

Parenting After Domestic Violence

What's Happening

When one person in a relationship uses any kind of abuse to control the other, this is domestic violence. You may have recently left a relationship that is abusive, or you may still be in one. Your children may have heard or seen the abuse, or they may have been targets themselves.

Living with domestic violence takes a toll on all family members. Your children may still feel afraid, even if the danger is past. But with your help, they can find ways to cope with stress, be safe, and heal.

What You Might Be Seeing

Some children living with abuse do not show signs of stress. Others struggle at home, at school, or in the community.

You may notice increased fear or anger, clinging, difficulty sleeping, or tantrums. If the abuse goes on for a long time, children can experience more serious problems, like depression or anxiety, skipping school, or using drugs.

What You Can Do

A strong relationship with a caring, nonviolent parent is important to help your children grow up in a positive way. You can help them by taking the following steps:

- **Plan for safety.** If you are still in an abusive situation, make a safety plan with your children. Teach them how to call 911, where to go for help, and never to get in the middle of an adult fight. Local domestic violence advocates can help you plan!
- **Take care of yourself.** Finding ways to cope with your own stress is good for you and for your children. Make time to connect with friends, exercise, listen to music, take a bath, or do something else that helps you relax and refocus.
- **Help your children feel secure.** Keep your kids close to you when you can, and give them lots of eye contact, kisses, and hugs. Play together, even if just for a few minutes at a time. Provide routines such as bedtime reading and regular meal times.
- **Stay calm.** Children who have lived with violence will sometimes act in ways that make life more chaotic. Set clear limits and follow through, but keep your voice calm. Get help if you need it.



- **Talk about it.** Be willing to listen to your children talk about what has happened and how they feel. Tell them the truth when they ask questions. Reassure them that you are working to keep your family safe.
- **Help your children develop relationships.** Positive relationships with peers and other supportive adults can help your children manage stress and stay strong and happy.
- **Celebrate their strengths.** Find the things your children are good at. Encourage them in school and other activities.

Remember: You are the most important person in your children's lives. Your children need to know that you are there for them, you love them, and you will do all you can to keep them safe.

If you are in danger, contact:

- 911 for emergency police assistance
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1.800.799.7233) for safety planning and referrals to local help

Other resources:

- Resources for Families (Child Welfare Information Gateway): <https://childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/domviolence/resources/>
- National Network to End Domestic Violence: <https://nnedv.org/>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: <http://www.nctsn.org/content/resources>
- Futures Without Violence: <http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/>

This tip sheet was created with information from experts in national organizations that work to prevent child maltreatment and promote well-being. At <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resources/tip-sheets/>, you can download this tip sheet and get more parenting tips, or call 800.394.3366.