

## Domestic Abuse and Your Children

If you are being abused by your partner/ex-partner, your children are likely to be affected. They may also be abused by your partner, or they may be hurt trying to protect you. Even if they are not hurt directly, they will almost certainly be aware of what is going on, however hard you try to hide the abuse. Sometimes abusive men use the children as part of the abuse by trying to turn them against you. This can be very distressing for you and the children.

It is important to remember that you are not responsible for the abuse. Your abusive partner is responsible. But you are responsible for getting help both for your own sake and for the sake of your children. You will not be blamed for asking for help.

It can be very hard to decide what is the best thing to do. Many women leave abusive partners because of the abuse, and many women stay with



abusive partners 'for the sake of the children'. But children will feel more secure with one parent in a stable environment than with two parents where there is abuse. It may be hard to meet your own needs as well as your children's needs so it is important to ask for help. There are many services which can help.

### Effects of domestic abuse on children

Children and young people can be affected by domestic abuse in many ways including:

- Anxiety, difficulty sleeping and nightmares
- Bed wetting
- Physical symptoms such as tummy ache and headaches
- Temper tantrums and aggression
- Depression and withdrawal
- Problems at school



*"Your children have the right to a good life."*

There are many things you can do to support your children and most find ways to recover from what's happened. Just because your child sees you being abused does **not mean** that they will grow up to abuse others.

### What you can do for your children:

- Ask for help
- Encourage your children to talk to you about what they are feeling. Talking to your children about the abuse can be hard for you so make sure you have someone you can speak to as well
- Listen to what your children say to you
- Reassure them that they are not to blame and explain that abuse is wrong
- Be aware that children may start to tell you things and express their feelings once they feel safe, this can be upsetting for you and for them
- Encourage your children to be children – many children want to look after their mums but it's your job to look after them

## Your Children

- Tell your children about places they can get more information such as The Hideout at [www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk), Childline 0800 1111 and the services listed in leaflet 12.
- Speak to your child's school/nursery so that they are aware of what is happening at home and can support your child
- Speak to your health visitor or any other health professionals involved with your child

### Referral to Children's Reporter

If the police are called to a domestic abuse incident and there are children in the household they will automatically refer the children to the Children's Reporter (see leaflet 11).

### Leaving a violent partner

If you leave a violent partner, it may not be possible for you to get away with all the children. But be aware that this may make it difficult for you to get the children back later. You and your children are entitled to safe temporary and permanent accommodation (see leaflet 3). You may get help to pay travel costs so your children can continue to go to their usual school.



### Residence and contact after separation

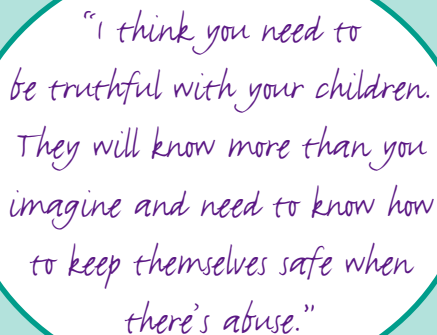
If you have children, they are most likely to live with you after you leave a violent partner. They may want to continue to see him and vice versa. It may be possible to make an arrangement that you all feel comfortable with.

However, if there is conflict, it may be necessary to go to court to decide who the children will live with (residence) and how often they will see the other parent (contact).

Your ex-partner may go to court to get residence (custody) or contact (access). The key point in law is what meets the best needs of the children. Only children over 12 have the right to be consulted by the court. The law says that domestic abuse has to be taken into account when arranging contact with children.

If the court agrees to award residence or allow a father contact with children, you must cooperate with the court. Get advice from a solicitor about appealing court decisions (see leaflet 7).

Be aware that abuse can continue after separation. Your ex-partner may use contact with the children as a way of maintaining control over you and the children. If your partner continues to abuse you after a court order giving him contact, you can ask a solicitor to apply for a Child Welfare Hearing.



*"I think you need to be truthful with your children. They will know more than you imagine and need to know how to keep themselves safe when there's abuse."*

Family Mediation (see leaflet 12) can help to arrange venues for contact and can make arrangements to ensure your and your children's safety.



### **Kidnapping**

If there is any risk that your partner/ex-partner might kidnap your children or might not give them back after contact, **see a solicitor immediately and contact the police if there is an immediate threat.**

### **Support from East Lothian Women's Aid**

East Lothian Women's Aid can support you and your children. It is experienced in working with women, children and young people. Specialist children's workers can help children and young people wherever they live in East Lothian. They can provide support during school hours and after school in local community centres. They offer space to talk to help young people make sense of what's happening, work through their feelings and feel happier. Your child can contact the young people's service direct or you can contact it on their behalf. Phone/text on 07804 877972 or email [cyp@elwa.uk.com](mailto:cyp@elwa.uk.com)

There are many other services for you and for young people in East Lothian (see leaflet 12 on sources of help and support).

**Phone the Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline in confidence  
on 0800 027 1234 any time, day or night.**

Domestic abuse: there's no excuse

**2008**