

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Parents : Dealing with Violence

Violent behaviour is not okay. If you or your teenager are behaving violently you need to find better ways to deal with your feelings.

Violence is not ok

Violence can occur in any family. It might involve:

- Breaking things.
- Hitting or beating people.
- Shouting bad things (abuse).
- Making someone do something they don't want to such as: have sex with you or forcing them to stay at home when they don't want to.
- Telling someone you will hurt them if they don't do something for you.

Where does violence come from?

Violence sometimes starts when strong feelings like anger, fear, hurt or helplessness get out of control.

Sometimes people who are violent think that they have a right to act that way, and that other people's feelings don't matter.

Drug and alcohol use can make violent behaviour worse.

Strong feelings can be hard to manage

It is difficult to learn how to cope with strong feelings. Young people often deal with their feelings in the same way their parents do. If parents can't keep control of their feelings, a young person will find it hard to learn to do that too.

If you are a violent parent

If you are a parent or caregiver who becomes violent when angry or stressed, you need to get help before you seriously hurt someone and before your child learns to behave in the same way.

Violence towards your child:

- Puts them in danger.
- Makes them feel unsafe.
- Makes them feel they can't trust you.
- Can lead to more trouble.
- Can lead to your child becoming violent too.

If you have fought or been violent recently

You may be feeling angry about the way your young person is behaving. Perhaps this led to a physical fight?

Sometimes a fight can make you both feel sorry. A fight can bring you close for a while. But the violence is not ok and will probably keep happening until you both learn to manage your feelings in better ways.

Get some help and advice now. Talk to someone you respect and trust.

Or call **Parentline** or **Crisisline** (see telephone numbers below).

- Don't let shame get in the way.
- Don't make excuses.
- If your parents were violent towards you, this is no excuse for you hurting your family too.
- Even if other people in your community feel violence is ok, this is no excuse for you hurting your family members.
- Get the help you need to keep your young person safe.

If your teenager is violent

Try to work out what triggers their violence.

- Is it stress or deep sadness?
- Are there family problems that have never been worked out?
- Does your young person believe you expect them to always do well at school or work or at home?
- Do they feel they can't live up to your expectations?
- Is your child drunk, drugged or coming off drugs (withdrawing) when they get violent?
- Do they have mental health problems?
- Do they seem to be acting strangely?
- Are they copying yours or another family member's violent behaviour?

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Try to encourage your child to get help to manage their feelings better. Do they need help with drug and alcohol or mental health problems?

Are you too ashamed to tell anyone about their behaviour?

Don't just excuse their violent behaviour because you care for them. **Talk to your doctor** and ask where is the best place for your young person to get some help with their problems. Or call one of the agencies listed at the end of this help sheet.

When a young person explodes

When a young person is very angry it can be very hard to talk sense to them. If they are violent and hurting you or other family members, it may be best to ask them to leave until they have calmed down.

If that seems too dangerous, leave the house yourself and call the police or the local Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (See **Mental Health Problems Fact Sheet**).

Safety plan

If you know that someone in the family may become violent, you must make sure that you have a safety plan. The plan will help to keep you and other family members safe if a family member becomes violent again.

Talk to your family and decide on:

- A code or signal to family members to leave or call a friend or police.
- A room you can go into with a door that can lock so you are safe.
- Car keys hidden so you can drive away.

If your life or someone else's life is in danger right now or you fear being hurt, leave the house and telephone the Police on **000**.

If you think the violence might happen but it hasn't yet, you could call someone you trust who can come and help calm the situation or keep people safe.

It is really bad for the other children in your family to see their brother or sister or parent act violently. Try to send them somewhere safe until the violence stops.

If the violence is happening often, the family or the violent person may need to live elsewhere for a while.

Calling the police

Parents find the idea of calling the police in relation to their children difficult. But if your teenager is behaving violently, then it may be necessary. It can help keep the rest of the family safe and lets the young person know you will not put up with this behaviour.

If the young person is hurting themselves

If your child is telling you they might hurt themselves, don't delay:

Telephone the **Police 000** or the **Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team** (Mental Health Services) at your local public hospital.

Preventing violence

Rules and consequences

Families need to have a clear rule that violence is not ok. The whole family needs to know that if this rule is broken, there will be consequences.

Choose the consequences to match the age of the young person and the level of violence.

Consequences for the young person might be:

- Saying sorry.
- Fixing things that are broken or paying to fix them.
- Helping the hurt or injured person.

If things get out of control, the parents might:

- Call the police
- Ask the police to charge the young person
- Apply for an Intervention Order. This is a legal order that can forbid the young person from:
 - Hurting you and your family
 - Breaking things or wrecking your home.
 - Having guns or other weapons.
 - Entering your home without permission.

If the order is broken the police can be called and asked to make an arrest.

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Before things get bad

Often there is a pattern of violence.

You may feel the mood is getting darker. You know violence is in the air.

If you get this feeling before the violence happens you may be able to stop it.

Make the young person aware of their mood. Then they get a chance to control themselves.

At this stage it might help:

- To talk about how they are feeling.
- To do some activity together out of the house.
- To show care, love and understanding.
- To make a quick change of plans.
- To leave the young person alone for a while.
- To ask them to leave the house.

Sometimes the young person may be looking for an excuse to get angry, to leave the house or to use drugs. Try not to get into a fight. Keep out of the way.

The pattern might always start the same way. Think about how that could be changed. Are there things you or other family members do or say that make the young person feel very angry?

But remember that at the end of the day, the young person is making their own life. You can encourage them to get help but it is not your job to stop them from being violent; that is their job. Your job is to keep yourself and the rest of your family safe.

→ Tips from this Fact Sheet

- Violence is never ok.
- Don't let shame stop you or your child from getting help if one or both of you is violent.
- Violence is a choice.
- A safety plan will help you know what to do if violence happens.
- Call the police if you or your family feels unsafe.
- If your young person is threatening to hurt themselves, call the police on 000 or the Crisis Assessment Team.

→ Related Fact Sheets

- Dealing with Conflict
- Adolescent Development
- Improving Communication
- What are Complex Problems?

→ Useful resources

Parentline

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| VIC | Tel 13 2289 |
| QLD, NT | Tel 1300 301 300 |
| ACT | Tel (02) 6287 3833 |
| TAS | Tel 1300 808 178 |
| WA | Tel 1800 654 432 |
| SA | Tel 1300 364 100 |
| NSW | Tel 1300 1300 52 |

Crisisline

Tel: Tel: 1800 019 116

Crisis Assessment & Treatment Team (CAT Team)
Call your nearest public hospital.

Men's Helpline

Tel 1300 789 978

Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Tel 1800 015 188

Child Protection Crisis Line

Tel 13 12 78

Strong Bonds

Jesuit Social Services
PO Box 1141
COLLINGWOOD VIC 3066
Tel (03) 9415 8700
Email info@strongbonds.jss.org.au
Web www.strongbonds.jss.org.au

