



Ideas for Parents

How to Help Children Who Have Been Exposed to Family Violence

Children who are exposed to family violence believe that it is okay to hit others when feeling angry or upset. Most children believe they are responsible for the fighting in their home and feel they could have somehow prevented the violence. They believe that inequality in adult relationships is common in all families.

How you can make a difference with children who have been exposed to family violence

1. Establish a caring and trusting relationship.
2. Be available to talk and listen.
3. Acknowledge and explore feelings (e.g. angry, sad, happy, scared, confused).
4. Never assume that you understand children's feelings and/or actions. Replace assumptions with questions (e.g. Why do you think that your stomach feels sick today?).
5. Be patient, as children often share thoughts and feelings over a long period of time.
6. Explain that children are not responsible for adult behaviour or for taking care of other family members.
7. Discuss behavioural choices and who is responsible for violent behaviour within the family home.
8. Model respectful behaviour.
9. Replace loud, angry discipline with calm and clear choices (e.g. You may pick up your toys by yourself or ask for my help.).
10. Encourage discussions about healthy family interactions and conflict resolution, feelings and safety strategies.
11. Encourage children to watch non-violent TV shows.
12. Help build self-esteem and feelings of self-worth by noticing and commenting on strengths.
13. Be informed and share information about where to get help (e.g. phone 911, child welfare agencies, shelters, children's mental health agencies, etc.).
14. Place anti-violence pictures and messages in areas where children will notice them.
15. Never give up!