

Family Violence

Family violence is any threatening, coercive, dominating or abusive behaviour that occurs between people in a family, domestic or intimate relationship, or former intimate relationship, that causes the person experiencing the behaviour to feel fear. Safe Steps n.d.

Family violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour which may involve physical, sexual, emotional abuse and/or neglect within a family context. Irrespective of whether the abuse is directed toward the child or young person, being a witness to family violence is distressing and harmful, and may result in significant physical and emotional trauma.

FAMILY VIOLENCE BEHAVIOURS

Possible behaviours that characterise family violence include:

- coercion and control
- physical abuse
- emotional abuse including verbal abuse such as name-calling, threats of harm, yelling, screaming
- sexual abuse
- financial abuse
- spiritual or cultural abuse
- stalking
- isolating the child or young person from others.

“I love my mum and dad but they were shocking providers and carers. They used to smash each other in our house. We were never beaten ourselves but when they hit each other they might as well have been hitting us with a baseball bat.”

Jimmy Barnes (quoted in Bennett 2016)

“It was the stuff that I had known since I was a child, but I had hidden it away, locked it away and tried not to think about it and tried not to feel it.”

Jimmy Barnes (quoted in Pryor 2016)

PHYSICAL INDICATORS

Possible physical indicators of family violence include:

- physical injuries (see also physical indicators of physical abuse in **INFORMATION SHEET: Child Physical Abuse**)
- failure to thrive (e.g. delays in development)
- speech difficulties (e.g. speech delay).

BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Possible behavioural indicators of family violence include:

- violent or aggressive behaviour
- depression and anxiety (e.g. self-harm, suicidal behaviour)
- over-compliance or passivity
- fear of the perpetrator(s)
- withdrawal
- wariness
- acting out (e.g. cruelty to animals, violence toward peers)
- regressive behaviours (e.g. bed wetting, soiling)
- demanding or attention-seeking behaviours
- disengagement from school, academic difficulties

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- taking a caretaker role in relation to other family members (e.g. protecting and caring for other family members, cleaning up after the incident, providing first aid to family members)
- significant conflict with parents
- hiding or running away from the abuse
- reluctance to go home
- alcohol or substance abuse.

Research has consistently found that children who are exposed to family violence have higher levels of emotional and behavioural problems than children who have not. Children who are in violent homes are also at a greater risk of physical abuse or having their physical and emotional needs neglected.

Given the often multidimensional nature of family violence, it is likely that children and young people may be experiencing a combination of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect; consequently, there may be relevant indicators listed in each abuse category.

The Preamble to the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic) recognises that family violence 'is a fundamental violation of human rights and is unacceptable in any form' and that 'family violence is not acceptable in any community or culture'.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Safe Steps (Family Violence Response Centre) is a state-wide service for women, young people and children experiencing family violence.

phone: 1800 015 188 (24 hours, 7 days)

website: www.safesteps.org.au.

Child FIRST links vulnerable families, children and young people with relevant services. Child FIRST teams are located across Victoria. Contact information for each region can be found at

<https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support-teams>

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation provides the Children Ahead program of intensive and therapeutic support to help children recover from significant trauma or violence.

phone: 9697 0666

website: <https://www.amf.org.au/what-we-do/children-ahead>

REFERENCES

Bennett, R 2016, 'Jimmy Barnes calls for conversation on domestic violence', *Manly Daily*, 12 October.

Family Court of Australia 2013, *Exposure to family violence and its effect on children*, Child Dispute Services INFORMATION SHEET.

www.federalcircuitcourt.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/04ecefcd-dcd0-433c-9b9f-43ac3f67b63d/FS_ExposureFVeffectonchildren_1113V3a.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORLDKSPACE-04ecefcd-dcd0-433c-9b9f-43ac3f67b63d-IC5FXzW

Pryor, S 2016, 'Rock star Jimmy Barnes tells audience his revealing memoir about abusive childhood is already helping others', *Canberra Times*, 23 September.



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Safe Steps n.d., *What is family violence?*

www.safesteps.org.au/understanding-family-violence/what-is-family-violence

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