

Family violence and harm

Supporting children and young people

Children and young people who live with violence and harm happening in their family or whānau face many challenges and risks. Not all children and young people are affected in the same way, but family violence and harm situations are always frightening and distressing for them. The greater and more frequent it is, the greater the negative effects will be. For some it can be deeply traumatic.

What are they dealing with?

A child or young person may

- see or hear people they love fighting, crying, yelling, or being hurt and abused in front of them
- see the consequences of harm done, such as injuries, damage, ongoing fear and tension, and the efforts to hide or deny what's happened
- be affected when growing during their mother's pregnancy, if they are injured or their mother is extremely stressed
- be directly harmed – injured, verbally bullied, abused, intimidated, or neglected
- possibly be used by an abusive family member to manipulate others, such as criticising another adult to them, or using them to find out information about another adult
- feeling caught in the middle of two people they love and are closely connected to.

They know what's going on

However well a parent tries to hide the harm and protect their children, they can sense the tensions and see the results.

“*Witnessing family violence has the same negative effects on children as physical violence against them.*”

Plunket NZ

CONTACT

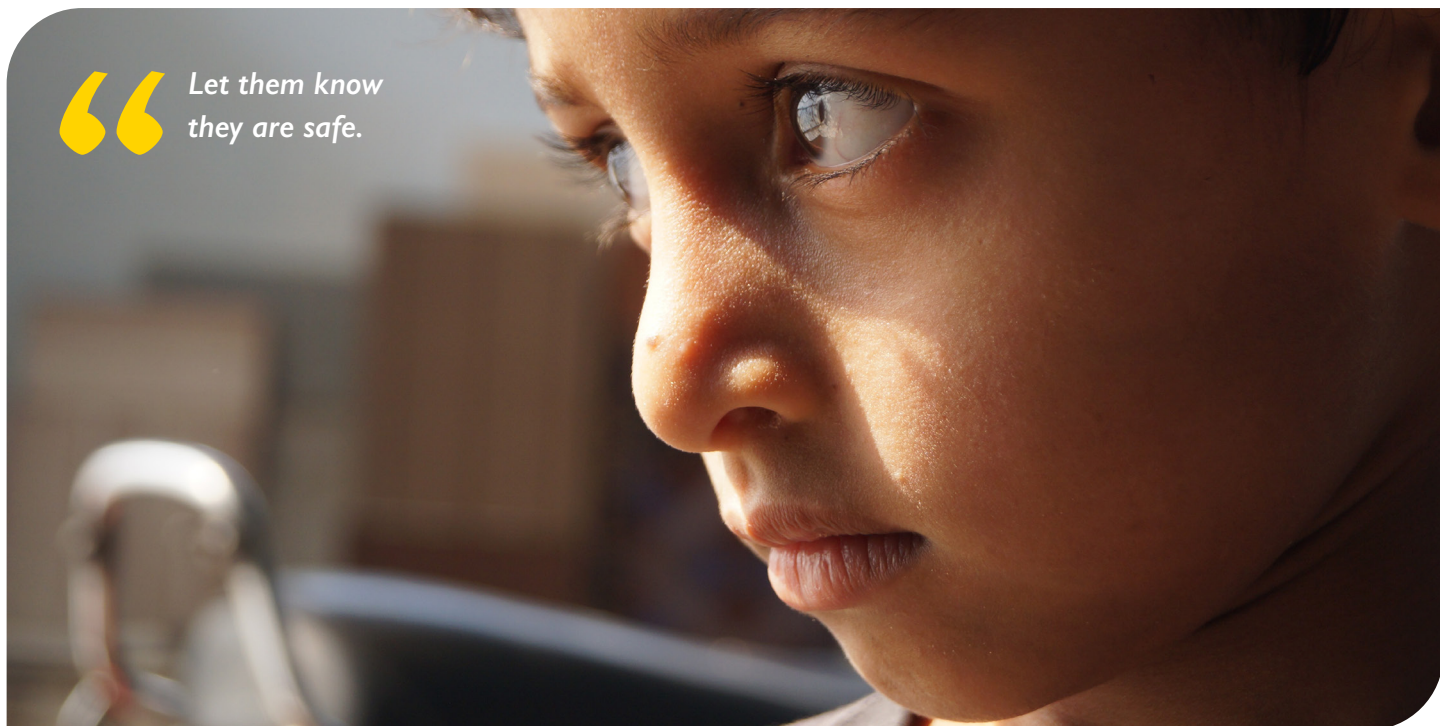
Victim Support

Get Help: 0800 VICTIM (0800 842 846)
enquiries@victimsupport.org.nz
victimsupport.org.nz





Let them know
they are safe.



They can't feel safe if family or whānau members are being hurt

They will feel worried and uncertain about what to expect next. The unpredictability means they live with high levels of ongoing stress and anxiety. This can threaten their health and wellbeing. There is a high risk that it will slow down their normal physical, emotional, and social development.

They may be unwilling to tell you how they are coping. Some might not have the words or language to express their fears and worries. Some may want to please the parents, caregivers or adults involved and don't know what to do, especially if one adult is trying to influence them against another adult.

Watching for changed behaviour and physical symptoms can alert you to the stress they are living with.

Common effects include:

- frightened or traumatised by incidents
- ongoing worry, anxiety, stress
- physical reactions e.g. stomach aches, headaches, body aching, rashes, existing health conditions may get worse, changes in eating, difficulty with sleeping, bedwetting
- more silent, withdrawn
- sad, depressed
- blaming themselves, feeling guilty, or blaming others
- behaving extremely well to avoid adults getting angry

- less confidence, lower self-esteem
- trying to protect others from harm, may put themselves in danger
- difficulty concentrating, distracted, finding school work harder
- more absent from school, may withdraw from teams and groups
- less trusting of others
- difficulty keeping up positive relationships
- increased irritability and anger, more tantrums or acting out
- being aggressive or violent to others, because they've learned this as normal behaviour in their family
- older children and young people may develop risk-taking behaviours, including abusing alcohol or drugs, or self harm, as ways to cope with their internal stress.

Even babies and toddlers become distressed when they sense or witness conflict. They can become fretful and clingy. Normal developmental milestones can be delayed.

The good news

When children and young people are given warm and caring love, support, and ongoing safety, they can begin to heal and recover from the effects of family violence and harm.





How can I support them best?

Keep them safe

Their safety and yours is the number one priority. Take the necessary steps to keep them as protected.

(* If you are concerned that you may have been harming your child or young person, you can ask for support to change your behaviour. Phone 0800 456 450 for information about local help available to you. This information and support line is provided by the Are You Okay organisation.)

Show your affection - remind them they're loved

Build them up. Be kind. Encourage them. Reassure them. Include them in things. Give them your time.

Talk with them, listen to them

Depending on their age, talk about what's been happening. Let them know it's okay to be honest about it.

- Keep it simple. Use words they understand.
- Let them talk if they want to. Listen well. Let them ask questions they have.
- Check what worries them the most. Reassure them. Comfort them.
- If they'd rather talk to a different adult instead, like and aunt or uncle, a grandparent, teacher, or school counsellor, don't be offended. They might be trying not to hurt or upset you. Let them know that's okay. Think together about caring adults around them who they could talk with. (See also the kids' and youth crisis lines listed below.)

Reassure them it's not their fault

Explain it's normal to have mixed up feelings when the person who has done this harm is someone we know and love in our own family. Try not to speak negatively about that person but instead explain that their violence and abuse is never okay. They are not to blame for what has happened.

Avoid giving them responsibility for adult problems

Without always meaning to, parents and caregivers can sometimes put onto their children and young people's shoulders the weight of their own adult issues. Instead of telling them about every issue, including your opinions of the other person involved, find other people you can talk to about your situation. If your children or young people start to take on adult responsibilities, remind them that you and other caring adults can be the responsible ones.

Make a safety plan together

Help them to have a safety plan - talk about it together.

First, let them know what you and other trusted adults will be doing to keep them, and the family, safe.

Next, plan together some things they can do whenever they feel scared at home. Ask them what makes them feel more safe. Where could they go? Who could they get help from?

Teach them how to contact and talk with family, whānau, friends, neighbours, or a teacher, who can give them a safe place. Explain how to call 111 in an emergency and what to say. Teach them to say their address. Practice saying it.

Consider choosing a code word together that you and those they trust all know. This code word can tell them that you need their help or that you need to leave now.

Speak with their teacher, or their dean if at secondary school. Keeping up a good relationship with the school can help support your child or young person. Let the school know about any active protection orders or ongoing concerns you have. Ask them to support your child or young person's privacy and safety. If you think they could play a helpful part in a safety plan, talk with them about what their role could be. For example, agree on who a child or young person can talk to at school if something happened, or what safety checks the school will do if the child or young person doesn't come to school. Make sure your child or young person also knows what the school's role is in the safety plan.

For more help to make a family safety plan, see our website's *Get Support* Section, under *Family violence and harm*. Look at *Steps you can take* for the blue box called *Making your own safety plan*.



Give them choices

Look for opportunities when they can make their own choices about things, even simple things, like what to wear, what to have for lunch, or which movie they could watch. This helps them feel more in control when so much else may feel out of their control. Talk together about any important decisions that will affect them.

Let them know it's normal to feel mad, angry, sad, worried, and upset

Talk about helpful ways to let out our strong thoughts and feelings.

Keep up routines

Make each day as normal and predictable for them as possible.

Spend time with them

Keep building up your bond with them. Enjoy some good times together. Having a strong, positive, trustworthy relationship will help them a lot.

Keep them connected with others

Give them opportunities to be with caring family, whānau, and friends. Encourage them to keep connected to their school and any other cultural, faith, sports, or social organisations they have positive links with.

Keep positive and hopeful

Avoid focusing just on the problems. Instead, help them notice the good things to be grateful for. Speak positively about the future. Plan some things they can look forward to.

Teach them it's never ok to be violent or harm others

If they show bullying or aggressive behaviour towards others, remind them of this. Seek advice and help from their teacher and school, and/or a support agency, to deal with this straight away.



Get extra help if you're concerned

Reach out to a support agency, your doctor, a counsellor, your child's school, or others you trust, if their health, wellbeing, or behaviour is worrying you. Let teens know about the support options available to them.

Use support yourself

You don't need to do this alone. Look after yourself well. Your own health and wellbeing matters too.



Crisis lines for young kiwis

What's Up

0800 942 8787 (0800 WHATSUP) or webchat at www.whatsup.co.nz from 5pm – 10pm for 5-18 year olds.

Kidsline

0800 543 754 (0800 KIDSLINE) - for young people up to 18 years.

Youthline

0800 376 633, free text 234, email talk@youthline.co.nz or webchat at www.youthline.co.nz (webchat available 7pm – 11pm) - for young people and their parents, family, whānau, and friends.



Some other helpful websites

What family violence and harm involves (Plunket)

<https://www.plunket.org.nz/being-a-parent/family-and-whanau/family-violence/family-violence/>

Safer Homes Booklet (Shine)

practical information for victims of domestic abuse
<https://www.2shine.org.nz/shop/written-resources-dvds/safer-homes-booklet>

Parenting through a break-up (Ministry of Justice)

resources for parents, children, and young people <https://www.justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children/parenting-through-a-break-up/getting-help-for-your-children/>

Understanding Parental Alienation – when one parent influences a child or young person against the other parent:

- thefamilymatterscentre.co.nz/parental-alienation/
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLD7A081704F6C4D06&v=v3YdldNXZnQ>

To get more information and support for yourself or whānau

- Please see *The Family Harm and Violence* section our website www.victimsupport.org.nz – look for it under GET SUPPORT.
- Our Support Workers are also available to support you personally, or as a family or whānau, and can connect you with the best services in your area best suited to your situation. You can call us 24/7 on 0800 842 846 to be connected to a Support Worker.



**Our service is
free, personal,
and confidential**





Recommended Resources

Trauma - How To Talk To Your Kids About It (Kidshealth NZ)

Some resources, in a range of languages, about how to talk to kids about trauma can be found on the NZ Kids Health website at www.kidshealth.org.nz/trauma-how-talk-your-kids-about

NZ Ministry of Education info sheets for Parents/Caregivers

This information was developed following the Canterbury earthquakes in 2011, however the advice remains relevant after any major traumatic event. Scroll down to After an Emergency resources to *Supporting People* to see the range available.

www.education.govt.nz/school/health-safety-and-wellbeing/emergencies-and-traumatic-incidents/

Skylight resources and support packs

Skylight makes available for purchase or loan a wide range of resources for all ages and stages, including the workbooks *Something Has Happened* (3-6 year olds) and *When Tough Stuff Happens* (7-12 year olds). They also offer free information packs tailored to your child's situation. Phone them 0800 299 100 or 04 939 6767 weekdays, or visit www.skylight.org.nz



Counselling Support Options

Different organisations around the country offer counselling and support for children and young people.

These links provide a list of the ways you can look for a child or youth counsellor in your area.

- Search for services in your own area on this online Family Services Directory: <https://family.services.govt.nz/#/> Look in the category *Family/Whānau* services for *Counselling*, then add in your location.
- www.talkingworks.co.nz (Talking Works)
- NZ Association of Counsellors 04 471 0307 www.nzac.org.nz - see search for a NZAC Counsellor
- NZ College of Clinical Psychologists 04 472 4088 includes a directory and downloadable lists: *Find a Clinical Psychologist*
- NZ Psychological Society 04 473 4889 www.psychology.org.nz includes a directory: *Find a Psychologist*
- www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/find-a-gp-or-counsellor (NZ Mental Health Foundation)

Or call or text 1737 to talk to a trained counsellor about your concerns (24/7) and find out about services in your area.

Examples of national organisations you can contact include:

- Barnardos
www.barnardos.org.nz 0800 BARNARDOS (0800 227 627)
- Skylight
www.skylight.org.nz FREEPHONE: 0800 299 100
- Family Works, Provided by Presbyterian Support Services.
www.familyworks.org.nz 0508 TO HELP (0508 864 357)
- Māori Women's Welfare League offers Whānau Toko i te Ora parenting programme for under five-year-olds. Branches throughout New Zealand. Email mwwl@mwwl.org.nz Phone 04 473 6451

In crisis right now?

- For urgent mental health support for your child or young person in your area see www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/ for a list of your local DHB services for children and young people
- If it is an emergency, such as a suicide threat, call 111 and ask for assistance, or visit a doctor or hospital emergency department as soon as possible with your child or young person.

Helplines for children and young people

- *What's Up*
Kids and teenagers up to 18 years old can talk with professional counsellors. Available 1pm–11pm daily. (Barnardos) 0800 WHATS UP (0800 942 8787)
- *Kidsline*
Kids up to 14 years old can talk with teenage volunteers, who are supervised by adults. Daily after school 4pm–6pm. (Lifeline Aotearoa) 0800 KIDSLINE (0800 543 754)
- *Youthline*
Confidential youth help and information. For intermediate-aged kids and older. 0800 376 633 Free txt: 234 webchat at www.youthline.co.nz

Victim Support

0800 842 846 www.victimsupport.org.nz

We can support parents and whānau with information, support, and coping tools, and help you find the right local services for your child or young person's needs.

