



*Child Abuse/
Children Exposed to
Family Violence*



Child abuse

There is no question:

that some children grow up in homes where the adults are abusive and violent toward each other. In some of these homes, violence is directed against the children.

EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE HARMS CHILDREN NOW AND IN THEIR FUTURE

Some parents hope that if the children do not directly see the violence, it will not harm them. Some parents hope they can protect the children from the impact of abuse.

But abuse does harm children, even if they are not directly subjected to it, even if they are in a different room when it happens. Children are harmed even if they are asleep when the violence happens.

Being in an environment of anger and abuse has an impact on children in many ways.

- It affects their brain development. That in turn affects every aspect of their development: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual
- It increases children's level of anxiety and fear
- It affects their ability to learn
- It affects their ability to connect with other people

IMPACT

All across the country, adults are harming children. Children are abused or neglected. They live in angry and violent homes. They are in environments where there is substance abuse. It happens in cities and towns, in rural and isolated communities, in settlements and on reserves.

- The children may become fearful and anxious. They may believe the whole world is a dangerous place
- They may become aggressive, lashing out and bullying others
- They may become passive and very obedient, thinking they cannot change any part of their lives. They may lose energy and hope, and disconnect from the real world
- They may have trouble learning, because so much of their brain is busy dealing with the stress of an abusive environment
- They may be at greater risk of growing up to be abusive to others, to be abused, or both

If children continue to be exposed to violence and abuse, the trauma will continue to affect their brains and development.

THINGS ARE CHANGING

There are some reasons to hope.

- As a society, we know much more than we used to about what helps children grow up to be strong and healthy
- More people know that child abuse exists, and that it is bad for children
- More people are willing to notice that a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect
- More people are reporting their concerns about a child or young person who may be in an abusive situation
- Some children who grow up in violent, abusive homes become strong, healthy, happy adults. They have satisfying long-term relationships



What is in this booklet

This booklet will help you to learn:

What is child abuse

- Understand more about the impact on children of child abuse and being exposed to family violence

How to tell if a child or young person is being abused

- Know how to recognize when a child or young person is being abused and/or exposed to family violence

What you can do

- Know what you can do to help

Where to get help

- Know where to get help

*Definition of family violence**

Family violence is the abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency that endangers the survival, security or well-being of another person. It can include many forms of abuse including spouse abuse, senior abuse and neglect, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse, parent abuse, and witnessing abuse of others in the family. Family violence may include some or all of the following behaviours: physical abuse, psychological abuse, criminal harassment/stalking, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, and spiritual abuse.

Contents

How violence in the home affects children	2
What is child abuse?	2
Children in a threatening environment use different ways to cope.....	3
Pre-school exposure to violence affects child development	4
Older children and young people have additional reactions	4
How can you tell if a child is being abused?	5
Clues that a child or young person may be in an abusive environment	5
Grounds for hope: What we know about children who grow up with abuse and become healthy adults	6
What to do if a child tells you about abuse	7
Report the abuse	8
Help the child as a trusted adult in the child’s life.....	8
How can you help?	8
If you live in a home where children are neglected, abused or exposed to family violence	8
If you are concerned about a child or young person outside your home	9
If you are a young person living in an abusive home with abuse.....	10
Get help	10

* This is Alberta Children’s Services’ definition of family violence. The definition has helped to focus Alberta’s Strategy for the Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying.

How violence in the home affects children

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

You can find the legal definition of child abuse in:

- Provincial law: Alberta's *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*
- Federal law: Canada's *Criminal Code*

These two Acts define what behaviours and conditions require Child and Family Services Authorities or the police to investigate.

TYPES OF ABUSE

Our understanding of the needs of children is growing all the time. In turn, our understanding of abuse and neglect is changing. Some practices that we used to think were okay, we now think are abusive.

Legally, there are four main kinds of abuse:

Neglect is any lack of care that puts a child in danger or harms a child's development.

- Physical neglect includes not providing adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care or protection from harm
- Emotional neglect is not meeting a child's needs for affection and a sense of belonging

Emotional injury can be:

- Exposure to violence or severe conflict which can cause emotional injury
- Chronic alcohol or drug abuse by the guardian or anyone living in the residence
- Rejection
- Inappropriate criticism, threats, humiliation, accusations, or expectations of a child

Physical abuse happens when someone uses force against a child on purpose and it results in physical injuries such as broken bones, bruises and burns.

- It can happen just once or more than once

Sexual abuse is introducing a child to any sexual contact, activity or behaviour.

- Sexual abuse includes any sexual touching, sexual intercourse, taking advantage of a child sexually or exposing a child to sex
- Sexual abuse can be by a parent, relative, friend or stranger. In most child sexual abuse cases, the sexual abuse is by someone a child knows

Sexual abuse can also take the form of **exploitation** – in other words, taking advantage of the child. Sexual exploitation crosses all social and economic boundaries. All children are at risk. Exploitation includes:

- Distributing, selling or making child pornography
- Using the Internet to attract a young person for sexual purposes
- Forcing someone under the age of 18 to go into prostitution

In 2003, the most common forms of confirmed child abuse in Canada were:¹

- Neglect: 30 per cent of confirmed child abuse
- Exposure to violence: 28 per cent of confirmed cases
- Physical abuse: 24 per cent of confirmed cases
- Emotional abuse: 15 per cent of confirmed cases
- Sexual abuse: 3 per cent of all confirmed cases

TWO CONCEPTS

It is useful to understand the legal definitions of abuse. It is even more important to understand these two concepts:

1. Different forms of abuse tend to cluster together.

“As long as I can remember, my dad has been yelling at us and hitting us. The worst is when he goes after my mom. Sometimes there are times when they seem to get along for a while. When I was younger, I used to think those times might last. But now I know they won’t. I just watch out for the next explosion. My biggest fear is that I’ll be like my dad... I hate my dad and at the same time I want him to be proud of me. He never is, though. I used to feel sorry for my mom, but now I don’t. I see him beating on her one day – sometimes so much she’s ended up in hospital. Then the next day she’s sucking up to him like nothing happened and I want to throw up.”

– Told by a 17-year-old in a violent home

For example:

- Emotional abuse usually comes first and is part of other forms of abuse
- Neglect, emotional abuse and physical abuse are often present in the same home
- At least one other form of abuse usually goes along with sexual abuse. In any case, sexual abuse has profound emotional impacts on children and young people

2. All forms of abuse and neglect are harmful to children.

CONDITIONS THAT INCREASE THE RISK OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse can happen in any home, at any income level and in any culture. However, some circumstances make child neglect and abuse more likely.

The three most common circumstances in which child abuse and neglect take place are when:

- Parents or guardians grew up in abusive homes and or witnessed abuse as children
- Parents or guardians have substance abuse or other addiction problems
- Parents or guardians are under enormous personal stress – because of poverty, unemployment, health problems, emotional or mental illness, relationship difficulties or a crisis in their lives

Two other circumstances with a risk of child abuse and neglect are when:

- A parent or guardian sees the children as objects or possessions
- A parent or guardian does not understand normal child behaviour or healthy child development.

It is obvious that children or young people are more at risk of abuse when they live with adults who have many personal problems. Helping children and young people directly, as well as helping their families, can benefit everyone.

HOW ABUSE, NEGLECT AND EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AFFECT CHILDREN

The threat of abuse affects children's brain development.² Brain scans show that children in abusive environments use much of their brain to watch out for danger. Less of their brain is available for healthy growth and development.

- It affects their physical, emotional and mental development
- It affects their ability to form healthy relationships
- It affects them even when the child is not consciously aware of the violence in the home³

All children in a threatening environment are affected by fear. They may:

- Feel anxious or panicky
- Have an increased heart rate – babies in violent or angry homes have faster heart rates even in their sleep
- Be very watchful and attentive all the time, as though on “red alert”

Because their brains are distracted by fear, the children may:

- Find it hard to concentrate or pay attention
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Have difficulty learning

CHILDREN IN A THREATENING ENVIRONMENT USE DIFFERENT WAYS TO COPE

Some children react by becoming more aggressive. They may:

- Be defiant
- Act impulsive
- Have angry outbursts
- Act bossy or pushy
- Bully or hurt others

“Another time I saw my step-dad beating my mother. I ran outside and kicked him. And I separated them. They wouldn’t let go of each other, but I separated them. And then I stood on the street and defied him to come and fight me. I was literally between the two of them, and pushing them apart. It was just like a reflex. Protect my mom. Get this guy off her.”

*– From Beth Balshaw:
Living with Intention,
Unpublished thesis,
University of Calgary, 1993*

“I was the listener all the time and waiting to see if something was going to happen... so you’ve just got to be really aware and very wary. It’s like, I don’t know, being on ‘red alert’ for a battle or something like that.”

– Village Counsellor

Sometimes these loud children do not appear to be affected. They look like they feel confident and in charge. But their aggressive behaviours grow out of fear expressed outwardly as anger.

Some children react by becoming quiet and withdrawn. They may:

- Try to stay safe by becoming “invisible”
- Go into their own fantasy world and tune out the world around them
- Be more obedient or passive than other children
- Be numb and disconnected from their own feelings
- Be detached from other people
- Have a hard time getting along with others
- Be depressed

Sometimes these quiet children do not seem to be affected by what is going on around them. They do not seem to react. However, this “unaffected” appearance is a danger sign. In the face of fear and feeling helpless to affect what is going on, they have disconnected from their environment.

As long as children live in a threatening or abusive environment, the trauma will continue to affect their brains. They will not be able to heal.

PRE-SCHOOL EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AFFECTS CHILD DEVELOPMENT

More children under the age of five live in a household with domestic violence than any other age group.⁴ Being in a home where violence happens can cause serious anxiety for children. The earlier they experience anxiety, the more likely it will last and affect their future behaviour, and the more likely they will be aggressive toward other children.⁵

Pre-school children exposed to neglect, abuse or violence may show the following effects:⁶

FEAR

- Anxiety and fear may limit an infant or toddler’s ability to play and explore
- Loud noises or images of violence may distress babies and young children

AGGRESSION

- Children may learn and copy aggression based on what they see at home
- Pre-schoolers may express anger and other emotions in unhealthy ways, by damaging things or hurting other children

WITHDRAWAL

- Babies and young children may have no energy or become passive
- They may not respond to others and no longer be curious about the sights and sounds around them
- Pre-schoolers may go back to behaviours that are more typical of younger toddlers

WEAKENED FAMILY BONDS

- When parents cannot respond to a child’s needs on a regular basis, it weakens the parent-child bond
- Pre-schoolers may become more dependent on caregivers outside the home when their home life is unstable

CHILDREN AND YOUTH HAVE ADDITIONAL REACTIONS⁷

Older children and young people in abusive homes may continue to cope the way they did when they were younger. They may be aggressive and very watchful, or detached and not responsive to their environment. As they get older, they may also have other reactions.

Shame and isolation: Children and youth in abusive homes often feel shame about their homes and family.

- Not only is there abuse and violence, but there may also be alcohol or drug abuse

Isolation: They may avoid close friendships with people their age because they don't want anyone to know what is going on in their family.

Seeking alternative “family:” Children and youth in abusive situations may look for a place where they can feel safe and accepted. This may be a group of friends, a gang, or a community group such as a sports team. There is certainly a risk of young people attaching themselves to a group that is involved in high risk or illegal activities.

Taking on adult responsibilities: Some children in violent and chaotic homes take on responsibilities far beyond their years when looking after the household. They may start doing laundry, cooking, or feeding and clothing their younger brothers and sisters. They may try to hide the abuse so they can stay at home and protect an abused parent or younger brothers and sisters.

Substance abuse: Some children may become involved in alcohol and drug use.

Running away: Some children in abusive homes run away in their early or mid-teens, and set out on their own. They may return home (or be taken home) several times before they finally leave for good.

The trauma of living in an abusive and/or chaotic home changes a child's brain in unhealthy ways, but the brain can heal over time if the child has a safe, predictable and loving place to live.

Suggestions for things you can do to help the children are listed on page 7 of this booklet. Suggestions for getting help are listed at the back of this booklet.

How can you tell if a child is being abused?

CLUES THAT A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON MAY BE IN AN ABUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Not all abused or neglected children have the following characteristics. Not all children who show these characteristics live in abusive or violent homes. However, if you observe the following, be aware that the child or young person may be abused, neglected, or exposed to abuse.

If you have any doubt or questions, contact your local Child and Family Services Authority or Delegated First Nations Agency. (Contact information is in the “Get Help” section at the back of this booklet.)

The following are signs that a child or young person may be neglected or abused, or living in an abusive or violent environment.

Signs of possible neglect

- A child who is often hungry, dirty or not dressed for the weather
- A young child often left alone
- A child or young person who seems to take on adult responsibilities, like often taking care of younger brothers and sisters, doing household tasks or trying to “look after” a parent

Withdrawal

- A child who does not have energy or is very passive
- A child who does not seem curious or interested in the sights, sounds or people in the environment
- A child who refuses to participate in or dress appropriately for physical activities

“All kids go off the track sometimes. Most kids get back on the track. In our research, we found that the best predictor of which kids will get back on the track is – somebody reads to them.”

*– Dan Offord,
in a presentation
about children at risk*



“An angry young man got caught shoplifting. He was in the store office with the manager and a police officer.

After they finished that discussion, the police officer put away the papers and looked at him and asked, “How old did you say you were?” The young man said, “Sixteen.” “Got a driver’s license?” “Yeah.” The police officer said, “Good for you. Takes some brains to get a driver’s license.”

Years later, the man told the story and said, “He gave me praise like I’d never felt before. And I walked out of there not knowing whether to be sad because I got caught in crime, or happy because someone recognized me. But he gave me such a sense of dignity. I felt valued. I didn’t steal any more.”

*– Story from a man who grew up in a violent environment
Reported in Beth Balshaw:
Living with Intention
Unpublished thesis,
University of Calgary, 1993*

Aggressiveness

- A child who is often aggressive, angry and hostile to other people
- Bullying

Fear

- A child who appears to be extremely watchful
- A child who is wary of the parents’ reactions, watching to figure out if a certain behaviour is in line with what the parents will accept
- A child who finds loud noises or loud voices unusually startling

Physical injuries

- Unexplained bruises or injuries, especially in places where children do not usually get hurt when they play or move around
- Bruises or injuries where the explanation does not match the nature of the injuries
- Bruises and/or burns that leave a pattern outlining an object may have been used to make the burn, for example, a cigarette, iron or electric stove burner
- Burns on the hands, feet, or buttocks from scalding water
- Rope burns from being tied

Sexual behaviours

- A child who knows more about sex than is normal for the age
- A child who behaves sexually around adults or other children
- A child who hints or talks outright about sexual abuse

A child or teenager who runs away from home over and over again

GROUNDS FOR HOPE: WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN WHO GROW UP WITH ABUSE AND BECOME HEALTHY ADULTS

CHILDREN WHO GROW UP IN ABUSIVE HOMES AND BECOME HEALTHY ADULTS

Children who grow up in unhealthy environments but become healthy adults often have several of the following three experiences.

1. The children understand: “This is not normal.”

- At some point, the children are exposed to a healthy environment and healthy relationships between people. They realize that not everybody lives the way they do
- They become aware that what is happening in their home is violent. They learn that violence and abuse are not normal or acceptable, and that it does not have to be that way

2. A healthy role model takes an interest in them.

- This person treats them with respect. The children’s opinions and feelings matter to the person, and he or she believes the children are worthwhile people
- A healthy role model has high expectations of the children, believes in them, and says, “Of course you can”
- A healthy role model helps them to believe that they can have a better life no matter what has happened in their family. He or she gives the child hope that a better life is possible

3. The children have reasons to believe in themselves, so there is hope.

- The children believe they are good at something
- The children believe they can influence or control some parts of their lives

In your contact with all children and young people – those who appear to be safe and healthy and those who appear to be in high risk environments – you can make sure that:

- You treat them with courtesy and respect
- You demonstrate healthy respectful behaviour between adults
- You notice their strengths and gifts
- You help them to believe in themselves

What to do if a child tells you about abuse

If a child tells you about abuse:

1. Listen to what the child has to say without interrupting or judging.
2. Believe the child.
3. Assure the child that abuse is not their fault – no one deserves to be hurt or abused.

If a child tells you about abuse, do not ask for details. Listen to the information the child gives you. Record it as soon as possible in the child's own words. Be supportive and let the child know it is right to tell someone.

DO:

WHEN YOU ARE WITH THE CHILD:

Find a private, quiet place to listen

Listen calmly and without judging

- Let the child talk without interruption for as long as the child wants
- If you must ask a question to understand what the child is telling you wait until the child has stopped talking, and then ask your question

Reassure the child

- Reassure the child that it is right to tell
- Tell the child that the abuse is not the child's fault
- Tell the child, "You do not deserve to be abused. Nobody does"
- Acknowledge how the child might be feeling

Say, "I'll try to help"

Close the discussion

- Ask, "Is there anything else you'd like to say now?"
- Explain what you will do next
- Again reassure the child that telling is the right thing to do

WHEN YOU ARE NO LONGER WITH THE CHILD:

Write down what you saw and heard as the child was talking to you

- Quote the child's words as much as possible
- Use words that describe things you can see or hear, for example:
 - “A bruise almost covered the child's left knee and red welts were on the child's upper left arm.” (not, “The child had been hurt.”)
 - “The child said, ‘I'm scared to go home because my dad is going to be mad at me.’” (not, “The child seemed afraid of the father.”)

Keep your notes and information confidential and secure

DO NOT:

Do not interrupt the child's story

Do not over-react in front of the child

- Do not show horror or anger. The child may stop talking
- Do not make comments about the situation or the people. The child may stop talking
- Do not express opinions or judgments about anything. The child may stop talking

Do not make promises you cannot keep

- Do not promise that you won't tell anyone. Legally, you must report abuse
- Do not promise the child what will happen
- Do not promise the child that things will get better

Do not conduct your own investigation

- Do not ask leading questions (example, “Did _____ happen?”) or probing questions (example, “Has this ever happened before?”)
- Do not “check out” the child's story before you report the abuse

“I was afraid to come home because the laundry wouldn't be done. It would smell. I'd be embarrassed. I was always embarrassed. I mean, I never brought anybody home. I didn't want anybody there. I didn't want anybody to see my personal life. It was horrible.”

*– Told by men who grew up in violent homes.
From Beth Balshaw:
Living with Intention,
Unpublished thesis,
University of Calgary, 1993*

“After I left my abusive husband, I supported myself by cleaning people’s houses. I was amazed when I saw couples being nice to each other. Like, they’d kiss each other good-bye and say, “Have a nice day.” I had never seen that before. I didn’t know people ever treated each other like that. I thought it was kind of nice.”

– Woman who grew up in an abusive home

It is not up to you to decide if the child’s information is true or accurate, or if the child is at risk. That is the responsibility of Child and Family Services Authorities or the police. It is your responsibility to listen to the child with respect, to report that a child told you about abuse, and to treat the child with dignity, courtesy and respect whenever you are in contact.

REPORT THE ABUSE

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected by a parent or guardian, report your suspicions immediately. Call the police, your local Child and Family Services Authority or the 24-Hour **Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-387-KIDS (5437)**.

If you suspect someone other than a parent or guardian is abusing a child, report your suspicions immediately to the police. Look in the red emergency pages of your local telephone directory to find the telephone number of police in your area.

The **Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act** ensures that children are safe and that their needs are met. The Act provides services and support to assist families to meet the needs of their children. Children are not removed from their home, unless they are unsafe and there are no other options.

The **Criminal Code of Canada** has rules for dealing with crimes against children.

These crimes include:

- Physical and sexual assault
- Other sexual crimes
- Leaving the child alone
- Not giving the child what is necessary to live

HELP THE CHILD AS A TRUSTED ADULT IN THE CHILD’S LIFE

If a child or young person trusts you enough to tell you about abuse, you are now officially an important person in that child’s life – whether you chose to be or not. You do not need to be bonded to the child for life. But you have to be aware that what you say and do will be very important to the child.

- **If you are going to stay in touch with the child** – for example, if you are a family friend, teacher, coach or relative – talk with the child about how you will act together when you are around other people in the future.
- **If you do not expect to stay in touch with the child**, say “good-bye” and let the child know that telling was the right thing to do.
- **If you have not had a relationship in the past but are willing to stay in touch with the child**, talk about what sort of contact you are willing to have. Tell the child how to contact you.

Above all else, be honest with the child or young person. Other adults have probably broken their promises, violated trust or lied to this child. You need to demonstrate that some adults speak the truth, honour trust and keep their promises.

How can you help?

IF YOU LIVE IN A HOME WHERE CHILDREN ARE NEGLECTED, ABUSED OR EXPOSED TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

As an adult in the home, take responsibility. Do everything you can to give the children a healthy place to live. Do it even if you are not the children’s parent or guardian. Sometimes adults have huge pressures and challenges in their lives. Even so, children deserve a safe, healthy and affectionate home.

Here are some things you can do to help children get over the difficulties in their lives, be safe and grow into healthy adults.

1. **Admit that exposure to abuse and violence is harming your children.** If another adult is violent or abusive, you are not responsible for the abuse. The abusive person is responsible. But as an adult in the home, you are responsible to protect the children.
2. **Make a commitment** to do everything you can to give the children a safe and healthy home – whether it is with you in this household or in some other place.
3. **Tell the children the abuse is not their fault.** They are not responsible for the abuse or the problems or challenges of the adults in the household. They do not deserve to be abused – nobody does.
4. **Find ways to show the children environments that are safe, predictable and loving.** Children need to know that most adults are kind to one another and that most homes are safe. Children need to experience what a safe, loving, and stable home feels like. They need to see how people act in homes like that. They need to know that a home does not have to be abusive and violent.
5. **Help the children connect with healthy adults** outside their home. Choose adults who care about the children and who are stable and predictable.
6. **Help the children find skills or activities where they can succeed.** Children who know they are good at something are stronger in themselves, even when they live in abusive homes.
7. **Think about the choices you have in your life.**
 - Get help with the pressures and problems that make it hard for you to have energy for the children
 - Get help with addictions or substance abuse
 - Get help to stop the violence and abuse. Find programs to change the abusive behaviour or leave the relationship
 - If necessary, get legal advice about custody, access and maintenance issues

Only you can decide what to do about the conditions in your home. However, you need to give the children a safe and stable environment – even if that means they must live somewhere else.

You do not need to do this alone. Whatever you decide to do, please get the help you need. The resources listed at the back of this booklet give you a place to start.

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON OUTSIDE YOUR HOME

WAYS YOU CAN HELP

1. **Report your concern.** If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected by a parent or guardian, report your suspicions immediately. Call the police, your local Child and Family Services Authority or the 24-hour **Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-387-KIDS (5437)**.
If you suspect someone other than a parent or guardian is abusing a child, report your suspicions immediately to the police. Look in the red emergency pages of your local telephone directory to find the telephone number of police in your area.
2. **Show the children or young people that you are interested in them.** Listen if they talk. Spend time with them doing things you both enjoy. Respect their choices. Show them that their feelings and opinions matter. Tell them they are worthwhile people.
3. **Expose children or young people to activities that are fun and light-hearted.** They need laughter and happiness in their lives.
4. **Arrange for the children or young people to be in situations** where adults are respectful of one another and of children.
5. **Expose them to situations where people work out problems** in healthy ways – without “wimping out” and without being aggressive.



“I didn’t like to go see people or I didn’t like to have friends or anything like that. I had a cousin I hung out with but we never really talked about this stuff going on because he was in the family and there was the shame of the whole thing within the family.”



- 6. Show them that they can count on adults.** Keep your promises. Do what you say you will do. Show up on time. Be completely reliable.
- 7. Comment on their strengths.** Be specific. Say, “I can see that you are good at driving.” Or “I like your drawings. I like the way you use color. I think you are good at drawing.”
- 8. Help the children discover their strengths and talents.** Children who know they are good at something find it easier to believe they can influence their lives.
- 9. Make sure they hear stories or meet people who have overcome tough circumstances** like the ones they live in.

THINGS NOT TO DO

1. Do not ask direct questions about what happens at home.
2. Do not give advice or tell the child what to do.
3. Do not over-react to stories of abuse or violence. If you show how upset you are, the child or young person may stop talking to you.
4. Do not criticize the child’s family. The child may feel personally criticized or may feel forced to defend the abusive adults.

IF YOU ARE A YOUNG PERSON LIVING IN AN ABUSIVE HOME WITH ABUSE

- 1. Know that you are a strong person** to have survived as long as you have.
- 2. Know that you can have a better life.**
- 3. Know that you are not responsible** for the abuse and violence. The abusers are responsible for their actions. You do not deserve to live with abuse. You do not deserve to be abused. Nobody does. You deserve respect and a safe, healthy and loving home.
- 4. Know that you are not alone.** Others have been in a situation like yours and have gone on to have a safe and happy life. You can too.
- 5. Look for people who are strong without being mean or violent.** Look for people who are living a life that you would enjoy. Look for people who have healthy, affectionate relationships with their friends and family.
Notice how they act. Notice what they do. What can you learn from them? If you can, seek out opportunities to be with them or talk with them.
- 6. Find ways to be in places that are safe, fun and healthy.** Find places that you enjoy, that make you feel good. Spend as much time in these places as you can. The more you are in safe and enjoyable places, the more you will be able to create a life for yourself that feels like that.
- 7. Find activities that are fun and safe.** Find activities that help you discover more of your talents and gifts.

Get help

If a child or young person is in immediate danger, call 911.

Visit www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca or call the 24 hour Family Violence Info Line toll free at **310-1818**.

Kids Help Line 1-800-551-8000

- **Child Abuse hotline 1-800-387-KIDS (5437)**
- **Children’s Services Crisis Unit 1-800-638-0715**
- Parent Link or Family Resource Centres exist in many communities. For contact information, check with your local Child and Family Services Authority office

¹ Trocmé, N., Fallon, B. MacLaurin, B., Daciuk, J., Felstiner, C., & Black, T. (2005). *Canadian Incidence Study of Report Child Abuse and Neglect 2003: Major Findings*.

² Information adapted from Perry, B. (2005). The Destructive Impact of Domestic Violence on Children, and Facts about Exposure to Violence. In *Family Violence: It’s Your Business, Community Resource Guide*. Edmonton, AB: Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying, Alberta Children’s Services.

³ Bender, E. (2004). “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Other Disorders Evident in Kids Who Witness Domestic Violence.” *Psychiatric News*, 39(11).

⁴ Baker, L., Jaffe, P., et al. (2002) *Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: An Early Childhood Educator’s Handbook to Increase Understanding and Improve Community Resources*.

⁵ Moss, K. (2003). *Witnessing Violence-Aggression and Anxiety in Young Children. Supplement to Health Reports (14)*. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.

⁶ Baker, L., Jaffe, P., & Moore, K. (2001). *Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence – A Handbook for Early Childhood Educators*. Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System.

⁷ This information is drawn from conversations with and observations of young people and adults who have experienced violence in their home. As well, some points are summarized from Balshaw, B. (1993). *Living with Intention*. Unpublished thesis, University of Calgary.



Alberta Children's Services
Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying
6th Floor, Sterling Place
9940 - 106 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 2N2
Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818
www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca

Child Abuse / Children Exposed to Family Violence