

Resourcing Mothers



Domestic Violence
Prevention Centre

What we do

The Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast offers FREE counselling, support, information and referral for women and their children, living in the Gold Coast and Beenleigh region, who have or are experiencing domestic and family violence.



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We acknowledge the Queensland Government who provided the funding for the development and printing of this resource. We hope you find it informative and useful. For more detailed information about domestic and family violence please refer to our *purple book* which can be accessed through our website: www.domesticviolence.com.au.

Disclaimer

Information in this publication should not be regarded as a substitute for specialist domestic violence or legal advice. The Domestic Violence Prevention Centre GC Inc. accepts no responsibility for any loss or risk suffered by any person as a consequence of using or relying on the information contained within, or for any loss or risk which may arise due to an error or omission in the information.

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Contents

To return to Contents, click on the home icon: 



1. About this resource	2
2. The impacts of domestic and family violence on children and young people	4
Pregnancy and babies	5
Children	7
Young people/adolescents	10
3. How mothering can be affected by domestic and family violence	12
The potential impact on mothering a baby/child	13
The potential impact on mothering an adolescent	14
Myths about mothers and children that experience domestic violence	14
4. Your relationship status and mothering	16
Staying in the relationship	16
Separated	17
Co-parenting	18
Re-partnering	19
Navigating the system	21
Legal (DVOs and court)	22
Concerns about the child or children's welfare and sexual abuse	23
5. How to support your children affected by domestic violence	24
What can I do for my baby?	24
What can I do for my child?	26
What can I do for my adolescent?	28
What does a healthy parent-child relationship look like?	29
6. Looking after yourself	32
7. Resources	34



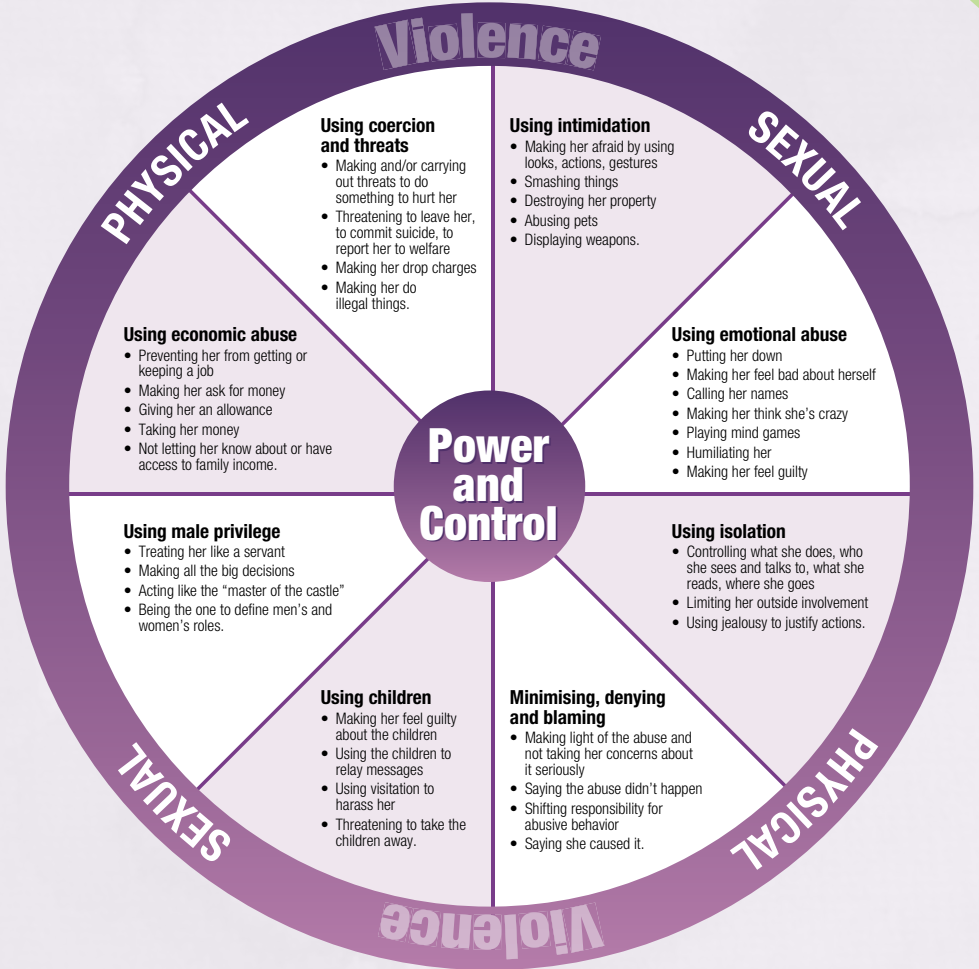
1. About this resource

This resource for mothers contains general information about the impact of domestic and family violence (DFV) on babies, children, and adolescents, and how this can affect their mothering. It includes some strategies on what can support children, and at the same time support mothering.

Domestic and family violence can happen to anyone at anytime. In a healthy relationship, there is a shared and negotiated balance of power and control with both parties safely expressing their opinions and concerns. In a relationship where one partner tries to have control over the other partner leaving them feeling fearful and isolated, it's likely that domestic and family violence is occurring. In other words, DFV is not about conflict, it's about power and control one person exerts over the other.

If you are experiencing domestic violence, finding and receiving the support that feels right for you is important. We understand the challenges and barriers for those who experience domestic and family violence.

For some women being a mother can be very rewarding, however this doesn't mean that it's easy, and for some women it can be described as the 'hardest job in the world'. It can be especially incredibly difficult for mothers who are being abused by their current partner or ex-partner. This can make it difficult for mothers to have the connection with their child or children in the way that they would like because of the abuse/violence, and they may find that they have to change their mothering in order to try and keep their children and themselves safe from further abuse/violence.



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2. The impacts of domestic and family violence on children and young people

Everyone has the right to feel safe and live free from violence.

When a partner or ex-partner tries to control the other partner, this is likely to be described as domestic and family violence. This type of abuse/violence often involves behaviours that are linked or connected and they can form a pattern that is often be predictable for women. This means the behaviours are not isolated or separate from each other. It is important to remember that no form of abuse is acceptable and there are no excuses. It is not the fault of the person who is being harmed. No one deserves to be abused.

DFV has an impact on children, even for children who do not see the violence or are not directly targeted. Children who are living or have lived in these situations can even experience the same level of fear and isolation that the abused parent or caregiver may be feeling. Children are often able to detect tension and fear, along with being able to 'tune in' to the feelings of adults.

Children are unique and so is their experience of DFV; therefore it can affect them in many ways. Reading about some of the ways babies, children and young people may feel, behave or think due to their experiences of DFV can be helpful.



Pregnancy and babies

It has been found that women are at greater risk of experiencing domestic violence from their partner during pregnancy. Women may experience abuse either for the first time during the pregnancy, or the existing abuse may escalate during the pregnancy.

Some indicators may include:

- an increase of sexual violence and coercion during pregnancy;
- an increase of jealousy and possessiveness; for instance, checking on the woman's whereabouts and limiting or restricting her contact with family and friends;
- accusing the woman of cheating and being disloyal;
- not letting the woman make her own decisions and choices around the pregnancy.

Domestic and family violence has been linked to an increased risk during pregnancy and to the unborn baby, which may include some or all of the below:

- a lower birth weight;
- miscarriage or premature labour;
- foetal distress and injury.

Babies and toddlers can react strongly to tension, fear, and aggression in their environment which in turn can cause feeding problems, sleeping problems and/or excessive irritability. For some toddlers this can also include nightmares, sadness, regression with their toileting and speech, headaches and tummy aches, and acting out with violence in their play with peers.

We now understand that ongoing DFV can affect the development of babies' and toddlers' brains with 90% of children's brains developing before they are five years old. When a child is living in a DFV environment, their brain stem is likely to be constantly on high alert for danger so they are ready to do what they need to in response to try and become safe. The problem is that even for children who have experienced trauma and have transitioned into a safe environment, the primitive part of their brain may not turn off, so the child operates from this part of the brain even when it isn't necessary. In other words, the child's body may respond to a 'perceived' threat rather than an 'actual' threat. This is often referred to as Flight/Flight/Freeze/Fawn, which are four responses that happens when a person perceives that they are in danger or under threat.

We know that children who are in the Fight/Flight/Freeze/Fawn mode of the brain (primitive), can experience normal everyday events as potential danger or threat. The Fawn response is a later addition to Fight/Flight/Freeze and can be developed during childhood trauma when a parent or a significant authority is the person using violence/abuse. The Fawn response involves the child immediately trying to please a person to avoid conflict, i.e. by answering in a way they think the parent wants to hear, and ignoring their own feelings and desires to do anything to try and prevent further abuse.





Children

As children develop, the impact of the DFV can show in a variety of ways. For some school-aged children, they may experience guilt about the abuse and believe that they are to blame for what is happening to them, their mother or siblings. They may struggle with their sense of self and struggle to socialise with their peers. They may avoid or feel afraid to participate in school activities, they may have fewer friends than others, they may feel different to others, and they may also find they are 'getting into trouble' more often. Some children can also experience physical symptoms and have headaches and stomach aches.

Other behaviours, feelings, and beliefs for children as an impact of their experiences can include some of the following:

- feeling numb, scared, confused and anxious;
- worrying that the violence will cause death of the parent or sibling;
- believing that the violence is a normal way to solve problems;
- regressing, i.e. bed wetting, sucking their thumb;
- believing that the violence is their fault;
- believing that the violence is a family secret;
- being easily startled and hyper-vigilant;
- aggressive-type behaviours towards other children, siblings and pets;
- decreased or diminished sense of self-worth and self-esteem;
- internalising the violence and experiencing depression and self-loathing;
- struggling with school/impact on academic performance, i.e. difficulty with concentrating, problem-solving, memory.

What you might notice happening for your child



Fight

- Aggressive, threatening: stiffening up, clenching fists
- Shouting, disruptive, loud and noisy

Flight


- Running away, escaping, disappearing, hiding under the table/bed/sofa
- Keeping super busy



Freeze

- Distracted, not listening
- Not moving to where you've asked
 - Scanning the room
- Wide eyed, pupils might dilate

Fawn

- Looking to other for how to feel in a relationship/situation
 - Constantly trying to please people
 - Feeling overwhelmed but taking on more regardless
 - Struggles to give opinion when asked
- 

Note: the responses/reactions can be at an awareness level and/or at a subconscious level for the child/young person.



What your child might need from you

Fight

- Tell me you love me even when my I push you away
- Don't punish me for being cross; reward me with your kindness and love for getting calm again
- Keep me safe from hurting myself
- Deep breathing
- Create somewhere safe to go to so I can calm down
 - Accept I might not know why I behaved in that way and I might not remember what happened
 - Listen and acknowledge how I feel; even if you see it differently, it will help me feel listened to

Flight

- Keep me close by
- Find me again happily or patiently
- Deep breathing
- Tell me that I am safe with you
- Talk through what you think I am finding tricky using a kind voice
- Create a safe space where I can hide away when I need to
- If you send me to do something and I forget, just patiently ask again

Freeze

- Stay with me, don't leave me
- Tell me I'm okay and that I am safe
 - Deep breathing
- Gently wonder where I have gone and invite me back to you
- If I have forgotten what I was supposed to be doing, remind me again gently

Fawn

- Tell me that my feelings matter
 - Tell me it's okay to say no
- Focus on me and be there with me
- Tell me that my boundaries matter
 - Play with me and let me chose the activity
 - Be my example



Young people/adolescents

For this age group, the impact can be different again. Even if they are not experiencing violence directly, exposure to violence can place young people at risk. For instance, the impact may result in risk-taking or self-medicating type of behaviours like using drugs and alcohol. These behaviours may be a way for young people or adolescence to block out bad memories or numb emotional pain. They may also try and stay away from home; however, this could place them in unsafe situations. Some young people may have had to take on the adult responsibilities for themselves or for younger family members, and this can create emotional and psychological burdens and responsibilities for them.

Other behaviours, feelings, and beliefs in young people as a result of their experiences may include:

- attempting to physically stop the violence with intimidation and aggression;
- difficulty establishing healthy relationships;
- believing that power and control can be gained through aggression and violence;
- believing that violence and abuse in relationships are normal and an acceptable way to end conflict;
- feelings of helplessness and hopelessness;
- using self-harming behaviours;
- detaching from feelings;
- anger with the situation, i.e. Why doesn't mum just kick him out?
- feeling responsible for protecting their siblings;
- internalising the violence and experiencing depression and self-loathing;
- struggling at school with negative impacts on academic performance, i.e. difficulty with concentrating, problem-solving, memory.



Other considerations for children and young people

Children and young people may also experience grief due to multiple losses and changes because of the domestic and family violence, such as having to leave the family home, their school, leaving behind their possessions, pets, and friends. There can also be grief associated with the separation of the parents and in some cases with the death of a loved one, i.e. a parent, a sibling, or a pet.

What we know from our work is that children and young people who live with DFV can move forward and heal from their experiences, especially if they are supported from having a constant relationship with a caring, nonviolent parent. A caring, nonviolent parent can promote their children's well-being by taking steps such as helping the children develop relationships with other supportive adults, and encouraging them in school or other activities. Children and young people can learn safe ways to help them manage or regulate their emotions and memories.



3. How mothering can be affected by domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence also can significantly impact on the mother and child relationship, and the impact can be different for everyone.

A mother's confidence in her parenting abilities, along with her connection with her children, may have been negatively affected by her experiences of DFV. This is not her fault. It is not uncommon for the person using violence to have actively and intentionally undermined her as a mother, along with the relationship she had with her children.

Below are some direct and indirect ways that the person using violence can undermine a woman's mothering and the mother-child relationship:

- limiting the mother's capacity to take care of her children due to fear, depression or the perpetrator's control of the money;
- belittling and insulting a woman in front of her children to make her doubt her parenting abilities and undermine her authority to parent with confidence;
- manipulating the children and young people into joining the abuse of their mother, for example through taking part in belittling or putting her down;
- directly interfering with a mother's parenting by coercing her to parent in a style she isn't comfortable with;
- ongoing abuse and violence post separation through contact arrangements;
- reporting the mother to child protection services as an 'unfit' mother;
- interfering with the mother's attempt to create structure for the children and ignoring or undermining her attempts;
- blaming the mother for separation and not providing child support to try and pressure the mother to reconciliation.



Women have reported that they can find it incredibly hard to mother how they want to when experiencing DFV. The impacts for women are numerous and can include experiencing depression, anxiety, poor sleeping, rage, and loss of confidence. Understandably, these and other impacts can make it difficult to be totally available to focus on the needs of children, and may also increase the possibility of her engagement with unhelpful behaviours as a way of trying to manage and cope with the situation.

In addition, if her parenting is being heavily criticised and undermined by her partner or ex-partner, she may experience a diminished sense of control over her mothering options, and these can be exacerbated by her partner or ex-partner's control of financial and material resources.

Furthermore, mothers may internalise the child's behaviours that they view as negative as a direct reflection of their parenting ability, and assign their own meaning to their children's difficult emotions like 'I'm a failure' or 'I must be doing something wrong'.

The potential impact on mothering a baby/child may include:

- struggling to bond with the baby/child;
- ongoing abuse/violence that is actively preventing the mother from spending time with their baby or ability to breastfeed their baby;
- restricting a mother from being able to reassure and comfort their baby appropriately, for example when a mother is holding her baby/child and at the same time is being abused by a person shouting and behaving aggressively;
- increased anxiety making it hard for a mother to let their baby explore and develop freely;
- inappropriate responses, for example telling your baby off for crying, perhaps in the attempt to keep the child quiet when the person using violence is around;
- finding it hard for a mother to play and have fun with their child.



The potential impact on mothering an adolescent:

- there may be conflict between the adolescent and their mother; the adolescent may be displaying violent type behaviours towards the mother or the person using violence due to their belief that they need to protect the mother;
- difficulty supporting the adolescent's complex needs that may be displayed, such as violent outbursts, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, absconding from home/school, and/or substance abuse;
- difficulty supporting the adolescents when they are either using or experiencing violence in their personal intimate relationships;
- struggling with setting consistent expectations and consequences to try and help the adolescent feel secure.



Myths about mothers and children that experience domestic violence

The following are some examples of myths. These examples are not an exhaustive list and you may want to reflect on others that you have heard.

Myth: *A woman who loves her children would get out of a relationship where she is getting abused to protect them from harm.*

Reality: *Some women believe that staying in relationships where they are being abused is safer for the children than leaving.*

As we know from women and statistics, leaving the relationship is often the most dangerous time for women and children. Furthermore, a woman might fear losing custody or worry that the partner might abduct them, perhaps to his country of origin. Even when the woman retains custody, she may worry about the safety of the children when she is not with them.



Myth: *Children hate their father who abused them or who abused their mother.*

Reality: *Children can love their father regardless of his abuse towards them or their mother.*

A man who uses violence or abuse may be seen as an unsafe parent by adults, however he may be adored and respected by his children. Over time, some children can grow closer to him and identify more with him rather than their mother, perhaps even believing that the abuse was her fault. If there is a separation from the family, children may grieve his absence. For children too young to comprehend cause and effect, the separation may be perceived as caused by the mother who leaves the relationship rather than the father whose behaviours made the relationship untenable and unsafe.

Myth: *Children recognise their mother as a victim and their father as the cause of the problems and abuse.*

Reality: *Children can blame their mothers as much, if not more than they blame their fathers.*

Younger children especially, don't always recognise the power imbalance when parents 'fight' and often see both parents as equally powerful. This may not occur, if at all, until they approach adolescence and have developed a more adult-like understanding of the dynamics of violence and abuse. Regardless, older children may remain angry at their mother and blame her for the violence they experienced, for not protecting herself or them from his abuse, for staying with him after it was evident that he was abusive, and/or reconciling with him after leaving.

Myth: *When violence no longer happens, any family problems the children have will get better.*

Reality: *If there is a separation, children may behave more out-of-control, angry, sad or in conflict with others, including siblings.*

Ending a child's exposure to violence is ideal, however if that exposure has been lengthy, the impacts are likely to be increased and additional support is encouraged in order to help the child or young person try and make sense of their experiences.

4. Your relationship status and mothering


Staying in the relationship

Society can place pressure on mothers to ‘keep the families together’ and this can have adverse consequences for both the mother and her children. This pressure can result in women feeling and believing that it will benefit their children if they stay and try to keep the family unit together. They may feel they can’t give their children a fulfilled life as a single mum. Unhelpful comments such as “you’ve made your bed, now lie in it” and “no relationship is perfect” can also contribute to women staying in a relationship where they are subjected to violence/abuse.

Residing with the person who is using violence/abuse can feel like walking on eggshells and over time this can erode the woman’s sense of worth and purpose in life. This can result in women experiencing feelings of inadequacy as a mother, along with a sense of hopelessness. She may be afraid thinking that she wouldn’t cope as a single mother, and believe that she needs to stay.

If a woman begins to think about leaving a relationship she may become overwhelmed. For instance, she may be a stay-at-home mum and the man is the income earner. She may not believe that she is able to reenter the workforce, secure affordable childcare for the children, and/or be able to find affordable housing in the area.

Women may feel responsible for keeping the children’s lives as normal as possible. When a woman is living in the house with a partner who uses violence/abuse, she will often try and protect the children from being abused themselves. Living with this type of responsibility and stress can have an impact on her overall emotional and physical wellbeing.





Separated

We know that leaving a relationship where DFV is experienced does not guarantee that the violence will stop. In reality, the DFV can increase and as mentioned, separation can be the most dangerous time for women. This may be due to the person using violence starting to feel like they are losing control over the woman and situation, so they increase abusive behaviours in the attempt to try and regain some sense of control. The person using violence may also feel like they 'have nothing left to lose' which can place women and children at risk. Some of the abusive behaviours women have reported immediately after separation include stalking, surveillance type behaviours such as tracking, making demands, making threats to gain full custody of the children, and even making threats to harm/kill her and/or the children.

Some mothers have said they can feel a sense of guilt for leaving the relationship and 'breaking up the family'. This guilt can be fuelled if their children keep asking about their father and worrying about his wellbeing. Some fathers may actively use the children to lobby for the reunification of the family and encourage them to put pressure on to their mother. Some mothers may have thoughts that doubt their decision to leave and wonder "was it really that bad?". This doubt can increase if the person using violence expresses remorse with promises that if she returns to the relationship, he will change.

After leaving the relationship, the support provided to women by family and friends can be crucial for immediate and ongoing safety and wellbeing. Unfortunately, not all women have a social support network, and this can be due to the use of isolation perpetrated against her by the person using violence. Domestic violence support services can play a vital role in supporting the women through the separation period to help women move forward with her children, along with validating her decision to want to live a life free from domestic and family violence.

After separation, mothers may have the opportunity to be in a relationship with their children in a way they prefer rather than in ways that have been impacted by the domestic violence. However, this is different for all mothers and children as it depends on many variables including age, development, and the duration of violence/abuse perpetrated against them. Some mothers have reported that now that they are separated, they have more time and emotional capacity to provide support for the children and their individual needs such as:

- listening to their child or children without distraction and showing interest in their activities;
- encouraging their child or children to express their feelings;
- nurturing their child or children with love and acceptance even if they are displaying some challenging behaviours post separation;
- making time to play with their child or children with their undivided attention.

Co-parenting

For some women who have experienced domestic violence, they are able to cut all ties from the person who used violence against them. However, when there are children involved, this is often not possible and even more so when there is a Family Law Court Order that supports co-parenting with children legally required to see their father. It is not uncommon for women to report that their ex-partner makes co-parenting difficult, with women subjected to further abuse and violence.

Additionally, children may be used by the person using violence such as having to report back to him about the mother's actions and her whereabouts. Children can also be used to pass on hurtful or threatening messages to their mother.



Managing the contact between the children and her ex-partner can be distressing for a mother. The controlling and abusive behaviours can continue with the person using violence by dictating the care arrangements and not putting the needs of the children first. Some women have experienced this as a form of punishment for leaving. The person using violence may use the drop off/pick up times as an opportunity to further perpetrate abuse to the woman. This can include a range of behaviours such as making belittling or demeaning comments about her mothering, making accusations and questions about dating other men, along with verbal abuse such as name calling and swearing. It may also include ongoing physical violence perpetrated in front of the children.

Understandably after separation and during any co-parenting, the children may be confused about what is happening and experience an array of feelings such as fear, anger and sadness. They may want to see their other parent regardless of safety issues and this can depend on their age and situation. The children may really look forward to seeing the other parent and be extremely disappointed and distressed if the other parent doesn't follow through with scheduled contact arrangements.

Re-partnering

At some point after leaving the relationship, a woman might feel ready to date and re-partner again. However, some women can feel anxious and fearful about this. The level of trust in relationships may be eroded and they may have difficulty trusting that they can be in another relationship. The following are four ways you might find helpful if you are experiencing this situation:

1. Something that has happened to you doesn't define you – being in a relationship where someone has used abuse and violence against you is never your fault.



2. Take your own time to process what you have gone through and make your own decision about entering a new relationship.
3. Get to know yourself and what you want, what you value in a relationship and how you might be able to identify any warning signs or red flags.
4. Get to know and understand what your boundaries or bottom-line are in a relationship.

Re-partnering requires a navigation when you have children involved. It can be both an exciting and very stressful time when introducing your children to a new partner; both for you and your children.

Some children may cherish having you around them on your own and may need time to readjust and accept a new partner in your life. They may be afraid that you all will be hurt again, or may feel disloyal to their other parent if they like your new partner. Some women have said that it was helpful spending time with their children and explaining that they are dating someone who they care about, and who they would like to introduce to them when they are ready. Some women have also said that checking in with their children if they have any questions helped their children feel involved and heard. We know that children need reassurance that they will be okay and taken care of, and reiterating this can be very helpful for children.



Navigating the system

Often women do not know what services are available to help them after leaving a relationship, and the person using violence may have even kept this information purposefully hidden. The long list of systems and agencies for women to navigate through can be overwhelming, especially when she has full time care of the children. This can be one of the many barriers for women leaving the relationship. Support services may be able to make the necessary referrals to agencies which can take some of the burden away from the woman.

A first step for many women when leaving the relationship is to ascertain if they are eligible for any payments to support them financially. This process can be stressful and unfamiliar for many women. Women are encouraged to speak to a social worker at agencies that provide support and information, and make sure they are accessing all the payments and supports they are eligible for.

There are many institutions women can contact in the attempt to maximise her safety – including her phone company to ensure the service is changed into her name so her ex-partner cannot access her phone records, and also her bank so she can either set up a new account or cancel her ex-partner's access to her current account.

Women may need to access urgent legal advice when leaving to seek advice in regard to care of the children and property settlement information etc. Private legal advice can be very expensive however there is free legal advice from Legal Aid, Women's Legal Service and local community centres.

Women may need to attend a police station at some stage to report domestic violence and some women have described this experience as confronting and re-traumatising when they are having to re-tell their story to a new person.

A Domestic Violence Liaison Officer (DVLO) is located in some police stations, and for some a domestic violence advocate can be available.

Legal (DVOs and court)

If a woman has left a relationship due to DFV, she may need or choose to apply to the courts for help. This can be because the ex-partner continues to be abusive, and she is worried about safety for herself and her children. In Queensland, an application can be made for a Domestic Violence Order (DVO) to legally try and stop the ex-partner's threatening, harassing or violent behaviour. Applications can also be made to have the children protected on the order if they have been directly harmed, or if they have been exposed to the abusive behaviours.

The courts may impose conditions on the order to restrict the person using violence such as prohibiting them from attending the woman's place of residence or work. Women can also apply for a DVO whilst remaining in the relationship. A DVO is not a criminal charge, however criminal charges can result from a breach of the order. To apply for a protection order you can either apply yourself through your local magistrates court, or the police can apply on your behalf.

Women may also need to access another court, such as the Federal Circuit Court where larger decisions are made such as who the children live with and how much time they spend with the other parent. There can be a large amount of paperwork required to file in the Federal Circuit Court. Prior to lodging this paperwork, it is advisable to get legal advice at a local community centre or Legal Aid. If you are in this situation and feel overwhelmed with the paperwork or struggling to complete it on your own, a solicitor from where you obtain free legal advice might be able to assist you.



Concerns about the child or children's welfare and sexual abuse

There can be many risks for children who are in contact with the person who has, and still is using violence against their mother. If a child expresses any fears or concerns or makes any disclosures about harm, neglect or sexual abuse, it is advisable to seek support from specialised, professional agencies for your child and yourself immediately. In the meantime, support can be provided to the child by letting them know that they are believed, that what happened to them is never their fault, and that there is support for them. If you are in this situation, there are a range of services listed at the back of this resource that may be able to help.



5. How to support your children affected by domestic violence

Children often look to parents for reassurance, security and certainty, and getting support for yourself can be an extremely important way to help your child. Mothers may experience guilt for seeking help for themselves, however this can be imperative so they can provide their children with the support they need from them. You can receive support for yourself that may be helpful by keeping in contact with family, friends, and/or professional help.

What can I do for my baby?

Babies and toddlers need lots of affection and positive attention, regular routines, sensitive and appropriate responses for a safe and predictable environment. If you have a baby and/or toddler, you are most likely already doing lots of things to help them feel secure. You could build on these by adding the following ways:

- using gentle touch and kisses and firm hugs to show your baby/toddler that they are safe in your arms;
- giving your baby/toddler lots of eye contact, real interest and warmth, sing to them and stroke them;
- saying positive and encouraging words like “I love you ... I’m here for you”;
- being skin to skin with your baby: this will help the baby’s body self-regulate. You will experience a surge or maternal hormones as well and begin to smell, stroke, and engage with your baby;



- having a predictable routine will make your child feel safe and secure: implement a consistent bedtime routine like dinner together, bath, book, and bed;
- getting outside with your child and having fun; some fresh air can do wonders.
- trying not to get stuck on the behaviour of the child when they are acting out or are being clingy or demanding; instead try to understand why they are doing this, and your response will be different too.
- being a positive role model for your child or children.
- speaking and acting respectfully to and about your children even when you feel frustrated with their behaviour. When you do address behaviour be sure to let them know it's not them you don't like, it's the behaviour you don't like. Offer your child an alternative way of responding rather than acting out.
- giving lots of positive praise: when you see your child do something positive, tell them.



What can I do for my child?

The way you are with your child and the relationship you are building together can be the foundation for what they come to believe a relationship 'should' look and feel like so your mothering has the potential to teach them. You can support your child by:

- letting them know that their feelings, opinions and thoughts matter;
- showing them the importance of boundaries;
- being clear about what you want them to do without saying “stop that” and “no” all the time. For example, instead of saying “stop whining”, try “can you please talk to me so I can understand what you need right now”;
- using lots of praise. Children who come from homes where there has been DFV may have been told that they are not worthy or called names, resulting in their self-esteem being adversely affected. Therefore, it's important to help them rebuild this and let them know that there are many things that they are doing right and well;
- simply being with them; it can be small moments as simple as doing a puzzle. It's about building upon moments of connection in which you may both feel mutual joy and happiness;
- checking in regularly to see how your child is feeling, as children that have experienced trauma can often feel very confused. For example, they may have seen adults act in very unpredictable scary ways, and on occasions have seen them be caring or loving;
- letting the child lead: for some adults talking about their experiences can be helpful, however children don't always want to talk, or they struggle finding the words; instead they might just want to play with you;
- keeping emotion out of discipline: this can be very hard when you feel frustrated, however when you let the emotions take over there is no lesson to be learned for your child. Instead, they see an emotional reaction;



- trying to keep a calm low voice: living with yelling and arguing can lead to a child tuning out because they feel scared, and they will need to ignore everything around them to try and feel safe;
- being honest with your child however age appropriately: you don't need to get into a lot of details about what happened as children too young to understand adult issues can get upset to hear about them;
- setting your expectations at a level that suits your child's age. Children growing up around abuse can act older than their age, however this doesn't mean that they should be treated that way. For example, taking a young child shopping during nap time and expecting them to behave is not reasonable as regulating emotions for a young child is very difficult when tired;
- linking children with things they love. This could be at school or in the community; art, music lessons, joining a team sport, anything that makes them feel good about themselves;
- building a stable and calm environment. Children exposed to trauma may be constantly on high alert, therefore creating a predictable environment can help them feel safe and grounded knowing what to expect. This in turn can help reorganise the structure of the brain most impacted by chronic violence exposure;
- respecting your child's cultural background and identity and supporting these connections;
- identifying and connecting with a child's anchors (someone that supports your child). Children rely on the adults around them to meet their needs; anchors can help children regain a sense of safety, power and control when their home life has been so chaotic and out of control. Examples of anchors are mentors, teachers, coaches, family members, friends or neighbours;
- don't give up and always remember it is never too late; the brain is constantly developing and when we are able to support children, we are helping the brain to reprogram with new connections.



What can I do for my adolescent?

Again your relationship with your adolescent has the potential to teach them about relationships. You can support this by:

- setting an example for healthy relationships at home. When there is a disagreement or stress, model how to handle stress and challenging emotions, such as anger or sadness;
- keeping the lines of communication open by telling your teen that you will be there to listen and to support them and encourage them to talk to you about anything that is important to them;
- getting to know your teen's friends and peers as healthy friendships, with people that are supportive, understanding and caring, can affect how your teen views relationships and what they think they are worthy of when entering an intimate relationship. On the other hand, unhealthy relationships with friends can do the opposite. Furthermore, knowing your teen's good friends can help you understand your teen better;
- teaching your teen to 'have a voice' and equipping them with the ability to clearly state their feelings, desires and opinions. For example, let them know it's okay to say "no" to going to a party that they don't feel comfortable going to;
- talking about healthy and unhealthy behaviours and making sure your teen knows that relationships that involve a lot of secrecy also contain a lot of hurtful behaviours like manipulation;
- teaching your teen that they don't need to solve their problems on their own, instead encourage them to tell someone safe about the things going on for them and ask for help;
- helping your teen recognise the warning signs of an unhealthy relationship often mistaken for love, like jealousy, insisting on spending every moment of the day together, wanting their passwords to social media accounts.



What does a healthy parent-child relationship look like?



It can be very helpful considering your relationship with your child by checking it against the following characteristics. You may find this helpful to build on the things you are doing already:

1. Trust and support

Letting your child be what they want to be, supporting what they want to do in life and respecting that they have their own feelings, opinions, interests etc.

2. Respect

Listening to each other in an open way. Accepting your child's feelings and that the way they feel is okay.

3. Communication

Communicate openly and respectfully. You both may have learned to keep uncomfortable things under the surface to keep the peace or you may never have learned how to acknowledge difficult feelings and express them. Try not to let a disagreement escalate into a full-blown war by lashing out when you feel threatened: when your child communicates how they feel it's not an attack on you.

4. Empathy

Being willing to imagine what it's like from your child's perspective even when you disagree with it.



5. Affection and interest

The expression of love in the form of affection can go a long way to keeping your child feeling comforted and secure within the relationship. There is no 'right' amount of physical affection within a relationship – as long as you are both comfortable with what you share.

6. Non-threatening behaviour

Talking to your child and acting in a way that makes them feel safe. Both you and your child should feel comfortable and safe in expressing how you feel.

7. Patience

Patience can encourage calm, space, flexibility and support when your child is having a bad day or is not at their best. Of course, we can't be patient all the time, but if we are constantly impatient with each other, it can create a dynamic of resentment.

8. Negotiation and fairness

Be willing to give way a bit so that your child can have some of what they want (within reason) and you can have some of what you want. This also includes seeking ways that satisfy both people in a disagreement.

9. Win-win

Being able to offer your child choices within limits to encourage your child to cooperate instead of your child falling into people-pleasing or obedience mode.



10. Positivity

Being able to focus on what your child is doing right and building on their strengths. Creating an environment that is orientated towards rewards: for example when your child is cooperating, the consequence should be a positive outcome for the child; for example, praise for following directions or making time to do an activity that they really like doing.

11. Boundaries

Being able to put boundaries in place that work together with what your child wants in a positive way. The idea is to be able to motivate your child to cooperate with the boundaries put in place without avoidance or negative adult reactions such as shaming, criticism and abandonment.

12. Self-care

Being able to identify what YOU need and take time for yourself. Sometimes we might feel that this is being selfish, however you could try viewing this as self-care. Furthermore, it is also the ability to view perceived 'mistakes and failures' as opportunities for growth, with new goals and aspirations that are supported by the foundation and practices of self-kindness.



6. Looking after yourself

Navigating mothering and DFV towards a life free of violence can be incredibly hard as the chaos and unpredictability can continue to undermine your capacity to parent. Therefore, self-care is essential so you can function on a daily basis and be the mother you prefer to be for your child. Below are some tips that you may find helpful. Don't think of these strategies as a 'to-do' list, instead as possible practical things you that might interest you. Only you know what works best for you!

Try to get enough sleep:

- Go to bed at the same time each day.
- Avoid exercise before bed.
- Avoid screen time just before bed.
- Try a warm bath/shower two hours before bed to help you relax and regulate your body temperature.
- If you cannot sleep, get up and do something else in another room.
- Try and have a short 20 minute nap during the day if you are tired as this can improve your alertness and help you make better decisions.

Take deep breaths/meditate: this can help to keep you centred when you feel overwhelmed and stressed.

Make to-do lists: making a to-do list and ticking them off may give you a sense of achievement and control, no matter how small the task.

Seek out help: get in touch with a domestic and family violence organisation, talk to people that have gone or are going through the same thing. Attend a mothering support group.



Write: writing can seem really daunting when your head is foggy but at the same time it can be really helpful to reduce the weight of the burden. It doesn't need to be a perfectly written piece; they are your thoughts. Your story and your feelings are valid.

Make time for physical activity:

- Fresh air and sunshine can lift your mood and boost vitamin D.
- Schedule exercise time in your day even if this means a short walk with your child in the pram.
- Exercise comes in different forms and can also include meditation and breathing exercises.

Acknowledge the progress you've made: this can be that you are now free to dress the way you want or make friends with all sorts of people. Identifying how you have gained control back can be incredibly uplifting and a great feeling.

Set goals: setting goals and reaching goals, no matter how small, can give you a sense of achievement and produce a positive mindset for you and your children. For example, one of your goals might be to take your child out for a walk in the pram daily. This can be very beneficial in reconnecting with your child and also make you feel more confident in your mothering ability.

Look after your dietary needs: when we feel stressed or struggle to juggle the mental load, it can be really hard to prioritise cooking, healthy eating and staying hydrated, however without food to fuel your body and mind it will become increasingly harder to keep going and be there for your children.

- Keep a bottle of water nearby as dehydration can make you feel tired.
- Plan weekly meals for your family but don't overcomplicate it: it doesn't need to be fancy to be nutritious.



7. Resources

Useful contact numbers

WOMEN'S SUPPORT SERVICES

DV Connect – 24/7 Support and Accommodation	1800 811 811
Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc.	5532 9000
Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence Inc.	5591 1164
Centre Against Sexual Violence (CASV) Logan	3808 3299
Sexual Assault Helpline	1800 010 120
Elder Abuse Prevention Unit Helpline	1300 651 192
Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)	1300 363 783
Respect 24-hour Counselling	1800 737 732
SARA – Support Assessment Referral Advocacy	04 05 06 55 44

CHILD SAFETY

Child Safety Service Centre – Beaudesert	5542 4300
Child Safety Service Centre – Beenleigh	3094 7000
Child Safety Service Centre – Labrador	5675 4300
Child Safety Service Centre – Logan Central	3094 7400
Child Safety Service Centre – Loganlea	3094 7300
Child Safety Service Centre – Mermaid Beach	5675 4100
Gold Coast Assessment and In Home Service, Nerang	5675 4400
Child Abuse Prevention Service	1800 177 135
Child Safety After Hours Service Centre	1800 177 135

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800
Gold Coast Youth Support	5572 0400
Youthlink Support (YFS)	3826 1500
(for young people in Logan and Redlands aged 12 to 21 years)	



GENERALIST FAMILY SUPPORT AGENCIES

Act for Kids Labrador	5656 8600
Act for Kids Varsity Lakes	5508 3800
Centacare Family and Relationship Services Gold Coast	5552 6500
Family and Child Connect GC	13 32 64
Family Relationships Advice Line	1800 050 321
The Benevolent Society	1800 236 762
(Beenleigh, Coolangatta, Coomera, Labrador, Loganholme, Nerang)	
Parentline	1300 30 1300
YHES House – Southport (for parents 12–25 years old)	5528 5333

LEGAL ADVICE

Legal Aid and Women's Legal Aid	1300 651 188
Legal Aid Queensland – Southport	5671 7700
Women's Legal Service	1800 957 957
Gold Coast Community Legal Centre	5532 9611
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (Qld)	1800 012 255
Logan Legal Advice Centre	3290 4199
YFS Legal	3826 1500
Caxton Legal Centre – South Brisbane	3214 6333
Queensland Law Society	1300 367 757
Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS)	3846 9300
Basic Rights Qld	1800 358 511
Residential Tenancy Authority (RTA)	1300 366 311
Robina Community Legal Centre (Thursday from 5pm)	0423 466 286

MULTICULTURAL SERVICES

Immigrant Women's Support Service (IWSS)	3846 3490
Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)	131 450
Department of Home Affairs (Immigration and Citizenship)	131 881
Access Community Services	3412 8222
Multilink Community Services	3808 4463
Multicultural Families Organisation	5571 0381
SARA – Support Assessment Referral Advocacy	04 05 06 55 44

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SERVICES

Murrigunyah Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Womens Corp	3290 4254
Mununjali Housing and Development Company Limited	5541 2575
Kalwun Child and Family Support Service	5520 8600
Krurungal	5536 7911

POLICE

Australian Federal Police	3222 1222
Beenleigh Police Station	3801 0777
Broadbeach Police Station	5581 2800
Coolangatta Police Station	5589 8444
Coomera Police Station	5519 5555
Logan and District Station	3826 1888
Loganholme Station	3489 8555
Mudgeeraba Police Station	5559 3888
Nerang Police Station	5503 8999
Palm Beach Police Station	5534 0222
Runaway Bay Police Station	5557 6999
Southport Police Station	5571 4222
Surfers Paradise Police Station	5657 6888
Watchhouse – Southport	5571 4333

COURTHOUSES

Beenleigh District Court	3884 7500
Beenleigh Magistrate Court	3884 7500
Beenleigh Domestic Violence Assistance Program (DVAP)	3807 7622
Brisbane Magistrate Court	3247 4760
Brisbane DV Court Assistance (WDVCAS)	3247 5437
Southport Magistrate Court	5583 5900
Coolangatta Magistrate Court	5569 3040
Family Court Australia	1300 352 000

QUEENSLAND DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

Logan Housing Service Centre	3086 3700
Gold Coast Housing Service Centre	5645 8100



Useful websites

DVPC GC Inc	domesticviolence.com.au
Act for Kids	actforkids.com.au
Australian Federal Police	afp.gov.au
Australia National Research Organisation for Women's Safety	anrows.org.au
Centrelink	centrelink.gov.au
Queensland Family & Child Commission	qfcc.qld.gov.au
Community Child Health	goldcoast.health.qld.gov.au/our-services/community-child-health
Dept of Home Affairs, Immigration and Citizenship	immi.homeaffairs.gov.au
Elder Abuse Prevention Unit	eapu.com.au
Family Court of Australia	familycourt.gov.au
Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence	stopsexualviolence.com
Headspace	headspace.org.au
Immigrant Women's Support Service	iwss.org.au
Kids Help Line	kidshelpline.com.au/parents
Kalwun	kalwun.com.au
Parentline	parentline.com.au
Pregnancy and Family Support	pregnancyfamilysupport.org
Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research	noviolence.org.au
Queensland Dept of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs	cyjma.qld.gov.au
Queensland Dept of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy	chde.qld.gov.au
Queensland Dept of Justice and Attorney-General	justice.qld.gov.au
Queensland Government	qld.gov.au
Queensland Health	health.qld.gov.au
Queensland Police	police.qld.gov.au
Raising Children	raisingchildren.net.au
ReachOut Parents	parents.au.reachout.com

Admin (07) 5591 4222 | Support (07) 5532 9000

Email: info@domesticviolence.com.au

PO Box 3258, Australia Fair 4215, QUEENSLAND

domesticviolence.com.au

 facebook.com/domesticviolence.com.au

 instagram.com/dvpreventioncentre



Domestic Violence
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