

Things You Can Do To Help Your Children Heal And Thrive

Talk about what's happening.

Children need to know that you care about them and that you are doing what you can to keep the family safe. Most often, children in homes with violence know about the violence, even if the parents don't think that they know.

It's okay to talk with children about what's happening, but they don't need all of the details. Focus on how they are feeling and what they can do. Kids need to know that it's "ok" and safe to talk to you about it.

Talk about "safety planning."

Many children feel powerless about the abuse, and want to do something. They want a role in responding to the situation. Think of things that your children can do to increase their safety.

Examples include:

- Getting to a safe place (i.e., their room, a neighbor's house).
- Keeping a few items in their safe place (i.e., a pillow and blanket in the closet where they hide, phone numbers of safe people to call).
- Creating a "kid code" (a code word that they can use if someone other than you comes to pick them up).
- Calling the police or other people that you designate as "helpers."

Make time to spend time playing or talking with your children.

Children may act out to get your attention. Life is busy with many demands, so make time to play, talk or just hang out. If you have more than one child, try to find some one-on-one time with each child.

Messages for Children

- The violence is not your fault!
- When adults "fight," it is an adult problem.
- It is not your responsibility to keep me safe.
- You can help me by staying safe.
- It's okay to talk to me about what's happening and how you feel.
- I love you and will do my best to protect and help you.



Remember, no one deserves to be abused.

Hands are for holding and helping, not hitting and hurting.

Information for this brochure was modified from *Helping Children Thrive* (Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System, London, Ontario, 2004), *The Batterer as Parent* (Lundy Bancroft and Jay Silverman, 2002), and *When Dad Hurts Mom* (Lundy Bancroft, 2005).

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Phone Numbers

People I Can Call For Help

Police/Local Emergency - 911

Friend/Neighbor:

Pastor/Religious Leader:

Other Family Members:

Nebraska's coalition of domestic violence and sexual assault agencies provide access to safety and shelter across the state. To locate the program nearest you, visit www.ndvsac.org.

Hotlines

1-877-215-0167
Línea de Crisis en Nebraska (en español)

1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
National Sexual Assault Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-866-331-9474
National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline

1-800-652-1999
Nebraska Child Abuse Reporting Hotline

1-800-448-3000
Girls & Boys Town National Hotline

Helping Children Heal and Thrive



Information for Parents Who Are Survivors of Domestic & Sexual Violence



Nebraska Domestic Violence
Sexual Assault Coalition
402-476-6256
www.ndvsac.org

Parenting Styles of an Abuser

People who abuse their partners often have common styles in parenting, including (but not limited to):

- Being very authoritarian with the children or being overly permissive in order to gain their loyalty.
- Controlling access to support systems like grandparents.
- Not being an active parent, not seeing it as his/her “job.”
- Undermining your ability to parent by changing and/or contradicting your rules.
- Teaching and maintaining a disrespect for you.
- Manipulating the children, such as making them take sides against you (i.e., telling them that you don't love them or telling them that you never wanted to have children).

Most children who live with an abuser are affected by the experience, but the nature and extent of the effects vary.

Some children are traumatized, particularly if they are also victims of child abuse. Others are able to cope well, and go on to live healthy, productive lives.

Children are resilient. They can - and do - heal and thrive.

How Abusers Use Children Against a Partner

Abusers often use children against the other parent. Examples of this could include:

- Not letting you parent the children how you want to parent them.
- Not supporting the rules and boundaries that you implement.
- Not allowing you to meet the basic needs of the family (i.e., food, clothing, housing) or restricting access to resources for those needs.
- Abusing the children as a way to punish you.
- Not paying child support.
- Fighting for custody as a way to punish you and limit your ability to be with the children.
- Performing well under observation (i.e., during mediation or supervised visits), so it is less likely that you will be believed if you disclose the abuse.
- Using visitation and court dates as a way to control your schedule (i.e., delaying hearings so you have to go back to court) and as a way to have access to you.
- Using disclosure of abuse against you by denying the abuse and trying to get the court to label you as an “unfriendly parent” in custody cases.

How Abuse Can Affect You As A Parent

Living with an abusive partner can affect your parenting ability. Some common reactions include:

- You may start to believe that you are a bad parent.
- You may lose the respect of some or all of your children.
- You may start to believe the excuses that the abuser provides for the abuse (i.e., that the abuse is justified by religious texts or caused by alcohol or stress).
- You may change your parenting style in response to the abuser's parenting style, such as becoming overly permissive to compensate for the abuse.
- You may feel overwhelmed by the day-to-day caretaking of your children.
- You may use survival strategies with negative effects on your parenting and on you.
- Your emotional bond with your children may be compromised.
- You may get trapped in competition with the abuser for your children's loyalties.
- You may have higher levels of stress than other parents. This doesn't mean lower parenting abilities.

Messages for Parents/ Adult Survivors of Abuse

Many parents wonder if they should leave the relationship to protect the children. There is no clear answer. Many abusers continue the abuse after the partner leaves, and in some cases the abuse gets worse. *You need to decide what you think will work best in your situation.*

You may decide to stay with the abuser because you believe that you can protect the children better if you stay. This may be true if he/she has threatened to get custody of the children and limit your access to them.

Remember:

- Staying in the relationship does not make you a bad parent.
- Parents can change the lives of their children for the better.
- Single parents can be good parents.
- Mothers can be good role models for boys.
- Help is available.
- Most children who have lived with violence in the past are functioning normally from a psychological point of view.

Remember, children are resilient. The most important safety factor is to have a loving, supportive relationship with a caring adult.