

Understanding Family and Domestic Violence

Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) can affect anyone and often develops slowly, making it hard to recognise at first. At its core, FDV is about power, control and fear, not just physical harm. Here are some strategies to navigate FDV if you or a loved one is experiencing violence.

Identifying Family and Domestic Violence: Abuse can be emotional, psychological, financial, sexual or carried out through technology. These behaviours can slowly undermine a person's safety, confidence and sense of self. People experiencing FDV may start to feel anxious or on edge, as though they're constantly trying to avoid conflict or "keep the peace." Friends or colleagues might notice changes too such as withdrawal, visible stress, or fear around a partner or family member. Abuse thrives in silence, and these early signs are often opportunities to reach out gently.

Who is most likely to be affected : FDV can occur in any family, relationship or community. It does not discriminate against race, religions or gender and can occur to people in intimate relationships and those who are not. Statistically, FDV is most often committed by men against women. However, there are some groups that experience higher rates of FDV than others. These include women who are pregnant or separated, people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ individuals and older people. Many people belong to more than one of these groups which increases their risk.

How to support someone who may be experiencing Family and Domestic Violence

Start a conversation gently: Choose a private, calm moment and share your concern with care. You don't need to know the full story. Simply acknowledging that you've noticed someone seems distressed or withdrawn can open a safe doorway for them to talk when they feel ready.

Listen and believe them: Always listen without judgement. People living with abuse often fear they won't be believed or feel shame and isolation. Reassure them that you take their experiences seriously and that what's happening is not their fault.

Follow their lead: Leaving or changing an unsafe relationship is complicated and can be dangerous. Instead of urging them to act quickly, support them in making safe decisions. Trust that they understand their situation best and do not pressure them to make a decision that could be risky.

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How to support someone who may be experiencing Family and Domestic Violence cont.

Offer practical and emotional help: Support can mean offering childcare, helping with transport, checking in regularly, or being someone they can talk to without fear. Practical help can ease immediate stress, while emotional presence helps them feel less alone.

Encourage connection to professional support: These situations are unique and sensitive so require tailored guidance. There are many services that provide confidential, personalised support. Suggest contacting specialised services such as 1800RESPECT, or a counselling service for safety, planning and emotional support. If someone is ever in immediate danger, call 000. Look after yourself too: Supporting someone through abuse can be emotionally heavy. Reach out for support yourself if you need it, such as counselling or speaking with a trusted person.

Strategies if you're experiencing Family and Domestic Violence

You are not to blame: Abusive behaviour is a choice made by the person using violence. Nothing you did or didn't do caused it. You deserve to feel safe, respected and supported.

Talk to someone you trust: If it feels safe, reaching out to someone you trust can help lighten the emotional burden. You don't need to tell them everything but letting someone know you're struggling can be a powerful step.

Reach out to professional support: There are services available to walk alongside you and help create supports to suit your situation. A counsellor can offer tailored emotional support and services can offer guidance. If there is immediate danger, call 000.

Make a safety plan that suits your situation: A safety plan can help you prepare for moments of risk. This may include keeping important documents in a safe place, identifying a friend's house you could go to, or knowing how to call for help quickly. A counsellor can help you create a safety plan privately and confidentially.

Consider your wellbeing: Living with fear or control can take a toll on your mental and physical health. Try to prioritise moments of rest and connection when possible. Whether it's speaking with a counsellor, practising calming techniques, or simply reminding yourself that your feelings are valid, wellbeing practices are important and impactful.

Take things at your own pace: There is no "right" time or way to seek safety. Every step you take can create change; the critical part is doing it safely.

Helpful resources:

Women's Domestic Violence Helpline: 1800 007 339

Men's Domestic Violence Helpline: 1800 000 599

1800RESPECT: <https://1800respect.org.au/>