

Family Violence puts Children at Risk

Child Protection Information Sheet

Why should we be worried about violence in the home when children have not been physically hurt?

There is increasing evidence that children are affected by violence in their families even if they are not actually hurt or even present when an incident takes place. These are some of the findings of contemporary research (notably Bagshaw and Chung, Partnerships Against Domestic Violence and Domestic Violence Clearing House):

- **Emotional distress and/or mental illness is four times more likely to occur in the children of women who are subjected to abuse, than in children from homes where violence is not present.**
- **Violence against mothers during childhood is strongly associated with ongoing depression in adolescent girls.**
- **If trauma continues unresolved or unhealed the consequences can typically include: aggressive behavioural disturbances, poor academic performance, poor peer relations, regressive behaviours and low self esteem.**
- **Infants show clear neurological disturbances in response to intimate partner violence from at least 6 weeks of age.**
- **There is a large body of research that indicates that the development of a child's nervous system can be affected by prolonged family violence in a similar way to the impact of inescapable shock, war or abduction.**
- **Initial reactions to family violence by children are often avoidant and dissociative in nature. This can be misleading as withdrawn behaviour can be misunderstood as 'quiet' and 'well behaved'.**
- **Family violence combines the impacts of inescapable shock with an acute or chronic deprivation of sensitive care-giving. The latter, as much as the former, can be the catalyst for negative psychological and/or developmental impacts. This can have a significant impact on the attachment between children and their primary caregiver.**
- **The home can become a place where the actions of all adult caregivers become 'angry' and 'unthinking'. The non-abusive partner in the relationship (generally the mother) sometimes can be rendered incapable of meeting the emotional, and other, needs of her children due to the effects of family violence.**

What is being done about this in Tasmania?

The impact and the cost of violence in the home to individuals and the community of violence has been recognised and a strong stand is being taken across government agencies to work to address this serious issue. The *Family Violence Act 2004* recognises the

importance of providing protection and support to children and young people as well as adult survivors of family violence.

Child Protection legislation has also included exposure to family violence within the definitions of 'risk of child abuse' to children.

As part of Tasmania's *Safe at Home* response to family violence, the DHHS Family Violence Counselling and Support Service (FVCSS) provides assistance to victims of family violence and affected children and young people. These services are free and include:

- Information on family violence and its impact on adults, young people and children;
- Individual support and counselling for victims of family violence including affected children; and
- Group work programs for adult victims and affected children and young people.

Who is eligible for this service?

Services are free and voluntary. They are available to anyone who needs support or information because their partner or ex-partner is, or has been, violent or abusive to them. People can self-refer, or be referred by another person or service. Services are available to people in heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

Children and young people can be referred by their protective parent, the Police, the Court Support and Liaison Service, the Child Witness Program, a non-government agency or by a Family Violence Worker who is already working with their parent. Other children and young people will be referred via Child Protection Services.

How can the service be accessed?

The Family Violence Counselling and Support Service has offices in Burnie, Launceston and Hobart. Weekday hours are 9-5. Appointments can also be made to see clients in other locations.

An extended-hours service is also provided for adults and operates weekdays (until midnight), weekends and public holidays (4.00pm - midnight).

The adult counselling and support service in each region can be accessed via 1800 608 122. The regional children's services can be contacted via:

North West 1800 608 122
North 1800 608 122
South (03) 6233 6981

If someone is at risk or in danger, call the 24 hour Family Violence Response Referral Line on 1800 633 937, or 000 in an emergency.

Further information on the impact of family violence on children can be accessed through the following websites:

www.safeathome.tas.gov/home;
www.justice.tas.gov.au/victims/child_witness_services and
www.women.tas.gov.au/safety/children.