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Children's counselling can support children to talk about, and make sense of, their feelings and experiences. A counsellor can help children successfully manage a range of behavioural and emotional difficulties and reduce the impacts of violence. Counselling can also assist in strengthening children's relationships with their families and others close to them. Children affected by violence need strong and reliable relationships and the safety and security of a non-violent home. Parents can help their children by accessing support and assistance from family, friends and professionals. Given that children depend on their parents for love and stability, getting help for yourself is a valuable way to help your children.

FOR PARENTS REQUIRING FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT:

**Mitchell Community Health**  
1300 773 352

**FamilyCare**  
03 5735 4600

**Men's Referral Service**  
1800 065 973

CHILDREN'S COUNSELLING IS AVAILABLE FROM:

**Mitchell Community Health**  
1300 773 352

A parent needs to be accessing this service before their children can see the children's counsellor.

FOR REFERRALS, ADVICE, INFORMATION AND SECONDARY CONSULTATION CALL:

**Child Protection**  
1800 650 227

**Child FIRST**  
1800 663 107

**Children's Resource Coordinator at Central Hume Support Services**  
03 5722 4129

 **INTEGRATED FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES**  
Women, men and children  
Hume Region



For more information about these fact sheets go to [www.familyviolenceservices.com.au](http://www.familyviolenceservices.com.au)

1 The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their children (2009) Time for Action: The National Council's plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their

children, 2009-2021, The Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

2 M. Flood & L. Fergus (2008) An Assault on Our future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships,

White Ribbon Foundation, Sydney.

3 The National Council, op.cit.

4 National Crime Prevention (2001) Young People & Domestic Violence: National

research on young people's attitudes and experiences of domestic violence, Crime Prevention Branch, Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, Canberra.

5 Flood & Fergus, op.cit.

6 Ibid

7 Central Hume Support Services (2005) Through a Child's eyes: Children's experiences of family violence

and homelessness in the Hume region, The Department of Human Services, Wodonga.

8 Domestic Violence Resource Centre (2005) Bursting the Bubble, booklet and website at [www.burstingthebubble.com](http://www.burstingthebubble.com).

9 C. McGee (2000) Childhood Experiences of Domestic Violence, Jessica Kingsley, London.

10 The National Council, op.cit.

11 Flood & Fergus, op.cit.