

# Helping Children Thrive



SUPPORTING WOMAN  
ABUSE SURVIVORS  
AS MOTHERS

# HELPING CHILDREN THRIVE : SUPPORTING WOMAN ABUSE SURVIVORS AS MOTHERS

Copies of this resource can be downloaded at no cost, in English and French, from: [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)

You can order hard copies for the cost of printing and shipping.

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The views expressed herein are those of the Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ontario Women's Directorate or the Government of Ontario.

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**On the Web:** Hot Links to organizations and resources listed in this document are at [www.lfcc.on.ca/mothers.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/mothers.html)

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Disponible aussi en français: visitez [www.lfcc.on.ca/meres.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/meres.html)

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# HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE



## WHO might be assisted by the information in this resource?

- mothers transitioning from abusive relationships
- mothers concerned about how violence may have affected their children

## WHAT is addressed here?

- general parenting guidance about children of all ages
- specific parenting guidance for families impacted by woman abuse

## WHERE might this resource be used?

- Ontario agencies where services are provided to women and/or children

## WHEN is this material likely to be helpful?

- the family is in a safe place to begin healing and moving forward
- women are accessing advocacy and other support to meet their needs
- they ask for information on parenting, perhaps to deal with challenging behaviours in a child

## WHY is support for parenting important?

- parenting is the most important job we have
- families in transition away from violence can require extra support and guidance
- parenting in the context of family violence has unique features, such as navigating custody and access with an abusive ex-partner

## HOW can I use this resource?

- in individual work with a woman, tailored to her needs
- or in a group format, perhaps in conjunction with material on other topics or integrated into an existing program

## Key Features:

- designed to be flexible (e.g., use for group or individual work)
- has 44 pages suitable for photocopying as handouts
- companion web page: [www.lfcc.on.ca/mothers.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/mothers.html)
- references to additional resources easily accessible (e.g., on the Internet)



The material in this resource can augment the parenting components of interventions with abused women. It also aims to increase relevance and sensitivity about the dynamics of woman abuse in the delivery of parenting interventions.

*Safety takes priority. Help with parenting is relevant only after safety is addressed. If a woman or children are not safe, help them access the appropriate services in your community.*

This resource has a companion web page for downloading the resource itself, printing individual pages, and accessing web-based resources mentioned here.



The companion web page is at [www.lfcc.on.ca/mothers.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/mothers.html) (English) or [www.lfcc.on.ca/meres.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/meres.html) (French)

## Handouts for Women

44 pages are written for women, as handouts or exercises in group or one-on-one interventions. Other pages may be distributed to a woman if relevant for her.



Pages designed as handouts for women are labelled **“for Women”**. The others are written as background material for service providers.

*Photocopy pages as needed or download them from our website.*

## Modality of Intervention

- as guided self-study for women, with the support of an advocate or worker
- as information to support a one-on-one intervention for woman abuse
- as resource material for a group-based parenting program
- as background information to support a one-on-one parenting intervention

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*While the words “men” and “fathers” are used, most concepts apply to abusive same-sex relationships.*

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Many of the resources listed in this document are available at no cost on the Internet. Help women find the information they need from the Internet or help them find a place, such as a public library, with free Internet access.

# WORKING WITH ABUSED WOMEN: ASSUMPTIONS & VALUES



*How we assist women reflects our values and assumptions about parenting, woman abuse, and service provision.*

## **Parenting is...**

- the most important role we play in life
- a learned behaviour: no parent is perfect but we can become the best parent we can be
- primarily the responsibility of mothers when fathers are absent and/or abusive
- never to involve corporal punishment as discipline
- the best way to promote healing and health in children who lived with violence

## **Woman Abuse is...**

- a pattern of coercive behaviour used to maintain control over a partner
- physical, emotional, sexual, or financial abuse, enforced social isolation and intimidation
- a learned behaviour
- never justified by the behaviour of the victim
- never caused by anger, stress, drugs/alcohol, or external factors or pressures
- always the responsibility of the perpetrator
- found in all age, cultural, socio-economic, educational, and religious groups
- not healthy for the children who live with it
- a factor that puts children at risk for physical maltreatment themselves

## **Services are...**

- premised on safety as the first priority
- non-judgmental, respectful, encouraging, and only appropriately challenging
- individualized to a woman's unique needs and desired pace of change
- an opportunity to model respect, positive female roles, and empathy
- based on the themes of triumph and survival rather than a victim status
- respectful of a woman's culture and religion
- ideally delivered in a language with which the woman feels comfortable

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*Every person holds a set of beliefs about violence, parenting, and service provision.  
If your beliefs conflict with these assumptions, discuss them with a supervisor.  
Service providers using this resource should feel comfortable with these assumptions.*

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## 10 PRINCIPLES OF SERVICE DELIVERY<sup>12</sup>

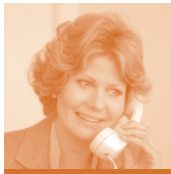


*Essential principles of good practice for working with survivors of woman abuse are:*

- **Client-centred services:** focus on the needs of women and their empowerment
- **Safety:** the primary objective is to promote the safety of women and their children
- Service practices should not minimise or deny the responsibility of violent men
- **Knowledge and understanding of domestic violence:** service providers should understand the complexity of the issues – including impact – and be able to assess risk, assist women to develop safety plans, identify controlling behaviours, appropriately address women’s feelings of self-blame and responsibility, and understand which behaviours are criminal
- **Accessibility and relevance:** consider the diversity of women – race, class, age, sexuality, abilities and culture – who might access the service and work toward eliminating barriers that discriminate, prevent or inhibit access
- **Needs of children:** the impact on children should be understood and, where appropriate, services or referrals offered. It is also important to understand the ‘duty to report’ child maltreatment
- **Confidentiality and privacy:** confidentiality and agency requirements about sharing of information with other agencies must be understood. Women must be advised of any limits on confidentiality (e.g., court subpoenas)
- **Inter-agency cooperation and consultation:** cooperation among agencies achieves the best outcomes for women. Where partners or ex-partners are in perpetrator programs, inter-agency liaison is encouraged so safety, confidentiality and privacy are ensured
- **Training, education and supervision:** on-going training and professional development is part of a commitment to working with survivors of violence
- **Evaluation:** measure, and report to stakeholders, the outcomes of service

*Also see the Advocacy Wheel on page 9.*

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSIVE MEN<sup>3</sup>



<b>Control</b>	The "overarching <i>behavioural</i> characteristic" achieved with criticism, verbal abuse, financial control, isolation, cruelty, etc. (see Power & Control Wheel, page 7). May deepen over time or escalate if a woman seeks independence (e.g. going to school).
<b>Entitlement</b>	The "overarching <i>attitudinal</i> characteristic" of abusive men, a belief in having special rights without responsibilities, justifying unreasonable expectations (e.g., family life must centre on his needs). He will feel the wronged party when his needs are not met and justify violence as self-defence.
<b>Selfishness &amp; Self-centredness</b>	An expectation of being the centre of attention, having his needs anticipated. May not support or listen to others.
<b>Superiority</b>	Contempt for woman as stupid, unworthy, a sex-object or as a housekeeper.
<b>Possessiveness</b>	Seeing a woman and his children as property.
<b>Confusing Love &amp; Abuse</b>	Explaining violence as an expression of his deep love.
<b>Manipulativeness</b>	A tactic of confusion, distortion and lies. May project image of himself as good, and portray the woman as crazy or abusive.
<b>Contradictory Statements &amp; Behaviours</b>	Saying one thing and doing another, such as being publicly critical of men who abuse women.
<b>Externalization of Responsibility</b>	Shifting blame for his actions and their effects to others, especially the woman, or to external factors such as job stress.
<b>Denial, Minimization, &amp; Victim Blaming</b>	Refusing to acknowledge abusive behaviour (e.g. she fell), not acknowledging the seriousness of his behaviour and its effects (e.g., it's just a scratch), blaming the victim (e.g., she drove me to it; she made it up because I have a new girlfriend).
<b>Serial Battering</b>	Some men are abusive in relationship after relationship.

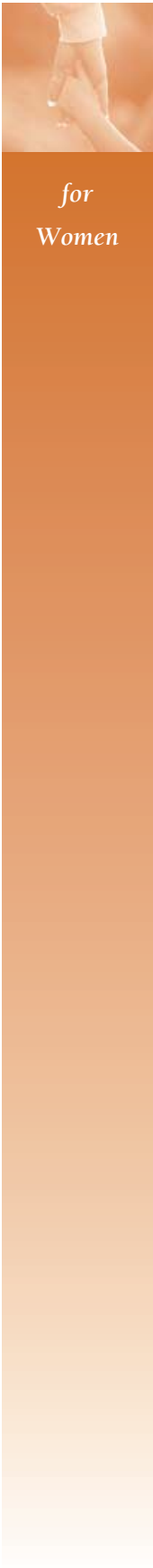
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*Some men can exhibit some or all of these characteristics and never physically assault a woman*

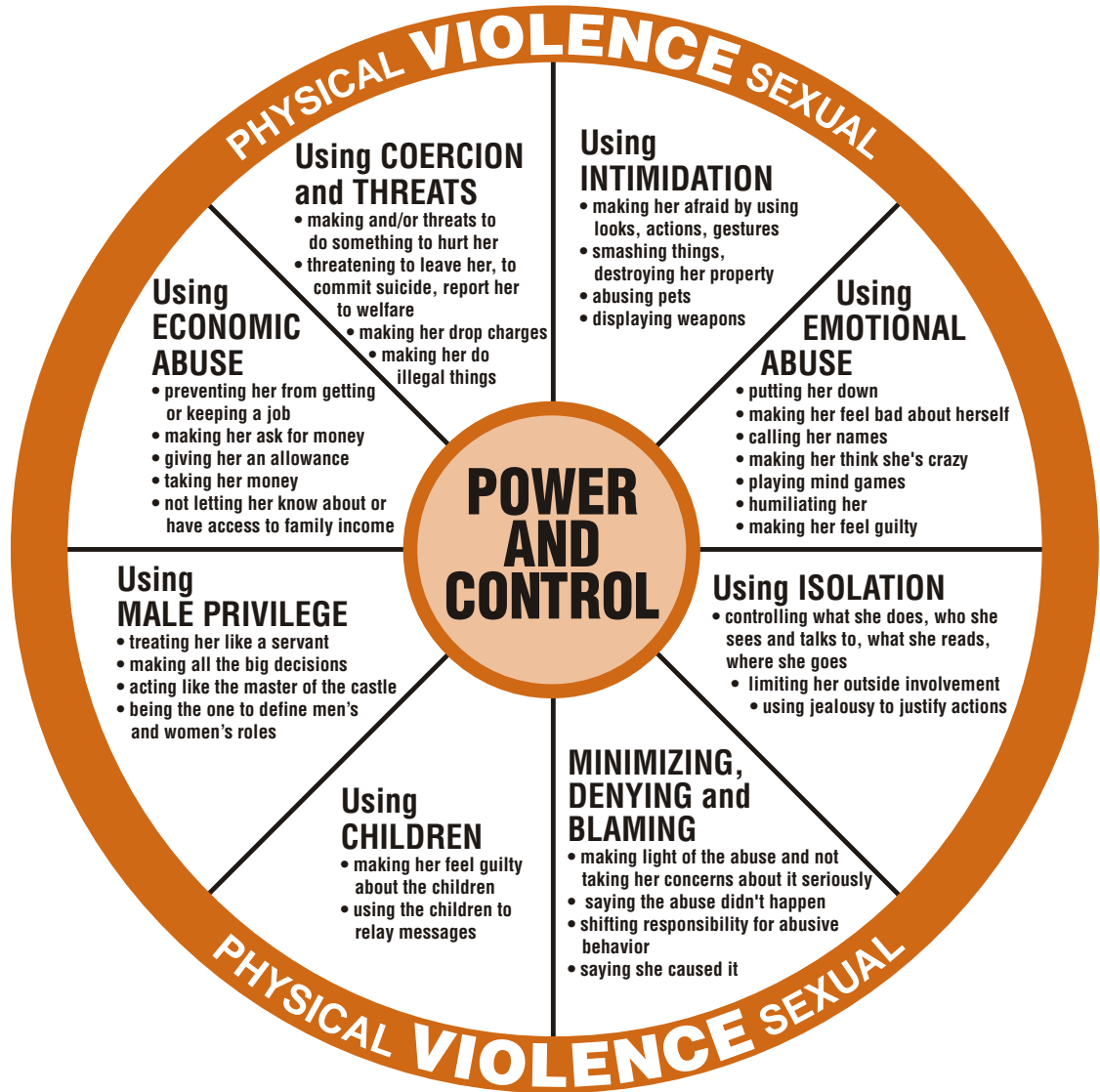
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# POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL



*This model helps some women put names to the behaviour of an abusive partner.*



Developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 202 East Superior St., Duluth MN 55802  
(For the Equality Wheel, see [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org) and click on "wheel gallery")



A Lesbian/Gay Power & Control Wheel is available for download from the National Center on Domestic & Sexual Violence ([www.ncdsv.org](http://www.ncdsv.org))

# POSITIVE MESSAGES FOR MOTHERS



*When working with women, who may lack confidence as mothers, find occasions to communicate some positive messages...*

## **... about being a mother**

- there are no perfect mothers: we all have strengths and weaknesses as parents
- mothers can change the lives of their children for the better
- single parents can be good parents too
- mothers can be good role models for boys
- learning to be a parent is a life-long process
- stopping exposure to violence was the best thing you could do for your children
- there are people to help if you need it
- you can make up for lost time: start today
- you can model and teach non-violent problem solving, attitudes, and behaviour

## **... about children who have lived with violence**

- most psychological "problems" in children diminish once the violence stops
- research shows that most children who lived with violence in the past are functioning normally from a psychological point of view
- living with violence as a child is not a "life sentence" for a bad future
- children are resilient and can thrive
- not all children need professional treatment to overcome the effects of violence: there is a lot a mother can do to help her children

# ADVOCACY WHEEL



*This model, sometimes called the Empowerment Wheel, illustrates basic principles guiding intervention with abused women.*



Developed by the Domestic Violence Project, Inc., 3556 7th Ave., Kenosha WI 53140

# STAYING SAFE



for  
Women

*After a separation, you still need a safety plan.*

## **What is a safety plan?**

*A list of ways to protect yourself, including how to leave your home quickly and safely if in danger.*

## **Now that you are separated...**

- update your personal safety plan or find an advocate to help you make a personal safety plan
- get legal advice about child custody, child support, property division, and (if needed) protection orders such as peace bonds and restraining orders
- find and use as many support resources and people to help as you can

## **Some things you could do at home...**

- change your locks, add a stronger lock, install a peep hole
- tell your landlord and/or neighbours your ex-partner does not live there and should not be hanging around
- put 9-1-1 on the speed dial and teach your children how and when to use it
- ask a trusted neighbour to call 9-1-1 if suspicious sounds come from your place

## **Remember...**

- stalking is against the law: it is called “criminal harassment”
- The Lawyer Referral Service can help you find a local lawyer. Their line for victims of woman abuse in crisis (in a shelter, hospital or living with an abuser) is 1-800-268-8326 / (416) 947-3330.
- the Ontario Women’s Directorate web site has many useful links under “Help for Assaulted Women” at [www.ontariowomensdirectorategov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorategov.on.ca)
- there is no “statute of limitations” on most crimes in Canada: you can report to the police any crime committed against you in the past



*Find services in your area of Ontario by calling the Assaulted Women’s Helpline: 1-866-863-0511 or in the GTA (416) 863-0511 or TTY at 1-866-863-7868*



With access to the Internet, you can make your own safety plan at this site: [www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca)  
Follow the link called “Make a Safety Plan”



Most public libraries provide free access to the Internet.  
If using the Internet at home, read the page called “Hide Your Internet Activities” at [www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca).

# HELPING YOUR CHILDREN STAY SAFE

*You can help children make a safety plan suited to their ages.*



\* ShelterNet has activities and information for children:  
**[www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca)**

\* teenagers may also find helpful information including  
how to make a safety plan at **[www.burstingthebubble.com](http://www.burstingthebubble.com)**

\* if your daughter is in an abusive relationship, visit  
“When Love Hurts” at **[www.dvirc.org.au/whenlove/](http://www.dvirc.org.au/whenlove/)**

## Some measures to consider...

- immediately start a motion in the Family Court for custody of the children (do this even if you were not married)
- whatever the custody arrangements (i.e., interim custody, custody, joint custody), carry the papers with you at all times
- give the school a copy of the custody documents and ask to remove your ex-partner from the list of people approved to pick up children
- give the school a picture of your ex-partner and clear instructions about who can and cannot pick up the children (including members of his family if that is true)
- help children make their own *safety plan*

## Important messages to give children...

- it is not a child's responsibility to keep a mother safe
- “I will do everything in my power to keep you safe”
- when adults fight, it is an adult problem and adults need to fix it



*The **Kids Help Phone** is a place where children and teenagers can call to speak with someone privately and anonymously about personal problems or to ask questions. It operates 24-hours a day.*

*The number for kids is **1-800-668-6868***

*They also have a Parent Help Line: **1-888-603-9100***

for  
Women

## THE NEEDS OF ABUSED WOMEN AS MOTHERS <sup>5,13</sup>



*A mother may ask for assistance with issues such as...*

- physical safety and/or safety planning for herself and her children
- information about community resources for children
- counselling for children, to let them talk about their feelings, learn to deal with anger, and learn to respect their mothers
- information on child development and how violence affects that development
- respite from care-taking or a break from day-to-day struggles
- help with parenting a child whose behaviour is worrisome or challenging
- help to relate to her children in a new and different way
- assistance to negotiate contact with a partner over his access to the children
- legal advice about a custody agreement/order or getting child support



*\* the forms on pages 18 and 19 help women tell you what they need*

*\* if unsure where to find services, the Ontario Women's Directorate has links to all relevant topics under "Help for Assaulted Women":*  
**[www.ontariowomensdirectorates.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorates.gov.on.ca)**

*Safety takes priority. Help with parenting is relevant only after safety is addressed. If a woman and children are not safe, help them access the appropriate services in your community.*

*At the Parent Help Line (1-888-603-9100), 23% of calls to this free 24/7 hotline are about discipline and problem behaviours, followed by child development and health (20%), personal problems of parents (17%), and issues arising from divorce, custody or adoption (9%).*



*Shelter residents may be in the midst of crisis and transition, sometimes precipitated by a recent and severe incident of violence. However, women enter shelters in great part to seek safety and a better life for their children.*

Studies of women in shelters suggest their most significant child-related needs are:

- counselling for children
- being kept informed of what happens in counselling of their children
- information about healthy or normal child development
- referrals and information about counselling for children available locally
- referrals and information about general children's services such as child care
- child care or parenting relief/respice to give them a break
- information on parenting a difficult or worrisome child, or support and insight into a child's behaviour

Communal living at a time of crisis and transition can be an additional source of stress. In one study, 40% of women found the co-operative living environment difficult because of the number or behaviour of other children in the shelter.<sup>5</sup>



*\* have books available for mothers to read with children (see page 45 for ideas). A list of parenting books is on our web site at [www.lfcc.on.ca/mothers.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/mothers.html)*

*\* distribute and post the "Everyday Essentials" of parenting (page 32)*

*\* consider organizing short group sessions for women to share ideas about using the "Everyday Essentials." See the work sheet on page 36*

*\* consider organizing short group sessions about how an abusive partner can affect mothers. Some background information is on page 26 and a work sheet for women is on page 28*

# WORKING WITH WOMEN ON FARMS OR IN RURAL OR REMOTE AREAS <sup>11, 13, 15</sup>



*Women in rural or remote areas may have additional needs and concerns, especially if they live on farms or in areas where resources are scarce.*

Studies confirm they experience the same thoughts and feelings as urban women, but can face additional barriers to leaving abusive relationships and getting assistance.

*Issues they may worry about or face include:*

- the visibility of their situation in the community and implications for confidentiality
- lack of public transportation, long distances to travel and treacherous winter driving as barriers to accessing services
- the safety of animals such as horses and cows if they leave the home
- implications of leaving the family farm on property division in a divorce
- the difficulty of finding appropriate resources
- centralization of many resources (e.g., legal aid offices) in urban areas
- less knowledge about family violence among some service providers than in urban areas or availability of only generalist services

Women in rural and remote areas may not be able to rely on police for safety (long response times) and may not have close neighbours to hear and intervene in violent episodes, leaving them more vulnerable.



*Farm Line: 1-888-451-2903  
Monday to Friday 8:30 am to 8:00 pm  
Their website ([www.thefarmline.ca](http://www.thefarmline.ca)) has an on-line resource directory of services in all parts of Ontario.*



*In areas where it is difficult to run closed-group programs, a parenting program for mothers could be delivered in any of several modalities including group sessions, individual sessions, individual with first and last group meetings, one-time retreats, family “home work,” mother conferences, and telephone or web-based conferencing.<sup>13</sup>*



## WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL WOMEN<sup>6</sup>



*Women of First Nations, Métis or Inuit ancestry may seek tradition-based interventions, perhaps one combining traditional healing with conventional social work practice, or one based solely on Aboriginal principles.*



Find programs at the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence: [www.nacafv.ca](http://www.nacafv.ca)  
The Creator Wheel from Mending the Sacred Hoop can be found at [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org)

Aboriginal communities are diverse and there are no “one-size-fits-all” answers. However, tradition-based interventions and assistance may:

- be holistic and focus on healing and wellness rather than dwelling on the negative
- seek harmony and balance among individuals, family and community
- discourage crisis-bound responses which punish the abuser and separate the family
- encourage community-level healing and re-connection with past wisdom

Many link problems such as family violence to the loss of culture and traditions, disenfranchisement, and the dependency it engendered. In addition, residential schools disrupted the inter-generational transmission of parenting skills.

Service providers should also keep in mind issues such as:

- the woman may have limited resources
- the abuser could be an important member of the community
- she may be suspicious, or fearful, of the justice system and child protection system
- victims are reluctant to put an abuser in a system viewed as racist
- there may be few services available in her community

Treatment of an abuser, independent of the family, is not always the preferred approach.



Claudette Dumont-Smith (2001). *Exposure to Violence in the Home: Effects on Aboriginal Children, Discussion Paper*. Ottawa: Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada.

# WORKING WITH WOMEN NEW TO CANADA



Women new to Canada experienced both **emigration** (leaving everything familiar behind) and **immigration** (getting used to strange new surroundings). Many speak neither official language and they may have no family here.

Among the community of new Canadians, there is great variability in attitudes and opinions, according to recency of emigration, education level, proficiency in English, religious commitment, community support infrastructure, and personal experience. Women new to Canada experience the same range of emotions and reactions as all women who are abused – fear, shame, hope for change – but seeking assistance from our social and legal systems may be a daunting task because of beliefs about the family, barriers to service, and concerns about immigration issues.<sup>9,14</sup>

## Beliefs about the Family

- focus on needs of the family unit as a whole over her own needs
- family matters are private and not to be discussed with others
- belief that a husband's behaviour must be tolerated by a wife
- divorce may lead to ostracization from the community
- traditional ideas of gender roles: women are compliant, men are in charge
- need to project image of "good woman" to the community
- strong prescriptions against divorce

## System Issues & Barriers

- language barrier prevents seeking advice and assistance
- fear of police rooted in experience of police as corrupt or arm of state repression in country of origin
- not wanting husband charged may prevent calls (or subsequent calls) to police
- fear of shelters and deep embarrassment if shelters are used
- fear of the Children's Aid Society
- going to a professional may be last resort after family or religious leader

## Immigration Issues

- fear of consequences of divorce or criminal charge on her immigration status
- fear of deportation (and possibly having to leave children in Canada)
- belief she does not qualify for Ontario Works because of sponsorship



A Newcomer's Introduction to Canada: Family Life & Family Law  
[www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomer/guide/section-08.html](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomer/guide/section-08.html)



Language is a significant barrier, preventing many women from finding and using social and legal services, or calling 9-1-1. Women may have been discouraged or prevented from learning English. Limitations with English can make it difficult to read street signs, get on the right bus to your office, use the Internet as a resource, read the telephone book, and use the telephone to find assistance.



Refugees and landed immigrants receive free language instruction through the federal Language Instruction for New Canadians (LINC) program. The web page of Citizenship and Immigration Canada has links to LINC Assessment Centres and LINC programs: [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca)

*Studies show that women want and need services delivered in their own language.*

## What Service Providers Can Do

The onus is on us to modify our usual style of service delivery to accommodate her better. Some ideas to consider are:

- visit her at home whenever possible
- take extra time to build rapport and make her feel comfortable
- use interpreters (cultural interpreters if available) even if she seems to manage in English
- do not expect or ask for disclosure of intimate matters unless absolutely necessary for the intervention
- speak slowly and avoid using jargon or idiomatic expressions that do not translate easily
- ask what type of help she is looking for and direct her to the best place for assistance if unable to meet all her needs
- learn something about her homeland and culture or about the political situation if there has been a war or other catastrophic events
- look for resources in her language, like at [www.hotpeachpages.net](http://www.hotpeachpages.net)



**[www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org)**: information and answers for newcomers to Ontario  
**[www.projectbluesky.ca](http://www.projectbluesky.ca)**: [Chinese, Korean & Japanese]  
**[www.rosenet-ca.org](http://www.rosenet-ca.org)**: the law and abused immigrant women  
**[www.hotpeachpages.net](http://www.hotpeachpages.net)**: links to informational material on woman abuse in over 60 languages, from Albanian to Welsh



\* *Life in the Family: A Newcomer's Guide to Parenting Issues in Canada* (2002), (ESL curriculum and video) by the B.C. Institute Against Family Violence.

\* *Assisting Immigrant & Refugee Women Abused by their Sponsors: A Guide*

# YOU KNOW WHAT YOU NEED: ASK FOR IT!



for  
Women

*In this chart, list what you need to be safe and to take care of your children. Write down names and addresses on the right as you learn about places to get that help.*

I NEED ...	I need this (✓)	Where can I find this?
an abused women's shelter		
counselling for the abuse		
help making a safety plan		
counselling for other issues		
a lawyer or legal advice		
help to pay for a lawyer		
counselling for my partner/husband		
help with immigration matters		
help to learn English		
help finding a family doctor		
help finding a place to live		
help getting welfare/ Ontario Works		
help going back to school		
help to find a job or to up-grade job skills		
other:		
other:		

# YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR CHILDREN NEED: ASK FOR IT!



for  
Women

*In this chart, list the things you need for your children. You can get some of these things here. For other things, you have to go to other places. Your worker or group leader can help you.*

I NEED FOR MY CHILDREN...	I need this (✓)	Where can I find this?
someone to look after my children while I work		
help to pay for child care		
help with changing to a new school		
to learn how to be the best mother I can be		
a lawyer so I can get legal custody of my children		
help with my child who is having some problems		
someone to look after my children to give me a break		
help for before and after visits with their father		
counselling for my children		
help because my child is abusing me		
other:		
other:		



### Authoritarianism

If an abusive man involves himself in child discipline, he has rigid expectations, low empathy and an angry style of "power-assertive" (i.e. verbal and physical force) punishment. Discipline is a quick fix to an immediate problem, not a thoughtful strategy based upon reasonable and age-appropriate expectations. He may see himself as a superior parent and not listen to input from his partner. He may swing between authoritarian and permissive, even neglectful, parenting.

---

*"He expects them to be perfect, like adults, but they are just kids who need to run and play."*

*"Most times he just ignores the kids but if he had a bad day, he explodes at them for no reason."*

*"I kept telling him: in Canada, girls go to the mall and it is just harmless fun with their friends."*

---

### Low Involvement, Neglect & Irresponsibility

While children must respect his authority, their daily care is the mother's responsibility, especially routine or less pleasant duties such as diapers and homework. He may be unaffectionate with children and find excuses to avoid coming home. He is unlikely to sacrifice his needs to meet family responsibilities. His praise and attention, so rarely bestowed, may be highly valued by children. Neglect can alternate with periods of authoritarian control.

---

*"With what he leaves at the bar in tips in just one night, I could buy a package of diapers. Then he tells CAS that the baby has diaper rash because I don't change her enough."*

*"I got a job but I had to lie and stay on Ontario Works. He took my pay cheques and I had to feed the kids somehow."*

---

### Undermining of the Mother

Overruling her decisions, ridiculing her in front of the children, portraying himself as the only legitimate parenting authority. Contempt towards his partner shows children it is okay to insult and even physically abuse her.

---

*"I try and keep it all on track, the homework and baths and getting to bed on time, but then he says it's okay to watch 'Law & Order' and I look like the bad guy who is always nagging."*

*"My son is starting to treat me just like his father did."*

---



## Self-Centredness

Selfishly expecting the status and rewards of fatherhood without sacrifices or responsibilities. May resist changes to his lifestyle when a baby is born. Can be enraged by normal behaviour such as crying in infants. Expects children to meet his needs (e.g., listen to his troubles, provide affection, or keep him company when he is in the mood).

---

*“When the baby cried, he actually thought she did it on purpose to get on his nerves.”*

*“He couldn’t tell you the names of the kids’ teachers or their birth dates. He really has no interest in them unless he’s in the mood to toss the ball around or something like that.”*

---

## Manipulativeness

Confuses children about blame for the violence and who is the better parent.

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*“Since I left, he repeatedly tells the kids that the divorce was all my fault because I wanted to have boyfriends and go partying. They are starting to believe him.”*

*“He told the children that God required him to punish them, and me, to teach us.”*

---

## Ability to Perform Under Observation

During professional evaluations or in social situations, some abusive men can seem to be loving and attentive fathers. The contrast between public and private behaviour may be stark. Children may feel most comfortable with him in public places.

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*“When we are with his family or his friends from work, you’d give him a father-of-the year award.”*

*“The judge sent us for an assessment. He turned on the charm so I ended up looking like a liar.”*

---

### Issues to keep in mind....

- the more frequently a man abuses his partner, the more likely he will maltreat the children
- children can be injured when mothers are assaulted (e.g., babes in arms)
- the emotional abuse that virtually always accompanies physical violence will have a profoundly negative effect on children
- children face enormous barriers to disclosing abuse or maltreatment in their homes

*Some abusive partners can appear to be kind and dependable parents*

# THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN WHEEL

This model shows the power and control tactics associated with child maltreatment.



Developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 202 East Superior St., Duluth MN 55802



# THE NURTURING CHILDREN WHEEL

*This model shows eight ways to love and care for children.*



Developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 202 East Superior St., Duluth MN 55802

# HOW ABUSIVE MEN AFFECT FAMILY DYNAMICS<sup>3</sup>



*These points are summarized from The Batterer as Parent (2002) by Lundy Bancroft & Jay Silverman.*

## FOSTERING DISRESPECT FOR THE MOTHER & HER PARENTING AUTHORITY

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### **Effects of violence, verbal abuse, and victim blaming**

Children see their mother as helpless, down trodden, stupid. They may acquire the abuser's view of the woman as unworthy of respect and some will see her as a legitimate target of abuse.

### **Deliberate tactics**

Interferes with mother's attempts to create structure; contradicts her rules; rewards child's disrespectful behaviour to mother; ridicules mother; portrays her as incompetent in front of child.

### **After separation**

Vies for child's loyalty by making his home a fun place with no rules; permits activities disapproved of by mother (e.g., violent videos); may alienate child from mother; may seek custody as vengeance.

## NEGATIVELY INFLUENCING THE MOTHER/CHILD RELATIONSHIP

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### **Direct interference**

May prevent mother from comforting distressed child; may prevent use of birth control so children are born too close together, overwhelming the mother; social isolation restricts opportunities to involve children in extra-curricular activities.

### **Indirect interference**

Abuse fosters depression, anxiety, poor sleeping, rage, loss of confidence so mother cannot focus on the needs of children; may increase likelihood of maltreatment, use of drugs/alcohol, or permissive and even neglectful parenting.

### **Children's distancing themselves from mother**

More pronounced in boys and teenagers of either sex, the development of contempt for a mother or being ashamed to be associated with her.

### **Violence by children against mother**

Also more common in boys, and most often after a separation, a child assumes the role of abuser, sometimes to win the approval of the absent father.



## USING THE CHILD AS A WEAPON AGAINST THE MOTHER

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<b>During the relationship</b>	Maltreatment, neglect or other hurtful behaviour to child (e.g., destroying Christmas presents) to hurt mother; having child spy on mother; deliberate endangerment of child; threats to harm, kidnap or kill child, leave the family destitute, or call the CAS.
<b>After separation</b>	Blaming mother for separation; enlisting child's support to pressure mother for reconciliation; using child to communicate with or spy on mother; seeking custody.

---

## IMPACT ON FAMILY FUNCTIONING

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<b>Sowing divisions</b>	Turning family members against each other or creating alliances of some against others by, for example, favouring one child over others; lying; revealing confidences; fomenting conflict; punishing all children for the misbehaviour of one, etc.
<b>Scapegoating one child</b>	Blaming one child for all problems in the family.
<b>Chronic fear and emotional deprivation</b>	Deepen and solidify unhealthy dynamics among family members; children may compete for abuser's attention because his attention and affection are scarce.
<b>Role reversal</b>	Parentification of children (i.e., adopting or being given a parental role in the family) and infantilizing of mother (i.e., treating her like a child) may over time see the woman being protected by child; child may try to predict and prevent violence by the abuser.

---

## TACTICS IN CUSTODY DISPUTES

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<b>Using unfair tactics</b>	Projecting non-abusive image; using new partner as character reference; using the mother's anger or mistrust to discredit her defensive accusations; presenting self as the party willing to communicate; manipulating mediation or dispute resolution; using litigation as abuse; using woman's sexual orientation against her; using actions in one court to advantage in another; involving his parents to seek visitation.
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# EFFECTS OF POWER & CONTROL TACTICS ON A MOTHER



*The tactics of power and control, listed on page 7, are the hallmarks of an abusive man, whether or not physical violence is used. The consequences of these tactics for women are well-documented and understood and include erosion of self-esteem, living in chronic fear, health challenges, and lack of self-determination.*

*How might power and control tactics affect a woman as she parents her children?*

## **1. woman believes she is an inadequate parent**

- woman portrayed by abuser as unfit mother, cause of children's deficits
- fears having her children taken by CAS
- is frustrated in attempts to create structure or be consistent
- children may have problems at school, in neighbourhood, fuelling her belief she is a bad parent

## **2. woman loses the respect of some or all children**

- some children see her as legitimate target of abuse
- children disregard her parental authority, don't follow her rules
- children may grow to devalue or be ashamed of mother

## **3. woman believes twisted excuses abuser provides for his behaviour**

- believes abuse is her fault so tries to modify her behaviour
- believes abuse is her fault so feels guilty about its effect on children
- believes abuse is linked to alcohol or stress
- believes abuse is culturally or religiously appropriate
- believes men and boys should have more privileges and power in the family

## **4. woman changes her parenting style in response to abuser's parenting style**

- is too permissive in response to authoritarian parenting of abuser
- is too authoritarian to try and keep children from annoying abuser
- makes age-inappropriate or unreasonable demands on children to placate abuser
- is afraid to use discipline because the children have been through so much
- left to do all the demanding parts of parenting while he engages in fun parts



### **5. woman's capacity to manage is thwarted or overwhelmed**

- depression, anxiety, poor sleeping, etc. compromise woman's capacity to care for children and provide for their daily needs
- if denied use of birth control, too many children are born too close together
- may be denied sufficient money to meet children's basic needs for food etc.
- reactive rather than pro-active parenting, responding to crisis not preventing problems

### **6. woman may use survival strategies with negative effects**

- may use alcohol or drugs to excess
- may maltreat children, physically or verbally
- may leave them with inadequate caretakers to get a break
- may avoid being at home (e.g., working double shifts)

### **7. woman's bond to children is compromised**

- children may be angry at mother for failing to protect them or evict abuser
- mother prevented by abuser from comforting distressed child
- one child assumes care-taking role for mother
- children anticipating a mother's deportation or leaving may become anxious or may emotionally disengage to protect themselves from impending loss

### **8. woman gets trapped in competition for children's loyalties**

- abuser attempts to shape child's view of himself as good and mother as bad
- abuser is fun parent who has no rules
- after separation, abuser entices children to support his bid for custody with promises of great life at his house
- abuser has more money and can offer more material goods and nicer home



*\* use these items as background to guide a group discussion on how women's parenting can be affected by power and control tactics*

*\* the form on page 28 can help in this exercise*

# HOW AN ABUSIVE PARTNER CAN AFFECT YOU AS A MOTHER



for  
Women

## **An abusive partner can affect all parts of your life, including parenting.**

### **Did any of these things affect your ability to be the best mother you could be?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was stressed out and worried all the time                              | <input type="checkbox"/> I still feel this  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was emotionally and physically exhausted, worn down, drained of energy | <input type="checkbox"/> I still feel this  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I had no confidence in my abilities as a mother                          | <input type="checkbox"/> I still feel this  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I never had enough money to take care of my children properly            | <input type="checkbox"/> This is still true |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was constantly afraid for our safety                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> This is still true |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I drank too much or took drugs to cope                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> This is still true |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I felt like running away from life and my responsibilities               | <input type="checkbox"/> I still feel this  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other:   |   |

## **An abusive man can interfere with your parenting.**

### **Did any of these things happen?**

- he insulted me so much the children had no respect for me as a person
- the children did not listen to me as a parent or obey my rules
- he made me do the demanding or unpleasant tasks (diapers, homework, saying “no”), and only did things he enjoyed or let him look good to others
- he criticised me as a bad mother
- he spoiled the children so I had to be the one to set limits and say “no”
- he refused advice from me about how to be a better father
- he threatened to call the CAS about me
- he threatened to take the children back to our/his home country
- he did not give me enough money to take care of the family
- he said if I didn’t do what he wanted, he would hit the children
- other:

### **After you separated, have any of these things happened?**

- he has the children spy on me or bring messages back to me
- he tells them the separation is my fault (“If it weren’t for your mom, we’d be together as a family”)
- he won’t let me get counselling for the children
- he freaks out when my new partner treats my children like a father does
- he refuses to pay child support or is pressuring me to accept little or no child support
- I worry if the children are safe when they visit him
- he is fighting me in court to get custody of the children
- he fought in court to visit them and now leaves them with relatives or babysitters when they visit
- he called the CAS about me
- other:

**With the children, here are some things you may have seen...**

- he had rules that are too strict
- he applied the rules unfairly or inconsistently
- he used harsh discipline, sometimes physical discipline like spanking or worse
- he expected them to act or understand things as if they were adults
- he took it out on them if he had a bad day
- he didn't understand them as individuals  
(e.g., that one is allergic to strawberries and one is afraid of dogs)
- he ignored them except when in the mood to be a father or was lonely
- he was too permissive, or swung between strict control and letting them do anything
- he expected them to behave as if we were still back home in our country
- other:

**How did this affect the children?**

- they get confused about what the rules really are
- they are treating me like he treated me
- they don't listen to me because they do not respect me as a parent
- they want to live with him because he lets them get away with anything
- they get caught between Canadian society and our ways from back home
- they think girls are not as good as boys
- other:

**Do any of these statements describe you as you look back?**

- I was quick to get angry at the children because I was so tired and frustrated
- I expected them to change their behaviour to keep him happy  
(e.g, being extra quiet)
- I wish I had praised them more and told them they are good kids
- I wish I had paid more attention to them
- I stayed with him too long because I thought they needed a father
- I would sometimes let them "get away with things" because their father was so strict
- other:

**Read the list of what you checked off. Are any of these things still true?**

**Which ones have you changed?**

# ROLES CHILDREN MAY ASSUME WHEN WOMAN ABUSE OCCURS



*In our family, we can adopt or be given “roles” we willingly or unconsciously play while interacting with others in the family. Examples of family roles are: the mediator of disputes, the “baby” of the family, the prized child who can do no wrong, the responsible one on whom everyone relies, or the “black sheep” who does not fit in and is expected to disappoint the others.*

Roles that develop or are assigned in families characterized by woman abuse reflect the unique ways each person adapts and copes with the secret, confusing, and dangerous situation in which he or she lives.

## **Key points about family roles...**

- a role may be imposed on the child or it may be assumed by the child
- children can play more than one role
- children may play roles during abusive incidents (e.g., referee, rescuer, deflector/distractor, caretaker of younger siblings)
- a child may use the role as a strategy to cope, so it might not be turned off overnight once the abuser is gone
- roles assigned by the abuser can lead to guilt, grief and other hurtful emotions, especially after he is gone

## **Examining family roles is important because...**

- it helps us understand how a child interprets and copes with violence (so we can intervene effectively)
- it helps us understand how different children in the same family can have dramatically different understandings of what happened in their homes
- it helps us understand how a child may think and feel once the abuser is gone
- it is a framework for understanding how tension can occur between siblings or in the mother-child relationship

For example, children who adopt pseudo-adult roles such as the “caretaker” may have difficulty adjusting when expected to assume the role of child once again. The “abuser’s assistant” may take up the role of abuser. The “scapegoat” child’s isolation within the family may be intensified by feelings of responsibility for the marital break-up. The “perfect child” may be impatient with and blaming towards siblings who misbehaved or otherwise “triggered” abuse by the abuser.





Assessing the role of each child can be helpful when families continue to struggle with conflict or abuse even after the abusive man has left the home.

These are examples of roles played by children in some families characterized by woman abuse.

- Caretaker** Acts as a parent to younger siblings and mother. May oversee routines and household responsibilities (e.g., meals, putting young siblings to bed), help to keep siblings safe during a violent incident and comfort them afterwards (e.g., reassuring siblings, getting tea for mother).
- Mother's Confidant** The child who is privy to mother's feelings, concerns, and plans. After witnessing abusive incidents, his or her recollections may serve as a "reality check" for mother, if abuser later minimizes or lies about events.
- Abuser's Confidant** The child who is treated better by abuser and most likely to be told his justifications for abuse against the mother. May be asked to report back on mother's behaviour and be rewarded for doing so with, for example, privileges or absence of harsh treatment.
- Abuser's Assistant** The child who is co-opted or forced to assist in abuse of mother (e.g., made to say demeaning things or to physically hit mother).
- Perfect Child** The child who tries to prevent violence by actively addressing issues (wrongly) perceived as triggers, in this case by excelling in school and never arguing, rebelling, misbehaving, or seeking help with problems.
- Referee** The child who mediates and tries to keep the peace.
- Scapegoat** The child identified as the cause of family problems, blamed for tension between parents or whose behaviour is used to justify violence. May have special needs or be a step-child to the abuser.



For more information on the child's perspective, see A. Cunningham & L. Baker (2004). *What About Me! Seeking to Understand the Child's View of Violence in the Family*. London ON: Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System.

# EVERYDAY ESSENTIALS: TOP TEN TIPS FOR PARENTS



for  
Women

*These 10 suggestions can help all parents. You can change a child's behaviour!*

## 1. Be a good role model

Children do as you do. You can model respect (and self-respect), politeness, honesty, good choices, compassion, healthy expression of emotion, non-sexist points of view, or any behaviour or attitude you want them to adopt.

## 2. Be clear on what you want them to do

Life with young children can be an endless string of “no” and “don’t” and “stop that.” It is important to teach children what not to do, but also show which behaviours are valued.

instead of: “Don’t hit the kitty!”

try: “Pat the kitty nicely”

instead of: “Stop that whining!”

try: “Use your words to tell me what you want”

instead of: “Be home by 10 or else!”

try: “When you get home at 10, we can watch Law & Order together.”

In other words, when you ask for one behaviour to stop, say which behaviour should replace it. This doesn’t work in every situation. “Don’t talk to strangers” is still good advice.

## 3. Praise good behaviour

Misbehaviour sometimes gets more of our attention than good behaviour. Praising good behaviour encourages more good behaviour.

*“Good job putting your toys away!”*

*“I like how you share toys with your sister.”*

*“Thanks for calling to say you’re going to Tina’s house after school. Now I won’t worry.”*

Parenting experts tell us to use 5 “praise statements” for every 1 time you correct misbehaviour.

## 4. Focus on the behaviour

You love your children but you don’t always love their behaviour. When you praise them (or correct misbehaviour) focus on the behaviour rather than the qualities of the child.

instead of: “You’re a messy boy!”

try: “I don’t like this mess in the livingroom.”

instead of: “You are beautiful.”

try: “You know how to pick clothes that look great.”

When there has been violence in the family, don’t assume boys will grow up to be abusers and girls will be victims. If you catch yourself wanting to say these things, stop.

*“You are just like your father!” or “You are acting just like your father!”*

## 5. Give the reason behind your request

instead of: “Turn that TV down!”

try: “Mommy has a headache. If the TV isn’t so loud, I can take a nap.”

instead of: “Get down from there!”

try: “I need you to stop climbing on the bookcase because it could fall over on you.”

Knowing the reason, they may comply quicker, or maybe not. But over time they learn that behaviour has effects and consequences. They also learn to see the view points of other people.

## 6. Keep emotion out of discipline...

All mothers get tired, frustrated, and irritable sometimes. When children misbehave at the same time, that can be a bad combination. Before you react, count to three, take a deep breath, and think out your next words. Discipline should be a well thought-out strategy to teach children, not an emotional reaction.

### ...and keep your voice down

Children ignore yelling if it’s all they hear. Living with arguing and yelling, they tune it out. Make requests in a normal tone of voice and let the words, not the volume, get your point across. When yelling is used only in emergency situations, like chasing a ball into traffic, they will take notice.

## 7. Give chances to choose, but not wide-open choice

instead of: “Do you want to go to bed?”

try: “Time for bed. Should we read this book or that book?”

Going to bed is a given. There is no choice so don’t give a choice. Getting a child to bed may be easier when they know it is not negotiable and is a predictable part of the day. Giving a choice between two options (red or blue pyjamas) may distract them from the impulse to resist.

## 8. Expect what is reasonable

Take a young child shopping during nap time and expect he will be cranky. Expecting a teenager to obey an 8 p.m. curfew may not be realistic. Set your expectations at a level consistent with age.

## 9. Keep adult matters among adults

Children too young to understand adult issues can be upset to hear about them. Keep a clear line between what you tell children and what you might tell a family member or friend. Likewise, it is not fair to expect a child to be the person in whom you confide your problems. They need you to be in charge.

## 10. Make the time to spend some time playing or talking

Children may act out to get your attention: if misbehaviour is the only way to get your attention, expect the misbehaviour to continue. Life is busy with many demands. So we need to make time to play, talk or just hang out. If you have more than one child, find one-on-one time with each.

# WHY THE “EVERYDAY ESSENTIALS” FOR PARENTING ARE IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN WHO LIVED WITH VIOLENCE



*These 10 strategies, while appropriate for any child, are especially important for use with children affected by woman abuse and child maltreatment.*

- 1. Positive role modelling** Abusive men are self-centred and constitute poor role models. Children may learn that power and control tactics are effective in getting needs met without consequence. He may model pro-criminal or anti-police attitudes, substance use, racism, anti-woman attitudes, selfishness, lying or victim blaming.
- 2. Clear expectations** Children may be caught between the mother’s rules and the father’s rules, or be confused because the rules vary from day to day.
- 3. Praise good behaviour** Children may have been emotionally abused and called names, corrected at every turn, insulted and never encouraged or praised. They may develop an inordinate fear of failure that prevents them from trying new things.
- 4. Focus on behaviour not qualities of the child** Children may have been told that they are stupid or unattractive. Self-esteem will be compromised rather than good behaviour encouraged.
- 5. Explanation for requests** Rigid and authoritarian parents issue orders and expect immediate and unquestioning compliance.
- 6. Avoid emotional reactions and yelling** Children who live with anger, yelling and conflict may cope by tuning out the noise, distracting themselves with fantasy or emotional numbing, or learning to yell themselves. Discipline based on emotion is unpredictable and unfair. Rather than teaching a constructive lesson, the children learn that “might makes right.” This type of discipline is also inconsistent so children see they can get away with the bad behaviour some of the time.
- 7. Givens and choices** Children might never have been asked for their preferences or opinions about anything.
- 8. Reasonable expectations** Children may have been expected to be quiet, clean, and a host of other things they just cannot live up to. They may always feel inadequate.
- 9. Boundaries around adult matters** Boundaries in homes with violence may be poor and children will hear or be told about intimate and private matters about their mother. They may have heard or seen sexual assaults.
- 10. Spending time with the children** Children may be socially isolated from peers, especially if the family had to move. A mother may be exhausted by coping with daily life and not have enough energy left for the children. Abusive fathers often ignore the children or make his attention contingent upon unreasonable requests (e.g., when you come live with me, you can get your Christmas presents). Children may even doubt their mother’s love, feel unworthy of love and attention, or not want to put pressure on a mother by asking for attention.

# LESSONS CHILDREN CAN LEARN FROM VIOLENCE



for  
Women

*Children learn what they live. The experience of living with violence teaches lessons. A mother's reaction to violence is also a learning experience.*

## **Children who live with violence can learn some things that are not true...**

- the victim of violence is the one to blame
- violence and threats get you what you want, win arguments or solve problems
- boys/men should be in control and girls/women should obey
- when people hurt others, they do not get in trouble
- women are weak, helpless, incompetent, stupid, or violent
- anger causes violence or drinking causes violence
- a person can love you and hurt you at the same time
- anger should be suppressed because it could get out of control
- inequality between men and women is okay in relationships

## **Children can learn good lessons from a mother's actions to leave and be safe...**

- hurting other people does have consequences
- being a victim of violence is not your fault
- women do not have to accept violence or abuse as normal or as an expected part of relationships with men
- women are strong, capable and resilient
- "Mommy will keep me safe"
- there are people who will help women and children be safe





*for*  
Women

<b>6. Keeping emotion out and my voice down</b>	Before I react, I will (e.g., count to three, walk away for five minutes, ask advice):
<b>7. Givens and choices</b>	These things are “given” in our family (e.g., bed time, eating dinner together)  These things can be choices (e.g., books to read, type of dessert)
<b>8. Reasonable expectations</b>	It would be unreasonable to expect my children to:
<b>9. Keep adult matters among adults</b>	I will not talk with my children about these things (e.g., finances):
<b>10. Spending time together</b>	These are some activities we can do together:

# CHOOSING NON-NEGOTIABLE RULES IN OUR FAMILY: R.S.V.P.



for  
Women

*Every family has rules, even if you never think or talk about them. Children cannot play with matches or teens cannot come home at 4 a.m. It is helpful when everyone knows the rules and understands why each rule exists.*

Negotiation and compromise are good – especially with teenagers – but some rules are too important to debate. These are the non-negotiable rules.

## **What is a NON-Negotiable rule?**

It is a “given,” something that is always true in our house. Some examples might be “no hitting” or “seatbelts on before the car moves” or “call home if you’re going to be late.”

## **Here are some ideas...**

- sit down as a family and decide what your non-negotiable rules are: every family is different
- when you make a rule, explain WHY that rule is important for your family
- write the rules down
- not all rules are DON'Ts. Rules can be DOs. (e.g., everyone gets a hug before leaving for school)
- everyone must follow the rules: if a rule in your family is “no hitting,” then adults cannot spank children
- match the rules (and expectations) to the age of the child

Expectations change as children get older. With young children, you decide all the rules. But as they get older, there is more room for negotiation on some issues. See page 58 for ideas on negotiating with a teenager. Having a curfew may be non-negotiable, but maybe there is room for negotiation on the time.

## **Some things to try and avoid....**

- when children do not understand what your rules are because you never told them
- when the rules change or are enforced one day but not the next
- when rules are only enforced when a parent gets angry and blows up
- when there are so many rules that children are being corrected far more than they are praised
- when children do not “buy in” or understand the reason for a rule





for  
Women

## Many non-negotiable rules fall under one of four categories

*Respect*

*Safety*

*Valuing Everyone*

*Privacy*

### Here are some ideas to get you started....

**Respect:** *each of us in this family values ourselves and values the others*

- we will never call anyone names, put them down, or make them feel bad about themselves
- we will never hit, be violent or abuse anyone
- if someone says or does something that hurts me, I can tell him or her how their words made me feel

**Safety:** *when we are old enough, we will do our best to stay safe and not take risks, because we are each important to this family*

- we will look both ways before crossing the street
- we will always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle
- we will always wear a seat belt and make sure babies and toddlers are in car seats
- we will never get in a car with a driver who is drunk or has been using drugs
- if sexually active, we will practise safe sex

**Valuing Everyone:** *every single person is equally important and valued in our family*

- girls will be treated the same as boys and boys treated the same as girls: a person is not more valued or special just because of his or her gender
- we will consider everyone's opinions and needs when making choices for the family

**Privacy:** *every person in our family is entitled to privacy*

- we always knock before entering a bedroom or the bathroom when the door is closed
- we promise not to listen in on other people's telephone conversations
- things said at Mommy's house stay there and things said at Daddy's house stay there, unless they affect someone's safety
- we will not keep "bad secrets" from the adults who care about us



*Privacy is good but some secrets are bad. Help children understand the difference between "good secrets," such as a surprise birthday party, and "bad secrets" such as sexual abuse, drug use, or illegal behaviour.*



The Secret of the Silver Horse is a booklet for children about sexual abuse and bad secrets. It is on-line at the web site of the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence or may be ordered through their web site: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/)

# WHAT I LEARNED FROM MY PARENTS ABOUT BEING A PARENT



for  
Women

*No one is born knowing how to be a good parent. We learn to be parents. Some things we learn are good and some things we learn are not-so-good.*

## Where do you get information to guide you as a mother?

- books, magazines or the Internet
- television (e.g., Oprah, Dr. Phil)
- a parenting course or family therapy
- advice from friends, sisters & brothers, co-workers
- CAS worker or family support worker
- my mother or father while growing up
- advice from my mother or father today
- other:

## What did your mother do well when you were growing up?

- |   |                                   |                                    |                                  |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| gave me encouragement and praise .....        | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| took an interest in my school work .....      | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| provided a comfortable home .....             | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| kept me safe from sexual abuse .....          | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| kept me safe from physical abuse .....        | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| taught me to respect others .....             | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| taught me to respect myself .....             | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| fed and clothed me well .....                 | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| let me have a stress-free childhood.....      | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| spent fun time with me.....                   | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| disciplined me in a fair way.....             | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| protected me from bad people.....             | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| understood me as an individual.....           | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| made me feel loved and wanted .....           | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| I knew I could tell her anything .....        | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |
| helped me feel girls are as good as boys..... | <input type="checkbox"/> good job | <input type="checkbox"/> so-so job | <input type="checkbox"/> bad job |

## What else did she do well?

**Read the items you checked off as “bad job.”**

**List three words to describe how they made you feel back then**  
(e.g., embarrassed, scared, unlovable, stupid, angry, sad).



for  
Women

**In what ways do you want to parent like your mother did?**

**How are you trying to be different?**

**What did your father do well when you were growing up?**

- gave me encouragement and praise .....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- took an interest in my school work.....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- provided a comfortable home.....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- kept me safe from sexual abuse .....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- kept me safe from physical abuse .....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- taught me to respect others.....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- taught me to respect myself .....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- fed and clothed me well.....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- let me have a stress-free childhood .....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- spent fun time with me.....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- disciplined me in a fair way .....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- protected me from bad people .....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- understood me as an individual .....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- made me feel loved and wanted.....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- I knew I could tell him anything .....  good job     so-so job     bad job
- helped me feel girls are as good as boys.....  good job     so-so job     bad job

**What else did he do well?**

**Read the items you checked off as “bad job.”**

**List three words to describe how they made you feel back then**

(e.g., embarrassed, scared, unlovable, stupid, angry, sad).

**In what ways do you want to parent like your father did?**

**How are you trying to be different?**

# SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF CHILDREN & TEENAGERS <sup>4</sup>



*When faced with a difficult situation, children “cope” by coming to an understanding (possibly distorted) about what is happening and dealing with the flood of hurtful emotions. Their strategies can involve feelings (emotional), thoughts (cognitive), or actions (behavioural).*

## **Some strategies are helpful**

- examples are seeking peers or supportive adults to talk about the feelings
- young children cannot easily engage in healthy strategies and need adults to buffer them from the harmful consequences of family adversities such as violence

## **Some strategies are helpful but costly**

- strategies may be helpful during a crisis but not healthy in the long run, such as emotional numbing, self-injury, substance use, having a baby to escape the family, or being an emotional caretaker for a parent
- these strategies can be a response to a variety of family adversities, including violence and maltreatment
- an objectively helpful strategy may not “work” while some objectively unhealthy strategies do work
- they help a child get through a time of stress or crisis, such as when there is violence in the home
- however, if used after the crisis is over, or in other circumstances, these strategies may create problems
- the longer a strategy is used, or the more effective it is in shielding a youth from overwhelming emotions and hurt, the harder it may be to extinguish

Once the family is safe, gradually extinguishing strategies with negative effects and replacing them with healthier strategies may be the key to helping children who have lived with family adversities such as violence.

These are some coping strategies commonly observed in children and teenagers who have lived with violence and maltreatment. Remember that coping styles vary with age.

## **Mental Blocking or Disconnecting Emotionally**

- numbing emotions or blocking thoughts
- tuning out the noise or chaos, learning not to hear it, being oblivious
- concentrating hard to believe they are somewhere else
- drinking alcohol or using drugs

## **Making it Better Through Fantasy**

- planning revenge on abuser, fantasizing about killing him
- fantasizing about a happier life, living with a different family
- fantasizing about life after a divorce or after the abuser leaves
- fantasizing about abuser being “hit by a bus”
- hoping to be rescued, by super heroes or police or “Prince Charming”



### **Physical Avoidance**

- going into another room, leaving the house during a violent episode
- finding excuses to avoid going home
- running away from home

### **Looking for Love (and Acceptance) in all the Wrong Places**

- falling in with bad friends
- having sex for the intimacy and closeness
- trying to have a baby as a teenager or getting pregnant as a teen to have someone to love you

### **Taking Charge Through Caretaking**

- protecting brothers and sisters from danger
- nurturing brothers and sisters like a surrogate mother/taking the “parent” role
- nurturing his or her mother

### **Reaching out for Help**

- telling a teacher, neighbour, or friend’s mother
- calling the police
- talking to siblings, friends, or supportive adults

### **Crying out for Help**

- suicidal gestures
- self-injury
- lashing out in anger/being aggressive with others/getting into fights

### **Re-Directing Emotions into Positive Activities**

- sports, running, fitness
- writing, journalling, drawing, acting, being creative
- excelling academically

### **Trying to Predict, Explain, Prevent or Control the Behaviour of an Abuser**

- thinking “Mommy has been bad” or “I have been bad” or “Daddy is under stress at work”
- thinking “I can stop the violence by changing my behaviour” or “I can predict the violence”
- trying to be the perfect child
- lying to cover up bad things (e.g., a bad grade) to avoid criticism and worse



*\* help women use the sheet on page 44 to identify coping strategies of each child (this exercise will not be helpful for babies, toddlers, or most pre-schoolers)*

*\* distinguish between those used in response to violence in the past and those still used today*

*\* help women devise specific ways to encourage healthy strategies*

# HOW MY CHILD OR TEEN COPES



for  
Women

*Children and teenagers living with stressful events at home do what they must to cope with the stress. “Coping” is trying to deal with violence and conflict, and their effects, especially how it makes them feel. Some ways to cope are more helpful than others. Some ways to cope make them feel better, but may also be harmful.*

*You know your child better than anyone does. Look for the ways he or she copes with stress.  
Help him or her replace unhelpful coping strategies with more helpful ones.*

**Did you notice any of these coping strategies in your school-age child or teenager when the violence was happening? Do any of these things still worry you now?**

- |   |                                     |  |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| never wanted to talk.....                         | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| tried to forget, not think about it .....         | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| yelled at me / blamed me / hated me .....         | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| used drugs or alcohol .....                       | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| stayed away from home / ran away .....            | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| tried to take care of me .....                    | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| wouldn't leave me by myself in the house .....    | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| let out anger by fighting or breaking things..... | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| had sex to look for love.....                     | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| needed to be alone all the time .....             | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| found bad friends .....                           | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |
| slept way too much or tried to avoid sleep .....  | <input type="checkbox"/> I saw this | <input type="checkbox"/> this worries me |

**Other ways of coping that worry me...**

**Ways of coping I am glad my child uses are...**

- |   |                                     |  |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| talking with friends for support .....      | <input type="checkbox"/> I see this | <input type="checkbox"/> I can encourage |
| talking with brothers or sisters .....      | <input type="checkbox"/> I see this | <input type="checkbox"/> I can encourage |
| writing poetry, stories, or a journal ..... | <input type="checkbox"/> I see this | <input type="checkbox"/> I can encourage |
| drawing, being artistic or musical .....    | <input type="checkbox"/> I see this | <input type="checkbox"/> I can encourage |
| sports, exercise, being healthy.....        | <input type="checkbox"/> I see this | <input type="checkbox"/> I can encourage |
| going for counselling.....                  | <input type="checkbox"/> I see this | <input type="checkbox"/> I can encourage |

**Other ways of coping I am glad my child uses... or that I can encourage...**

## BOOKS TO READ WITH MY CHILDREN

*Check the library for these books or ask your advocate or worker to help you find books for reading with children.*

for  
Women

TITLE	AUTHORS	PUBLISHER	AGES
<b>Black-eyed Susan: A Story of Hope for Children &amp; Families</b> (2000)	Demetra Bakas & Cheryl Powell	Creation of Celebration Inc.	6 to 13
<b>A Family that Fights</b> (1991)	Sharon C. Bernstein & Karen Ritz	Albert Whitman & Co.	4 to 8
<b>Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families</b> (1986)	L.K. Brown & M. Brown	Brown & Co.	4 to 8
<b>Something Is Wrong At My House</b> (1984)	Diane Davis	Parenting Press	3 to 10
<b>Family Violence: My Parents Hurt Each Other!</b> (2000)	Kate Havelin	Lifematters Press	9 to 12
<b>Hear my Roar: A Story of Family Violence</b> (1994)	Ty Hochban & V. Kryorka	Annick Press	4 to 8
<b>A Terrible Thing Happened: A Story for Children who have Witnessed Violence or Trauma</b> (2000).	Margaret M. Holmes & C. Pillo	Magination	4 to 8
<b>When Mommy Got Hurt: A Story for Young Children About Domestic Violence</b> (1996)	Ilene Lee & Kathy Sylvester	Kidsrights	3 to 9
<b>Love you Forever</b> (1986)	Robert Munsch	Firefly Books	all ages
<b>The Paper Bag Princess</b> (1980)	Robert Munsch	Annick Press	4 to 8
<b>Mommy &amp; Daddy are Fighting</b> (1986)	Susan Paris & Gail Labinski	Seal Press	4 to 8
<b>A Safe Place</b> (1997)	Maxine Trottier	Childwork/Child splay	5 to 9
<b>Clover's Secret</b> (1996)	Christine Winn & David Walsh	Fairview Press	4 to 10
<b>I Wish the Hitting Would Stop</b> (1987)	Red Flag Green Flag Resources	Red Flag Green Flag Resources	6 to 14

*First, read the book by yourself, to check if the content and language are okay for your child.*

# POTENTIAL IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON INFANTS & TODDLERS<sup>2,4</sup>



## KEY ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT IN INFANTS

Take in information from the world around them through five senses

Form secure attachments

Become more active explorers of their world through play

Learn about social interaction and relationships from what they hear and observe in their families

## POTENTIAL IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

→ loud noises, vivid visual images associated with violence can be distressing

→ parents may not consistently respond to infant's needs, negatively affecting the parent-child bond

→ fear and instability may inhibit exploration and play; imitation in play may be related to witnessed aggression

→ learn about aggression in observed interactions

### Points to keep in mind

- these little ones are highly vulnerable to maltreatment including shaken baby injuries
- women with babies require and deserve extra support with basic needs
- if a mother is struggling, help with parenting at this early point can get things on the right track early in a child's life

### Implications for Intervention with Mothers of Infants and Toddlers

- ensure the mother is safe from violence and children are safe from maltreatment
- help with housing, accessing income assistance, accessing medical services, and other assistance she requires (see pages 18 and 19 for a form for mothers)
- offer support to the woman as a mother (e.g., parenting assistance, referral to moms-and-tots group, etc.)
- make a referral to the local home-visiting program for young mothers and babies
- a high-quality child care program will be respite for the woman and help the child with self-regulation and age-appropriate socialization
- assist the woman to gain legal advice if required for custody and support issues
- discuss the strategies she might use to address safety of the child when on access visits with her ex-partner (see page 66)
- consult the Children's Aid Society if you have concerns a baby might be at risk for abuse/neglect or in need of protection: see page 72 for information applicable in Ontario



Help the woman find the Ontario Early Years Centre nearest her at [www.ontarioearlyyears.ca](http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca)



# POTENTIAL IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON PRESCHOOLERS <sup>2,4</sup>



## KEY ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT

Learn how to express angry feelings and other emotions in appropriate ways

Experiences and observations most salient in forming meaning in their world

Outcome is more salient than the process

Think in egocentric ways

Form ideas about gender roles based on social messages

Increase physical independence (e.g., dressing self)

## POTENTIAL IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

→ learn unhealthy ways to express anger and other emotions

→ confused by conflicting messages (e.g., what I see vs. what I am told)

→ may be distressed by perceived unfairness, father's arrest and/or trip to shelter

→ may attribute violence to something they did

→ learn gender roles associated with violence and victimization

→ instability may inhibit independence; may see regressive behaviours

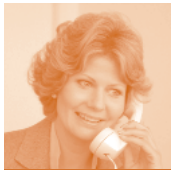
## Implications for Interventions with Mothers of Preschoolers (ages 3 to 5)

- ensure the mother is safe from violence and children are safe from maltreatment
- help with housing, accessing income assistance, accessing medical services, and other assistance she requires (see pages 18 and 19 for a form for mothers)
- offer support to the woman as a mother (e.g., parenting assistance, referral to parenting program, etc.)
- encourage the mother to re-establish comforting routines (e.g., bed time) as soon as practically possible
- a high-quality child care program will be respite for the woman and help the child with age-appropriate socialization and school readiness
- assist the woman to gain legal advice if required for custody and support issues
- discuss the strategies she might use to address safety of the child when on access visits with her ex-partner (see page 66)
- consult the Children's Aid Society if you have concerns a child might be at risk for abuse/neglect or in need of protection: see page 72 for information applicable in Ontario



Learn more about assisting pre-schoolers in *Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Early Childhood Educators* (2001), available at [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)

# POTENTIAL IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN <sup>1,4</sup>



## KEY ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT

Increased emotional awareness for self and others

Increased complexity in thinking about right and wrong; emphasis on fairness and intent

Academic and social success at school has primary impact on self-concept

Increased influence from outside family (e.g., peers, school) and competition assumes new importance within peer group

Increased same sex identification

## POTENTIAL IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

→ more aware of own reactions to violence; more aware of impact on others (e.g., mother's safety, father being charged)

→ possibly more susceptible to rationalizations heard to justify violence (e.g., alcohol as cause, victim deserves it) or may challenge rationalizations not viewed as fair or right; may assess "was the fight fair?"; can see discrepancies between actions and words and consider intent; justifications involving children may lead to self-blame or guilt

→ learning may be compromised (e.g., distracted); may miss positive statements or selectively attend to negatives or evoke negative feedback

→ possibly more influenced by messages that confirm attitudes and behaviours associated with partner abuse; may use hostile aggression to compete; increased risk for bullying and/or being bullied

→ may learn gender roles associated with partner abuse (e.g., male perpetrators, female victims)

### Implications for Interventions with Mothers of School-age Children (ages 6 to 12)

- ensure the mother is safe from violence and children are safe from maltreatment
- help with housing, accessing income assistance, accessing medical services, and other assistance she requires (see pages 18 and 19 for a form for mothers)
- offer support to the woman as a mother (e.g., parenting assistance, referral to parenting program, etc.)
- liaise with the school if required to access assessments or supports there
- assist the woman to gain legal advice if required for custody and support issues
- discuss the strategies she might use to address safety of the child when on access visits with her ex-partner (see page 66)
- consult the Children's Aid Society if you have concerns a child might be at risk for abuse/neglect or in need of protection: see page 72 for information applicable in Ontario



Learn more about assisting school children in *Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: A Teacher's Handbook to Increase Understanding and Improve Community Responses* (2002), available at [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)

# POTENTIAL IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON TEENAGERS <sup>4</sup>



## KEY ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT

Increased sense of self and autonomy from family

Physical changes brought on by puberty

Increased peer group influence and desire for acceptance

Self worth more strongly linked to view of physical attractiveness

Dating raises issues of sexuality, intimacy, relationship skills

Increased capacity for abstract reasoning and broader world view

Increased influence by media

## POTENTIAL IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- ➔ accelerated responsibility and autonomy, positioning youth in care-taking roles and/or premature independence; family skills for respectful communication and negotiation may be poorly developed, so transition to adolescence may be more difficult and result in such challenges as parent-child conflict, early home leaving, school drop-out
- ➔ may try to stop violence; may use increased size to impose will with physical intimidation or aggression
- ➔ possibly more embarrassed by family resulting in shame, secrecy, insecurity; might use high risk behaviours to impress peers (e.g., theft, drugs); may increase time away from the home; may engage in maladaptive defensive (e.g., drug) and offensive (e.g., aggression towards abuser) strategies to avoid or cope with violence and its stigma
- ➔ view of self may be distorted by abuser's degradation of mother and/or child maltreatment; may experience eating disorder and use image management activities (e.g., body piercing, tattoos)
- ➔ may have difficulty establishing healthy relationships; may fear being abused or being abusive in intimate relationships, especially when conflict arises; may avoid intimacy or prematurely seek intimacy and child bearing to escape and create own support system
- ➔ "all or nothing" interpretations of experiences may be learned and compete with greater capacity to see "shades of grey" (e.g., everyone is a victim or a perpetrator); this style of processing information may be intensified by experiences of child maltreatment; may be predisposed towards attitudes and values associated with violence and/or victimization
- ➔ possibly more influenced by negative media messages re: violent behaviour, gender role stereotypes

*See page 56 for ideas about helping teenagers*



*The Ontario Women's Directorate has prepared a "tip sheet" for adults who work with or mentor youth, to encourage positive influences:*  
**[www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca)**

# YOU & YOUR BABY OR TODDLER



for  
Women

*From birth to age two, babies grow and change quickly. Important for developing infants are frequent bodily contact, prompt meeting of needs for food and changing, adequate sleep, and lots of face-to-face interaction. They are completely dependent on adults and need good nutrition, reliable access to health care (e.g., vaccinations, monitoring of development), stability through routines, and lots of hugs.*

**These things are typical of children as they grow from birth to age 2. Which things do you see in your baby or toddler so far?**

- smile, laugh, make gurgling noises
- follow you with his eyes
- grab and hold small objects (and usually put them in his mouth)
- become attached to one person more than others, the primary caregiver
- soak in information through watching, listening, touching, tasting and smelling
- get frustrated and cry when they want something but cannot ask for it with words
- be anxious with a stranger and away from his primary caregiver
- over time they will sleep less and be more active during the day
- get stronger: rolling over, crawling, sitting up, walking with support, walking by himself
- feed himself with a spoon, hold a crayon
- temper tantrums are common, and he may do the opposite of what you ask him to do
- moves from baby words to real words, stringing two or three words together

**Each child is unique. Pick six words to describe your baby or toddler to someone who does not know him or her** (e.g., babbly, cranky, adventurous, busy, bright, shy).

**When a baby or toddler sees violence at home, he may feel things like this...**

- he may be distressed or scared at the loud noises such as yelling
- he may be upset because he is not getting his needs met when he wants them met
- he may be scared to explore and play
- he may sense the tension and stress of his mother

**What your baby or toddler may be feeling now**

Babies and toddlers are too young to understand what is happening between adults in their homes but they hear the noise and sense the tension. Now that you are away from violence and conflict, he is happy just to be with you and be fed and played with. Babies and toddlers live in the present so the past and future do not concern them much. However, predictable routines are comforting.

## What you may be feeling about your baby or toddler...

**resentment** ...if you are too tired or distracted to meet the need for constant attention

**guilt** ...if you regret he does not have a responsible and loving father

**concern** ...if he visits your ex-partner and you worry about his safety

Babies and toddlers need your attention 24-hours a day, seven days a week. That is overwhelming and exhausting. Finding ways to take a break is important, so you are not too stressed out and tired to meet the demands of a baby or active toddler.

### A baby's visits with your ex-partner

When he visits your ex-partner, you may worry about his safety, or worry that your ex-partner cannot look after a baby properly. You want a visitation agreement that takes your concerns into account. This may be difficult or impossible for you to negotiate by yourself so get a lawyer to help. Depending upon your income, you may qualify for Legal Aid. The information on page 66 may be helpful.

### Explaining the violence to your baby or toddler

Don't. Children of this age, even those starting to talk and understand simple words, cannot understand the concepts involved in family violence and marital separation. Your actions will speak louder than words.

### How to help your baby or toddler

Children should not live with violence and getting away from abuse is the best thing you can do as a mother. Here are some other ideas:

- spend time in face-to-face interactions, lots of baby talk and giggles: he loves to see your face and hear your voice
- hold him and hug him and tell him you love him
- take a parenting course or read some parenting books, especially if you feel unsure of yourself or this is your first child
- find other new mothers to spend time with, like at a moms-and-tots group
- find people you trust to babysit so you can go shopping, take a walk or see a movie
- consider using a high-quality child care centre even if you are not working
- if you have a home visitor from public health, ask her for suggestions
- if you feel too overwhelmed to take care of him, find someone immediately to babysit, to give you a break
- NEVER SHAKE A BABY. Shaking causes permanent brain damage and even death
- take care of yourself: he needs you



Visit an Ontario Early Years Centre. You can find the nearest one at [www.ontarioearlyyears.ca](http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca) or call Ontario Government Information at 1-800-267-8097 (1-800-268-7095 TTY)

# YOU & YOUR PRE-SCHOOLER



for  
Women

*Preschoolers, children aged three to five, are becoming individuals, learning to express emotions appropriately, playing cooperatively with friends, and getting ready to start school. At the same time, they still think the world revolves around them. What they see is more real than what they are told about.*

**These things are typical of children as they grow between ages 3 and 5. Which changes do you see in your preschooler?**

- learning hundreds of new words and using longer sentences
- becoming aware of the differences between boys/men and girls/women
- being proud of doing things by herself (e.g., getting dressed)
- learning to play with other children, perhaps making mistakes once in a while, like hitting
- having fewer temper tantrums but more aggression directed at others such as same-age friends
- being tearful and anxious sometimes when left with babysitters or a child care provider
- having nightmares and being afraid of things like the dark and monsters in the closet
- needing structure, predictability, and routines, perhaps getting upset when a routine changes
- showing curiosity about how things work, and asking why, why, why
- having a short attention span and being easily distracted
- telling other people, even strangers, about things in your family you would rather keep private
- understanding “yesterday” and “tomorrow” and knowing time is divided into present, past and future

**Each child is unique. Pick six words to describe your pre-schooler to someone who does not know him or her** (e.g., stubborn, kind, shy, smart, musical, imaginative).

**When a pre-schooler sees violence at home, she may feel and think things like this...**

- she may worry about her own safety and about being hurt herself
- she may feel responsible because she thinks everything in the world is related to her
- she may hope that a TV character or super hero can come and save her
- she may “tune out” the noise by concentrating hard on something else
- she may worry about being arrested or taken away, if Daddy was arrested or left
- she may worry that Mommy will be taken away by the police if Daddy has been arrested
- she may have nightmares about being harmed
- she may try and make it stop by, for example, yelling at the abuser

**What your pre-schooler may be feeling now**

Children should not live with violence and getting away from abuse is the best thing you can do. However, pre-schoolers may have feelings and beliefs that seem strange to an adult.

- confusion** – confused why people are saying bad things about Daddy  
– confused why Daddy cannot live with us anymore

- distress**
- distress over seeing Mommy upset
  - distress about unfamiliar surroundings in a shelter or new residence
  - distress over the loss of familiar routines and treasured possessions left behind
  - distress over floods of emotions and not knowing how to control them
  - distress you may see when she backslides on things already learned (e.g., using the potty)
- guilt**
- guilt because she blames herself
- grief**
- grief over missing Daddy, and maybe relatives on Daddy's side of the family
  - grief over missing old house/apartment, old friends, toys and possessions left behind
- fear**
- fear of abandonment: if Daddy left me, will Mommy leave me too?
  - fear for personal safety: if it happens again, will I get hurt?

**These feelings and beliefs are all normal reactions to an abnormal situation. How do you think your pre-schooler is feeling and thinking now?**

#### **What you may be feeling about your pre-schooler...**

- betrayal** ...if she misses her father
- confusion** ...if she is not upset about what happened to you
- concern** ...if you worry the violence has damaged her or caused bad behaviour
- guilt** ...if you regret that she does not have a responsible and loving father

#### **Explaining the violence to your pre-schooler**

Today is far more important to her than what happened in the past. In fact, she may not seem very upset at all (unless she sees you upset). If the abuser was a man to whom she was emotionally attached, if she saw him as "Daddy," she will experience the same emotions felt by children in divorce. Be careful about blaming her father for the violence or the separation. She needs only to be told in simple terms that Mommy and Daddy have to live apart. When she is older, she will understand things more like an adult does. Today she needs to hear that what happened was not her fault, she is still loved, and Mommy can and will keep her safe.

#### **How to help your pre-schooler**

- re-establish (or establish) familiar routines as quickly as possible: this will be comforting
- tell her you love her and give her lots of hugs and attention
- help her believe that nothing which happened between adults was her fault
- take responsibility for the decision to leave (if you and partner have separated)
- don't rely on her for emotional support: seek out friends, family or professionals for that
- have clear rules and consequences so she knows what you expect
- consider finding a high-quality child care program, to give you a break and help her prepare for school
- read a book with her designed for her age level (see page 45)
- teach "hands are not for hitting," hands are for tickling, drawing, making shadow puppets, etc.
- take care of yourself: she needs you

# YOU & YOUR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD



for  
Women

*Elementary school children, ages 6 to 12, can understand right and wrong, cause and effect. Academic and social success at school has a big impact on their self-concept. They will make friends and plan social activities for themselves. Toward the end of elementary school, many will be thinking about how they are thought of by members of the opposite sex. They start to identify more with the same-sex parent and are now keenly aware of differences between males and females in our society.*

**These things are typical of children as they grow from ages 6 to 12. Which changes do you see in your child?**

- able to think and talk about his emotions and how he feels
- being able to understand how other people feel, not just himself
- wants everything and everyone to be fair
- considers the reason for a behaviour, not just what happens
- everything is a contest: he has to have the best and be better than his friends at sports, etc.
- being popular with friends is important
- doing well in school is important and if he does not do well, he blames himself

**Each child is unique. Pick six words to describe your child's personality to someone who does not know him or her** (e.g., energetic, curious, friendly, honest, sensitive, athletic)

**When a school-age child sees violence at home, he may feel and think things like this...**

- he may be concerned for his mother's safety and any consequences for his father (e.g., arrest)
- he may understand that his mother remains upset even after the violent incident ends
- he may recognize one person in a "fight" as the aggressor and one as the victim
- he will accept reasons for violence that seem plausible (e.g., alcohol, job stress)
- the intent of a "fight" is as important as how the "fight" turned out
- the fairness of a "fight" is very important
- he will notice any differences between what he saw happen and how others describe it later
- he may blame himself for the violence if he hears himself talked about during the fight
- he may blame himself for the violence if he believes he could have prevented it (e.g., by cleaning up)
- he may feel that arrest or incarceration are not fair consequences for his father

**What your child may be feeling now...**

- guilt** – guilt if he blames himself for bad things such as the violence and any divorce
- concern** – concern seeing Mommy sad and upset



- grief** – grief over missing Daddy, and maybe relatives on Daddy's side of the family  
– grief over missing old house/apartment, old friends, toys and possessions left behind
- confusion** – confusion about why one beloved parent would hurt another beloved parent
- worry** – worry over what the future holds for the family

**These feelings and beliefs are all normal reactions to an abnormal situation. How do you think your child is feeling and thinking now?**

### **What you may be feeling about your child...**

- resentful** ...if he wants things you cannot give him
- hurt** ...if he is disrespectful or withdraws from you
- concern** ...if you worry the violence has damaged him or caused bad behaviour
- guilt** ...if you regret that he does not have a responsible and loving father
- frustration** ...if he seems to have “forgotten” about the violence or maltreatment

### **Explaining the violence to your child**

A child of this age will still see a “fight” between Mommy and Daddy but can recognize when the fight is not fair, as when Daddy is bigger than Mommy. Explain the violence in terms of rules. For example, “there is a law, a very serious rule, that people cannot hit others. This is a good rule. It keeps everyone safe. Daddy knows this rule. He must learn to live with people and not break this rule.” Why does Daddy break this rule? Children of this age may need to explain a father's violence using external factors such as substance abuse, a bad childhood, or current stressors (e.g., financial worries). The alternative is to believe that the parent is trying to be cruel and hurtful on purpose. Explaining the violence in this way may help children manage the confusion and ambivalence they feel after seeing one parent hurt the other. As they get older, they can adopt a more complex understanding of causes, motives and consequences.

### **How to help your child**

- tell him and show him you love him and will take care of him
- help him believe the violence and separation were not his fault
- let him know you are there to talk when he is ready, but do not force him to talk
- let him know it is okay to talk about his father
- take responsibility for the decision to leave (if you and your partner have separated)
- don't rely on him for emotional support: seek out friends, family or professionals for that
- reassure him that you are okay
- do not express your anger at his father in front of him
- do not say he is “like his dad”
- help him learn to meet his wants without intimidating or threatening others
- find activities he can do with his friends (e.g., soccer)
- spend some “fun time” together (homework and chores do not count)
- help him succeed at school, make sure his schooling does not take a back seat to family troubles
- limit (or eliminate) the amount of television and movies with violence and violent themes
- take care of yourself – he needs you.

# YOU & YOUR TEENAGER



for  
Women

*Teenagers are not children but they are not adults either. They mature and their brains grow a lot between 12 and 20. The “unfinished” parts of the brain aid good decision making, self awareness, impulse control, and control of emotions. Teens still have a lot to learn about problem solving, controlling emotions, understanding how others think of them, and assessing the motives of others.*

**These things are typical of young people as they grow from ages 13 to 18. Which changes do you see in your teenager?**

- increased independence from family, especially for social activities
- dramatic physical changes brought on by puberty
- dramatic mood changes brought on by puberty
- friends and the need for acceptance by friends are very important
- interest in dating and relationships grows
- more likely to challenge you when you try to impose rules
- wants more freedom but is not taking on more responsibility
- they may not always make good choices about friends and risky behaviour such as drugs
- may be embarrassed to be seen with a parent in public, may value friends more than family
- obsessed with own appearance, clothes, music, gadgets, etc. and the money to get them
- does things impulsively without thinking through consequences

**Each child is a unique person. Pick six words to describe your teenager’s personality to someone who does not know him or her (e.g., stubborn, kind, lazy, quiet, smart, moody).**

**When a teenager has seen violence at home, she may feel and think things like this...**

- she may feel responsible for taking care of younger brothers and sisters, to keep them safe
- she may be embarrassed by her family and reluctant to bring friends home
- she may try and intervene in violent incidents to protect her mother
- she may fantasize about leaving home or actually leave home
- she may blame you for not protecting her or siblings
- she may adopt unhealthy coping strategies such as drug use or early sexual activity
- she may have difficulty establishing healthy dating relationships or avoid intimacy
- she may start to stereotype males as perpetrators and females as victims

### What your teenager may be feeling now

- relief** – relief the abuser is out of your life  
– relief the abuser is out of her life and away from younger siblings
- anger** – anger that you did not leave sooner  
– anger that you did not protect yourself from abuse  
– anger if you did not protect her from maltreatment  
– anger that her whole life has been turned upside down  
– anger that her teenage issues have been swept aside by focus on violence
- worry** – worry you might go back to him, especially if you have reconciled before  
– worry you might start dating a new abuser, if you have done that before
- concern** – concern that you are sad and upset  
– concern about the well-being of younger brothers and sisters
- vengeful** – fantasizing about taking revenge against abuser
- confusion** – confused by how to re-assume role of “child” after being a caretaker

**These feelings and beliefs are all normal reactions by teenagers to an abnormal situation. How do you think your teenager is feeling and thinking now?**

### What you may be feeling about your teenager...

- confusion** ...about why she is angry at you
- hurt** ...if she blames you for all her problems
- frustration** ...if she is not following house rules and seems out of control
- anger** ...if challenges to your authority take on abusive qualities
- guilt** ...if you think her problems are related to the violence

### Explaining the violence to your teenager

Children of this age can understand the “bigger picture” of woman abuse and you can have a frank discussion about what you were thinking and feeling. Spend most of the discussion, however, on how she was thinking and feeling. Let her express her anger or other emotions and her worries for the future. This may not be pleasant to hear but let her talk. This is a worrisome age, even at the best of times. Teenagers need stability and guidance, a firm base from which to experiment. Reassure her that you will be her base.

### How to help your teenager

- tell her and show her you love her, and do not blame her for anything that happened
- let her know you are there to talk when she is ready
- take responsibility for the decision to leave (if you and your partner have separated)
- don't rely on her for emotional support: seek out friends, family or professionals for that
- negotiate clear rules and consequences that are appropriate for her age
- review the coping strategies on page 42 and encourage healthy strategies
- take care of yourself: she needs you



The Ontario Women's Directorate has “tip sheets” for parents, to encourage healthy dating relationships in boys and girls:  
[www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca)

# LIFE WITH A TEENAGER: THE ART OF NEGOTIATION



for  
Women

*The teenage years can be a challenging time for both of you. Parents must adapt and gradually change expectations as young people experiment with adult-like activities from the safety of a solid home base. Parents will guide teens through some dramatic changes, providing a solid and reassuring presence against which to rebel and test limits in a safe way.*

## **Parenting a teen ...what is the same?**

- you still need to be a parent even though your child is older
- you still nurture and support your child to grow up in a safe way
- you still love and are concerned for your child
- the “Everyday Essentials” for parenting still apply (see page 32)
- there are still some “givens” that are non-negotiable rules in your family (see page 38)

## **What is different?**

- *how* you express your love and concern (e.g., less physical and fewer expressions in public)
- your teenager may not realize parents are still needed or desirable
- you have less control over a teen’s behaviour and cannot physically enforce limits (e.g., if an adolescent decides to go out, he or she will)
- it may be more challenging to keep emotion out of it: you may work harder to avoid losing your temper
- the “givens” or non-negotiable rules are fewer and take the form of things that could be harmful (e.g., drinking and driving; unprotected sex)
- how you parent changes, as your child matures and moves toward independence
- the limits and rules, except for the “givens,” must be **NEGOTIATED**

## **Negotiation**

Negotiation is an important skill when you have teenagers. It is the basis for problem solving and setting rules or limits with teens. Negotiation:

- requires give and take: both parties must listen, show respect, talk, and be willing to compromise
- requires everyone to be clear on what is **NOT** negotiable (e.g., no drinking and driving)
- helps your child learn and practise this essential relationship skill
- is a skill most parents and adolescents need to improve and continually practise

## **When you don’t negotiate, it...**

- increases the frequency and intensity of adolescent/parent power struggles
- increases the likelihood of extreme, “all or nothing” outcomes (e.g., running away, physical altercations, moving out at a young age)
- deprives young people of chances to learn and use this essential life skill
- decreases the likelihood your child will transfer this necessary skill into other relationships (e.g., dating, friends, teachers, employers and co-workers)
- diminishes the opportunities for gradually and safely shifting power from parent to teen

### Steps for parent-teen negotiation

1. Parent or teen says what she wants to happen.
2. Other person shares her reaction without saying yes or no to the request or suggestion
3. Each person then says any problems with the other's suggestions
4. Both teen and parent think of solutions to the problems raised
5. If agreement, negotiation is over. If no agreement, try to find alternate compromise
6. If no compromise apparent, then state differing positions as objectively and respectfully as possible
7. Decide on a time to try again

*An example of negotiation over curfew is given on page 63.*

### What you can do

- decide what rules are “givens” and what are negotiable (see page 38)
- write them down and make sure everyone knows them (and buys in)
- seek support from other adults whose ability to parent you respect

Getting teens to cooperate requires parents to show respect, define “givens” but negotiate other limits, choose limits that are appropriate for teens, and have fewer rules than when the child was younger

### When your teen breaks a rule or does something wrong...

- keep your voice in a normal tone and your emotions under control – when you yell, order, or threaten, it shifts focus from the youth's behaviour to your behaviour
- try to understand what happened and what your teen was thinking and feeling
- if you are emotional or upset, set a future time to discuss consequences (e.g., next day after school)
- model respect, reasonableness and flexibility

### If your adolescent threatens you...

- stay calm
- don't threaten back
- deflect - calmly say you will discuss the matter later and say when (e.g., after dinner)
- don't change your position on an issue because of a threat
- when forced to respond immediately
  1. *briefly say what you hope will happen*
  2. *say that because you love him or her you cannot change your position*
  3. *say you are doing what you believe is best for him or her*

**Daughter:** *“If you don't let my boyfriend sleep over in my room, I'm moving out and you'll be sorry.”*

**Mother:** *“I hope you don't leave home. I love you and I would miss you. As a parent, I have to do what I believe is best for you.”*

# 10 BASICS POINTS OF GOOD DISCIPLINE



for  
Women

*Children are not born knowing the rules of life. They learn to be good men and women by first learning to be good boys and girls. Expect mistakes, tantrums, pouting, and crying. How you respond is an important part of how they learn.*

## **1. Good discipline is not punishment**

*Discipline* and *punishment* are different. Punishment is supposed to make a person choose not to repeat bad behaviour. But, from punishment, especially physical punishment, children learn how the powerful make rules and the weaker must go along with it, or else. They might learn to avoid being honest about mistakes or to divert the blame on to others (“he did it, not me,” “it’s not my fault”). Because young children do not *choose* to mis-behave, they can feel like failures if punished over and over.

## **2. Good discipline teaches**

Punishment teaches what is wrong, but does not help a child learn what is right. The goal of discipline is to teach. It teaches self-control and socially acceptable behaviour. You encourage good behaviour by correcting misbehaviour and praising good behaviour. Discipline is an opportunity to model respect, patience, and good problem solving. In the long run, you teach them to decide all by themselves to do the right thing.

## **3. Good discipline is not a power struggle**

“Do you want to go to bed?” “No!” “But it’s 9 o’clock so you need to get to bed.” “YOU CAN’T MAKE ME!” You are in a power struggle. Where do you go from here? With small children, you *can* make them: you can pick him up and take him to bed. But is that going to work when he is 12?

## **4. Good discipline never involves physical violence or threats of violence**

Never, ever hit a child. If you find yourself using physical discipline like spanking, you may be getting yourself into power struggles, exercising your power as the bigger and stronger person. Re-assess your overall discipline strategy and look into ways to replace spanking. For example, try time ins or time outs, but no more than one minute for each year of the child’s age (i.e., two minutes for a two-year-old).

## **5. Good discipline does not involve insulting or demeaning comments**

For abusive parents, “discipline” means yelling, blaming, and putting the child down. This teaches a child he is a bad person, not a person who has exercised bad judgment or engaged in bad behaviour. Also, don’t put down one child by favouring or praising the other.

## **6. Good discipline does not involve anger and over-reactions**

Good discipline is a planned out strategy to encourage good behaviour and discourage bad behaviour. It is consistent and fair.

## **7. Good discipline uses clear expectations, clear consequences, and consistent “enforcement”**

1. define clear expectations which are reasonable for the age of the child...
2. ...and clearly linked to consequences that match the age of the child
3. use fair, firm, consistent follow-through



- \* sit down as a family and make a list of “house rules” to post on the refrigerator
- \* some rules are “don’ts” (e.g., no hitting, don’t go in a bedroom without knocking)
- \* some rules are “do’s” (e.g., bring your dishes into the kitchen when you finish eating)
- \* some hints for defining non-negotiable rules are on page 38
- \* what happens if someone breaks a rule? Decide now, also as a family
- \* “consequences” should help the child learn what is right and how to act responsibly

When someone breaks a family rule, give them a chance to do it right before you apply a consequence. Be consistent. If you enforce a rule one day, and let it slide the next, you teach the children they can sometimes get away with it, so they are likely to repeat the bad behaviour.

### **8. Good discipline is neither permissive nor punitive**

Some parents never discipline. The permissive parent lets kids do whatever they want, so he or she never has to enforce rules. With the punitive parent, children are too scared to step out of line. Neither style is good.

### **9. Good discipline solves problems**

Using good discipline, you should feel the atmosphere at home getting more relaxed. Then you’ll know you are on the right track. Children learn not only what is wrong, but what is right.

### **10. The best discipline is the kind you never have to use**

Using the “Everyday Essentials” of parenting (page 32) may help prevent the need for discipline in the first place. This may not work immediately, but over time it can.

- be a model of good behaviour: if you want “please and thank you,” use “please and thank you”
- be clear on the rules so they know what behaviour you do not want to see
- praise good behaviour 5 times for every 1 time you comment on misbehaviour
- when correcting misbehaviour, focus on the behaviour not the child
- when correcting misbehaviour, explain the logic behind your request or behind the rule
- keep your voice at a normal volume level and do not react out of anger, fatigue or other emotion
- don’t get into a power struggle: state the “given” and give some choices
- don’t have rules that are impossible to meet, or impossible for the age of your child
- you are the adult, you set the rules, you enforce the rules, you are in charge!
- if acting out is the only way to get your attention, expect children to act out



Thomas P. Phelan (2003). *1-2-3- Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2 to 12*. Child Management. (also available as a video)

Barbara Coloroso (2001). *Kids are Worth It! Giving Your Child the Gift of Inner Discipline*. Penguin Canada.

*What’s Wrong with Spanking?* (2004).

Available from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence:

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/index.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/index.html)

*Discipline is not possible with babies.  
They are too young to learn from discipline.*

# ROOM CLEAN-UP: AN EXERCISE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN



for  
Women

**“Clean up your room!”** This is a common request in many homes, and a commonly ignored request. Try this exercise to see if these seven steps get results.

## 1. Break the big task into little tasks

A chore like cleaning-up is really a series of small tasks. Breaking the big task into chunks helps a child know where to start and gives little triumphs of accomplishment along the way towards the big goal. Start with one request – *“Let’s put these toys in the toy box”* – and move on to other parts: making the bed, bringing dishes to the kitchen, putting dirty clothes in the laundry, dusting, vacuuming, cleaning the hamster’s cage, and so on.

## 2. Set a (realistic) time limit

Some children can dawdle their way through these tasks over the entire day. Set a time limit, like *“Let’s get done by lunch time”* or *“Let’s get done by 3 o’clock when your sister gets home.”*

## 3. Link success with something fun

Children will do something that is not so fun if they expect some fun later. *“When we get this finished, we can bake those cup cakes.”* Younger children may need smaller rewards for smaller tasks rather than one big reward at the end of a big task. Rewards can include hugs, watching Sesame Street together, or extra time on the swings on your next visit to the park.

## 4. Make it a game

To divert attention from the fact that you are doing a chore, find ways to make the tasks like a game. *“Let’s pick up all the orange toys first.”* Or *“Who can get all the toys picked up first, you or your sister?”*

## 5. Make the task reasonable for the age of the child

With little children, you may end up doing most of the work at first. As they get older, let them do more and more. Also, Martha Stewart isn’t dropping by so don’t expect their results to be perfect.

## 6. Offer praise

As each task is completed, give positive feedback. *“Good job on the toys!”* The final result may not be perfect (they are kids after all) but praise the effort. Trying is sometimes more important than succeeding.

## 7. Clean up YOUR room

If having a clean room is an important feature of life in your home, keep your own room clean.



*These seven steps can also work for other household chores, even homework.*



# NEGOTIATING A CURFEW: AN EXERCISE FOR TEENS



for  
Women

*With teenagers, the skill of negotiation becomes important for parents. Setting a time for curfew on a school night is an example of how to negotiate something between the two of you.*

**1. Parent says what she wants to happen**

Start by suggesting what you see as a reasonable curfew.

**2. Teenager shares his reaction without saying yes or no to the request or suggestion**

Ask your teenager to suggest a curfew time.

**3. Each person then says any problems with the other's suggestions**

If he accepts your suggestion, you are done. If he suggests a later curfew than you did:

- repeat his suggestion to show you listened
- do not say "no" or "yes" to his suggestion
- express your concerns with his curfew suggestion (e.g., not sure that would work because he has a hard time getting up for school on time)
- ask what his thoughts are

**4. Both teen and parent think of solutions to the problems raised**

If still no agreement, then brainstorm solutions. For example, maybe a compromise can work: e.g., earlier than his suggestion and later than yours; slightly later curfew on weekends but keep earlier curfew on school nights; earlier curfew but later bedtime; accept later curfew on the condition that it be changed to earlier time if he has difficulty getting up or is tired at school.

**5. If agreement, negotiation is over.**

**If no agreement, try to find a compromise**

Encourage selection of an option both of you can live with.

**6. If no compromise possible, then state differing positions as objectively and respectfully as possible and set a time to discuss the issue again in the near future**

If you just cannot agree on the curfew, agree to keep the same curfew as before and set specific time for talking about it again (e.g., on the weekend, after supper the next night).



for  
Women

*If you are starting a life free of violence and abuse, you and your children have come a long way together. Moving forward means leaving the past behind. But some parts of the past may have to be dealt with.*

There is information in this resource to help mothers understand what their children might have been thinking and feeling about the violence back then, and what they might be thinking and feeling today. See pages 50 to 57.

## Re-assure

### **Children need to know these things. They must...**

- trust you will take care of them and protect them
- know you won't leave them
- believe nothing that happened was their fault
- be sure you love them, forever and unconditionally



Robert Munsch (1986). *Love You Forever*. Firefly Books.

### **Don't be afraid to talk about the violence**

As parents, our instinct may be to leave unpleasant events in the past. If children want to talk about what happened in your home, don't pretend it never happened. On the other hand, they may not want to talk precisely at the same time that you bring it up. Let them know you are open to a discussion when they are ready.

### **Ask how the violence made them feel**

One way to start a conversation about a difficult topic is by asking how it made them *feel*. Depending upon their ages, children might have felt scared, angry, sad, guilty, embarrassed, concerned, or confused.

- respect and accept their feelings / don't tell them how to feel
- acknowledge those feelings are okay
- help them put words to the feelings if they are having trouble
- be prepared to hear things that may surprise you or hurt you

Sometimes, when children are safe, all the emotions come tumbling out, including anger.

## Listen

Just let them talk and show you are ready to hear whatever they need to say.



Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish (1999). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*. Avon Books.

Dominic Capello (2000). *Ten Talks Parents Must Have with their Children About Violence*. Hyperion.

### Encourage healthy ways to cope

In this resource, on page 42, there is a list of ways that children cope with stressful events at home. Some of these strategies are things you want to encourage while some might worry you. Help your child find healthy ways to cope with stress.

### Be the best “you” possible

Your children learn a lot by how you live your life. Leaving an abusive partner and starting a new life shows you respect yourself and care about them. Don't rush into a new relationship just because you think children need a father. Consider going back to school or doing something else for yourself. Be the best “you” you can possibly be.

### A few things NOT to do...

- don't confide in children or use them for emotional support: if you need to talk to someone, find a supportive adult
- don't be drawn into a competition with your ex-partner for your children's love
- don't tell them bad things from the past they don't already know about



***If your son or daughter is behaving abusively in your home, see page 68.***

# NAVIGATING CHILDREN'S CONTACT WITH THEIR FATHER



for  
Women

*After separation, depending upon the children's relationship with your ex-partner, they may want to, or have to, visit him. When abuse has been an issue, this will be difficult. You may worry about their safety when with him.*

## Getting Legal Custody

After a separation, whether or not you were legally married, you should have a written arrangement about custody. If the children stay with you, you have *de facto* custody but not *legal* custody. Many couples make a custody agreement or parenting plan and get lawyers to write it out in a legal way. When there has been abuse in a relationship, such negotiation might not be possible, nor wise. Get a lawyer to help you. A lawyer should protect your right not to be pressured into an agreement that is not in the best interests of your children.

- if your ex-partner refuses to sign an agreement, you must go to court to ask a judge for a custody order. The Court may make an interim order (meaning temporary) until there is time to hear the case.
- if mediation is suggested, tell the mediator about the abuse: your case may not be appropriate
- having a custody agreement or order is vital if an ex-partner might take a child to another country
- if you worry about this, get the children's passports, talk to a lawyer, and read the booklet called *International Child Abductions: A Manual for Parents*.



Ministry of the Attorney General (2002). *What you Should Know About Family Law in Ontario*. [available at [www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca](http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca)]

Community Legal Education Ontario (2001). *Do you Know a Women who is Being Abused: A Legal Rights Handbook*. [available at: [www.cleo.on.ca/](http://www.cleo.on.ca/)]

Government of Canada (2003). *International Child Abductions: A Manual for Parents*. [available at [www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca)]

## Conditions of Visitation

Another important issue to get written down involves visits by children with your ex-partner. Arrangements can be loosely defined (e.g., reasonable access) or specifically defined (e.g., every second weekend from 5 p.m. Friday to 8 p.m. Sunday). If the judge believes your children may be at risk of harm, the visits may have to be supervised. This means that an approved person must be present during the visit. In extreme cases, a court will deny an abusive parent any access at all, but this is very, very rare. The Children's Aid Society may also have a say about visits to your ex-partner.

## Child Support

The Federal Government has guidelines for how much a non-custodial parent should pay the custodial parent. For example, an Ontario parent earning \$50,000 (before taxes) would normally pay \$429 for one and \$700 for two children, per month. Sometimes you are so tired of fighting that you might agree to less. Or you may be afraid to ask for the full amount that your children have a right to. So have a lawyer help you.

### **Applying for Legal Aid**

If your income is below a certain level, you may qualify for Legal Aid so a lawyer can help with custody, visitation and child support. You must apply in person at one of their 48 offices across Ontario. Look in the telephone book under “Legal Aid Ontario” or call 1-800-668-8258 to find the nearest one.

### **Finding a Family Law Lawyer**

The Legal Aid office has a list of local family lawyers who accept legal aid certificates. Or you can call the Lawyer Referral Service. Abused women in crisis can call: 1-800-268-8326 / (416) 947-3330. You can also find the names of lawyers in the Yellow Pages of the telephone book under "lawyers."

### **Family Law Information Centres (FLICs)**

In many courthouses in Ontario, FLICs offer free access to a lawyer called a “duty counsel.” He or she can explain how to seek custody and child support through the courts, and how to apply for Legal Aid.

### **Safety on Visits**

Sit down with the children and develop a safety plan for their visits with your ex-partner. Make sure they know how to contact you and how to call 9-1-1 in an emergency.

### **Document Problems**

Keep a written record of problems with visitation, including when your ex-partner does not show up for scheduled visits or does not bring the children home at the appointed time.

### **Carry Custody Documents at All Times**

Once you have legal custody, let the school know and carry the papers with you at all times

### **Help with Transfer**

For some women, having your ex-partner pick up the children for visits is too risky. Consider asking a family member whom you trust to deliver and pick-up the children, have the transfer in a public place, or use any other option that reduces the risk for you. All Supervised Access Centres offer supervised exchanges.

### **Supervised Access Centres**

The government of Ontario funds Supervised Access Centres in all court districts in Ontario. For more information, call: 1-416-212-2028.

### **Custody and Visitation Assessments**

The judge may ask you and your ex-partner to undergo a mental health assessment to determine the best interests of the children. The same assessor sees you both, but at separate times. The recommendation is given to the judge, who may or may not use that recommendation to make the final order. Sometimes, the Office of the Children’s Lawyer arranges the assessment. The assessment may be paid by Legal Aid.

### **When to call the Children’s Aid Society**

It is the job of CASs across Ontario to protect children from abuse and neglect. If a CAS sees your ex-partner as a risk to your children, the agency can ask a Court for supervised visits and other conditions, like counselling. Before you call the CAS, however, be aware that both parents are assessed to determine the best interests of the children. Some women do not find this helpful.

# WHEN CHILDREN ACT ABUSIVELY IN YOUR HOME



for  
Women

*When your child is abusive toward you or other children in your home – using insults, threats, or physical violence – this is a problem that must be responded to immediately.*

You may be tempted to excuse the behaviour because of what the child has been through with your ex-partner. But abuse is always unacceptable.

**As soon as you see abusive behaviour, start to help your child because:**

- this behaviour is hurtful and disrespectful and you do not deserve to be abused
- this behaviour will be harmful to your other children
- your child will get into serious trouble, such as school expulsion or criminal charges, if the behaviour is used at school or in dating relationships

## You need to deal with this now

When you see or experience your child being abusive...

- do not give in to a threat or demand
- do not use abusive behaviour (i.e., yelling insults, hitting) in response
- do not ignore the behaviour: your child needs to learn not to be abusive
- tell the child you both need some time apart to calm down
- tell the child you will speak with him or her later

## Sometime later...

- find an opportunity to talk calmly with the child
- validate his or her feelings by saying something like "You were angry at me because I would not let you watch that movie"
- make a link between his or her behaviour and the abusive behaviour he or she saw in the past
- clearly state why the behaviour was wrong (e.g., it is NOT okay to call people mean names, even when you are angry)
- make it clear that there will be consequences for abusive behaviour in the future (and mean it)

## If the child repeats the abusive behaviour...

- repeat the steps above and enforce the consequence
- be sure to stay calm and make it clear that the consequence is because abusive behaviour is not acceptable
- be consistent: respond to each and every time the child is abusive
- find a place in your community to get counselling



- if the child is 12 years of age or older,
- if the child is hitting or making threats to harm you,
- if all these other techniques have been tried and did not work, and
- if you worry for your safety or that of other children,  
**you need to call the police**

## Dealing with anger

Anger is an emotion. It is not good or bad. Everyone feels angry sometimes.

Some people, including some children, think anger causes abuse. So they may be afraid to let the anger out. For other people, the anger comes out in hurtful ways such as yelling, insults and violence. Either way, it is important to help by:

- telling children it is okay to have angry feelings
- helping them put a name to their feelings such as anger
- expressing your anger in ways that do not hurt others (e.g., by talking about why you are angry)
- showing them ways to be angry that do not hurt others

## Here are some words that can help...

*"It's okay to be angry, but it's not okay to hit."*

*"You seem angry. Take a big breath and then blow out all the air. Let's do it again. Okay, now use your words to help me understand what's wrong."*

*"I was angry when the vacuum broke. I called Nana and told her I was upset. She's going to bring her vacuum over for us to borrow."*

## WHEN YOU NEED MORE SUPPORT



for  
Women

*Leaving a relationship, starting a new life, re-establishing a home for your children, these activities are both hopeful and stressful, optimistic and exhausting.*

Especially when there are many changes in your life, you may need the help and support of friends, family, and sometimes professionals who can help you as a survivor of woman abuse, as a woman, and as a parent.

### **Think about reaching out for more support if...**

- you are being stalked or otherwise fear for your safety
- you resent your children because they need your attention
- you worry you might abuse your children or you have abused your children
- you see yourself repeating patterns from your parents that you don't want to repeat
- you do not have a safe and stable residence for you and your children
- you are feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope with life
- your children have been apprehended by the Children's Aid Society
- you might return to an abusive ex-partner just because everything is too hard
- you worry that your anger may be hurting people you love
- you worry that your drinking or drug use may be affecting people you love
- or if for any other reason you feel in need of some extra support

*You are not alone. Some things you have to do for yourself, but not by yourself.*



*Your advocate or worker can help you find additional support.*

*If you do not have an advocate or worker,  
call the Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1-866-863-0511  
(or in the G.T.A. (416) 863-0511 or TTY at 1-866-863-7868)  
to learn about services in your community.*



# WHEN YOUR CHILD NEEDS MORE SUPPORT



for  
Women

*When children have been through difficult and stressful times like living with violence and experiencing marital separation, there is a lot a mother can do to help them get through it all. In this resource, there are some ideas:*

- use the “Everyday Essentials” of parenting (page 32 and page 36)
- help your child or teen move away from unhealthy coping and move towards healthy coping strategies (page 44)
- review the specific suggestions for children of each age group who have lived with violence (pages 50 to 57)
- practise good discipline techniques at home (page 60)
- work to heal the bond with your children if it has been affected by the violence (page 64)
- do what you can to ensure your children’s contact with your ex-partner does not place them at risk (page 66)

Even so, some children or teens will be having problems that suggest you should consult a professional. Seek assistance when your child’s concerning behaviour:

- poses a risk to your child's safety or the safety of others
- poses a risk to you because he or she is assaulting you.
- is intense enough to interfere with day-to-day adjustment at home or school
- is intense enough to interfere with the well-being of your other children, or the children at school
- is creating stress for you that compromises your well-being
- does not respond to consistent use of basic parenting strategies



Your advocate or group leader can suggest an agency in your area to get a mental health assessment for your child. This is the first step in finding the most appropriate intervention.



This website helps parents find the nearest children’s mental health centre in Ontario:

**[www.parentsforchildrensmentalhealth.org](http://www.parentsforchildrensmentalhealth.org)**

## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF <sup>8</sup>



*Hearing the horrific stories of women and children changes us. A service provider should take responsibility for her own best interests and encourage organizational measures to address the risks inherent in working with survivors of violence.*

“The effects of vicarious trauma are cumulative and build upon memories obtained through listening to the stories of one inhumane act of cruelty after another. This creates a permanent, subtle or marked change in the personal, spiritual and professional outlook of the counsellor or advocate.”<sup>8</sup>

### **How can vicarious trauma affect me?**

- how I feel (e.g., anxious), think (e.g., diminished concentration), act (e.g., use of coping strategies such as alcohol to relax), and interact with others (e.g., withdrawal from friends)
- my health (e.g., somatic reactions, impaired immune system)
- my work as a professional, including performance of job tasks, morale, interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and behaviour on the job (e.g., absenteeism)

### **What can I do?**

- take care of myself with good nutrition, exercise, sleep, massage, time to relax
- avoid overwhelming myself with overwork, using alcohol or drugs to cope, etc.
- develop and maintain good support networks, both on and off the job
- seek assistance when I recognize signs of vicarious trauma in myself

### **What can my agency do?**

- Jan Richardson has many recommendations in her *Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma*



Jan Richardson (2001). *Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-Violence Workers*. Ottawa: Health Canada [available from the National Clearinghouse on Domestic Violence: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/)]

# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF



for  
Women

*The most important things you do for your children are taking care of yourself and to being healthy, so you can take care of them. Here are some ideas.*

## **Engage in self-care**

- have positive thoughts about yourself
- get enough sleep and eat properly
- listen to music, read poetry or novels, be creative
- start an exercise program or take a walk every day
- find a little piece of each day to be yours, even 10 minutes, to close your eyes and think of nothing
- read books, articles, resources and pamphlets concerning women's issues
- keep your life and activities at a manageable level, so you don't feel overwhelmed and stressed
- avoid the use of alcohol or drugs as a stress reliever or for comfort

## **Build support networks or access existing supports**

- don't be afraid to ask for what you need
- find (or make) a support group of other women who can meet regularly
- spend time with people who make you feel good and avoid people who make you feel bad

## **Break the isolation**

- volunteer or otherwise get involved with community activities
- take some courses, join a book club, or find other places where other adults are engaged in fun or educational activities

# KNOWING WHEN TO REPORT CHILD MALTREATMENT <sup>10</sup>



*Members of the public in Ontario, including professionals who work with children, have a legal obligation to report promptly to a Children's Aid Society when they suspect a child is or may be in need of protection. If you have concerns about a child, call your local CAS immediately. All CASs have emergency service 24-hours a day.*

The *Child & Family Services Act* defines the term “child in need of protection” and it includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm. Being exposed to woman abuse is not by itself sufficient grounds to suggest that a child is in need of protection, especially if the abuser is no longer in the home.

## **Who makes the report?**

The person who has the reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must make the report directly.

## **What if I am not sure?**

You do not need to be sure that a child is or may be in need of protection to make a report. “Reasonable grounds” are what an average person, given his or her training, background and experience, exercising normal and honest judgment, would suspect.

You can call the CAS and provide the details of your concerns, without giving any information to identify the family. They will say if you have to make a formal report.

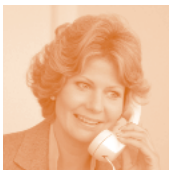


\* for more information, read the information sheet called “*How & When to Report Abuse or Neglect*,” produced by the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies

\* your local CAS and the agencies providing violence against women services in your areas will have negotiated a conciliation agreement to guide reporting in cases of woman abuse. Consult that document for guidance.

*To find contact information for the nearest CAS, visit [www.oacas.org](http://www.oacas.org)*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



***Simple Secrets of Parenting: Easy as ABC*** (1997),  
by John Q. Baucom. Child Welfare League of America.

***Parenting Through Crisis: Helping Kids Through Times of Loss, Grief and Change***  
(2001), by Barbara Coloroso. Penguin Canada.

***Helping Children who Witness Domestic Violence: A Guide for Parents, Instructor's Manual*** (1999), by Meg Cramer [available at [www.mincava.umn.edu](http://www.mincava.umn.edu) ]

***What About Me! Seeking to Understand the Child's View of Violence in the Family***  
(2004), by Alison Cunningham & Linda Baker [available at [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)]

***Parenting in the Context of Domestic Violence*** (2003),  
by J.L. Edleson, Lyungai F. Mbilinyi & Sudha Shetty  
[available at [www.vaw.umn.edu](http://www.vaw.umn.edu), Violence Against Women On-line Resources]

***Breaking the Cycle: A Parenting Guide for Single Mothers of Children who have Witnessed Violence*** (1997), by J. Ericksen, A. Henderson, M. Davidson & S. Ogden.  
Vancouver BC: FREDA Centre.

***Parenting Support for Women who have Experienced Abuse: Facilitator's Manual***  
(1997), by A. Henderson, J. Ericksen & S. Ogden. Vancouver BC: FREDA Centre.

***Competency Standards for People who Come into Professional Contact with Those Affected by Domestic/Family Violence*** (2000), Australia.  
Partnerships Against Domestic Violence [available at [www.padv.dpmc.gov.au](http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au)].

***Effective Intervention in Woman Battering and Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice*** (1999), by Susan Schechter & Jeffery Edleson  
[[www.thegreenbook.info](http://www.thegreenbook.info)]

### Web Sites

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence .....[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/)  
Education Wife Assault.....[www.womanabuseprevention.com](http://www.womanabuseprevention.com)  
Ontario Women's Directorate.....[www.ontariowomensdirector.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirector.gov.on.ca)  
Ontario Women's Justice Network.....[www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org)  
B.C Institute Against Family Violence.....[www.bcifv.org](http://www.bcifv.org)  
When Love Hurts: A Guide on Abuse,  
Respect and Relationships [for "girls"].....[www.dvirc.org.au/whenlove/](http://www.dvirc.org.au/whenlove/)

### Web Sites on Parenting and Child Development

Child Development Institute.....[www.childdevelopmentinfo.com](http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com)  
Parent Kids Right .....[www.parentkidsright.com](http://www.parentkidsright.com)  
Canadian Parents.....[www.canadianparents.com](http://www.canadianparents.com)  
The Center for Effective Discipline .....[www.stophitting.com](http://www.stophitting.com)

# Helping Children Thrive



This resource is for service providers in Ontario who support women who are moving beyond abuse. The goal is to promote effective parenting of children who lived with violence against their mothers. The information contained here can be applicable in individual work with women or as an adjunct to group work, for a brief or longer-term intervention. Both women and service providers are directed to additional material and resources of greater depth for more information. All material is grounded in three bodies of research: the expressed needs of abused women as mothers; techniques of “effective” parenting; and, the effects of violence on children.

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