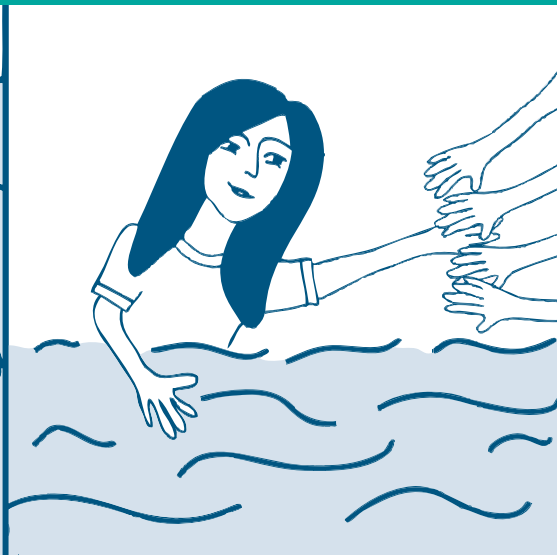


# Safe from violence

A guide for women leaving or separating



*Relationships Australia.*

## Authors

Relationships Australia Victoria: Allie Bailey, Helena Deacon-Wood, Jane Vanderstoel and Anastasia Panayiotidis. Additional writing, editing and graphics by Helpful Partners Pty Ltd. Illustrations by Katherine Kotaras.

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations. We have over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services from more than 18 locations across Melbourne and Victoria. For more information visit [www.rav.org.au](http://www.rav.org.au).

RAV acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia. We support Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

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## About this booklet

Making changes can be difficult. The authors encourage you to seek professional help if you feel you are being controlled, manipulated and/or exposed to physical and psychological family violence. Trust yourself and your instincts when making decisions about the safety of you and your children. If you need immediate help or are in danger, call 000.

For free and confidential information, advice and safety planning or to talk to a trained counsellor, call 1800RESPECT 24/7 on 1800 737 732.

This booklet can be flipped through from beginning to end. It includes input from women who have experienced violence in relationships.

Keep this booklet in a safe place for your reference.

# What is domestic or family violence?

Family violence, or domestic violence, is a pattern of behaviour where one person tries to dominate and control the other.

Family violence can include a range of behaviours, including the following.

**Family violence is a deliberate act and is rarely an isolated event. Over time, the violence tends to increase in frequency and severity.**

## Physical abuse

- Hitting, punching, pulling by the hair, choking, pinching, pushing, stabbing or restraining you in any way. Physical injuries are often directed at parts of the body that other people will not see.
- Using weapons to frighten you or causing damage to property.
- Not letting you sleep, eat, or take your medication.

## Verbal abuse

- Harassing or threatening you.
- Saying things to frighten you. For example, telling you that the children won't live with you if you leave.
- Calling you insulting names.
- Undermining you as a parent in front of the children.

## Sexual abuse

- Forcing you to have sex when you don't want to or making you engage in sexual practices you are not comfortable with.
- Making you wear clothes you are not comfortable with.

## Emotional abuse

- Withdrawing from you and not giving you support.
- Controlling you with anger or by not speaking to you.
- Expressing extreme jealousy.
- Stopping you from using the phone or transport.
- Not giving you an opportunity to make choices for yourself.
- Harming your pets.

## Social abuse

- Putting you down in front of other people.
- Lying about you to other people.
- Isolating you from people who do support you.
- Not letting you visit a doctor on your own.
- Controlling your life; not letting you have a life outside the home.

## Financial abuse

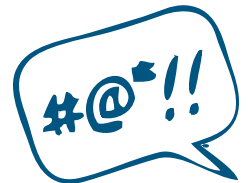
- Controlling the money so you are financially dependent.
- Forcing you to sign for loans you might not agree with.
- Questioning you about every purchase you make.
- Using joint finances for personal use.
- Incurring debts for which you are also responsible.

## Spiritual abuse

- Not letting you practise your own religion.
- Forcing you to follow a religion that you don't want to.

## Stalking

- Constantly making phone calls to you, or sending text messages, emails, faxes, letters or unwanted gifts to you.
- Loitering near your home or workplace.
- Spying on you or following you.



*It was like a light bulb coming on!  
When he puts me down and calls  
me names in front of our friends...  
that's abusive.*

## Coercive control <sup>4</sup>

This is a more subtle type of abusive behaviour. Coercive control is a pattern of controlling and manipulative behaviours within a relationship.

### There are 12 signs of coercive control

1. **Isolating you from your support system.** An abusive partner will cut you off from friends and family, or limit your contact with them so you don't receive the support you need.
2. **Monitoring your activity throughout the day.**
3. **Denying you freedom and autonomy.** A person exerting coercive control may try to limit your freedom and independence. For example, not allowing you to go to work or school, restricting your access to transportation, stalking your every move when you're out, taking your phone and changing passwords, etc.
4. **Gaslighting,** where the abuser makes you doubt your own truth, experience and sanity, by insisting that they are always right, and instils their narrative of a situation, even if the evidence points against this. Gaslighting in essence, is based on lies and manipulation of the truth.
5. **Name-calling and severe criticism,** as well as malicious put-downs which are all extreme forms of bullying.
6. **Limiting access to money and controlling finances.** This is a way of restricting your freedom and ability to leave the relationship. Financial abuse is listed above as a specific form of abuse but, within the context of coercive control, financial control is a tactic to keep a person disempowered, by utilising strategies such as:
  - placing you on a strict budget that barely covers the essentials such as food or clothes
  - limiting your access to bank accounts
  - hiding financial resources from you
  - preventing you from having a credit card
  - rigorously monitoring what you spend.
7. **Reinforcing traditional gender roles** and coercing you, as the woman, to take care of all the cleaning, cooking and childcare.

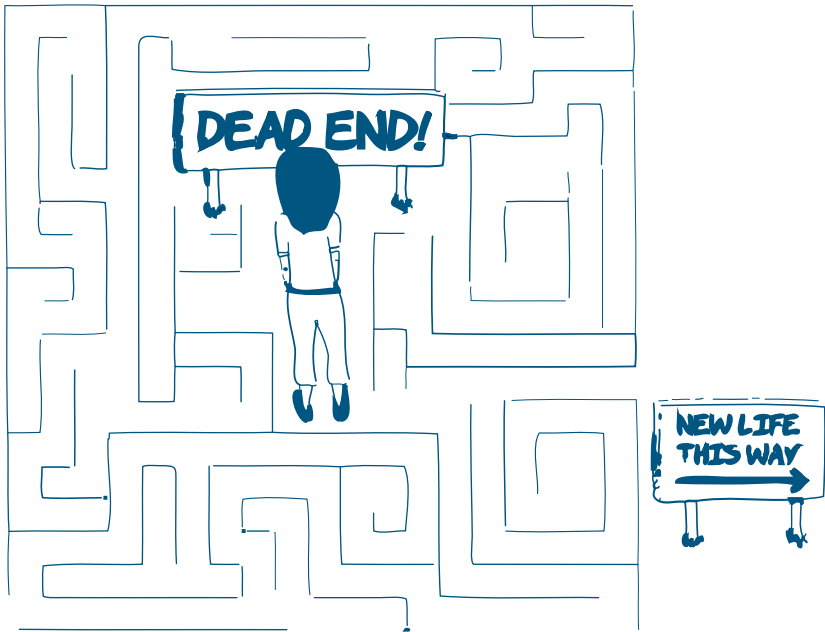
8. **Turning your children against you.** If you have children either with the abuser or someone else, they may try to weaponise the children against you by making comments that are critical of you, belittling you in front of the children, or telling them that you're a bad parent. Sometimes the techniques are very subtle and insidious, involving slow drip-feeding of a narrative that regards you as abnormal.
9. **Controlling aspects of your health and your body.** The abuser will monitor and control how much you eat, sleep, exercise, or how much time you spend in the bathroom. They may also control where you go for medical help, and the medications you take.
10. **Making jealous accusations about the time you spend with family or friends,** either in person or online, as a way of phasing out all your contact with the external world, except for them.
11. **Regulating your sexual relationship,** for example making demands about the amount of times you engage in sex each day or week, and the kinds of activities you perform.
12. **Threatening your children or pets as an extreme form of intimidation.** When physical, emotional, or financial threats do not work for the abuser as desired, they may make threats against others such as your loved ones, children and pets, who are also beloved members of the household.

# Are you experiencing family violence?

If you are, you're not alone. One in four Australian women has experienced violence and abuse by a current or former partner, and women are at least three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner.<sup>1</sup>

Every day, Relationships Australia works with women who are living through the experience of family violence. While family violence can happen in many different family relationships, it is overwhelmingly women and children who experience violence, and men who use it.

This booklet will help you to understand family violence in relationships and give you information that may be helpful when thinking about whether to stay, or how to leave an abusive relationship.





Think about your relationship, your feelings and the behaviour of your partner. If you answer yes to any of the following questions, it is likely that you are experiencing family violence.

Do you feel that you are often 'walking on egg shells'?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Is it difficult to disagree with or say 'no' to your partner?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Does your partner check up on what you are doing?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Does your partner try to stop you from seeing your friends and family?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Does your partner accuse you of flirting with other people?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Does your partner dictate how the household finances are spent, or stop you from having any money for yourself?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Does your partner pressure you to do sexual things you don't want to or to have sex when you don't feel like it?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Does your partner threaten you, push you, damage property, throw things or make you feel unsafe?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Do your children hear or see things that might be damaging to them?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Does your partner threaten to kill themselves or take the children away from you?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Have you been frightened for your own or your children's safety?	( ) Yes ( ) No

This is not an exhaustive list of questions about family violence, and there are other forms of family violence women can experience.

If you are unsure if you are experiencing family violence, contact 1800RESPECT to talk about what's happening (see page 35).

*I hadn't wanted to admit it, even to myself. But in the end I stood in front of the mirror and said 'Yes, you are a victim of domestic violence and you are going to do something about it.'*

# Different kinds of family violence

## Adolescent family violence

Like other forms of family violence, adolescent family violence is an attempt to control and have power over family members.

If family conflict includes verbal and physical abuse from the adolescent, and if parents and other family members feel scared, intimidated, manipulated and are physically hurt, the adolescent is being abusive and violent. This is not acceptable behaviour - everyone in a family should feel safe and be safe.

*Having to lie in my own bed at night and not go to sleep...[being] scared that your own child is going to come in and do you some harm during the night is no way to live, so I had to do something about that.*

*- Mother of 15-year-old girl*

## Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Family violence, rape and sexual assault are serious issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. Research has shown that incidents of violence against women and children, by both white and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, continue to increase in communities. At the same time, women are either reluctant or unable to report the violence to the authorities.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced family violence, rape or sexual assault have identified that there are difficulties in trying to obtain information, advice or support. Some of these include:

- a history of negative experiences with the legal system, including existing services being unsympathetic or giving unhelpful advice
- limited knowledge of existing services and their roles
- difficulties accessing these services
- a lack of appropriate services
- anxiety about approaching services
- an unwillingness to disclose a history of family violence to people who are not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, including family report writers
- a lack of trust that the courts will be culturally understanding
- the stigma attached to experiencing family violence, particularly in rural communities.

## Violence against people who identify as LGBTIQ+

Violence against people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or asexual (LGBTIQ+) can include sexual assault, family violence, controlling behaviour and particular types of violence based on sexuality, gender or identity. Homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism also contribute to violence.

When present in LGBTIQ+ relationships, sexual assault and family violence can create unique vulnerabilities and risks. These include:

- a lack of information that recognises violence or controlling behaviours in LGBTIQ+ relationships as sexual assault or family violence
- threats from a partner to publicly 'out' your sexuality, gender, identity or HIV or health status
- pressure from a partner to look or act more 'male' or more 'female'
- the fear of a lack of confidentiality within the LGBTIQ+ community
- the fear of being isolated from the LGBTIQ+ community
- the fear of being blamed for the violence.

### Police

Many police stations have a Domestic Violence Liaison Officer (DVLO), and your police station may have a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer Liaison Officer (commonly known as a GLLO). You can ask for these officers when you contact the police station.

Some states and territories have specialist LGBTIQ+ services to respond to sexual assault or family violence.

**Everyone has the right to live free of fear and violence.**

## Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experiencing sexual assault, domestic or family violence face a set of complex dynamics, issues and risks when trying to access services and increase their safety.

Language, however, should never be a barrier to seeking support. When contacting 1800RESPECT, you can access a confidential, free interpreter service (see page 35).

## Women with disabilities

Women with disabilities can also experience family violence from intimate partners, family members, formal or paid carers, informal or unpaid carers, staff in institutions, other residents in institutions and disability support workers.

The effects of family violence against women with disabilities can last a long time, particularly if there are increased barriers to accessing help as a result of the disabilities.

## Disability advocacy services

A disability advocate is someone who stands up for the rights of a person with disability and helps to sort out issues, concerns or problems. Disability advocates take direction from you. They keep your issues and information private and confidential and only release information with your permission. There are disability advocacy organisations in every state and territory of Australia (see 1800RESPECT on page 35 and the National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline on page 36).

# The effects of family violence on women

Women often describe living with violence as like being on a roller-coaster - never knowing what will happen next. This uncertainty may mean you are living in constant fear. You may feel confused and scared as your partner's behaviour swings from anger or abuse to guilty promises or remorse.

Living with family violence has far-reaching effects. It can affect your self-esteem, your mental and physical health, your employment, your friendships and your ability to parent.

Women experiencing family violence may:

- be isolated from their family and friends
- be increasingly dependent on the person who is using violence against them
- find it hard to make sense of what is happening
- start to believe verbal insults
- blame themselves for the violence
- deny that anything is wrong
- ignore the abuse and hope that things will change.

*I coped by trying to keep him happy so he wouldn't do these things to us. For a long time I believed that it was my fault or the children's. I cried a lot when he wasn't home. I lost all my belief in myself. I was totally isolated and spoke to no one about what was happening. I don't think I really did cope except to hide it from myself and the world.*

*In the end I realised that you can't make someone better no matter how much you love them. It is NOT your fault, it is theirs. You are a wonderful person and deserve so much better.*

# Children's responses to family violence

Of women who have experienced violence by a partner they lived with, more than half had children in their care.<sup>2</sup> Children are affected by family violence too, whether they experience it themselves or see or hear it expressed against a parent or sibling. Even when children are not directly seeing or hearing abuse, they live with uncertainty and fear like you do, and they know that something is not okay at home.

Violence and witnessing violence affects children of all ages and can influence how they deal with conflict throughout their lives. They may even come to believe that violence is a normal part of an intimate relationship.

Violence leaves children feeling confused, sad, angry and frightened. How this is expressed depends upon their age and stage of development.

- Babies' and toddlers' feelings will be reflected in their behaviour. If you are stressed it is likely that they will also become stressed.
- Small children may blame themselves for the violence.
- Primary-aged children may want to hide what happens at home from their friends.
- Teenagers may feel angry and blame either the violent parent or the parent being abused. They may also feel resentful at having to protect you. Some may engage in violent or risk-taking behaviours.

## Children may:

- show side effects such as diarrhoea, nightmares, bed-wetting or beginning to stutter
- get headaches, stomach aches or develop asthma
- suffer from low self-esteem or become withdrawn
- experience difficulties at school
- hurt other children or their pets.

You are not to blame for these effects on your children, but you can support them to repair and recover when they are safe to do so.

*After I left I made it very clear to the kids, 'Verbally abusing or physically hurting others is not okay.'*

Children living with domestic or family violence have made the following comments.

*When the yelling started, I had to take my little sister upstairs and shut the door.*

*I couldn't bring my friends home after school anymore in case Dad was in a bad mood.*

*It was pure hell - living like that.*

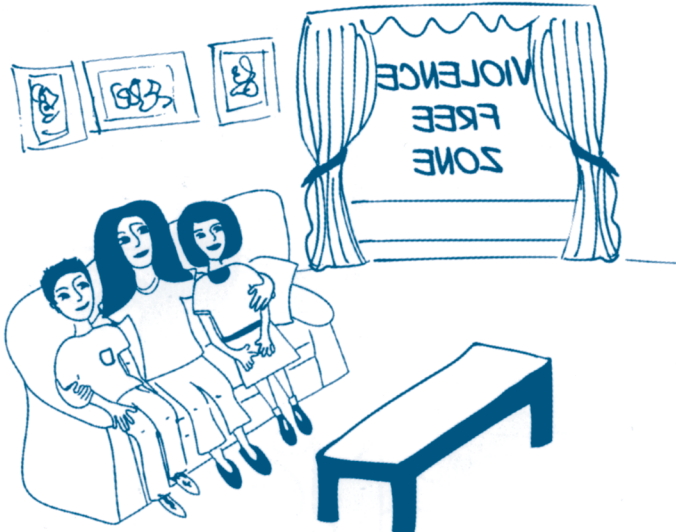
*I was so terrified - it was like a battlefield.*

**Remember:**

You are never to blame for someone else using violence.

The way children see the world is different to adults. It is important to talk with them about their feelings and experiences.

Family violence services (see page 35) can help you and your children to recover from abuse.



# Breaking the silence

Many women feel ashamed of being with a partner who abuses them.

Their violent behaviour, however, is not your fault.

Choosing to speak up about your experiences is brave.

Remaining silent can put you and your family at risk but sometimes speaking out can also be a risk. Only you can decide what to do. Trust your own judgement.

It's also recommended that you seek professional help in order to develop a safety plan (see page 21), which you can action in an emergency or any other time you need to in the future.

If you decide to speak out, who are you going to tell? Is there a friend, family member or workmate you can talk to?

You may choose to contact a support service (see page 35). They will give you information about your options and support you in your next steps.

*Before I told my best friend about the violence I was shaking inside, I thought I'd be blamed and feel so ashamed. Instead I felt this huge relief! It came as a surprise.*





# On the road to separating

It often takes multiple attempts before a woman finally leaves a violent partner.

- Many women don't want the relationship to end – they just want the violence to stop.
- Separating is even more difficult for women with children.
- Women from immigrant, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and rural communities, and women with disabilities often face additional difficulties.

Many women report that separating is one of the most difficult experiences of their life. They may feel too scared to leave and worry about what might happen if they do. And it's true that separating is often a time when women and children are at most risk of harm.<sup>3</sup>

*Loyalty is one thing but in the end I realised my constant hopefulness was simply unrealistic.*

Planning ahead is an important component of leaving safely.



# Help along the way

It takes a lot of courage to leave a partner who is violent. It's very important to draw on the circles of support you may have around you: family, friends, workmates and professional support.

1800RESPECT is a confidential, national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service for people experiencing, or at risk of, sexual or family violence, their family and friends, and frontline workers and professionals.

1800RESPECT can help you to find specialist services in your state or territory, including family violence, legal, financial, accommodation, and support services. 1800RESPECT will give you practical advice and put you in touch with support services that can help keep you safe. Call 1800 737 732 (see page 35).

Relationships Australia offers counselling and support programs to support those affected by family violence. Call 1300 364 277 or visit [www.relationships.org.au](http://www.relationships.org.au).

## The police can help

They will respond to any call to 000 for assistance, whether it comes from you, a friend or a family member.

Reporting what is happening to police will send a clear message to your partner or former partner that his behaviour is not acceptable.

If you are a family member affected by family violence, you can apply for a Domestic or Family Violence Order from the Magistrates' Court, or the police can apply on your behalf. You will need to make a statement to the police about how the family violence has affected you. For more information, see pages 19-20.

The police will serve an Interim Order until the case is heard in the courts and a formal Order is issued by a magistrate.

If you continue to feel intimidated and threatened by your partner or former partner, seek legal advice and assistance. See page 37 for more information.

## Financial help

It's helpful to contact Centrelink (see page 36) before you move out of home or before you have any financial difficulties. They can give you immediate financial advice and assist you to access benefits.

Financial counsellors can help you prepare a household budget to manage paying bills and debts. They will also help you access services that can provide transport, food and household items.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Support assists parents who have care of children by collecting child support payments. It's useful to tell them about the family violence so they can make arrangements to keep you safe. Sometimes women prefer not to collect child support to ensure their safety (see page 36).

## Help with accommodation

If you need to leave your home, alternative accommodation can include family and friends' houses, emergency housing such as women's refuges, private rentals or public housing. Funds are available to assist women with children in these situations. Call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 to find a crisis or accommodation service in your state or territory (see page 35).

## Women's refuges and shelters

A women's refuge or shelter is usually a cluster of secure units or rooms.

They offer confidential:

- safe, secure shelter, for between a couple of days to a few months
- assistance in getting you and your belongings to the refuge, including furniture moving and storage
- facilities for cooking and washing
- linen and bedding
- information, support and advocacy
- referrals to legal advice, financial assistance, longer-term housing and appropriate community resources.

## Legal advice

Women's Legal Services or Legal Aid can provide you with legal advice and explain your rights, and some local courts can also provide assistance (see page 37).

## Safety plan

Working through the safety plan (see page 21) included in this booklet will help you know what to do if your situation becomes risky.



*The day before my appointment I was really nervous but the support worker was great. She really listened and understood what living with him was like for me.*

# Domestic or Family Violence Orders

## What is a Domestic or Family Violence Order?

Domestic or Family Violence Orders are known by different names in different states and territories throughout Australia. They are orders made by the Magistrates' Court in your state or territory to protect you and your children from future violence or threats. Orders can be made that specifically relate to you and your situation.

For example, your former partner could be ordered not to:

- commit any acts of family violence against you or your children
- go to your home or place of work
- go to your children's school or childcare centre
- approach or follow you
- contact you in any way
- threaten, intimidate or harass you.



## How do I get a Domestic or Family Violence Order?

To obtain an Order you will need to make an application at your local Magistrates' Court. The police can also apply on your behalf, or issue an Interim Order in a situation of family violence which they have attended.

This court application is a legal hearing. You may be required to tell the magistrate what has happened and in some cases present any other evidence you have. The police will also present any evidence they have. The best way to prepare for a legal hearing is to seek legal advice. A lawyer can explain how the process works, what evidence there is and what your options are.

Once the Order is made and given to your former partner, the police have the power to arrest or detain them if they break its conditions. They may then be charged with the criminal offence of breaching a Domestic or Family Violence Order.

For legal advice and how to apply for an Order, call your local Legal Aid office or Women's Legal Services (see page 37).

If your Order also covers your children, make sure the staff at your children's school or childcare centre:

- know who can and cannot pick up the children
- have seen a photograph of your former partner
- have a copy of your Domestic or Family Violence Order and Parenting Plan (see page 29) if you have one.

### Always keep your Order with you

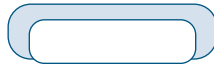
*I was terrified at the thought of going to court. But the people there really helped me through and explained what I needed to do. Now I have the Order and he knows he is not allowed to come to the house. I feel so relieved!*

# Safety Plan

## Be prepared to leave

You and your children may need to leave in a hurry. Use this information to make sure that you have everything covered to ensure your safety.

Actions	Done
Have a bag packed and ready with essential items you will need if you have to leave a violent situation very quickly. Hide it or give it to a trusted family member or friend to keep for you. See <i>Your emergency suitcase</i> below.	
Have a code word that tells a friend, family or neighbours that you feel unsafe and need assistance.	
Decide on the best way to leave the house (which doors or windows) if you and the children need to do so in a hurry.	
Ask neighbours to call the police if they hear a commotion from the house.	



### Your emergency suitcase

- Money, debit and credit cards.
  - Forms of identification (or certified copies) for you and children (e.g. birth certificates and passports).
  - Lease, rental agreement, mortgage papers for your house.
  - Bank account details.
  - Insurance papers.
  - Any medication for you and your children.
  - Medical records, immunisation details and your Medicare card.
  - Centrelink information.
  - Legal papers and copies of Domestic or Family Violence Orders.
  - Clothing and personal hygiene items for you and your children.
  - A recent photograph of your former partner.
  - A recent photograph of your house.
  - A spare key to your house and car.
- You may also need to include jewellery and you and your children's personal treasures.

## Safety and children

Actions	Done
<p>Discuss your safety plan with your children (if they are at an age where it is appropriate).</p>	
<p>Help your children choose a room in the house where they feel safest but can escape from if necessary. Tell them to go to this room if there is a fire and not to get involved in the fighting.</p>	
<p>Develop a code word that signals to your children that they need to leave now.</p>	
<p>Teach your children how to contact family, friends or neighbours they will be safe with.</p>	
<p>Teach your children how to call 000 for the police, fire and ambulance services. Tell them not to hang up afterwards. This helps the services to monitor what is happening and to find you if necessary.</p>	
<p>Have each child practise what they should say if they have to report violence.</p> <p>For example, “My name is ....., and my mum is being hurt.” “My address is.....”</p>	
<p>Re-think this safety plan on a regular basis to ensure it continues to contain the most appropriate actions for your circumstances.</p>	
<p>If it is appropriate, give your children their own mobile phone so they can discretely call for help if necessary.</p>	



## In your safe house

Are you living in the family home or elsewhere? Once you have separated there are things you can do to increase your safety.

Actions	Done
Apply to your local Magistrates' Court for a Domestic or Family Violence Order.	
If you remain in the family home, change the door locks, fit window locks and install outside lighting.	
Arrange to have a silent telephone number.	
Use caller ID or an answering machine or message bank service so you know who is calling before you answer the phone. This can also provide evidence of harassing phone calls.	
Tell your neighbours and/or landlord that your former partner no longer lives with you. Show them a photograph. Ask them to let you know if he is seen near the property.	
Get your neighbour's phone number in case of emergency. Provide a code word that lets them know that you are feeling unsafe.	
If your former partner breaks a Domestic or Family Violence Order, ring the police and report them.	

## At work

You will want to get on with your life but make sure you are safe when getting out and about or going to and from work.

Actions	Done
Tell your employer, work colleagues and building security section that you have separated and that the relationship was violent. Provide them with a photograph of your former partner.	
You can include the address of your workplace on your Domestic or Family Violence Order. Provide a copy to reception, security and other relevant people.	
If you do not want to communicate with your former partner, ask co-workers to screen your phone calls. Save any abusive emails or voicemail messages as they may provide future evidence.	
Change your daily travel route. Park close to your building. Consider asking someone to accompany you to and from the car.	
Let work colleagues and family members know your expected times of arrival.	

# Safety and technology

## Trust your instincts

If you suspect the abusive person knows too much, it is possible that your phone, computer, email, car use or other activities are being monitored. Abusers and stalkers can act in incredibly persistent and creative ways to maintain power and control. You can get help from the e-Safety Commissioner and report abuse at [www.esafety.gov.au](http://www.esafety.gov.au)

## Safety planning

Dealing with violence, abuse, and stalking is very difficult and dangerous. Domestic violence services and police can discuss options and help you with your safety planning, including in relation to technology.

## Safer computers

If anyone who is abusive has access to your computer, they might be monitoring your computer activities. 'Spyware' and 'keylogging' programs are commonly available and can track what you do on your computer without you knowing it. It is not possible to delete or clear all of the 'tracks' of your online or computer activities. Try to use a safer computer when you look for help or a new place to live, etc. It may be safest to use a computer at a public library, community centre, or internet cafe.

## Email, Facebook or instant messaging accounts

If you suspect that anyone abusive can access your email, consider creating an additional email account on a safer computer. Do not create or check this new email from a computer your abuser could access, in case it is being monitored. Use an anonymous name and account. For example: `bluecat@email.com` rather than `YourRealName@email.com`. Look for free web-based email accounts such as Yahoo or Hotmail. Do not provide detailed information about yourself in the account.

## Mobile phone settings

If you are using a mobile phone provided by the abusive person, consider turning it off when not in use. Many phones let you 'lock' the keys so a phone won't automatically answer or call if it is bumped. When turned on, check the phone settings. If your phone has an optional location service, you may want to switch the location feature off/on via the phone settings menu or by turning your phone off.

## Passwords and pin numbers

Some users of violence use the other person's email and other accounts to impersonate and cause harm. If anyone abusive knows or could guess your passwords, change them quickly and frequently. Think about changing the passwords for any protected accounts, including online banking and voicemail. Use a safer computer to access your accounts.

## Use of cordless phones and baby monitors

Turn off baby monitors when not in use and use a traditional corded phone for sensitive conversations.

## Personal mobile phones

When making or receiving private calls or arranging escape plans, try not to use a shared or family mobile phone as the phone bill and phone log might reveal your plans to an abuser. Consider using a prepaid phone so that you won't get phone calls and numbers listed on your bill.

## Records and data

Ask government agencies about their privacy policies for how they protect or publish your records. Request that courts, government, post offices and other agencies and organisations restrict access to your files to protect your safety.

## Private post boxes and real addresses

When asked by businesses, doctors, and other agencies and organisations for your address, have a private post office box address or a safer address to give them. Don't give out your real address.

## Search engines and social media

Go to a search engine, such as Google, and search for your name in quotation marks ("Full Name") to see if your private contact information can be found online. Ensure that none of your social media accounts include personal details, and do not share photos of yourself or your children online with location details.

## Evidence and reporting abuse or stalking

Messages sent via texts or left on answering machines can be saved as evidence of stalking or abuse. Keep a record of all suspicious incidents. You can report abuse, violence, threats, stalking or cyber-stalking to the police and the abuser can be charged with a criminal offence. Police can also assist with applying for a Domestic or Family Violence Order (see page 20).

## Safe parenting after separating

### Things you can do to help your children through

- Give all children love and attention, with hugs and positive words. Be patient, observe and listen to them.
- Give young children simple but truthful explanations. For example, 'This isn't your fault' and 'It's okay to love both me and your dad'.
- Allow your children to be sad. Sit with them when they are tearful.
- Talk to your children about feelings. Let them express their feelings through drawing, painting, playing and talking.
- Discuss safe ways for your children to show their anger. Tell them that it is okay to be angry but it is never okay to hurt people.
- Let your children know if you are feeling sad, but tell them you will be okay. It is important that your children do not feel that they need to look after you.
- Look after yourself so that you can care for your children in the best possible way.
- Talk with your children's school, kindergarten or childcare centre about what your children are experiencing or have experienced, so that staff understand and can support your children.
- Learn about how children can respond to trauma, and how you can best support your children if they have experienced trauma.

If you have concerns about the emotional or physical wellbeing of your children, talk to your GP or contact a children's support or counselling service in your state or territory. Some domestic violence services have specialist children's workers.

The Family Relationship Advice Line (1800 050 321) or 1800RESPECT can help you locate appropriate services (see page 35).

## Child safety and the legal system

It is important that you get good legal advice to preserve your rights and the safety of your children. Remember that legal advice does not necessarily mean a court battle.

If you are concerned about your children's safety, you can notify the relevant Child Protection and Family Welfare authorities in your state or territory.

Contact the Legal Aid Office or Women's Legal Service in your state or territory for information and advice (see page 37).

It is likely you will need to find a lawyer who is experienced in family law. In some circumstances Legal Aid may not be able to provide services, however, a community legal service will still be able to support you.



## Parenting Plans

Parenting Plans set out written parenting arrangements such as:

- who the children will live with
- what time will be spent with each parent
- education and other important issues.

Your safety and the safety of your children must be the first priority of any arrangement between you and your former partner.

Where there has been violence, parenting plans can include very specific guidelines to ensure the safety of your children. For example:

- exact times for exchange and time spent with your former partner
- if the children are returned more than 15 minutes late you will go directly to the police station
- if your former partner is late picking up the children, the handover will not take place
- the location of a safe handover place, such as a police station or contact centre - this can be helpful if your former partner is or has been abusive to you during previous exchanges.



*I was able to negotiate what would happen if he is late to pick up or drop off the kids.*

## Assistance with preparing your Parenting Plan

It is important that anyone giving you assistance or advice understands your history and concerns.

It is recommended that you use a specialist dispute resolution service staffed by practitioners with extensive training in family violence.

Dispute resolution is provided by Legal Aid centres and organisations such as Relationships Australia (see pages 35-37).

For further information about preparing for dispute resolution visit [www.dvrcv.org.au/help-advice/legal-protection-and-safety-ideas](http://www.dvrcv.org.au/help-advice/legal-protection-and-safety-ideas)

### Family Relationship Centres

These centres provide information, advice and dispute resolution to help separated parents focus on the needs of their children, resolve conflict and develop workable arrangements for their children without going to the courts.

The centres provide information and referral, family relationship seminars and/or group sessions, and individual help free of charge. One hour per couple of joint family dispute resolution is also provided free of charge. Where interpreters are required, up to four hours of joint family dispute resolution is provided free of charge. Centres may charge fees after this, depending on your circumstances.

For more information go to [www.familyrelationships.gov.au](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au)





## Parenting Orders through the Family Court

If you and your former partner cannot agree on a Parenting Plan or you believe that you or your children are at risk of harm, you can apply for a Parenting Order through the Family Court.

A Parenting Order is a court order which sets out each person's responsibilities. An order can set out:

- where the children live
- the amount of time the children spend with each parent and other people
- how parental responsibility is to be shared by each parent.

With assistance from experts, the Family Court will consider how, and if, your children's safety can be maintained while having contact with their father.

The Court has a number of measures in place to ensure your safety. These include:

- separate interviews if you fear attending a court appointment at the same time or in the same place as your former partner
- having a phone interview
- safe rooms with separate entry and exit points.

Contact the Court before you attend to find out what arrangements can be put in place for you. **Make sure you tell the Court about any Domestic or Family Violence Order in place.**

*My lawyer and the court support staff really helped me understand my rights and my children's rights. Now I feel clearer about how to keep us all safer when the kids see their dad.*

## Breaking a Parenting Order

You may have concerns about the safety of your children when they are spending time with the other parent.

Even if you are intending to act in the children's best interests, remember breaking a Parenting Order is a serious action and you should seek urgent legal advice should you decide to do this.

### Family dispute resolution

Under Australian family law, most separating parents are required to attend family dispute resolution before they can go to the Family Court. **However, this is not compulsory where there has been violence.** You can contact a Family Relationship Centre or call the Family Relationship Advice Line (1800 050 321) to discuss your situation.

*I didn't see my ex at all during the mediation. He was in another part of the building and the mediators moved between us.*

# Moving forward

It is quite normal to feel overwhelmed sometimes by the decision to leave the relationship. Some days you might even think it would be easier to return to your former partner. Your former partner may:

- tell you that they have changed and they want you back
- recognise that they do have a problem
- attend a men's behaviour change group.

Research shows that it is very difficult for many men to stop their violent behaviour. Attending a men's behaviour change group is not a guarantee of change or that women and children will be safe.

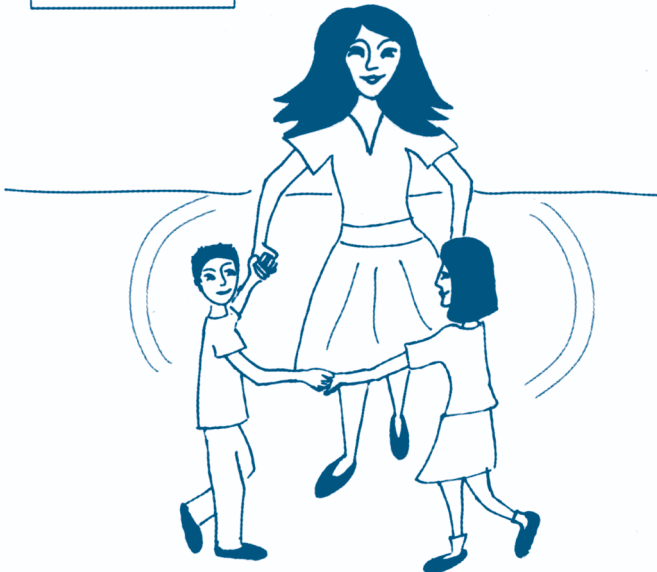
In order to stay positive, try doing the following things.

- Express your feelings. Talk or write about them in a journal.
- Use your journal as evidence of what you have endured and how you have grown as a result of what you have been through.
- Recognise that bad feelings pass. If you are feeling sad, cry.
- Exercise regularly to help relieve anger, stress and depression. Walk the dog, go for a swim, ride your bicycle with the kids or go to the gym.
- Write positive statements on post-it stickers and place them around the house.
- Play music with positive messages.
- Learn relaxation techniques. For example, have a warm bath or practise breathing techniques.
- Think about the people that you admire and list their qualities, then think about yourself and the similar qualities that you have or are developing.
- Set simple, short-term goals for yourself. Achieving these will give you the confidence to set larger, longer-term goals.
- Build a community of support (for example, with your family violence support worker, counsellor, support group, family and friends).
- Be kind to yourself and make time to do things that you enjoy.
- Acknowledge your achievements, large and small. Celebrate each step you take on the path to personal safety and empowerment.

## Don't forget

When you are in a relationship, you have a right to:

- be treated with respect
- participate in decision-making
- not be intimidated or put down
- make decisions that affect your life
- have access to your own money
- have a partner who takes responsibility for their own behaviour
- be free from violence and abuse
- raise children in a home free from violence
- be safe.



# Where to get further assistance

Contact any of these national organisations. They can refer you to support services in your area.

## Family violence support

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### 1800RESPECT

1800RESPECT is the confidential, national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service for people experiencing, or at risk of, sexual or family violence, their family and friends, and frontline workers and professionals.

1800RESPECT also provide information on family violence, legal, housing and finance and other support services in your state or territory.

A confidential, free interpreter service is available either on request, or by calling the Telephone Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and asking them to contact 1800RESPECT.

1800 737 732

[www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

### Daisy

A mobile app that connects women to family violence services in Australia.

Download Daisy from

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/daisy>

## Counselling, family and individual support

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### Relationships Australia

Help and support for those affected by family violence including counselling, mediation, courses and programs and other relationship services.

1300 364 277

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

## Abuse against people with disability

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**National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline**  
Receives allegations of abuse and neglect being experienced by people with disability.

1800 880 052  
[www.jobaccess.gov.au/complaints/hotline](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au/complaints/hotline)

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**National Relay Service**  
For those who are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment.

TTY/voice calls: 133 667  
Speak & Listen service:  
1300 555 727

## Benefits and financial support

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**Centrelink Families Line**  
For advice about benefits and immediate financial help.

136 150  
[www.servicesaustralia.gov.au](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au)

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**Department of Human Services (Child Support)**  
For help to receive child support payments.

131 272  
[www.servicesaustralia.gov.au](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au)

## Courts

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**Family Court of Australia (except Western Australia)**  
For information and procedural advice, forms and brochures, and referral advice to community and support services. The website includes a free chat.

1300 352 000  
[www.familycourt.gov.au](http://www.familycourt.gov.au)

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**Family Court of Western Australia**

(08) 9224 8222  
[www.familycourt.wa.gov.au](http://www.familycourt.wa.gov.au)

## Family Relationship Advice Line / Family Relationships Online

Provides information and advice about:

1800 050 321

- family relationship issues
- services funded by Government
- law, the family law system and legal aid
- children's contact centres
- counselling services and mediation (dispute resolution)
- finances.

[www.familyrelationships.gov.au](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au)

## Legal Services

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### Legal Aid

For information about Legal Aid in all states and territories, visit National Legal Aid.

[www.nationallegalaid.org](http://www.nationallegalaid.org)

### Women's Legal Services Australia

Information on Women's Legal Services in each state and territory.

[www.wlsa.org.au/members](http://www.wlsa.org.au/members)

## LGBTIQA+violence

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### Intersex Human Rights Australia

A national organisation promoting the rights of intersex people, and providing information, education and information.

[ihra.org.au](http://ihra.org.au)

### Say It Out Loud

A website specifically about LGBTIQA+ relationships. It includes information, support and referrals for domestic violence in LGBTIQA+ relationships as well as more information for professionals.

[sayitoutloud.org.au](http://sayitoutloud.org.au)

# Support for children and adolescents

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**Kids Helpline**

A free, 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

1800 55 1800

[www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

**headspace**

headspace works with young people aged 12 to 25 in need of support with their general health, mental health, education and employment or alcohol and drugs.

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

**eheadspace**

A confidential, free and secure space where young people aged 12 to 25 or their family can chat, email or speak on the phone with a qualified youth mental health professional.

1800 650 890

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

## Notes

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# References

<sup>1</sup> Our Watch. (n.d.). *Facts and Figures*. Retrieved 8 August 2016, from [www.ourwatch.org.au/understanding-violence/facts-and-figures](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/understanding-violence/facts-and-figures); Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth. (2015). *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*. Melbourne: Our Watch.

<sup>2</sup> Cox, P. (2015). *Violence against women: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey 2012* (Horizons No. 1). Sydney: Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety.

<sup>3</sup> Dunkley, A., & Phillips, J. (2015). Domestic violence in Australia: a quick guide to the issues, Parliamentary Library (Australia), viewed 17 August 2016, [www.apo.org.au/node/53885](http://www.apo.org.au/node/53885).

<sup>4</sup> Hill, J. (2020). *See What You Made Me Do: Power, Control and Domestic Abuse*. Black Inc.

Douglas, H A. (2016, April 15) *Legal systems abuse and coercive control* [Paper presentation]. Two Steps Forward and Two Steps Back? Contemporary Issues in Access to Justice for Victims of Family and Domestic Violence Conference, Wollongong, NSW, Australia.

Relationships Australia Victoria gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria Australia. With their permission we drew on their training materials and website [www.dvrcv.org.au](http://www.dvrcv.org.au), including for the section on Safety and technology.

We also gratefully acknowledge the use, with permission, of material from the Choosing Positive resource kit, a joint initiative of Women's Health West and Berry Street, based on a resource developed by community participants in 2003. [www.whwest.org.au/resource/choosing-positive-paths](http://www.whwest.org.au/resource/choosing-positive-paths)

The following materials and websites also informed the development of this booklet.

- [www.safesteps.org.au](http://www.safesteps.org.au)
- [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)
- [www.unitingvictas.org.au/services/family-services/family-violence-services](http://www.unitingvictas.org.au/services/family-services/family-violence-services)
- [www.ncsmc.org.au](http://www.ncsmc.org.au)
- [www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/technology-safety](http://www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/technology-safety)
- [www.womenaresafe.org](http://www.womenaresafe.org)
- [www.anrows.org.au](http://www.anrows.org.au)

Relationships Australia provides counselling, mediation, courses in family violence prevention, relationship skills, family skills and parenting, and other relationship services. It has branches across all states and territories of Australia.

*Relationships Australia.*

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

1300 364 277