



TIP SHEET 9

Domestic and Family Violence and Children/Young People

Adults are not the only ones who experience family and domestic violence. Unfortunately, children also witness and experience the effects of abuse. Children in families with parental conflict are at greater risk of worse health, social and educational outcomes than those without parental conflict.¹ Domestic violence is harmful to the relationship between the non-violent parent and their children.

Not all children are affected by family violence in the same way.

Some areas where children experiencing family violence are at increased risk include:

- Emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, guilt and shame
- Behavioural problems such as aggression or self-harming behaviour
- Developing poorer relationships with both parents
- Somatic impacts e.g. changes to sleep, appetite, headaches, stomach aches
- Sleeping and eating problems
- Social impacts e.g. being bullied
- Copying abusive attitudes and behaviours of the parent using violence

"Children described living with fear, anxiety and dread, and worried about the safety of their siblings, mothers and themselves. Children further conveyed feelings of shame about their home life, and thus lacked confidence and self-esteem, resulting in poor relationships." – Australian Institute of Family Studies²

Family violence on parenting can impact in the following ways.³

For the parent using violence, they may:

- Show a lack of warmth.
- Be inconsistent or harsh with discipline.
- Engage the children to use violence against the other parent.
- Criticize the other parent in front of their children.

¹ Campo, M. Children's exposure to domestic and family violence: Key issues and responses (CFCA Paper No. 36). Melbourne: Child Family Community Australia information exchange, Australian Institute of Family Studies. 2015.

² Ibid.

³ Court, Family. "Exposure to Family Violence and Its Effect on Children - Family Court of Australia." Familycourt.gov.au, Family Court of Australia, 2013, familycourt.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/fcoaweb/reports-and-publications/publications/family+violence/exposure-to-family-violence-and-its-effect-on-children.



For the parent experiencing violence, they may:

- Be hypervigilant in their behaviour to avoid more anger and abuse and attempt to shield their children from abusive behaviour.
- Be less emotionally or physically available to their child due to the stress of abuse.
- Experience depression and other mental health problems which can impact parenting.

Child protection is everybody's business and we all have a responsibility to ensure that children are safe. It is important to help families experiencing violence to understand the effect abuse has on their children, and how to heal.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS⁴

Protective factors include:

- Warm, consistent and empathic relationships between the parent and their children to support healthy emotional, psychological brain development and emotional regulation.
- Positive adult role models and support outside their immediate family such as relatives, friends and teachers. Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders can play an important role in providing this relationship.
- Having a positive relationship with siblings and peers.
- Help the parent not using violence to understand the impact that violence can have upon the child and support them in strengthening the relationship.
- Providing structure, warmth, emotional support and positive reinforcement.

What to do⁵

- If a child/young person discloses abuse, then listen, listen, listen, and do not add anything. Allow the person to talk the person finishes telling their story.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you and that the violence is not their fault.
- Explain to the child, for their safety you may need to report what they have shared to someone else and you will only share it with those you need to.
- For further information on what to do see Tip Sheet 3 and Tip Sheet on the [DFV Resources page](#).
- Complete the Mandatory Reporters guide to determine whether you need to report to Community Services. Visit reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s

Let them know that you will continue to support and look out for them. Pray for them, and their family. Pray for the Police and other support services.

If a child/young person **has not** disclosed violence in the home but you are **concerned that abuse may be occurring**, please raise your concerns with your *Breaking the Silence* representative, to the CPU or to church leadership.

⁴ Ibid.

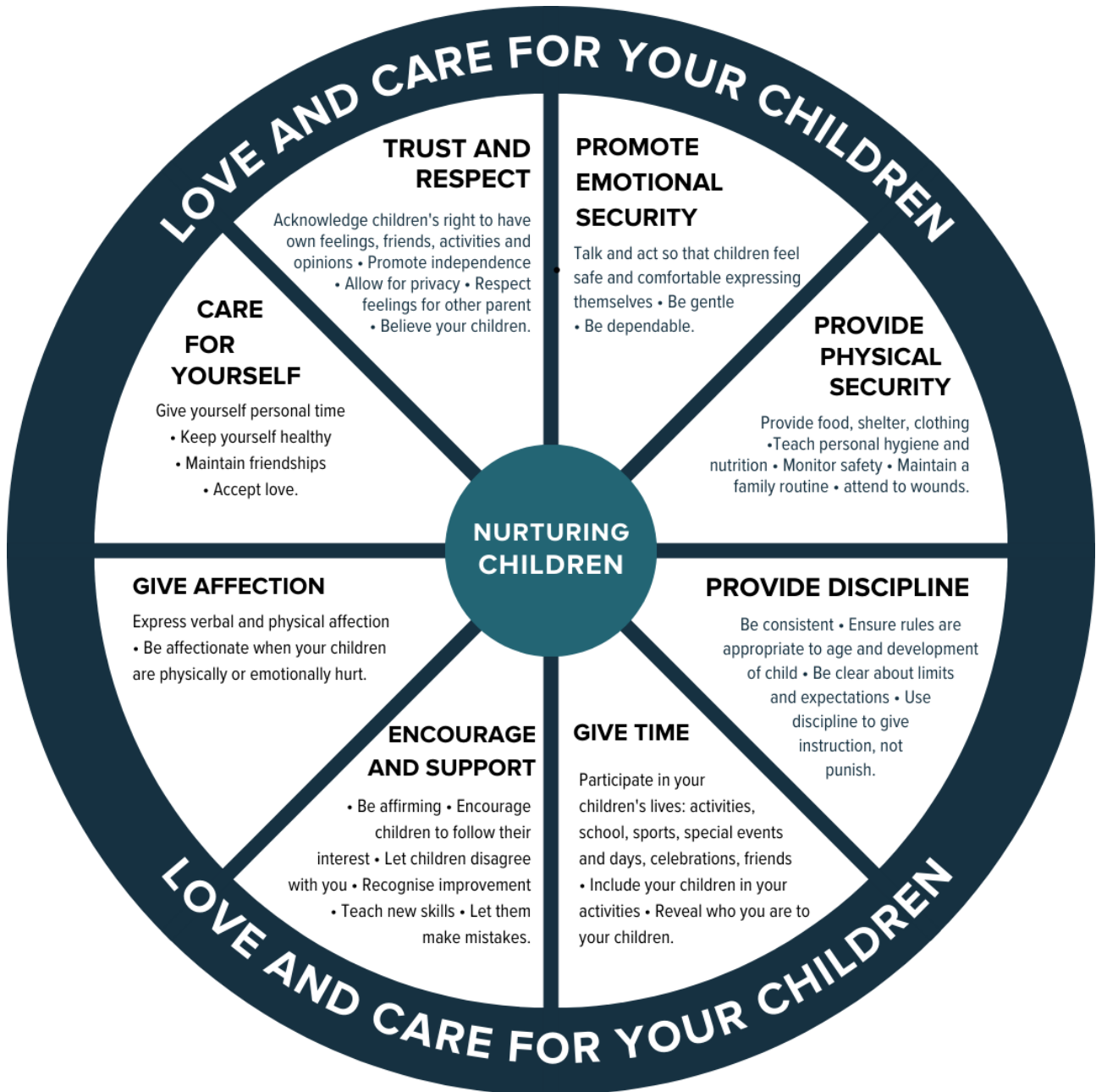
⁵ Government. Responding to Children and Young People's Disclosures of Abuse Listen, Reassure and Respect. aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/disclosure-infographic.pdf.



The nurture wheel below gives some good examples of how to support children.

Nurturing Children Wheel

Used with permission by Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre, Duluth, Minnesota





For more information on the effects of abuse on children please visit:

domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help/children
aifs.gov.au

To determine if you need to report to Community Services complete the mandatory reporters guide or contact the CPU:

reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s

Breaking the Silence Training Workbook

From: jerichoroad.org.au/breaking-the-silence/basic-training/

Conduct Protocol Unit, Presbyterian Church of Australia (NSW, ACT, WA, TAS)

Phone: [02 9690 9325](tel:0296909325) | Email: cpu@pcnsw.org.au | Website: breakingthesilence.org.au

SUPPORT SERVICES

NSW Domestic Violence Line

24/7 information, support and referrals for women experiencing violence.

Ph: [1800 656 463](tel:1800656463)

Web: domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/get-help

Kids Helpline

kidshelpline.com.au

Ph: [1800 55 1800](tel:1800551800)

No to Violence: Men's Referral Service

National service providing advice and support for men using violence.

Ph: [1300 766 491](tel:1300766491) Web: ntv.org.au

NSW Child Protection Helpline

24/7 helpline for reporting concerns for the safety of children and young people.

Ph: [132 111](tel:132111) Web:

reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s

MensLine

National service supporting men experiencing violence in a relationship.

Ph: [1300 789 978](tel:1300789978) Web: mensline.org.au

FURTHER RESOURCES

Professional Standards Unit, ***Sydney Anglican Policy on Responding to Domestic Abuse***. Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, 2018, safeministry.org.au/domestic-family-abuse.

'Renew: An Australian Guide for Christian Women Survivors of Domestic Abuse', Anglicare Sydney, Restored, 2022.

domesticviolence.com.au

fcfcoa.gov.au/fl/pubs/fv-impact-children

saferresource.org.au/children_who_witness_domestic_violence

kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/families-impacted-domestic-violence