

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Supporting children living with family and domestic violence

TIP SHEET

The COVID-19 pandemic has created conditions for an increase in family and domestic violence. School closures and isolation measures have forced family members into close contact with each other and reduced children's access to the usual avenues of support and protection.

Parents' anxiety about health, education and finances may have given rise to a more stressful home environment. Children are also having less contact with their teachers, counsellors and friends who they turn to for support and who might raise concerns about their safety and wellbeing.

Here are some of the ways a person who is using violent and abusive behaviours in the family home might use COVID-19 as a strategy to cause further harm:

- They may blame the children for their anxieties and frustrations about the virus.
- They may expose children to COVID-19 media coverage without acknowledging the worry and fear this may cause them.
- They may confine children to their rooms or prevent them from talking to their friends by restricting access to electronic devices.

- They may implement rigid schedules and expectations around home learning or have unrealistic expectations of children's behaviour leading to more punitive, abusive forms of discipline.

Here are some important messages for children if they are not feeling safe at home at this time:

- Living with family and domestic violence is not ok. Everyone has the right to feel safe.
- You are not alone. If you are worried about what is going at home, talk to an adult who you trust and who can help, or call the [Kids Helpline](https://www.kidshelpline.com.au) on 1800 551 800
- You might have lots of different feelings about what is happening including feeling scared, angry, sad, worried or ashamed. You might not even be sure how you feel. It is normal to feel scared or angry, but none of this is your fault.
- During COVID-19, you might be concerned about something you heard on the news or you may be worried about the future. Everyone feels differently. Feelings can be hard to talk about. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' feelings.

- There are things you can do to help you stay safe. [What's ok at home](#) is a resource for children and young people to help them understand what family and domestic violence is, how to recognise it and how to stay safe.



Here are some ideas and resources for parents supporting children during this time:

- **Try to have realistic expectations of children at this time and pick your battles.**
Many parents are struggling to work out new routines and rules. It is normal for children to be more challenging and unsettled when they are missing their friends, school and their normal routine. Like many parents, kids may also be experiencing losses and changes e.g. loss of school trips, school balls. Some websites with helpful ideas on parenting during COVID-19 include: [End Violence Against Children](#), [Triple P Parenting](#), [Unicef](#) and [raisingchildren.net.au](#)

- **Social distancing does not have to mean emotional distancing**

Children need support to understand COVID-19 and how it is being covered in the news. For some children, this can be very distressing. You can help them with their fears by acknowledging them and discuss all the things they can do to stay healthy, such as washing hands. Here are some websites for that might help in talking with kids about COVID-19 and some ideas to support them: [Beyond Blue](#), [Australian Childhood Foundation](#).

- **Help children be safe online**

COVID-19 is likely to mean young people spending more time at home and online. There are a lot of great ways they can use electronic devices to connect with others and play, but there are also risks that you can help them avoid. The government's [Esafety](#) website has a wide range of advice for parents and carers covering common online safety issues.

Seeking Help

We offer programs, at no charge, for men, women, young people and children who have perpetrated, experienced or seen abuse in their families or in their relationships.

The *Family Abuse Integrated Response (FAIR)* program is based on best practice principles and guidelines, and clinical staff are trained about family and domestic violence to enable appropriate support to occur.

Djinda Service also provides support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and their children, in the Perth metropolitan area affected by family violence and/or sexual assault. They are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women, mothers and sisters who care about the future of Aboriginal communities.

Please call FAIR on 6164 0270 or Djinda Service on 6164 0650 to let us know how we can support you and your family.

You can find out more about the range of support services we offer by visiting our website www.relationshipswa.org.au.

If you need immediate support, please contact:

Lifeline on 13 11 14

Suicide Line on 1300 651 251

Mensline on 1300 78 99 78

Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800

