

A guide for women who may be experiencing Family Violence

Are you worried about how you are being treated by your partner or husband, boyfriend, family member or carer?

It can be difficult to recognise the signs of abuse.

Emotional abuse: when someone regularly puts you down, criticises you, threatens to stop you from seeing your family/ children, or threatens to commit suicide if you leave the relationship. This includes **spiritual abuse**, for example preventing you from making or keeping connections with your religious ceremonies or practices, or preventing you from expressing your spiritual identity.

Social abuse: when someone prevents you from seeing your friends and family, makes you feel guilty about socialising or working, constantly checks up on your whereabouts.

Financial abuse: when your partner/family member takes control of your financial affairs when you don't want them to, prevents you from accessing money.

Sexual abuse: when someone makes you do sexual things that you don't want to do.

Stalking: when a partner, ex-partner, or someone else follows you around, or repeatedly tries to contact you, even if you say you don't want this

Physical abuse: Includes pushing, hitting, throwing objects, driving dangerously to frighten you, threatening to physically harm you, other people, or pets.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Domestic and family violence – both terms are commonly used - is **a pattern of abusive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship that over time puts one person in a position of power over another, and causes fear.** Family violence can occur in many different kinds of intimate relationships. For example, from one partner towards another, from an adolescent towards a parent.

There are other types of violence that can occur in families and relationships. These are not necessarily linked to behaviour patterns of power and control, but they can be harmful to individuals and to family and community harmony. **All violence is unacceptable.**

HOW MIGHT FAMILY VIOLENCE BE AFFECTING ME?

All forms of violence have damaging consequences. Your confidence can become worn down by abuse.

If you have been in an abusive relationship you may feel:

- Afraid to tell anyone
- Worried that it's your fault
- Depressed and alone
- Confused
- Scared of coping on your own
- Scared it will get worse if you leave
- Worried about what others will think
- Afraid that no-one will believe you
- Frustrated and sad because you've tried everything.

Remember, you are not to blame for the abuse. You have a right to feel safe and to live free from violence and intimidation.



Good Shepherd
Australia New Zealand

IS THIS AFFECTING MY CHILDREN?

Children can't feel safe or happy if their mother is being hurt. They may feel frightened or helpless. Some children may try to protect you, or they might feel angry and blame you. Some children may even think it is their fault.

Children may:

- Feel unwell with stomach cramps or headaches
- Have trouble concentrating at school
- Have difficulty with friendships
- 'act out' or withdraw
- Learn that violence can give them control over others.

YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME

Some abusers try to damage the relationship between a mother and her children.

The abuser may:

- Tell your children that you are a 'bad mother'
- Encourage your children to ignore what you say
- Stop you from attending to your children
- Be jealous of your pregnancy or when you are breastfeeding your baby

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR CHILDREN

A warm and supportive relationship with you or another family member makes a positive difference for your children. You can:

- Give lots of cuddles
- Tell them you love them
- Ask them how they feel, listen and give them opportunities to talk about the violence
- Reassure them that the abuse is not their fault
- Show them respect and help them show respect for others
- Let them know it is not their role to protect you
- Let them know that other children have similar experiences and that feeling upset is normal
- Get help and support for your children and for yourself

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF

No-one likes, asks for or deserves to live with abuse or violence. Working out what to do can be hard.

Your safety is important. Whether you decide to stay or leave the relationship:

- Plan where you can go and who you can call **in an emergency**
- Keep important items together in a safe place in case you need to leave suddenly – such as birth certificates, bank card, Centrelink details, money, medication, keys, clothes. Or leave these things with a trusted family member or friend.
- Teach your children what to do and who to call if they don't feel safe.
- **Talk to someone you trust.** You don't have to go through this alone. Talking about the abuse and how you feel can help you decide what to do. Talk to a friend, a family member, or a counsellor. Whoever you talk to shouldn't judge you.

Our goal must be a society where all people are safe in their home, families and close relationships; where violence and abuse are not acceptable; and where all relationships respect the equality and dignity of each person. This is part of the Gospel vision of love and respect.

Bishops of Victoria, October 2016

SERVICES THAT CAN HELP SOMEONE WHO IS A VICTIM OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

POLICE – Call '000' and ask for the Police for immediate assistance

SAFE STEPS – 1800 015 188 – A state-wide 24 hour, 7 day a week crisis support and accomodation service for women and their children

1800 RESPECT – 1800 737 732 – A national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling and advice service. 24 hours, 7 days a week.