

Parenting

during  
and  
after

domestic  
violence  
and abuse

# Children and Domestic Abuse

If you have experienced domestic abuse, you will probably have tried to protect your children as much as possible - perhaps you hope that they do not know it is happening. However, in most families where there are children and where domestic abuse is happening, the children will be aware of this even if they do not talk to you about it.

Children can witness violence in many different ways, for example they may be in the same room and get caught up in the violence trying to make it stop, they may be in a different room but be able to hear, or see injuries following an incident of violence. They may even be made to be physically or verbally abusive toward the victim of the domestic abuse themselves.

Children are entirely dependent upon the adults around them and if they do not feel safe in their own homes, this can have many negative physical and emotional effects upon them.

This leaflet will help you to understand how your parenting may be affected by domestic abuse, and what you can do to help and support your child.

# How an abusive partner can affect parenting

## Abuser's tactics to undermine parenting

- Control of contraception
- Forced pregnancies
- Forced terminations
- Damaging attachment by not allowing the non abusive parent to respond to their child - pretending to be jealous of a child
- Using the child to abuse the non abusive parent
- Abusing the child to punish the non abusive parent
- Keeping the non abusive parent exhausted, e.g. expecting chores and child care to be solely the non abusive parent's role
- Controlling money so children's needs cannot be met
- Threaten to take the children or harm them
- Isolate the child and non abusive parent from extended family and support networks
- Use the courts to hassle over contact
- Make false claims to agencies such as Health and Social Care
- Putting the non abusive parent down, blaming them for any misbehaviour, undermining routines, bribing the children or dismissing any request made by the non abusive parent.

## How the non abusive parent can be affected

- May make decisions that put the abuser ahead of the children due to fear of reprisals
- May believe that they are a bad parent
- May feel frustrated that the children challenge their authority and dismiss their requests
- May believe that they are to blame for the continued abuse
- May feel guilty for having to be strict to protect the child from abuser
- May feel guilty about losing control, shouting and name-calling
- Could be unable to meet the day to day needs of the children through being exhausted
- The emotional bond with their children may be damaged
- May find ways of coping that impact negatively on their parenting e.g. alcohol, drugs, eating or other self harm
- May feel trapped in competition with abusive parent especially after they have separated
- May live in fear of the children being harmed
- May be abused by children manipulated by the abuser.

## Ten tips for parenting during and after domestic abuse

### 1. **Give your child time to talk and listen to them**

Children need time to discuss how they feel about the abuse they lived with. They may act out to get your attention if they feel unheard or confused. If you can, take a few moments each day to play and talk with your child.

## **2. Reassure your child it is not their fault and that abusive behaviour is wrong**

Being clear about the abuser's behaviour being wrong and unacceptable can help children make decisions about their own behaviour. Being open and honest about the fact the abuser has hurt people around them can make it less confusing for children as they get consistent messages about behaviour. Let them know in a clear way "people are not for hurting" if you see them hitting others.

## **3. Keep adult issues to adults**

When discussing abuse with a child keep the language and detail at a level they understand. Keep adult matters for the adults who can support you. Children should not become best friends or confidants. They need to be reassured that you are the parent and they are a child.

## **4. Show unconditional love**

Children living with domestic abuse often learn that love comes with rules and conditions. By showing that you love them, a child will understand that love can be given with no conditions and no threats.

## **5. Be clear about what you expect from your children**

It might feel like you spend your life saying "no" or "don't do that". To challenge your child's behaviour tell them the things you would like them to do. For example instead of "Stop screaming" you could say "slow down, try telling me what you want to say, I am listening".

## **6. Praise good behaviour**

To help children build their confidence it is important that we try not to just focus on the things which they are doing wrong, although these are often the things that grab our attention most. Think of a child as a piggy bank, to keep their confidence balance good we need to put in 3 lots of praise to every single negative withdrawal.

## **7. Focus on the behaviour**

It is important not to label a child's behaviour as a quality of your child. Make it clear that it is the behaviour you don't like, not your child. For example instead of saying "You are a messy boy" try "I don't like the kitchen untidy could you help me tidy up?"

## **8. Try to keep emotion out of discipline**

It is very hard to stay patient and calm when we are exhausted and frustrated. When experiencing domestic abuse we may also be scared, angry and depressed. If children are also being challenging it is very hard to keep a cool head. Try to slow things down, take a deep breath and think about what you are going to do before jumping in. Children often do not react to shouting if they live with lots of arguing, you are more likely to get a reaction if you are calm and in control. It can be helpful to say sorry to them if you have been overly angry and irritable with them.

## **9. Offer an opportunity for children to make choices**

Decide what parts of your child's routine should be consistent, such as bed time. Try and offer choices wherever possible, for example what they want to wear and what they want for lunch. Make the choices limited

so you don't create work for yourself. This will encourage your child to problem solve and feel in control of their lives without being overwhelmed.

## 10. **Keep your expectations realistic**

It is important to remember that your child will be affected by living with domestic abuse and they are likely to behave in a way that helps them cope with the confusion and mixed feelings they have. Try and put yourself in their shoes and think about what it is they are trying to say by behaving the way they are.

### **Remember...**

You can be a good role model.

Children can learn to survive from watching their non abusive parent manage with difficulties. Recognise that you can be a good role model and a good parent. You are the most important person for your children.

## Helpful books

There is an accompanying leaflet to this one titled "**Talking to Children about domestic violence and abuse**" which may be of use.

- A family that fights. Sharon Bernstein. 4– 12 years
- Clover's Secret by Christine Winn and David Walsh. Fairview Press: Minnesota
- Hear my roar: Lungin's Broken Family. Dr T Hochban. 6-11 years
- Talking to my Mum - Cathy Humphreys
- Something is wrong at my house - Diane Davis

# Useful Contacts

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>National Domestic Abuse Helpline 24 hours</b>           | 0808 2000 247  |
| <b>Berkshire Women's Aid</b>                               | 01189 504003   |
| <b>Crossing Bridges (can help provide legal support)</b>   | 0118 959 7333  |
| <b>Parentline National helpline for carers of children</b> | 0808 800 2222  |
| <b>Men's Advice Line (Male victims)</b>                    | 0808 801 0327  |
| <b>West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Forum</b>                 | <a href="http://www.domesticabusewb.org.uk">www.domesticabusewb.org.uk</a>                               |
| <b>Thames Valley Police (TVP)</b>                          | 0845 8 505 505   |
| <b>NSPCC</b>   | 0808 800 5000  |
| <b>Childline 24 hours</b>                                  | 0800 1111  |
| <b>The Hideout</b>   | <a href="http://www.thehideout.org.uk">www.thehideout.org.uk</a>   |
| <b>Berkshire East &amp; South Bucks Women's Aid</b>        |  |
| Support to male and female victims of domestic abuse       | 01753 549865 or 0800 085 2654  |
| <b>Kinara Asian Women's Service</b>                        | 01753 592988   |
| <b>Victim Support</b>                                      | 01344 411411   |
| <b>Reading Borough Council</b>                             | 01189 390 900  |
| <b>West Berkshire Council</b>                              | 01635 42400  |
| <b>Wokingham Borough Council</b>                           | 0118 974 6000  |
| <b>Bracknell Forest Council</b>                            | 01344 352000   |
|  | <a href="http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/domesticabuse">www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/domesticabuse</a> |
| <b>Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead</b>             |  |
|  | <a href="http://www.rbwmdvf.org.uk">www.rbwmdvf.org.uk</a> 01628 683800                                  |
| <b>Slough Borough Council</b>                              | 01753 475111   |
|  | <a href="http://www.slough.gov.uk/services/13358.aspx">www.slough.gov.uk/services/13358.aspx</a>         |

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To request copies of these booklets or for more information, please contact Berkshire Health Promotion Resources on 01753 638 678 - [www.bhps.org.uk/resources](http://www.bhps.org.uk/resources)