

If you feel that you are not coping with your child or that their behaviour is worsening or dangerous it is important to get help and support as soon as possible. You can speak with your IDVA, a teacher, your health visitor, your midwife or your GP.

All of the above agencies have a duty of care to you and your child. If your child is considered at significant risk of harm then these agencies may have to share information with each other. Where possible, we, and they, will attempt to get your permission to share information. In some cases though, we may need to share information without your permission if it would put your

### Other factsheets in this series

- Leaflet 1** Pregnancy and domestic abuse
- Leaflet 1a** You, your child and domestic abuse
- Leaflet 2** Parenting Babies under 18 months
- Leaflet 3** Parenting Toddlers (18 -24 months)
- Leaflet 4** Parenting Preschool Children
- Leaflet 5** Parenting 5 - 12 year olds
- Leaflet 6** Parenting Teenagers
- Leaflet 7** Separation, Moving home & Contact
- Leaflet 9** Communicating with your child about domestic abuse. What children need to hear from the victim
- Leaflet 10** Successful Parenting

You can access these factsheets and find out more information about domestic abuse at the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership website

[www.cambsdasv.org.uk](http://www.cambsdasv.org.uk)

Cambridge Women's Aid **01223 361214**  
(City/South Cambs)  
Refuge **07787 255821**  
(Fenland, East Cambs, Hunts)

Children's Social Care (Cambridgeshire)  
**0345 045 5203**  
Specialist abuse services for children  
& young people (Peterborough) **01733 669404**



**Cambridgeshire  
& Peterborough**  
Domestic Abuse & Sexual  
Violence Partnership

## What children learn when they experience domestic abuse



**Leaflet 8**

## **WHAT CHILDREN LEARN WHEN THEY EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC ABUSE**

This leaflet is one of a series of ten. They are designed to give you information on how domestic abuse may impact on your children and how you can help your child to overcome the effects of domestic abuse.

Leaflet 8 - Children who experience domestic abuse and/or violence can often have a skewed view on relationships and how people should behave with each other. It is very important that you understand what your child's belief systems are about abuse and how to help them overcome negative beliefs and explore healthy relationships. This leaflet will briefly explore what children can learn when they have witnessed domestic abuse and encourage you to think about how the abuse has impacted on your children directly.

It is important that you begin to think of your children as inside the abusive situation and affected by it in many different ways and acknowledge how they will have felt during an incident of abuse and/or violence.

## **SOME OF THESE FEELINGS MAY INCLUDE:**

**Scared**  
**Powerless**  
**Confused**  
**Bad**  
**Helpless**  
**Angry**  
**Self Blaming**  
**Anxious**  
**Guilt at loving the abusive parent**  
**Guilt at not being able to protect you**

**Worried about the future**  
**Insecure**  
**Hopeless**  
**Split down the middle**  
**Numb**

Children experience all of the emotions that we as adults experience. However, they are less knowledgeable about their world than adults. Situations that we may see as manageable may seem insurmountable to them. Without us talking to them about abuse, they can be left with the feelings discussed above and no way to make sense of their situation, emotions and thoughts. If we don't talk to our children about the abuse they have experienced they may develop belief systems about the world that are untrue.

### **THEY MAY LEARN:**

**Other people are responsible for my behaviour (it is my sister's fault that I hit her because she wouldn't do what I said)**  
**I am responsible for other people's behaviour (my mum and dad had a fight and she was cross. She wouldn't have hit me if my room had been clean)**  
**Men have the right to control women (my mum never stops him)**  
**Violence is a way to solve problems (my dad hit my mum because tea wasn't ready on time)**  
**The abuse/violence was my mum's fault**  
**Women have no rights**  
**My mum can't protect me**  
**Nothing is safe**  
**Domestic abuse/violence is normal**  
**If I intimidate people I will get what I want**  
**Other people have the right to abuse me**  
**The abuse was my fault**  
**It's ok to abuse my mum**

**It's ok to abuse other people**  
**You should not talk about abuse/violence**  
**You must deny your own feelings**

It is very important that you speak with your child and allow them to tell you how they have felt about the abuse. Without talking, they also get unrealistic beliefs about the causes of abuse which are listed above. You can begin to work with them on their negative beliefs and views on people and relationships.

## **BELOW ARE SOME THINGS THAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP THEM:**

**Talk to them when they are ready**  
**Listen to them**  
**Talk about their feelings**  
**Show understanding**

It's a lot scarier for children when no one talks to them about the abuse. The benefits of talking to our children about domestic abuse and/or violence are that they feel safer, learn that abuse is not their fault, that it is never ok, it also helps them feel cared for and that it is ok to talk about feelings. The Leaflet entitled "Communicating with children about domestic abuse: What children need to hear from the victim" will help you to understand how to talk to your children further about your experiences.