

## About this brochure

People caring for a child who has experienced violence are often very worried about how that experience will affect the child. Children – regardless of their age – do respond to what's going on around them. However, **the effect** on children and their recovery **can depend on many things**. You can do a lot to help.

This is one of a **set of brochures** to help you understand and respond to some of the effects of violence on a child.

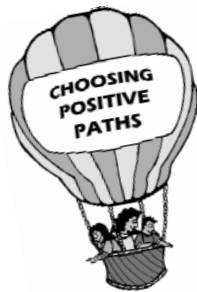
The main focus of the brochures is domestic violence – that is, intimate partner violence – and its effects on children. We also touch on issues of child abuse and other violence experienced by children, usually included in the term family violence.

The brochures talk about children who have experienced violence. This means knowing about, seeing or hearing violence against someone else. It also means being assaulted or abused by family members. All forms of violence in the family affect children.

Mostly the language in the brochures is directed at mothers. However it will also be helpful for other people who are taking on the role of primary carer – fathers, grandparents, aunts, family friends and even foster parents. In this brochure, the phrase 'your child' means 'a child in your care'.

**This brochure contains tips and information about:**

- **the impact of domestic violence**
- **activities for babies**
- **stages of development**



# Parenting a 5 to 12 year old

# 5

**who has experienced violence**



**D**uring or after an experience of violence, your primary-school-aged child will probably be feeling a huge mix of emotions. **Common feelings** in children of this age who have experienced violence in their family are:

- **Confusion** about what is happening and why
- **Fear** of being hurt, of you being hurt, of their other parent being 'taken away' by police
- **Sadness** about their parents fighting, about the separation, about their own losses
- **Anger** about what is happening

### How Primary School Aged Children Think

This is a time when children are **questioning many things** and **finding out how their world works**. For children who have experienced violence, this might also be a time when their experiences affect how they make friends. They might try to keep their experiences a secret, especially from their school friends.

Your child might feel responsible for the violence or arguments, or for their parents breaking up. They might also feel split about how they feel about their parents. They might, for example, feel guilty or confused about loving someone who has hurt you or who has hurt them.

The ways **children see the world** might be **different** to the ways we see things as adults, so it's important to regularly ask your child how they are going.

### You and Your Child

You might find that experiences of violence have affected **your relationship with your child**. It might take time and patience to **rebuild trust** and communication between the two of you.

### Getting through this experience

**You are one of the people who knows what's good for your child**. Your judgement and **instincts are valuable**, so listen to them and to your child.

It's also important to listen and learn from other people whose wisdom and experience you respect.



# Activities



Provide opportunities for **active play**.

Ball games, running games, jumping rope and tumbling games

are popular at this age

Encourage **quiet games** as well. These might include board games (these help children understand rules and consequences), puzzles, cards and dominoes

**Participate** in your child's games and activities when you think this is appropriate. It is important for children to spend time with friends, by themselves and with you

**Encourage children to feel good** about themselves by providing opportunities to try new things or practice what they love (for example, cooking, making models and crafts, drawing and building things)

Encourage your child to **take responsibility for simple chores** like setting the table, putting dirty washing in the basket, cleaning their room and making their bed

Encourage your child to have **hobbies** and/or special collections

Help children **explore and expand their world** by going to the art centre, zoo or museums and by going camping or bush walking

Encourage your child to be curious by talking with them about **how things work** and what other people are doing. Children often have many questions; answer the questions to be best of your ability. If you don't know the answer, tell your child and suggest that you find out the answer together



**P**lay is a fun, normal and very important part of growing up. Playing lets children learn and practice many different skills. It helps them to develop:

- Physical skills such as catching, throwing, holding and drawing
- **Imagination, creativity and how to solve problems**
- The ability to communicate and to play and share with others
- **The ability to know right and wrong, to take responsibility and understand the consequences of their actions**

Children who have experienced violence usually have **mixed feelings** that are hard to talk about. They often have low self-esteem and **low self-confidence**, which might be shown by not wanting to try new things.

**Play** is one of the easiest and safest ways for children to express how they are feeling. Play can help them to develop their self-confidence and work through their worries.

Playing with your child can **strengthen your relationship**. It can also **help you to understand** how they see their world. For you, play can also be a great way to relax and to **have a good laugh**.

## When you are playing with your child

- Follow their lead, but make sure the game is safe
- **Let them make the rules wherever possible**
- Listen to them
- **Talk with them about what they are doing**
- Be patient
- **Allow them to try different things and to make mistakes**
- Give them praise and encouragement
- **Be prepared to have fun!**



Parenting can be very stressful, especially in stressful circumstances. If you feel unable to protect your child or are worried that you are not coping or might harm your child in any way, call **ParentLine on 13 22 89**

# The impact of domestic violence



**M**any people worry that the domestic violence will have an effect on their child forever. Children are just like anyone else. They need time and support to recover from traumatic situations. Like you, once the violence has stopped and they feel safe, your child can heal from their experience.

If your child has experienced violence they might:

- Be withdrawn or aggressive (hurting self/others)
- Not cooperate with you
- Complain about feeling unwell (tummy aches and headaches)
- Wet their bed
- Find it hard to make friends
- Have difficulties with school work

**At age 5-8, your child might also:**

- Have problems talking or using new words
- Be picky about food or not willing to eat
- Challenge adult authority, or become very cooperative and eager to please
- Not be able to share or take turns
- Not ask adults for help, or rely heavily on adults

**At age 8-10, your child might also:**

- Not be able to express their feelings
- Be extremely active
- Find it hard to trust others
- Be isolated from friends and find it hard to share
- Show little interest or enthusiasm for anything

**At age 10-12, your child might also:**

- Be argumentative
- Ask more questions, for example 'Why?' or 'What if?'
- Blame one parent or the other (for example, they might be angry at you because 'Dad can't live at home anymore')
- Find it hard to express their feelings



# TIPS



## Communication

Tell your child that the violence is **never their fault**

**Ask your child** if they have any worries, for example at school, home or with friends

Give your child **lots of affection**

**Spend time together** doing things you both enjoy

Give **simple and truthful explanations** and responses that suit your child's age



## Behaviour & self esteem

**Tell your child what they are good at.** For example, 'You run so fast' or 'You draw really well' or 'Well done'

If your child is **hurting themselves** in any way (for example, banging their head against a wall), call the Royal Children's Hospital on 1800 445 511 for advice



## Feelings

**Listen to your child** and show that you **understand** that things are hard, scary, or frustrating for them.

Let your child **cry and be sad** if they need to

Talk with your child about ways of **showing feelings**, especially safe ways of showing anger

Reassure your child that it is **okay to be angry**, it's just not okay to hurt anyone!

Don't feel you have to always hide your own feelings but **let your child know that whatever you are feeling, you will be okay.**

## Parenting Boys and Parenting Girls

Parents often get worried about how their child will grow up. They worry that they might behave like the parent who is the same sex as them.


All children need to learn to express their feelings and to know what behaviour is okay.

It's best for boys and girls to learn from people they can rely on, regardless of their gender. Safety, security and stability are more important than finding them same-sex role models.

## Concerns about sexual abuse

If you think someone might be sexually abusing your child call The Gatehouse Centre on 9345 6391.

# Ages & Stages



**E**very child is different and each develops at their own rate.

However, trauma or stress can mean that a child's development might be slower than **average**. Often your child will **catch up** when the violence or abuse has stopped and **they feel safe again**. The **ideas** mentioned in this brochure can help as well.

If you are **worried** about your child's development or if you would like some new ideas to help them out, it might be good to **talk with somebody** whose opinion and knowledge you value.

Talking things through might also help you to feel better. This is just as important.

Some people who might be able to help are:

- **Doctors**
- **Maternal and Child Health Nurses**
- **Social workers**
- **Children's workers**
- **Counsellors**

You can find these people at your local Community Health Centre, regional Parenting Service or local Council.

**For other suggestions, see Brochure 10 – Who Can Help?**

## 5 to 8 years

- Uses play to express feelings
- Understands many new words
- Forms friendships
- Enjoys a challenge
- Is very physically active and has increased muscle strength
- Has better hand/eye coordination and increased control over small actions
- May be afraid of the dark

## 8 to 10 years

- Enjoys the company of others and plays well
- Is increasingly independent
- Begins to see parents and authority figures as human beings who make mistakes
- Rituals, rules, secret codes and made-up languages are common
- Body strength and coordination are getting better
- May develop a special interest in collections or hobbies
- May fear having their experiences known at school
- May experience difficulties in social relationships

## 10 to 12 years

- Can see the point of view of others more clearly
- Can understand ideas without having direct hands-on experience
- May have some growth spurts but is generally showing slow and steady growth
- By age 12 is almost as coordinated as an adult
- Can focus their attention more easily and take the time to search for needed information
- May be entering puberty, with girls developing breasts and either sex starting to grow pubic hair

