

## **Strong Bonds Fact Sheet:** **Handling the Situation : Dealing with Violence**

Violent behaviour is not okay. If you or your child is reacting violently to situations in your life, you need to find ways to deal with feelings another way, to keep people safe, and reduce violence as much as you can.

Breaking things, damaging property and hitting people are acts of violence. Yelling abuse is also a form of violence. So are threats and intimidation.

### **Where does violence come from?**

Violence is sometimes triggered by strong emotions that overwhelm the person, like anger, fear, hurt, or helplessness. Sometimes people who act violently also hold the belief that they are entitled to act that way, and that other people's feelings don't matter.

Sometimes violent people want to feel some level of power. Sometimes they use it to divert attention from something else.

Some people have trouble controlling their impulses. In some cases this might be because of mental health issues or drug/alcohol use.

### **Strong emotions are hard to handle**

It is difficult to learn how to handle strong emotions. People who react by being violent or abusive may not know how else to handle their emotions, particularly young people, who are still learning.

Young people usually learn these behaviours from the people around them, especially family members. It is harder for young people to learn to handle strong emotions without becoming abusive, if their parents have not learnt self-control themselves. If this is a problem for you, you should get help.

### **What if they cannot help it?**

Regardless of the underlying reasons, violence involves a choice about how to behave. You may feel partly responsible for the problems that are triggering the violent behaviour, or sorry for the young person who is behaving badly. You may know that drug use or mental illness are contributing to their behaviour, and feel they are 'not themselves'. But it is not helpful to allow the violent behaviour to continue. They need to learn other ways to handle their feelings.

### **If you have been abusive**

You may have been abusive towards your child. If this is a pattern in the way you treat them, you need to get help to stop.

If it is in the past, you may need to apologise sincerely, talk it through, hear their feelings, and help them to feel safe now. It may be hard for your child to trust you, and it may take time and support for your child to feel safe and for you both to overcome this barrier in your relationship. Individual or family counselling may help.

If the problem is more urgent contact a support service such as Parentline (**tel: 13 2289**) particularly if you feel that you might abuse your child.

### **If you have fought more recently**

You may have got into a physical fight with your young person out of frustration and helplessness about their behaviour. This is not uncommon, but it is not all right. Sometimes a fight can make you both feel sorry, and bring you closer again for a while. But it can happen again if neither of you learn to handle those feelings in other ways. Next time, someone might get hurt.

If you believe it was a one-off incident, it may be enough to talk about it together and agree that it must not happen again. Otherwise, you need to plan what to do in future to keep everyone safe and change the behaviour.

### Safety plan

You must act to keep you and your family safe. If you know that violence is possible, you will need a safety plan. Put the plan into effect if violence erupts. It could include:

- a code or signal to family members to leave or call a friend or police.
- an exit strategy for other siblings to leave the home.
- a room you can go into with a door that can lock.
- car keys hidden so you can drive away.

If your life or someone else's life is under immediate threat or you fear being hurt, leave the house and call the police.

If the risk is less immediate, you could call someone who can come and help calm the situation or keep people safe.

Exposing other young people or children to violence is very damaging. They may need to go elsewhere until the violence stops, or the violent young person may need to live elsewhere for a while.

### If the young person is substance-affected or psychotic

If your child is highly substance affected (intoxicated or withdrawing) or in a psychotic (out of reality) state, then you are unlikely to be able to reason with them. It may be best to ask them to leave, if that does not seem too dangerous. If this does not work, leave yourself, and call the police or the CAT team.

### Involving police

Parents usually find the idea of calling the police in relation to their child really hard. But it often has a good effect. It can help to keep people safe and defuse the situation. It lets the young person know you will not put up with violence.

Police attending doesn't mean you have to lay charges, or get your child removed from the house. It is about keeping you and them safe. If it happens again, it may be appropriate to increase the consequences for them.

### Threats of suicide or self-harm – call the CAT team

If your child is threatening to hurt themselves, call the police or the Psychiatric Service Crisis Assessment Team (CAT Team) at your local public hospital. The CAT team may be reluctant to come if they think the person is drug affected, but you should clearly tell them of the risk to the young person or others.

### Preventing violence

#### Boundaries and consequences

Everyone needs to know clearly what behaviour is not acceptable. You need to set boundaries and consequences that make it clear that violence is not accepted. Dealing with the consequences of unacceptable behaviour helps young people learn to not act that way.

Consequences depend on the age of the young person, the level of violence, and other factors involved. Consequences range from:

- have them apologise and make amends somehow
- have them fix damage or pay for it
- have them help the family member they hurt
- call the police
- have them charged by police
- apply for an Intervention Order (they may or may not live in the home)
- enforce the Intervention Order

### When tension is building

Often there is a cycle of violence. You may feel the tension building towards an outburst. If you notice when tension is building, you can try to defuse it.

You might be able to make the young person aware of their mood so they get a chance to control themselves. It might help to say that you can see they are getting angry and offer to talk about it, or suggest another activity.

A joke or distraction might work, or it might help to give them space. If you know what has triggered the mood, it can help if you show understanding and sympathy.

Sometimes the young person may be on edge, unconsciously looking for an excuse to get angry with you or to leave the house or use drugs. Try not to buy into the fight. Ignore them, or keep out of their way for a while.

You might notice that certain things act as triggers for the cycle to start. If so, you may be able to find ways to stop those things from happening.

At the end of the day, the young person is responsible for his/her own behaviour. It is not your responsibility to stop them from being violent; it is their responsibility. You need to feel safe and keep other family members safe.

**In a crisis moment**

Sometimes the way you react can help to defuse a potentially violent moment. It is good to use firm, short statements, such as: "Can you take some long breaths" or "Let's both calm down and sort it out". Use a calm, low voice. Say their name. Make good eye contact; soft and gentle. Use firm body language, not scared or aggressive. Breathe slowly and deeply. Position yourself near a door so you can leave if you need to. Try not to make the young person feel caged in; give the young person personal space and let them also have access to a door so they can leave if they need to. If the aggression continues to escalate, put your safety plan into action.

**For Help Contact:**

- Mens Helpline  
**1300 789 978**
- Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service  
**1800 015 188**
- Women's Information Referral and Exchange (WIRE)  
**1300 134 130**
- Parentline  
**13 2289**
- Lifeline  
**131114**
- Child Protection 24 hr Emergency Service  
**131278**
- DirectLine (for alcohol & drug issues)  
**1800 888 236**
- For Mental Health Services in your area check the following website: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/index.htm>



**Tips from this Help Sheet**

- Violence is never okay.
- Abuse towards children is never okay. If this has happened, you need to get help to stop.
- Violent behaviour is a choice.
- You may need a safety plan. This will help you know what to do if violence erupts.
- Call the police if you need to.
- If your child is threatening to harm themselves, call the police or Crisis Assessment Team



**Related Help Sheets**

- Keeping Calm
- Feeling Blamed
- Setting Boundaries
- Improving Communication
- Need a Helping Hand?





→ **Strong Bonds**  
Jesuit Social Services  
PO Box 1141  
Collingwood Victoria 3066

Tel (03) 9415 8700  
Email [info@strongbonds.jss.org.au](mailto:info@strongbonds.jss.org.au)  
Web [www.strongbonds.jss.org.au](http://www.strongbonds.jss.org.au)

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