



Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

State-wide Children's Resource Program

The Victorian State-wide Children's Resource Program (SCRP) is a Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) program funded by Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to assist, support and resource homelessness assistance and other non-government services to respond more effectively to the needs of children who have experienced homelessness and family violence. SCRCP coordinators are funded in each of the departmental divisions across the state. The role involves identifying and addressing the systemic and structural limitations that impact on the effective service responses to children experiencing homelessness and family violence in Victoria.

The SCRCP maintain close working relationships with state and regional departments, peak bodies and agencies to advocate on behalf of children and young people in the homelessness and family violence sectors.

The SCRCP also manages a brokerage program funded by National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) linking children to the education system. This has been a fantastic enhancement to the program to, as it has provided children experiences they may have otherwise missed out on.

GAPS OF THE SERVICE SYSTEM

- Homelessness, transience and instability as a result of family violence causes disruption to children's education, family and social connections, sense of belonging, participation in community, cultural and religious practices.
- The impact of having to move from rural to metro areas and vice versa or any unfamiliar environment for a child can result in further trauma and isolation.
- There is lack of services for children especially within rural and remote communities for children.
- Lack of housing is a significant issue for people experiencing family violence. It contributes to the persistence of violence because if women are unable to find safe and affordable accommodation for themselves and their children, they may be forced to remain in a violent relationship, so as not to enter the homelessness service system.
- The lack of availability of crisis accommodation is a significant issue for those who are fleeing family violence.
- The court system continues to grant access for children with their violent fathers because of the "equal shared parental responsibility" principle which causes ongoing trauma and is detrimental to the best interest of the child. There are many times where children have been able to clearly articulate that they are afraid of being with their father, yet the court still grants access. Consequently if the mother doesn't send the children she is then in breach of a court order. Judges *must* place the best interests of the child before the right of the parents to have access.
- People are reluctant to report family violence in small towns because of stigma/reputation and the potential impacts of others "finding out" and on existing personal relationships in the community.
- There is a gap in Men's Behavioural Change (MBC) programs that are delivered in languages other than English. There are times that the man is mandated to attend a course; however he is unable to access this due to language barrier. Therefore, the individual cannot meet the conditions of the order nor have the opportunity for education in regards to family violence and behaviour. Children can be further traumatised by the system by being exposed to further violence or situations that place a child in a place where they don't feel safe.
- Isolation and language barriers can be seen in person's who are newly arrived in Australia. These persons can be particularly vulnerable as their situation is exacerbated by language barrier and isolation and often other complex factors such as visa status and mental health issues.



- There is concern that children from refugee and migrant communities may be at greater risk of negative effects as a result of a lifetime of exposure to various forms of violence. These families also tend to have significant barriers to accessing support services and are often unknown to child welfare and support agencies.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF MEN WHO USE VIOLENCE

- We need to ensure users of violence are held accountable. There must be more stringent follow up on participants in MBC program. Adequately structured and resourced behaviour change programs need to be part of a coordinated response to family violence, so that we are able to address the cause of the issue.
- Responding to breaches of intervention orders in a timely manner. Also including cross state breaches – a way of ensuring that women are protected not only in Victoria but nationwide.
- The impacts of FV on children should be included into MBC programs bringing a realisation of how they are affecting their children. Often exploring the impact on children can be a turning point for men.
- The current court system/ magistrates/ court registrar's need to increase their understanding of childhood trauma in relation to family violence. There should be a state-wide model where FV act, law, child protection and criminal matters are dealt with by the same magistrate. For example the Brooklyn Integrated Court Model.
- All disclosures of family violence to services and authorities should be taken seriously and receive a consistent response. Children should be supported in disclosing their experiences of family violence, and have their best interests considered when parenting decisions are made.

SOLUTIONS

- Need longer term support for children and families who have witnessed family violence. Many victims live precariously for a long period of time after the initial crisis as they, and their children, struggle to manage emotionally and financially. There is an ongoing need for support as families work to re-establish their lives; intervention must stretch far beyond the point of crisis.
- When the media reports in relation to Family Violence, they also need to include statistics on children being killed not just women alone. They also need to put a focus on the number of men who are violent, to change the discourse around "why doesn't she leave" as opposed to "why doesn't he stop using violence". This also shines a light on the gendered nature of violence and how it enables it to pervade society and family dynamics (head of the household/power dynamics). We need to also look at how these attitudes impact on children.
- Interventions must focus on placing the responsibility for change on the perpetrator not the women and children. Users of violence should be removed from the home (when safe to do so) and greater focus needs to be placed on holding men accountable for breaches. This might be through the use of CCTV and GPS locaters. We know that women and children are at greatest risk when they leave the violent relationship so we must provide appropriate support and safety measures.
- We need to have broader and consistent education within schools and sporting groups around healthy relationships and early intervention of family violence.
- We need to properly engage universal services like GPs and Maternal Child Health Nurses to be able to identify and appropriately respond to those at risk of family violence. This requires consistent and ongoing training to ensure universal services – which are often a first point of call for many are able to adequately respond. This will help catch those young children (0-5 yrs) and families who may fall between the cracks as often issues are not picked up on until they enter the education system.
- Universities must include modules into the coursework for teachers in training, around impact of trauma as well as responding to issues of family violence. This should be built upon throughout the teacher's working life.
- The state-wide children's resource program is a great way to support and resource the service system as we work within the homelessness and family violence sectors as well as across sectors. We have developed a number of resources that can assist (these are enclosed).



- Programs that assist include solving the Jigsaw, Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service, Cool kids, play connect, peek a boo, bubs on board, dads on board and the vulnerable children's strategy. Often these programs are given short term funding; it would be great if there was a commitment to fund these programs recurrently. Most of these programs have lost their funding and need to be refunded.
- Cultural change from government bodies so that agencies and society prioritises children first rather than adults (Working from the bottom up, rather than top down).
- Child protection system needs to have a greater capacity to understand and respond to family violence. Information and referral pathways should be immediate and consistent.
- Early intervention strategies can also target individuals or population subgroups that are showing early signs of violent behaviour to reduce the likelihood of them perpetrating acts of domestic violence. They can assist children to recover from traumatic events and there are culturally appropriate targeted programs to support
- It is extremely important to work with Aboriginal families to build and strengthen relationships. The use of early intervention programs supports to reduce the risk, escalation and severity of violence and its effects. Some examples of great programs are Meminar Ngangg Gimbe Women's Aboriginal Refuge in Mildura as a safe haven for women and children and Elizabeth House. SNAICC provides important resources to help people to engage with Aboriginal families, along with the Indigenous Children's Resource Workers.
- There is increasing recognition that large-scale social change comes from better cross- sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organisations. This scale of coordination has been termed 'collective impact' and involves the commitment of a group of important players from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific problem to achieve significant lasting change.
- Professionals working with families affected by family violence should all have regular training on the dynamics and impact of family violence, in particular in relation to the impact on children.
- Work in partnership with government and other relevant peak bodies advocating for children in policy, planning, and research.
- Strengthen the capacity to advocate for the specific needs and resources of children from migrant and refugee families. Use culturally competent practices in supporting children, cultural diversification of the workforce. Use the expertise of those belonging to particular cultural groups to address family violence.
- It is a fundamental right of all children to be seen as clients in their own right. To equally participate and be included in their individual assessment and case plans. Successful participation and inclusion of children allows equal access, opportunities, values, policies, attitudes, practices and resources that support every child. It explores a child's sense of belonging, and helps children to contextualise what's happening to them, and explore their journey.
- Continuation of care on a longer term basis to effectively respond and support children who have experienced/witnessed family violence and homelessness.
- Organisations should increase collaboration across sectors to better respond to family violence and the impact this has on children
- *Mandated* data collection on children is required across all service systems – as this is currently not occurring.
- An effective service system requires all relevant services across sectors to put the best interests of children at the heart of their practice
- A shortage of affordable housing deters women and children from leaving violence and keeps them homeless when they do leave. We advocate for an enhanced rapid rehousing response to family violence, combined with a long-term Affordable Housing Strategy to make both private rental and social housing more accessible.
- Continue to build on police capacity to understand the children's experience of family violence also including training at police academy about childhood trauma in relation to family violence.
- Effectively sharing information in regards to the protection of children, this will include information from police, CP, Child first, DHHS. For example the RAMP model allows all agencies working with the family to share information in the best interests of the family.



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to feel safe, secure and protected from harm. Family violence is a violation of these rights.

Children's experiences of family violence are extensive and complex. Research shows that the severity of the impact on children is similar regardless of whether they witness violence or experience physical violence themselves.

The emotional and personal costs of domestic violence in our community are enormous. We need to acknowledge that addressing family violence requires long term and coordinated effort by all levels of government in partnership with non-government organisations, service providers and the community.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide our thoughts. We have also enclosed a number of our resources for your reference.

Child Development and Trauma Impacts for Practitioners

Children are different and each develops at their own rate. For some children and adolescents the trauma and stress of being homeless or experiencing family violence can affect their development.

Babies

- Grow rapidly
- Learn they are separate beings from their parents
- Learn through senses, environment and imitation of others
- Begin to regulate emotions and self soothe through attachment to primary carer
- Develop motor control and brain development in orderly sequence
- Fear loud or unexpected noise, strange objects, situations or persons
- Need to feel sure that someone will take care of them
- Learn to trust others and be secure in the world
- Learn language skills through interaction
- Learn mobility and gross motor skills
- Learn to express positive and negative emotions

Toddlers

- Are curious about their world and other people-want to explore and learn.
- Separation anxiety may begin to increase
- Like to play alongside, rather than with, other children
- Are not developmentally ready/able to share
- Become more independent
- Like routine
- Can have difficulty changing from one activity to another
- Are easily frustrated
- Have tantrums
- Increased memory for people, books and events
- Active and unaware of danger/risk
- Brain continues to develop best with close, frequent, positive interaction with a main caregiver

Pre-Schoolers

- Begin to play with other children and for longer periods of time
- Are curious about everything and will ask lots of questions
- Greater awareness of self
- Increasing desire for control
- Use imaginative play
- Will copy adult behaviours
- Can communicate using simple sentences
- Communicate their wants more clearly
- Increasingly independent eg want to dress themselves
- Enjoys helping with simple tasks eg washing up

Primary Schoolers

- Friendships are important
- Greater awareness of their role within family
- Develop relationships with family members and other adults
- Improved communication skills
- Improved memory for events
- Enjoy playing games with teams
- Developing a sense of the rules in games
- Creative- enjoys making and drawing things
- Can manage an increasing range of tasks independently.

Adolescents

- Puberty brings about huge physical and emotional changes
- Increased importance of peer relationships
- Increased sexual awareness
- May struggle with self identity
- Increased desire for independence
- Peer relationships become more important
- Developing own identity separate from family
- Increased self awareness
- Increased risk taking
- Swings between child like behaviour and the desire to be treated as adult

Development

Trauma impacts on health, emotional and social wellbeing and learning across all developmental ages and stages

Potential Impacts of Trauma

- Failure to thrive
- Feeding and sleeping problems
- Avoidance of eye contact
- Inability to be soothed
- Increased startle response
- Separation anxiety and clinginess
- Regression of acquired skills
- Passivity, withdrawal, lack of initiative, disinterest
- Increased tension, irritability, reactivity, and inability to relax
- Reduced capacity to attach to caregiver
- Reduced capacity to manage emotional states or self soothe
- Lowered immune system
- Failure to reach developmental milestones

- Do not understand that adults may be too tired, stressed/distressed to play/interact with them
- Find it difficult to learn new skills when feeling unsafe
- May be unable to settle and play
- Sound, sights and smells may trigger fear responses
- Eating, sleeping and settling problems
- Fearful of strangers
- Distress at separation with caregiver
- Lack of inhibitions with strangers
- Increased irritability and tantrums
- May become very quiet, passive or appear to be disinterested in anything
- Little eye contact with others
- May become overly upset to minor events
- Regress and lose known skills

- Difficulty with separation
- Reluctant to attend familiar places such as kinder
- May revert to toddler behaviours eg thumb sucking and bed wetting
- Eating and sleeping may become disrupted
- May become difficult to settle
- Nightmares
- Language skills may revert to toddler levels
- Changes in established behaviour
- May become aggressive or withdrawn
- More easily upset by events
- May find playing co-operatively more difficult
- Increase in tantrums

- Undiagnosed health issues may become more apparent
- Become withdrawn or aggressive
- Act out in school or the playground
- Reluctance to go to bed
- Difficulty sleeping
- May have nightmares
- Lack of concentration
- School work may suffer
- Withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities and friends
- Anxiety/depression / mood swings
- Feels responsible for family situation
- Takes on adult roles
- Headaches and stomach aches
- May be bullied or display bullying behaviours to siblings or friends
- May display overt sexualised behaviours

- Strong emotions including anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety
- Reliving or re-visiting traumatic events
- Change in desire to be with family
- Acting out /risk taking/self harming
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Depression/anxiety/mood swings
- Return to childlike behaviours
- Seek support from peer networks
- Self medicating with drugs, alcohol and intimate relationships
- Disturbed sleep
- Self absorbed
- Impact on education
- Impulsive decision making
- Feel responsible for family situation and take on adult role

Tips

- Respond to needs in a timely and consistent way
- Maintain good routine for playing, sleeping and feeding
- It is not possible to spoil a baby by responding to their crying or distress
- Short periods of time for play
- Recognising babies cues and cries eg when they are tired, hungry and ready to play or upset
- Engage with baby through eye contact, gentle touch and calm voice
- Need stimulation through touch, taste, sights, sounds and smells
- Enjoy simple games eg peek a boo

- Often want the parent very close and enjoy books, singing, pretend games.
- Quiet, cuddle-time can be very calming for parent and child and have minimal cost.
- They may also just want the parent or carer close by while they play
- Need to explore and have new experiences with parental supervision
- Outside play can be stimulating, allow lots of running etc. It can improve a toddler's sleeping and mood
- Distraction can help a toddler before frustration becomes overwhelming
- Clear simple instructions are easier for toddlers to follow than long instructions with multiple steps
- Consistent routine, rules and predictability help toddlers feel safer. This can be a challenge for parents in crisis; accessing support can make a big difference
- Many parents find themselves wanting to loosen the rules for children during/after a difficult time but this can be more unsettling for young children and make it harder to resume these boundaries later on

- May need more adult attention
- Maintain routines as far as possible
- Prepare children for changes in the day transitioning from one place to another with lots of reassurance
- Allow children to draw/play to explain what they cannot say in words
- Encourage parents to talk to childcare staff about what has been happening for the child. It may help to explain possible changes in behaviour

- Provide the opportunity for the child to talk about their experiences
- Explain what is happening in age appropriate language
- Accept that children might perceive the situation differently to parents
- Encourage parents to contact the school to see how they are doing
- Re-establish normal activities to the best of family's ability in the circumstances.
- Seek support for the child

- Provide opportunities for the adolescent to talk about their experiences
- Provide reassurance
- Discuss feeling of distress and anger and let teens know that this is normal
- Respect their emotions and reactions
- Support them to gain perspective of the situation
- Be honest
- Encourage teens to make time for fun
- Explain that friends and other family may react differently to the situation
- Encourage them to maintain communication with their school and teachers
- Encourage regular routines, ie school
- Promote ways to deal with stress, ie, exercise, healthy eating
- Make time for family activities
- Seek professional help if they are struggling to cope



Child Development and Trauma Impacts for Parents

Children are different and each develops at their own rate. For some children and adolescents the trauma and stress of being homeless or experiencing family violence can affect their development. The following information will highlight some of the milestones which children and adolescents generally experience at certain stages and how trauma may impact on their development. There are also some tips and activities that can help you to support your child.

	Babies	Toddlers	Pre-Schoolers	Primary Schoolers	Adolescents
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn to manage their feelings when there is an adult who cuddles them, plays with them and talks to them Often fear loud or unexpected noises, strange objects, new situations or people Need to feel sure that someone will always take care of them. This is how babies learn to feel safe and to trust others Learn through all their senses, by what is around them and by copying people closest to them Learn to talk when parents/careers sing songs, talk about everyday things and read books aloud, even if only for short times Love the sound of loving voices and to look at people's smiling faces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are curious about their world and other people they want to explore and learn. May not want to be away from parent Like to play near other children, but not with other children Are not ready to share toys Are becoming more independent but are not aware of danger/risk Like routine and can have difficulty changing from one activity to another Are easily frustrated and will have temper tantrums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin to play with other children and for longer periods of time and are curious about everything and will ask lots of questions They use imaginative play They will copy adult behaviours Communicate their wants more clearly using simple sentences Are becoming more independent eg want to dress themselves Enjoy helping with simple tasks eg washing up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendships are important Primary School is an important part of a child's life. It is a time for learning to read, write and make friends Enjoy playing games with teams Can manage an increasing range of tasks independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puberty brings about huge physical and emotional changes Increased importance of friendships Increased sexual awareness May struggle with who they are and what they want May begin to push the boundaries Increased risk taking Swings between child like behaviour and wanting to be treated as adult

Possible impacts on health, emotional and social wellbeing and learning across all developmental ages and stages

	Babies	Toddlers	Pre-Schoolers	Primary Schoolers	Adolescents
Potential Impacts of Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May change their feeding/sleeping patterns May cry a lot more than is usual for them and be harder to settle or may become very quiet and not seem to care about, or cry about anything May be much more sensitive to loud noises and new people and may need more cuddles and reassurance When a parent is more stressed, upset, distracted or angry, the baby can tell and can feel very unsafe, and scared When babies are fearful, feel unsafe and have poor sleep they can be slower to learn and to reach their milestones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not understand that adults may be too tired or stressed to play with them Find it difficult to learn new skills when feeling unsafe May find it hard to settle and play May be a change in eating, sleeping and settling routines Fearful of strangers Sometimes your toddler will only want you Increased irritability and tantrums May become very quiet and not interested in anything Little eye contact with others May become overly upset by little things Go back to baby behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes your child will only want to be with you Reluctant to attend familiar places such as Kinder May go back to toddler behaviours eg thumb sucking and bed wetting Eating and sleeping habits might change May have nightmares or be reluctant to go to bed Changes in behaviour May become aggressive or seem very quiet More easily upset by events/changes Increase in tantrums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes health problems become more noticeable i.e hearing and speech delay May become aggressive or seem very quiet Reluctant to go to bed, difficulty sleeping may have nightmares Lack of concentration and school work may suffer Withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities and friends Feels responsible for family situation and takes on adult roles Headaches and stomach aches May be bullied or display bullying behaviours to siblings or friends Can become frustrated and have difficulty expressing how they feel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong feelings including anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety and difficulty managing them Acting out /risk taking/self harming Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities Depression/anxiety/mood swing May spend more time with friends Self medicating with drugs, alcohol and sex Disturbed sleep Self absorbed School refusal Impulsive behaviours and decision making Feels responsible for family situation and takes on adult roles
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most reassuring thing for a baby is a parent who is loving, offers lots of cuddles, eye contact and a loving voice If it is not possible to spoil your baby by responding to their crying or distress, it is the best thing you can do to help your baby feel safe Babies need stimulation through simple games, happy tones, being talked to in a happy/joyful/gentle voice All parents have times when it is really hard to respond in a loving way to a crying baby or to play with their baby. Please speak to your worker about some support as there is help available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toddlers often want the parent very close and enjoy books, singing, pretend games. These can provide quiet, cuddle-time that can be very calming for parent and child Outside play can be stimulating, allow lots of running etc. It can improve a toddler's sleeping and mood Distraction can help a toddler before their frustration becomes overwhelming Consistent routine, rules and predictability make a child feel safer. It is very common for parents to find themselves wanting to loosen the rules for children doing/after a difficult time but this can be more unsettling for young children and make it harder to resume these boundaries later on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May need you to spend more time with them Keep routines the same as far as possible Prepare children for changes in the day moving from one place to another with lots of reassurance Talk to your child about what is happening in their day Encourage children to draw, play and have fun even when you are stressed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to your child Explain what is happening in words they can understand Accept that children might see the situation differently to you and keep talking to them Keep in contact with the school to see how they are doing Re-establish normal activities to the best of your ability in the circumstances Seek support for you and your child if needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let them know you are always available to talk Provide reassurance Discuss feelings of distress and anger and let them know that this is normal Respect their emotions and reactions Accept that they might see the situation differently to you Be honest and patient with them Maintain communication with their teachers and school Encourage healthy ways to deal with stress eg exercise and healthy eating Seek professional help if they are struggling to cope

Supporting Your Children

Being a parent is hard work and becomes even more difficult when your family experiences stressful times. During these times your children will experience stress even when you have tried to protect them.

These are some things that parents have talked about. You may notice some of these in your children.

The children are really driving me crazy, they keep whinging and won't leave me alone

The children are stressed and worried about what is happening. They may need to be close to you.

Children find it hard to put into words why they feel upset and angry, they show us by their behaviour. They will need more attention and comfort to understand their feelings and feel safe and secure.

Babies may cry more, feed more and need to be held longer and more often.

Toddlers will cry and need to be picked up. They may hurt others and throw more tantrums. Stay calm and give lots of hugs.

Children and adolescents may be irritable and easily upset. Try to spend special time with each child. It is added security for them.



My children are really quiet and aren't interested in things

It is important to notice these changes sometimes children who are frightened, angry or worried can become quieter and withdrawn. These children still need comfort and attention.

Babies may stop looking at you and may not cry as much or feed as regularly.

The children keep asking when we are going home

Talk to your child about what is happening. Use language they will understand.

Give them the chance to ask questions.

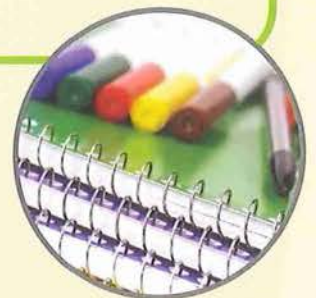
They will be more settled if they know what is happening and why.

Having a favourite toy or special thing can provide comfort.

My child used to be able to do their own shoelaces

When circumstances have changed it is common for children to lose confidence and stop being able to manage tasks. This could be any skill e.g. feeding themselves, toileting, sleeping on their own.

Give extra support, encouragement and lots of praise. When they feel secure these skills often return.



My child is being extra good, always helping, isn't really a bother at all

Children might try really hard to be good, to keep things happy at home. Remember your children need you to be the adult and they need to be allowed to be children.

My children miss their dad

Children need adults to keep them safe and they will often continue to love a parent who is unsafe.

Children can be hurt when parents talk badly about the other parent.

Playing helps children make sense of the world around them.

When adults share their worries and problems with their children, the children can try and behave like grown-ups.

It can be confusing for children to have mixed feelings about the people and changes in their family. These feelings can be a mixture of love, fear, hate, and anger and can change from day to day.

Remember that you have also been experiencing a lot of stress, when you are really tired and stressed yourself ask friends or family if they can help with the children. You are not the only one who can support your children and getting some breaks will help you all.

If you are worried about your child and how they are coping speak to your worker who can organise extra help for you and your children.

Children feel safer when they have routine. Don't change the rules but give lots of support to follow them.

The school says my child is falling behind.

It is important to talk to your child's teacher and let the school know what's going on. Keep in regular contact with the school.

Your child might just need some extra support for a short time. Take some time to talk about what is happening at school with your child.

Try to get your child to school on time each day and keep homework routines in place.

They yell at me over little things

Children can find change difficult and they can react to little things in a big way.

They are stressed and so are you, but it is important not to yell back.

Try to help your child recognise and talk about their feelings.

Children of all ages need reassurance and help to manage their feelings.



They won't go to sleep at night on their own

The children might be frightened of being on their own, especially if things have been unsettled.

Try to keep set bedtime routines.

You may need to stay in the room with them for a while. An extra story, a night light or rubbing their backs may help them to settle.

Avoid big changes to bedtime routine like bringing them into your bed. It makes it harder to get them back to their own bed.

My child has started to hit other children

This can be a common reaction when children are stressed by their situation.

It is difficult for children to handle strong feelings and helplessness and they can lash out at others to try and cope.

If your child behaves like this make sure everyone is safe and stay calm yourself. This helps them to calm down.

Tell them that feeling angry is okay but that hurting other people is not.

Statewide Childrens Resource Program

Regional Children's Resource Programs aim to improve sector response and service delivery for children in the homelessness and family violence sector. Program coordinators provide resources, training, brokerage, information and secondary consultation to the homelessness and family violence sector across Victoria.

Children's Resource Program Contacts by Department of Human Services' Area and agency

Barwon & Western District Areas Colac Area Health	03 5232 5231
Central Highlands & Western District Areas UnitingCare Ballarat	03 5337 2791
Goulburn & Ovens Murray Areas Junction Support Services	02 6043 7404
Inner & Outer Gippsland Areas UnitingCare Sale	03 5144 7777
Loddon & Mallee Areas Centre for Non-Violence	03 5434 4115
Brimbank Melton & North Eastern Melbourne Areas Merri Outreach Support Service	03 9359 5493
Hume Moreland & Western Melbourne Areas Merri Outreach Support Service	03 9359 5493
Inner & Outer Eastern Melbourne Areas Wesley Homelessness & Support Services	03 8870 4042
Southern Melbourne & Bayside Peninsula Areas Hanover Welfare Services	03 8626 5506

Regional Aboriginal Children's Workers

Inner & Outer Gippsland Areas Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative	03 5150 0731
Loddon & Mallee Areas Bendigo District Aboriginal Co-operative	03 5442 4947

Family Violence & Homelessness Websites

Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearing House www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu
 Domestic Violence Resource Centre www.dvrcv.org.au
 Bursting the Bubble www.burstingthebubble.com
 White Ribbon Day www.whiteribbonday.org.au
 Council to Homeless Persons www.chp.org.au
 Hurt www.hurt.net.au
 Children's Rights www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights
 Better Health Channels
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Trauma_and_children
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/domestic_violence_and_children

ABig Thank You to.....

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- ♥ King Print for their support and assistance



Through a child's eyes

Children's Experience of
Family Violence & Homelessness



VICTORIAN STATEWIDE CHILDREN'S RESOURCE PROGRAM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Statewide Children's Resource Program would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and elders past and present and the various members of the Aboriginal community who have been generous in their provision of resources and assistance with this booklet.

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet may assist you to help a child through their experience of family violence and/or homelessness. It contains children's own stories in their words.

Homelessness resulting from family violence can have a serious impact on a child's mental and physical health and overall developmental progress. It is important to remember that only the person using violence is responsible for their behaviour and the resulting effects.



WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE? (taken from www.dvic.org.au)

Family violence is a pervasive, life-threatening crime that impacts on thousands of women and children with serious physical, psychological and economic effects.

Family Violence includes not only physical assaults but also an array of power and control tactics, including:

- Direct or indirect threats
- Sexual assault
- Emotional and psychological torment
- Economic control
- Property damage
- Social isolation; and
- Any behaviour that causes a person to live in fear

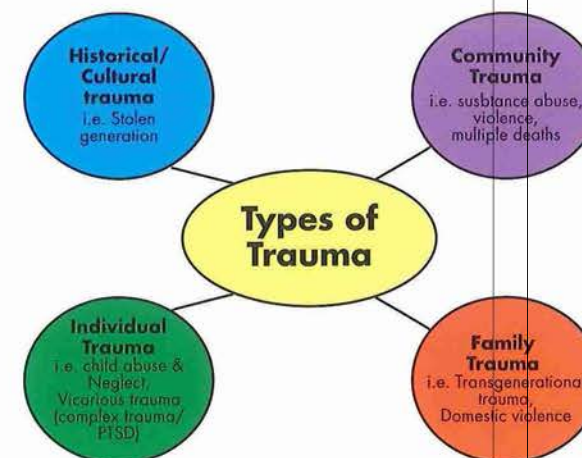
Family violence can occur within any intimate relationship, age and ethnicity. While it can be perpetrated by any member of a family against another, it is more likely to be perpetrated by men (predominately by a woman's current or ex-partner) against women and children.



THE VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE TASK FORCE (2003) DEFINES VIOLENCE AS

"An issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one on one fighting, abuse of indigenous community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide."

- Although only representing 2.5% of the total Australian population, indigenous people represent 22% of those accessing specialist homelessness services in 2011-12
- Nationally, 1 in 15 indigenous Australians received support from a homelessness agency in 2011-2012 compared with 1 in 142 non indigenous clients
- 31% of indigenous female clients reported "domestic and family violence" as the main reason for seeking assistance from a homelessness agency (compared to 14% of indigenous male clients, most of whom were children)
(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012, Specialist Homelessness Services: 2011-2012 Canberra: AIHW p.48-50)
- The rate of indigenous children accompanying their parents or guardian to a homelessness agency was 7 times that for non-indigenous children under 14 in 2011.
(SAAP National Data collection 2010 - 2011)



Adapted from *Yarning Up On Trauma: Healing ourselves, our children and families, healing our communities*: Shaun Coade and Sandie de Wolf (with permission)

CONSIDERATION FOR CHILDREN FROM A CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUND

"For children who are part of families who have migrated to Australia, the effects of family violence is compounded by several factors. These include being in a new country, learning a new language and set of cultural norms and being removed from extended family, friends and community support networks. Some children also carry the burden of experiencing discrimination at school and in the community at large."

(What about the Children: The voices of culturally and linguistically diverse children affected by domestic violence. Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service)

- Children may not have English as a first language and the use of a translator may not convey everything a child is trying to say. Drawing and play may be better ways for children to explain what they have experienced.
- Children may have experienced traumatic events in their home country.
- Children may have spent time in detention centres which may contribute to their trauma.



DILLON: Age 10

I used to live in a house. It was scary because my step dad kept on hurting me, lashing out on me, blaming me for everything. He used to hit me with the potato-masher, meat tenderiser, a pot on the head. It was hurting and everything. I wished I could have stopped things. I tried to stop him hurting my sisters but he told me to go away/ shutup or he'd hurt me again.

This person was also hurting my sister. One day the police came to our house and took this person away and we have never seen him again.

We stayed in our house for 2 months and we moved. I wanted to move cause the whole town found out what happened and the neighbours and kids at school teased us, telling me it was my fault.

We went to a new house for 5 months, it was an emergency house. The new school was ok because no-one bullied me cause they didn't know.

We moved to a new house and settled in. Now I feel safer that I have someone who cares about me cause my Dad has given me stuff to keep him out of my mind. Now I don't have nightmares anymore because I feel safe because he is in jail. Now I am going to another new school and I'm in another new house.

Jenny: Age 7 'Mum & Dad didn't know I was watching'



EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE IS TRAUMATIC AT ANY AGE

COMMON MYTHS

"They're too little to know what's going on"

Family violence affects children in utero and beyond their own lifetime (it will impact on their own parenting and so their children's lives)

"He doesn't hurt the kids"

Family violence has significant short and long term impacts on children who witness it; regardless if they have been directly abused. Children are affected even when in a different room.

"They didn't see it when"

Research has shown that children are greatly affected even if not present at the time of an incident. They are affected by their mother's state of fear.

FACTS AND STATS

- Around 80,000 Australian children aged 0-14 (19 out of every 1000) presented as part of a family group (that is accompanying children) to a specialist homelessness agency. (SAAP National Data collection 2010-11)
- In 2011-12, 43% of all clients (99,228 clients) were children (aged 0-17) presenting with others or young people (aged 15-24) presenting alone. Of these, 57% were children presenting with others, and 43% were young people who presented alone. (AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services 2011-2012)
- The main reason for seeking assistance (from a Homelessness agency) given for one-third (33%) of all children was 'domestic and family violence'. A further 12% reported 'housing crisis' as the main reason for seeking assistance, followed by 'inadequate and inappropriate dwelling conditions' and 'financial difficulties' (both 9%). (AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services 2011-2012)
- Of children identified in the court data as affected family members (aged 17 and under) has risen 341 percent over the 11 year period, from 4530 children in 1999-2000 to 19,974 children in 2009-2010. (Victorian Family Violence Database Vol 5 Eleven Year trend Analysis 1999-2010)
- Important knowledge from the research literature indicates the co-occurrence of family violence and child abuse

CHILDREN EXPERIENCE FAMILY VIOLENCE IN A NUMBER OF WAYS

- Babies react to and learn from their environments, instability can affect their ability to form healthy attachments to their caregivers
- Long term exposure to traumatic experiences can affect brain development, particularly around regulation of emotions, language and memory
- Constantly feeling alert and worried about the perpetrator's changes in mood and behaviour. Feeling insecure and unsettled, never knowing when a crisis will erupt
- Feeling scared of those they love in their own home where they should feel safe
- Feeling anxious about their safety and that of other family members.
- Having to be responsible for the care and safety of the abused parent and/or siblings
- Guilt; feeling they are responsible for the violence
- Unable to bring friends home/sleepovers/birthday parties
- Loss of a healthy safe family; potential loss of one parent if they leave or constantly threaten to
- Homelessness and the loss of personal belongings and a sense of place (e.g. favourite toys, familiar surroundings and people)
- Physical harm during a violent incident

Impacts on children who live with family violence may be acute and chronic, immediate and cumulative, direct and indirect, seen and unseen.



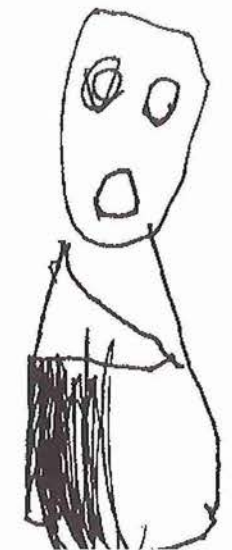
IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Children may feel:

- Scared
- Powerless
- Confused
- Angry
- Worried about the future
- Guilty about loving the abusive parent
- Guilty about not protecting the abused parent
- Grief and Loss
- Shame/embarrassment
- Unsettled
- Blame
- Withdrawn
- Numb
- Detached

Children may believe :

- Men have the right to control women
- Violence is an okay way to solve problems
- My mother is to blame for my father's violence
- My mother can't protect me
- Nothing is safe
- Family violence is normal
- Intimidation is the only way to get what you want
- Other people have the right to abuse me
- My parent's violence is my fault
- It's okay to abuse my mother
- Inappropriate ways of coping



CHILDREN MAY:

- Be aggressive to other children, brothers, sisters, pets
- Treat the non abusive parent the way the abusive person did
- Experience problems concentrating
- Be easily distracted
- Fight or bully other children at school
- Refuse to go to or not do well at school
- Become overly responsible for their age
- Experience developmental delays
- Withdraw, become shy, isolate themselves
- Have problems sleeping, nightmares, bedwetting
- Have a heightened sensitivity to noise, smells, sights, crowds
- React strongly to triggers e.g. a look, tone of voice
- Try to be "good" to please others or seek perfection
- Attach easily to unfamiliar adults

BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER!

- Children need to be allowed to have a childhood
- A warm and secure relationship with a parent or primary caregiver is the best way for children to overcome the effects of the violence
- Both children and parents can recover and heal from the impact of violence
- The earlier the exposure to family violence in a child's life the more vulnerable and cumulative are the effects

TOBY'S STORY: Age 11**What happened?**

He hit mum and tried to strangle her and threw me against the wall. I got really bad headaches. He hit David all the time with his hand and the belt.

What did you do?

Us kids ran off and hid in the cupboards or put things up against the door. We wanted to help mum but we couldn't.

What did you want to do?

Hit him

How do you feel about him now?

I hate him. Wish he was dead. I just wanted him to stop and be a normal Dad

What did you do to keep yourself safe?

Be good or hide

Who did you talk to?

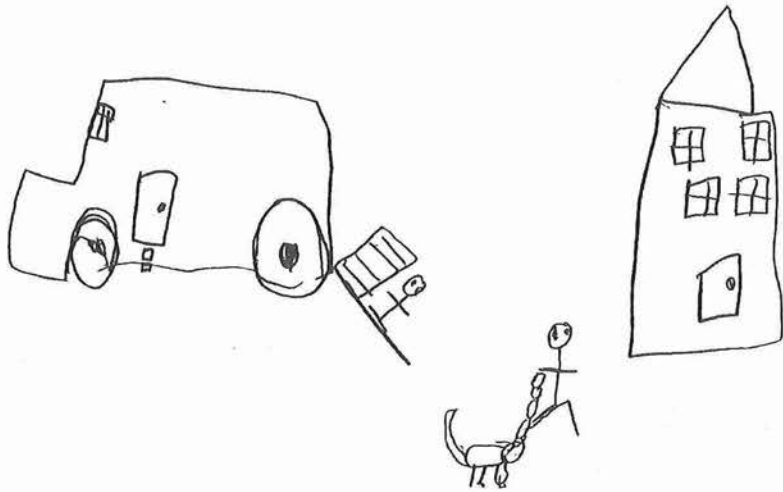
No-one

What was it like when you first left?

Good, but keep losing friends and have to change schools. School was normal, better than being at home.

Jimmy: Age 7

Happiest memory – leaving our old house where Mum and us kids got hurt. We took our dog.



WHAT PEOPLE SAY IS HELPFUL:

Kids say:

"Put an AVO [ie. Intervention Order] or something on him"

"Seeing other members of the family who care"

"Someone to play with"

Mums say:

"Don't stay because kids need a dad, they can still have a relationship with their dad when you don't live together"

"Teach kids that they don't have to put up with it"

"Lots of talking"

Workers say:

"Tell the kids that it is not their fault, to give them a voice and to know that they too are important"

"Counselling for children and parents"

"Give children the opportunity to talk about the good times they had with dad, but acknowledge his violent behaviour is not okay"



PARENTING IN A LOVING, CARING MANNER IS:

- The best way to promote healing and health in children who have lived with violence
- A unique bond with your children; which may assist healing
- Challenging and constant; but one of the most rewarding roles you may have

WHAT CHILDREN NEED

Children need someone who will talk to them and listen to them that person could be you.

Break the silence – talk about domestic/family violence

- Talk about their feelings – invite children to talk, draw or play
- Show understanding
- Let them know IT'S NOT THEIR FAULT
- Let them know they are loved
- Let them know you will try to keep them safe/and act in a way that is safe
- Let them know that violence is not okay
- Validate the child's experience
- Acknowledge how they feel
- Talk about the "violent behaviour" of the person not the "violent person"
- Let them know it's okay to love someone and be angry at them at the same time
- Always act in a non threatening and non violent way yourself
- Don't expect them to make adult decisions
- Children need to be given age appropriate explanations

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP CHILDREN

- Provide a **safe** environment free from violence
- **Discuss** the situation using words that suit their age
- Give them lots of reassurance that the violence or separation is **not their fault**
- Let children know it's normal to feel angry, sad, scared and upset. Encourage children to talk about their feelings.
- Tell them it's okay to be angry but not to hurt others
- **Get support for yourself** – find ways to keep in contact with family, friends, professional help. Children look to parents for reassurance, security and certainty – getting support and help for yourself is an extremely important way to help your child
- **Be mindful** about discussing details of the violence with another adult, if the children are present, it may cause the children to relive the trauma.
- The person who uses violence **acknowledges responsibility** for their behaviour

WE NEED TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO TELL THEIR STORIES IN THEIR OWN WAY

Outcomes from this may be:

- They can learn that the violence is not their fault
- It helps them to feel cared for and understood
- Children learn that it is okay to talk about feelings
- Children feel safer
- They can learn to express strong emotions in more helpful and appropriate ways
- Know it is okay to love the perpetrator even when they hate the behaviour
- Develop a support system of extended family or friends outside the home
- Create a safety plan with someone they trust

WHEN TO SEEK ASSISTANCE

Children need safety, support and belief; while numerous children can overcome their difficulties with help from their parent, there are children who require specific intervention to address their unique needs.

When children show strong and persistent patterns of unhappiness, aggression, or non-cooperation, it would be wise to seek specialist assistance.

Other signs:

- Changes in behaviour
- Regress developmentally – bed wetting, thumb sucking
- Problems at school
- Nightmares
- Withdrawing
- Physical illness – stomach ache, nausea, headache

Children rarely talk about their experiences the way adults do. Children might tell their story through: imaginative play, artwork, stories, drawings and the way they behave, re-enacting their experiences.

THERAPEUTIC WORK WITH CHILDREN

Counselling: sometimes it is hard for children to talk about what has happened. A counsellor is someone outside the family with whom a child can feel safe to talk about what's worrying them.

Art/Play/Sand Therapy: Children naturally express themselves through play, art and games. They may not yet have the vocabulary to communicate solely with words and in the presence of a trained art or play therapist they can start to communicate about their experiences in a way that they are familiar and comfortable with.

PRACTICAL THINGS TO DO

SAFETY AND CHILDREN

- Let the school personnel know to whom children can be released and if legal orders are in place.
- Help your child to identify people they trust to call or talk to.
- Talk to your child about what things are important to them, for you to take if you have to leave.
- Help children understand the role of any workers helping them or the family

Books you can read to your children:

Talking to my Mum

A picture workbook for workers, mothers and children affected by domestic violence. C Humphreys, Ravi K Thiara, A Skamballis & a Mullender

A terrible thing happened

M Holmes

A Family that Fights

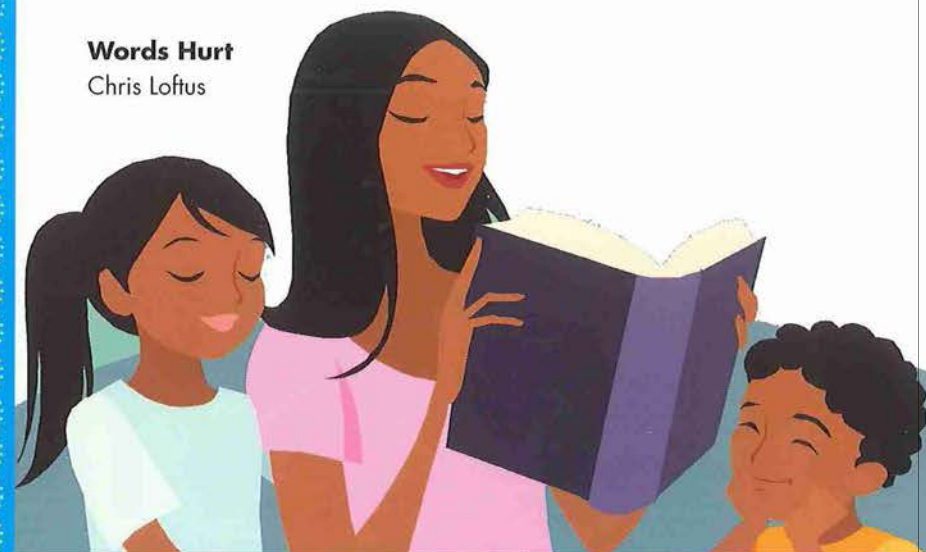
Sharon Bernstein

I Don't Want to Go to Justin's House Anymore

Heather Klassen

Words Hurt

Chris Loftus



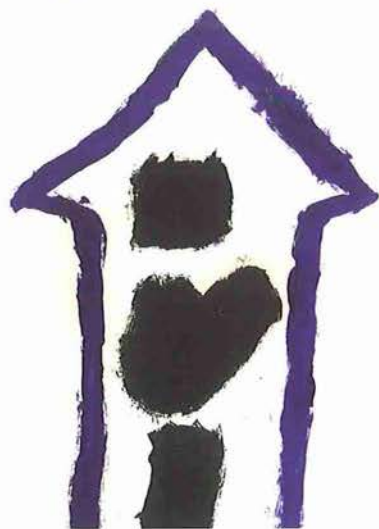
POST SEPARATION CONTACT

This can be a particularly difficult time for all family members.

A significant issue for people who have separated from a violent person is contact between their child and their child's other parent.

- Is it safe for you or your children to see the other parent? If you are feeling unsure about this contact one of the agencies listed in this booklet for advice.
- Make sure you don't fight with your children's father/mother in the presence of your children.
- Be aware that children may relive the trauma by overhearing adult conversations regarding violence.
- Let your children know that it is ok for them to love both their mother and their father. It is okay and very normal for children to be confused about their feelings for the perpetrator.
- Do not use your children as messengers between adults.
- Know your legal rights!
- Where there is family violence professional help is recommended

It is important to allow children to talk about and ask about the violence if they choose to. Keeping silent about the violence around children can send the message that it is too dreadful to speak about and should remain a secret, shameful and shaming.



IMPORTANT CONTACT NUMBERS

Police Fire Ambulance	000
The Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria	1800 015 188 (toll free)
Statewide Homelessness Assistance	1800 825 955 (toll free)
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service	1800 105 303
Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service	1800 755 988 (free call)
WIRE Women's Information Referral Service	1300 134 130
Interpreting and Translating service	131 450
After Hours Child Protection Emergency Services	13 12 78 (toll free within Victoria)
Victoria Legal Aid Help	1300 792 387
Aboriginal Legal Aid	1800 064 865
Women's Legal Service of Victoria	03 9642 0877
Sexual Assault Crisis Line	1800 806 292
Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800
Lifeline	13 11 14
24 hr Maternal and Child Health	132 229
Men's Referral Service	1800 065 973 (free call within Victoria)
Nurse on Call	1300 60 60 24
Parentline Victoria	13 22 89
Victims of Crime Helpline	1800 000 055