

Family Violence Information Sheet

What is family violence?

Family violence is when one family member uses words or behavior to hurt or threaten to hurt another family member. One form of family violence is **physical violence**. Hitting, slapping, kicking, and choking are types of physical violence. Another form of family violence is **emotional violence**. Emotional violence is behavior like yelling a lot, saying cruel things about a family member, controlling what a family member can do or who a family member can see, and destroying a family member's belongings.

Family violence is also sometimes called domestic violence when the harm happens between adult family members. Some children may refer to domestic violence as fighting. Violence of any kind between family members is never okay.

How do children feel when there is violence in their family?

Children can respond to family violence in many different ways. Some children try to ignore the violence in their family. They hope the fighting will stop or they pretend that it isn't happening. Some children feel angry at family members who are violent. Children might also be afraid of family members who are violent. Other children sometimes feel guilty about the violence. They think that it is their fault that it is happening or they feel bad that they can't protect family members who are being hurt. Some children may be scared that they will get into trouble if they talk to someone outside their family about the fighting. Some children may be afraid that their parents might get into trouble or have to go to jail if others find out about the violence.

Sometimes when children have these feelings, the feelings impact the way they behave. For example, a child who is feeling afraid may not want to go to school and may want to stay home and protect a younger brother or sister. Some children get into more arguments with other children, friends, and family members. Other children may just feel sad and want to be alone. Some children feel upset for a long time after family violence has ended, but they often feel better with the help of counseling. If

children are having any of these feelings, talking with a parent who hasn't been violent or a counselor can help them feel better.

What kinds of families experience family violence?

Violence happens in many families. It can happen in families of all sizes, religions, and races. Families who experience violence can be rich or poor. They come from all types of neighborhoods. Millions of children live in families where violence by adults occurs.

Why does family violence happen?

There are lots of reasons family violence happens. It is very hard to know the reason why it happens in every family. Some adults may have never learned how to solve conflicts. Other adults may not know how to calm down when they get upset. Some adults may become violent when they drink alcohol or use illegal drugs. Drugs and alcohol are not the reason a family member becomes violent, but might be used by the family member as an excuse for why they were violent. We do know this much: No child is responsible for an adult's violent behavior.

What can children do when there is violence in their family?

Children should stay away from any adults that are hurting another person. If an adult is being violent in a child's home, a child should go to a room far away from the fighting. Some children will go to their own bedroom to stay safe. If there is not a safe place in the home to go and there is a safe way to leave the home, a child can go to a neighbor's house to ask for help. Some children may call 9-1-1 to ask the police for help when an adult is being violent in their home.

Children can tell an adult they trust that they are scared of the fighting that is happening in their family. They can choose to talk to an adult relative, teacher, school counselor, pastor, police officer, neighbor, or a babysitter. If the adult who the child talks to doesn't help, the child can find another adult to talk to who will listen and help.