

Family violence

Emergency Department factsheets



This factsheet explains how family violence can harm the health and wellbeing of victims. It includes details of community services that provide crisis support and help to anyone experiencing violence at home.

What is family violence?

Family violence happens when one person uses abusive or violent behaviours to control another person within a relationship. Some examples of abusive behaviours include the use of, or threats to use:

- physical injury or harm e.g. punching, slapping, hitting, strangling, kicking, pushing
- words or actions to intimidate or harass e.g. repeated verbal or emotional abuse, name calling, insults, humiliation, repeatedly telephoning, stalking/following, or in the case of a carer, threatening to withdraw care from the person who is disabled
- damage to property or pets e.g. hurting pets, breaking furniture, punching holes in the walls, damaging belongings.
- indecent behaviour without consent including unwanted sexual behaviour
- withholding or restricting essential needs such as housing, food, money, transport, medical care and contact with family and friends.

Who experiences family violence?

Domestic and family violence happens across the community - within any kind of relationship or household. This includes:

- spousal and intimate relationships
 - married, defacto, dating or same sex partners
 - current, separated or ex-partners
- other family relationships
 - parent to child (child abuse)
 - young person to parent
 - sibling to sibling
 - adult child to older relative (elder abuse)

- other relative to relative (related by blood, marriage or cultural connection)
- informal care relationships
 - where a person with a disability or high care needs is dependent on an unpaid carer.

People who use violence, and people who are victims of violence are any age – children, teenagers, adults or elderly people, male or female, have any range of income, and can be from any cultural background.

How does family violence affect health and well-being?

Victims of family violence often have many health issues, usually due to physical injuries or the stress of living with constant fear and anxiety. Common health concerns are:

- physical injuries such as cuts, bruises, fractures, burns, bites
- chronic health concerns like headaches, neck pain, chest pain, abdominal pain, and breathing difficulties
- gynaecological issues such as miscarriage, sexually transmitted diseases or abortion
- mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, eating disorders, post traumatic stress disorder, self-harm, suicidal ideation, alcohol and drug abuse
- neglect of general health needs such as dental and optical care, routine screening such as mammograms.

Family violence can also affect well-being in other ways such as:

- lowering self esteem and belief in self because of feelings of shame and self-blame
- lowering confidence in your ability to make your own decisions because of the abuser's attempts to control things such as what you wear, where you go and who you talk to

- isolating you from the support of friends and family
- limiting your access to money, transport, health care, personal care and clothing
- leaving you feeling powerless in the relationship.

How are children affected?

All children need to feel nurtured, valued and safe to be able to grow and reach their full potential. Children and young people living in a home with violence usually do not feel safe.

They are often directly involved in family violence situations either by seeing their caregiver being abused, being abused themselves or suffering as a result of parental stress and frustration. As a result, their health and well-being can be seriously harmed.

Some common health concerns reported in children living in a home with family violence are:

Young children

- difficulties sleeping and feeding
- slow weight gain
- regressive behaviours in toddlers
- other developmental and language delays.

School age children:

- physical injuries such as bruises and fractures
- general health issues such as head aches, asthma, general aches and pains
- sleep disturbance, nightmares and bedwetting
- anxiety
- over-protectiveness or fear of leaving the abused parent alone
- school difficulties such as poor concentration, withdrawal, absenteeism and aggression towards others.

Teenagers:

- mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, suicide attempts, alcohol and drug abuse

- extreme risk taking behaviour
- school drop out
- abuse of siblings or parents
- homelessness or prolonged staying away from home
- increased likelihood of experiencing violence in future adult relationships.

Many of these issues can develop into lifelong problems without early and appropriate help.

What can I do if family violence is happening in my family?

If you are living with family violence, it is important to seek help early and take action to protect yourself and any children in your care.

The longer you live in a home with violence and abuse, the greater the risk of long term harm to your health and well-being. Violence and abuse usually gets worse over time.

Talk to someone

The first step may be just telling someone about what is happening at home. This could be a friend, family member, crisis counsellor or a health professional.

Talking about your situation may help you to understand more about what is happening in your relationship, how it is affecting you and your family and may help you explore options available to you.

To talk to a counsellor contact

- DVConnect Womensline (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 811 811
- DVConnect MensLine (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 600 636
- KidsHelpLine (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 551 800

Find out about your options

Domestic Violence Protection Orders

You may be eligible to apply for a Domestic Violence protection order. A protection order requires an offender be of good behaviour and not commit acts of domestic violence towards you. The order may also specify that the offender have 'no contact' with you. If the offender breaches the order they can face criminal charges.

You can apply for a domestic violence protection order in the magistrates court yourself or get someone to help you such as the police, a solicitor, friend or counsellor.

Some acts of violence and abuse such as hitting, strangling, destroying property and stalking constitute criminal offences and action could be taken under the Criminal Code in addition to an application for a Protection Order.

For more information contact

- DVConnect WomensLine (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 811 811
- DVConnect MensLine (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 600 636
- Your local police (some police stations also have Domestic Violence Liaison Officers)
- Your local Magistrates Court.

Alternate accommodation

If you choose to leave a relationship with an abusive partner or family member you may need to find alternate accommodation to ensure your safety. The period after ending a relationship can be high risk for increased violence towards you (and any children in your care).

You may choose to stay with friends or family if their address is unknown to abusive person. If this is not an option you may need crisis accommodation in a refuge. The location of refuges is confidential.

If you have pets, the RSPCA can help care for them under the 'Pets in Crisis' program. DV Connect can help make arrangements for pets if there is a risk of harm to them due to domestic violence, and if you are staying in a refuge.

For help with crisis accommodation contact

- DVConnect Women's Line (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 811 811
- DVConnect MensLine (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 600 636

Financial assistance

Depending on your circumstances you may be eligible for financial support from Centrelink. Centrelink Social Workers can help anyone affected by family violence with information about financial options, counselling and support.

For more information contact

- Centrelink
Phone: 13 28 50 (social worker)

Legal options

It is advisable to get legal advice about your rights in regard to separation and divorce, property, finances and any matters involving children.

For information about how to access free legal services in your local area contact

- DVConnect Womensline (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 811 811
- DVConnect MensLine (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 600 636

Make a safety plan

It is important to develop a safety plan in case you feel threatened and need to leave home quickly. Make sure any children in your care are aware of a safety plan for themselves in case you are unable to leave the house.

It is helpful to consider the following:

- who can you call if you feel threatened or in danger? e.g. police, a neighbour, relative or friend
- where can you go if you need a safe place? e.g. a neighbour or someone else who lives close by
- do you have access to transport if you need to escape quickly?
- you may need to keep a spare house and car key, or cash for a cab that is easy to access

- consider keeping some clothing, medications, important papers, keys and some money with someone you can trust
- practise travelling to the location that you have chosen as a safe place
- talk to the police even if you do not wish to take out a protection order, so they are aware of your circumstances.

Seek medical care

If you have been injured or are at risk of self harm you should attend your local Emergency Department for urgent medical care. It is also helpful to have a local General Practitioner who can support you and treat any other medical or mental health concerns when they arise.

Many victims of family violence seek medical care from their General Practitioner or Emergency Department frequently, but may not talk about the real cause of injuries or the stress they experience at home. This is often because of fear the abuser may find out, feelings of shame, or worry about not being believed.

Health Practitioners including doctors, nurses and social workers can provide you with confidential care and support to ensure your health and safety needs are addressed. If requested they can usually arrange for you to remain anonymous on their computer systems, ensure correspondence or phone calls are not made to your home and arrange referral to a domestic violence counsellor.

Seek counselling

Living with violence can affect the way you think, and how you feel about yourself. It takes time and support to restore self-esteem and to build a different future.

Counselling can help you to understand more about yourself and the effect violence in a relationship may have had on you. A counsellor can also discuss options for your particular situation that will increase your safety and well-being. Some services can also provide support and advocacy in dealing with legal and housing services.

Domestic Violence Services also provide

counselling and support services for children who are victims of family violence. Children also need an opportunity to talk about their experiences. It is important that children are reassured that they are not to blame for violence, and that violent behaviour is wrong.

To talk to a counsellor contact

- Brisbane Domestic Violence Service
Phone: 3217 2544
- DVConnect Womensline (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 811 811
- DVConnect MensLine (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 600 636
- KidsHelpLine (24hrs)
Phone: 1800 551 800
- Parentline
Phone: 1300 30 1300
- Elder Abuse Prevention Unit
Phone: 1300 651 192.

These services can provide information about other appropriate counselling services in your local area.

Take care of yourself

Anyone who has lived with family violence needs to take special care of their emotional well-being, as well as their physical safety. Some ways to do this could be to:

- spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself such as friends, family or counsellor
- attend a support group for survivors of domestic and other family violence
- take care of your general health such as dental needs, nutrition or substance abuse issues
- learn healthy ways to reduce your stress such as exercise and relaxation.

Community Services

If you or someone you know is experiencing family violence, you can contact one of the following organisations for support, information and assistance.

Public Guardian

Assistance for adults who are unable to make decisions for themselves due to illness, injury or disability.

Phone: 1300 653 187 or 3234 0870

Website: justice.qld.gov.au

Brisbane Domestic Violence Service

Support, information and referral for people experiencing domestic violence. Also provides 24 hour outreach to metro Brisbane through Safer Lives Mobile Service.

Phone: 3217 2544

Phone: 0408 321 996 (Safer Lives)

Website: bdvs.org.au

Department of Communities, Child Safety Services

If you suspect a child is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing harm, contact Child Safety Services.

Phone: 1800 811 810 (9am–5pm Mon–Fri) or

Phone: 1800 177 135 (24hrs)

dvconnect Mensline

Phone counselling for men about relationships and strategies to address use of violence. Also provide support to men who are victims of family violence.

Phone: 1800 600 636 (24 hours)

Website: dvconnect.org

dvconnect Womensline

Phone counselling, support, information and advocacy for women and state-wide referral to refuges and local domestic and family violence services.

Phone: 1800 811 811 (24hrs)

Website: dvconnect.org

Elder Abuse Prevention Unit Helpline

Information, support and referral for older people who are experiencing abuse.

Phone: 1300 651 192 (9am–5 pm, Mon–Fri)

Website: eapu.com.au

Encircle

Specialised domestic and family violence counseling for adults and children.

Phone: 3889 0063 (Lawnton)

Phone: 3284 3081 (Redcliffe)

Website: encircle.org.au

Family Relationship Advice Line

Assistance for families affected by relationship or separation issues.

Phone: 1800 050 321

Website: familyrelationships.gov.au

Immigrant Women's Support Service

Support, referral and advocacy to women from non-english speaking backgrounds. Provide phone support for women in remote and rural areas.

Phone: 3846 3490

Website: iwss.org.au

KidsHelpLine

Counselling for children and young people under 25 by phone, internet or email.

Phone: 1800 551 800 (24 hrs)

Website: kidshelpline.com.au

Lifeline

Phone crisis counselling or face-to-face counselling by appointment.

Phone: 13 11 14 (24hrs)

Website: lifeline.org.au

Mensline Australia

Counselling, information and referral services for men about family, relationship or other concerns.

Phone: 1300 789 978 (24hrs)

Website: menslineaus.org.au

Parentline

Provide counselling, information and support for parents and those who care for children.

Phone: 1300 30 1300 (8am–10pm, 7 days)

Website: parentline.com.au

Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research

This website has a series of fact sheets about domestic violence, adolescent to parent abuse and the effects of family violence on children and young people.

Website: noviolence.com.au/factsheets.html

Queensland Police Service

Urgent response to immediate threats, and can assist to obtain Domestic Violence Protection Orders. The Police website also has information about Domestic Violence and how to apply for a Protection Order.

Phone: 000 in an emergency, or your local station for non-emergent assistance
Website: police.qld.gov.au

SANDBAG Domestic Violence and Family Support Program

Face to face counseling, support groups, information, referral and advocacy for women and children experiencing domestic violence.
Phone: 3269 0277
Website: sandbag.org.au

Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline

Crisis counselling, support, information and referral to anyone who has experienced sexual assault or sexual abuse.
Phone: 1800 010 120

Victim Assist Queensland

Financial assistance to victims of crime to assist pay for medical care or counselling required to recover from the effects of an act of violence.
Phone: 1300 LINKUP (1300 546587)
Website: justice.qld.gov.au/justice-services/victims-of-crime/victim-assist-queensland

Caution:

If you have concerns about someone else knowing you have had contact with family violence counselling and information services, consider whether it is safe to use your own phone or computer. Alternatives could be a friend's phone and computer, public phone or computer in your local public library.

Disclaimer: This health information is for general education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.