

MELI

Protecting little eyes and little ears

meli.org.au



**Children are not
passive witnesses
to noise, tension and
violence at home**





I am listening...
I am thinking...
I am feeling...

Children living with family violence are trying to make sense of complex issues and emotions before their brains and bodies can understand it.

By taking the time to understand a child's view we can nurture positive changes and help them cope with their emotions.



Children are resilient.

While they may experience negative impacts of family violence, we can help make sure tomorrow is better.

The impact of family violence on children

Just like adults, children are individuals and react to situations and circumstances differently.


The way family violence can affect a child depends on their circumstances and a range of factors including their personality type, temperament, age, gender, role in the family, problem-solving ability, connection to their own emotions and their home and community environment.

A child's ability to thrive while experiencing family violence can be further impacted by external factors such as poverty, negative parental behaviour, lack of positive connection to extended family and/or community, neglect, substance abuse, child sexual abuse, and maternal depression.

Research consistently shows the more of the above factors present in a child's life, the higher the likelihood emotional and/or behavioural disturbance will develop.

The brain is most vulnerable to traumatic experiences during a baby's first year and up until the age of six years. During this time, exposure to trauma can change the organisation and structure of the brain.

Violence can be one or more traumatic incidents that can trigger change in the brain. By seeking help, you can prevent damage to your child's mental and physical wellbeing.

A young boy with dark hair is sitting on a green metal fence. He is wearing a grey t-shirt, blue jeans, and white sneakers. He has blue headphones around his neck and is holding a black smartphone in his hands, looking down at it. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a brick path. A large purple shape is overlaid on the bottom left of the image, containing white text.

**Every child will
respond differently
to family violence
in the home.**

Look out for changes in behaviour and wellbeing.

Children exposed to family violence may often feel a range of emotions including, guilt, confusion, anger, fear and anxiety. Common symptoms of these emotions are listed below.

Physical symptoms:

- Headaches
- Stomach cramps
- Poor concentration
- Restlessness
- Hair pulling
- Nail biting
- Scratching self
- Changes in toileting habits

Other behaviours a child may display:

- Reluctance to trust people and peers
- Fearful of making mistakes
- A decreased ability to make friends and keep long term relationships
- Difficulty relating to others
- Social shyness or anxiety
- Clinginess towards those they do trust
- Difficulties falling asleep
- Changes in eating habits (excessive or minimal)
- Aggressive language and/or acting out (hitting)
- Withdrawal
- Depression

If you notice your child's behaviour and/or general wellbeing changes, consider discussing this with your doctor, school or another professional service.



How to support your child

- Be ready to listen and give your full and undivided attention.
- Do an activity that your child enjoys and that encourages talking in a safe environment.
- Let your child lead any conversation related to violence and how they feel about it.
- Suggest ways they can feel part of a community to help with a sense of belonging (i.e. sports teams, community activities, music groups, etc).
- Foster the development of friendships and help them build a nurturing peer group.
- Help them write a safety plan (on page 11).

What to say

- Use encouragement and positive responses that show genuine interest in the child's thoughts and ideas.
- Provide straight-forward answers and use child-friendly language.
- If you don't know the answer, admit it and commit to finding the information.

Keep in mind...

- When children express their feelings, it provides an emotional release.
- Children often don't want to talk for a long time and only take in small amounts of information at a time.
- Just one long term, regular, and reliable source of support and comfort can help children believe in themselves and restore their sense of hope in the future.

Safety plan

Talk about this with an adult you trust and complete the form together. Keep it in a safe place.
Write down some people you feel safe with and comfortable to call when you feel scared.
Make sure that one of these people can come and get you if needed.

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Name: | Phone number: |
| 2. Name: | Phone number: |
| 3. Name: | Phone number: |
| 4. Name: | Phone number: |

Other places you can go:

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Other people you can count on in an emergency:

Call 000 for police, fire or ambulance Or Kids Helpline 1800 551 800

In order to be the best version of yourself as a parent/carer, it's important to show yourself some kindness and nurture your physical and mental wellbeing.



Tips for nurturing yourself as a parent/carer

Taking some time out to nurture yourself will help you provide better care for yourself and your child(ren).

- Do something you find enjoyable, even though it may not feel like a priority. Think about activities you enjoy and what might stop you from doing these. How could you include more of these activities in your life?
- Spend time with people who care about you.
- Give yourself time to come to terms with your experiences, both past and present.
- Ask friends and family for support. They may be waiting for your permission to help out and would feel comfortable being given some practical things to do (make a list of possibilities).
- Talk about your situation and your concerns to trusted family members, friends or a professional.
- Think about where you are now and where you want to be. Start making a plan for how to get there in your own time.
- Grief and mourning are normal emotions to feel. Sometimes this can help with acceptance and personal healing.
- Everybody has strengths and weaknesses. Avoid putting yourself down and instead, try focusing on your strengths.
- Try to slow down. Write lists and place things in order of priority then tick off what you have achieved as you go.
- Spend time engaging with your child. This can improve your relationship as well as their development.
- Try to eat a balanced diet.
- Try physical exercise, it can be helpful in decreasing stress levels and is great for your overall health.
- Ongoing stress can reduce the effectiveness of the immune system. Trying some of the above tips may help to reduce your stress levels.

Family violence services - Barwon

Meli

Specialist family violence support for men and women
03 5226 8900

Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre

Sexual Assault and Family Violence Counselling
03 5222 4318 or 1800 806 292 crisis line

The Orange Door

For people who are experiencing or have experienced family violence
1800 312 820

Barwon Community Legal Service

Free legal advice to people living in Geelong, Barwon and western
Victoria
1300 430 599

Colac Area Health

Specialist family violence support for women and children
03 5232 5100

Diversitat

Services for CALD communities
03 5221 6044

Geelong Court Network Support

Non-legal information and support for people attending court
03 5225 3356

Opening Doors

Housing and homelessness support
1800 825 955

Salvation Army

Family support, financial aid, food relief
03 5223 2434

Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative - Family Services
03 5277 0044

Wathaurong Aboriginal - Health Services

03 5277 2038

Family violence services - Victoria

Safe Steps

24 hour crisis line, emergency accommodation, outreach services,
advocacy, referral and information and support services
1800 015 188

Djirra

Family violence support program for Aboriginal women
1800 105 303

Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE)

Information, support and referrals to women across Victoria
1300 134 130

Women's Legal Service Victoria

Legal service for victim-survivors of family violence
1800 133 302

Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Family Violence Services

Refuge accommodation, specialist family violence services, therapeutic
support for Aboriginal women and children
1800 796 112

InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Violence

Services, programs and responses to issues of family violence in culturally
and linguistically diverse communities
1800 755 988

Victorian Forensic Paediatric Medical Service

Medical service providing assessment and care for abused, assaulted and
neglected children and young people

Family violence services - National

1800 Respect
1800 737 732

Relationships Australia
1300 364 277

Lifeline
13 11 14 (free call 24/7)

Men's Line Australia
1300 789 978 (free call 24/7)

No To Violence - Men's Referral Service
1300 766 491

Kids Help Line
1800 551 800

Useful family violence support websites

www.meli.org.au
A community support agency servicing Barwon and western Victoria

www.safesteps.org.au
Victorian Family Violence Response Centre

www.1800respect.org.au
National sexual assault, domestic family violence counselling service

www.safvcentre.org.au
Specialist family violence support for women and children

www.orangedoor.vic.gov.au
Family violence and child wellbeing intake service

www.thelookout.org.au
Family violence information, resources and services

www.relationships.org.au
Relationship support services for individuals, families and communities

www.wire.org.au
Women's Information and Referral Exchange. Free information, support and referrals to women across Victoria

www.dvrcv.org.au
Victorian Domestic Violence Resource Centre – training, publications, research and other resources relating to family violence

www.casa.org.au
Centres Against Sexual Assault

www.lifeline.org.au
24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services

www.amf.org.au
Alannah & Madeline Foundation keeping children safe from violence

www.woah.org.au
Information for adolescents about family violence

www.kidshelpline.org.au
Kids helpline web resource

www.reachout.com
Online youth mental health service

www.youthlaw.asn.au
Victoria's state-wide free community legal centre for young people aged under 25 years of age

www.humanservices.gov.au
Federal government health, social, welfare payments and services

www.djirra.org.au
Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service

www.yla.org.au
Legal information for children and young people

How to contact us

We provide support in offices located in the Barwon and Wimmera South West regions.

Community Support

☎ General enquiries: 03 5226 8900

✉ info@meli.org.au

Meli Kindergartens

☎ General enquiries: 03 5273 0200

✉ kindergartens@meli.org.au

📘 @meli.community

📷 @meli.community

in @meli-community

meli.org.au

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we work and connect on the traditional and unceded lands of Aboriginal peoples and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We are committed to the reconciliation journey through our actions and openness to learn.



We celebrate difference

Meli is committed to creating an environment where everyone feels safe and that they belong. We welcome people of all races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, religions, abilities, and nationalities and value diversity of experience as a vital part of supporting people and strengthening communities. We will listen, learn and evolve as an accessible, inclusive, and safe organisation for all, including First Nations peoples, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disability and those with culturally diverse backgrounds.



Interpreter services are available upon request.