

# Through your child's eyes



## Authors

Tonia Keating and Deborah Lockwood, Relationships Australia SA Ltd.

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General Manager, Communications and Development Unit  
Relationships Australia SA  
191 Flinders St, Adelaide SA 5000

[www.rasa.org.au](http://www.rasa.org.au)

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# Through your child's eyes

This booklet is written to help you to see the effects of family violence and of moving from one place to another through your child's eyes. It's been tough for you and your children and we know the best way to help your children at this time is to help you support your children. Family violence can have serious impacts on a child's emotional, mental and physical health. In this booklet we give you information on the effects that violence can have on children and we provide suggestions for what you can do right now, with your child, to help them understand what is happening and why, and to increase their sense of safety despite all the changes going on.

It's important to know that not every child exposed to family violence will experience long-term negative affects, but what you do next is so important. Let's start with the things you can do right now.

# Creating the environment your child needs

Even though you and your child are in a temporary living arrangement, as mum, you can still create a safe and loving emotional environment by showing your child love, care and positive attention with hugs and praise. Comforting them when they are upset will help create the safe feeling environment your child needs.



# Common Myths

“They’re too young to know what’s going on ...”

Seeing or hearing violence changes the way your child’s brain grows. Children aren’t “tough”. Even if they aren’t talking yet, being exposed to family violence has a negative impact on children and babies’ development.

“He didn’t touch the kids ...”

Regardless of whether your child has been directly abused verbally or physically, they are affected by the exposure to the fear that surrounds family violence. Children can be affected even when they are in a different room.

“They didn’t see any violence ...”

Research shows us that children are greatly affected by family violence even when it hasn’t happened right in front of them. They feel their mother’s fear.



## Some of the ways children experience family violence

- Feeling anxious about being unsafe
- Fear; feeling scared of those they love
- Guilt; feeling like the violence is their fault
- Not being able to have friends home
- Grief and loss over not having a healthy safe family
- Potential loss of one parent if they leave or a parent constantly threatens to leave
- Feeling insecure and unsettled as life is unpredictable, never knowing when a crisis will erupt
- Moving from place to place and a loss of personal belongings and sense of home.



## Some things they might learn

- Family violence is normal
- It's okay for men to control women
- Violence is an okay way to solve problems
- It's mum's fault that dad is violent
- Nothing and nowhere is safe
- Intimidation is the only way to get what you want
- Other people have the right to abuse me and treat me badly
- My parent's violence is my fault
- It's okay for me to abuse mum
- It's okay to keep secrets even when you are scared.



## Some things you might notice about your child while you await a place to call home

- Being aggressive to you, their brothers and sisters, other children, and animals
- Blaming you for the violence
- Saying they want to hurt Dad (being protective of you)
- Crying a lot
- Worried about their toys and clothes
- Not wanting to go to school
- Fight, bully other children at school
- Become overly responsible
- Withdraw, become shy, hide themselves away
- Be overly sensitive to noise, smell, sights, crowds
- Have problems sleeping
- Try to be “good” to please others
- Attach easily to unfamiliar adults
- Your child might feel they need to look after you and parent you.

## But it is important to remember

A warm, loving and secure relationship with a parent is the best way for a child to overcome the effects of violence. While children aren't "tough" they are resilient, which means they can move past the trauma. Children can recover and heal from violence.



## What your child needs

Your child needs to feel connected with you. They need to know you are there and you will comfort them. They also need you to talk with them, gently and reassuringly. They need the silence around family violence to be broken.

- Acknowledge this is scary and confusing for them
- Let them know it's not their fault
- Let them know you love them
- Keep yourself calm and do not raise your voice - this can be difficult but it's important to tell them that violence is not okay, ever
- Let them know it's okay to love someone (their Dad) and also be angry at their behaviour; children can be confused by your mixed feelings or their own
- Discuss the situation with them using words that suit their age. Let them know that they are in a safe place
- Let your child know it's normal for them to feel angry, sad, scared and upset. Encourage your child to talk about how they are feeling, but don't force them - let your child communicate at their pace
- Don't talk about details of the violence with another adult in front of your child because this can cause your child to relive the trauma

- Remember they are kids and don't expect them to make adult decisions or have adult reactions
- Seek support for yourself. You are the most important person in your child's life and your child is looking to you for reassurance, security and certainty. Support is available for yourself and is an extremely important way to help your child.



# Parenting in a loving and caring way

Despite all the challenges and uncertainty in your life at the moment, the best way you can help your child right now is to be the most loving and caring parent you can. It's the best way to promote healing and well-being in children who have experienced violence and disruption.

Your child's brain is still growing in the midst of all these experiences. It is so important that you:

- Hug your child
- Give lots of gentle eye contact and smiles
- Praise them
- Sing, read and talk with them
- Tell them you love them
- Comfort them when they are scared (which might be when they are showing anger)
- Have fun and play with them.



## When to seek some support for your child

While children can overcome the difficulties they experience from being exposed to family violence with the support from their mum, many children require specific therapeutic support to help them with unique needs.

When children show strong and persistent patterns of sadness, aggression, or non-cooperation, it is a good idea for you to seek specialist support for them.

Some signs to keep an eye out for that indicate your child could do with some more support:

- Changes in behaviour
- Developmental regression – like starting to bed wet again and thumb sucking
- Problems at school
- Nightmares
- Withdrawing, not talking, hiding
- Physical illnesses – like stomach aches, feeling sick, headaches.



# Together4Kids specialised therapeutic support for children

We know that as a parent in this crisis service you have lots of things to sort out. The workers at the service can be great help for you. Together4Kids is a service available to your children during this time and when you move to more secure housing. Your child could benefit from some time with a specialist children's therapeutic worker which Together4Kids can provide. It can be hard sometimes for kids to talk about the things that have happened. A specialist children's therapeutic worker is someone outside the family that your child can talk to about what's worrying them. The therapist helps kids develop coping strategies, make sense of what has happened, and reduce anxiety. The therapist will also provide you as the parent, with resources and tips that you can use to support your child.



Therapeutic support for children looks different to a counselling session for an adult. Children's therapeutic work is provided by a specialist who may engage with your child using:

- Play therapy
- Drawing and art work
- Body movement
- Breathing and relaxation activities
- Sandplay.



# Why it is important for children to have an opportunity to make sense of their story

Through therapeutic support children have an opportunity to:

- Learn that violence is not their fault
- Learn to express anger in non-destructive ways
- Feel safe
- Develop an extended support system of family and friends outside the home
- Know that it's okay to love someone even when they hate their violent behaviour
- Feel cared for and understood
- Know they have a voice and are listened to.



# More about Together4Kids specialised therapeutic support for children

Together4Kids is a specialist therapeutic service that provides customised support to children aged 0-12yrs. If you also have older children, they too can also receive specialist support from appropriate youth services.

Together4Kids exists because children who have had to move from place to place, often due to family violence, may be feeling insecure, or even traumatised. Their routines and their relationships with family members, friends and schoolmates are likely to have been disrupted and they may have experienced multiple losses and stresses.

As their parent, you are going through tough times, and at a time of crisis, many parents struggle with knowing how to provide the emotional support to their child.

Children can be assisted by the caring, skilled staff from Together4Kids to make sense of their sometimes complex experiences, understand and manage their feelings, develop friendships and feel safe. Our starting point is the needs of each child, and to provide support that responds to each child as individuals in the context of their family.

We work directly with children and parents in collaboration with other service providers (like housing or domestic violence services). We view parents as allies in our work, supporting them to learn more about their child's experiences and strengthen positive bonds with their children.

# Speak with one of your workers about referring your child to Together4Kids

Together4Kids is a service of Relationships Australia South Australia

Together4Kids direct phone 08 8245 8190

Email [t4k@rasa.org.au](mailto:t4k@rasa.org.au)

[www.rasa.org.au/services/couples-families/together-4-kids/](http://www.rasa.org.au/services/couples-families/together-4-kids/)





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