

# Safe from violence

A guide for women who are separating  
or leaving a relationship



*Relationships Australia.*

## Authors

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation that has been providing family and relationship support services since 1948. Our services are for all members of the community, regardless of their religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

We're committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people. We acknowledge First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways of Australia and support their right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma. We recognise those who had children taken away from them.

## Acknowledgements

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## About this booklet

Making changes can be difficult. The authors encourage you to seek professional help if you feel you are being controlled, manipulated and/or exposed to physical and psychological family violence. Trust yourself and your instincts when making decisions about the safety of you and your children.

If you need immediate help or are in danger, call 000. For free and confidential information, advice and safety planning or to talk to a trained counsellor, call 1800RESPECT 24/7 on 1800 737 732.

This booklet can be read from beginning to end, or flipped through. It includes input from women who have experienced violence in relationships. Keep this booklet in a safe place for your reference.

## Support services

This booklet was developed in Victoria and many of the services detailed are state-specific. For other services in other states and territories, please call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit your state or territory government's website.

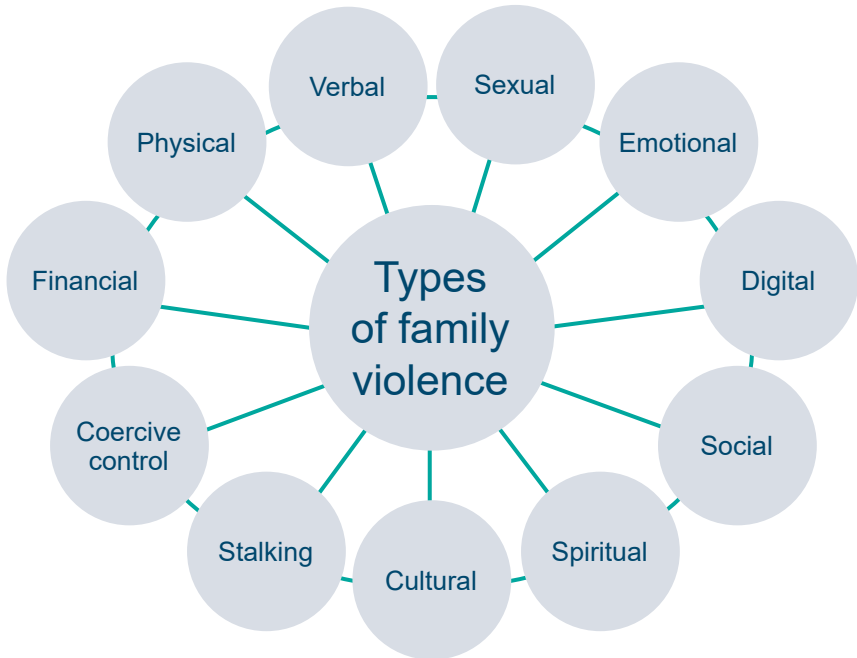
# What is family violence?

Family violence involves a pattern of abusive behaviour within a family or intimate relationship that seeks to control, dominate, or cause fear and intimidation. It can include physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, social, financial, and spiritual abuse, as well as stalking and coercive control.

**If you are experiencing any form of family violence, it is important to know that you are not to blame and that help and support is available.**

Family violence is not limited to physical harm; it encompasses any behaviour that instils fear, diminishes autonomy, or isolates a person from support.

Family violence is a crime, and the responsibility lies solely with the perpetrator. If you are experiencing any form of family violence, it is important to know that you are not to blame and that help and support are available.



**Family violence is a deliberate act and is rarely an isolated event. Over time, the violence tends to become more frequent and severe.**

## Physical abuse

Physical abuse involves any intentional act causing injury or trauma to another person through bodily contact. This can include hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, or using objects to inflict harm.

Physical abuse is a crime and may occur alongside other forms of abuse to control and intimidate the victim survivor.

## Verbal abuse

Verbal abuse includes the use of words to cause emotional harm. This can take the form of name calling, undermining parenting decisions, shouting and yelling, threats, insults, or constant criticism aimed at belittling and controlling the victim survivor. Verbal abuse can have emotional impacts and often occurs alongside other forms of abuse.

## Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves any forced or unwanted sexual activity. It includes rape, coerced sexual acts, and any sexual behaviour that makes a person feel uncomfortable, scared, or threatened. It may involve making you dress in a way that you are not comfortable with or being told to perform certain acts that you are not comfortable with.

Sexual abuse and sexual assault result in experiencing trauma and are a violation of a person's ability to feel safe. Sexual abuse and sexual assault are considered crimes and can be dealt with through the justice process.

'It was like a light bulb coming on! When he puts me down and calls me names in front of our friends that's abusive.'

## Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the systematic undermining of an individual's sense of self-worth and mental health. It can include manipulation, intimidation, humiliation, and persistent undermining of confidence.

Gaslighting, a tactic where the perpetrator manipulates the victim survivor into questioning their own reality, is a common part of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse includes deliberately withdrawing affection, using children as leverage, threatening pets, or hinting at physical harm. Emotional abuse can be as damaging as physical abuse, leading to long-term psychological harm.

## Social abuse

Social abuse aims to isolate the victim survivor from family, friends, and community, and limit their perspectives about the pattern of abuse they are experiencing.

Social abuse includes controlling where the victim survivor goes, making it difficult to see friends and family, and limiting their social interactions with people in their workplace. Isolating the victim survivor from their support networks makes it harder for them to seek help or to leave the abusive situation.

## Financial abuse

Financial abuse involves controlling a person's access to financial resources, making them financially dependent on the perpetrator. This can include controlling bank accounts, forbidding or forcing employment, limiting access to money or forcing you to get a bank loan. Financial abuse can trap victim survivors in abusive relationships by making them financially insecure.

## Spiritual abuse

Spiritual abuse involves the misuse of religious or spiritual beliefs to control, manipulate, or harm the victim survivor. This can include using religion to justify abuse, restricting religious practices, or belittling the victim survivor's spiritual beliefs.

## Digital or technological abuse

This involves the use of technology to track, monitor, control, harass, or intimidate the victim survivor. This can include cyberstalking, monitoring communications, sharing intimate images without consent (revenge porn), and using GPS or spyware to track the victim survivor's location. See pages 21-22 for more information.



## Cultural abuse

Cultural abuse exploits or undermines a person's cultural identity within family or intimate relationships. It includes behaviours such as belittling cultural traditions, coercing assimilation, isolating from cultural communities, distorting cultural norms, and using cultural roles to control. This form of abuse can erode identity, cause isolation, and create barriers to seeking help.

## Stalking

Stalking is a pattern of repeated, unwanted contact that causes fear or concern for safety. It can include following, monitoring, surveillance of and harassing the victim survivor, both in person and through digital means. Stalking is a crime and a form of coercive control.

## Coercive control

Coercive control involves perpetrators using patterns of abusive behaviours over time in a way that creates fear and denies liberty and autonomy of the victim survivor. This can include isolation, manipulation, monitoring, threats, and usually begins with tactics like love bombing to create emotional dependency very early in the relationship. Coercive control is a criminal offence and can often precede and include physical violence.

# Are you experiencing family violence?

If you feel scared, controlled, or threatened by a family member or partner, you may be experiencing family violence. It is important to trust your feelings and reach out for help.

Everyone's background and experiences are unique, and no matter how you identify or perceive the severity of your situation, support and information is available.

Confidential assistance can help you understand your options and guide you through the process. Depending on your circumstances, you may need to access multiple services to address all your needs. Specialist services are bound by confidentiality and privacy policies and regulations.

All support services are trained in trauma-informed approaches to assisting you. They can provide information about family violence, collaborate with you to create a safety plan, and help in planning your next steps.

## Emergency situations

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, always call emergency services on 000 for urgent assistance.

## Services that can help



### 1800RESPECT (Australia-wide)

- **24/7 Crisis Support:** National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service. Provides 24/7 phone and online counselling, information, and referrals. Available in multiple languages through interpreter services.
- **Contact:** 1800 737 732 or visit [1800respect.org.au](https://www.1800respect.org.au)

### Safe Steps (Victoria)

- **24/7 Crisis Support:** Offering immediate counselling support through a phone helpline and online chat for those in urgent need.
- **Emergency Accommodation:** Arranging safe crisis accommodation for individuals and families escaping violence.
- **Safety Planning:** Helping create personalised plans to enhance safety for those at risk.
- **Advocacy:** Supporting victim survivors to navigate legal and social systems, including obtaining intervention orders.
- **Referrals:** Connecting individuals to additional support services, such as counselling, legal aid, and financial assistance.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 015 188 or visit [safesteps.org.au](https://www.safesteps.org.au)

## The Orange Door (Victoria)



- A free Family Violence Support Service that operates during business hours Monday-Friday (9am-5pm).
- You can phone or visit any Orange Door location. Each location offers the same help and support. For a list of all Orange Door locations and phone numbers, please visit: [orangedoor.vic.gov.au/support-near-you](https://orangedoor.vic.gov.au/support-near-you)
- **Contact:** Visit [orangedoor.vic.gov.au](https://orangedoor.vic.gov.au) for more information and resources. The website often includes details about how to access their services, eligibility criteria, and answers to frequently asked questions.
- You don't need a referral from a professional to receive support from the orange door as it is a voluntary service. Other professionals can make a referral on your behalf, with your consent. These include health professionals, support services, or community organisations.

## Victoria Police

- The police have departments and teams that cater to diverse groups experiencing family violence including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning and asexual community members.
- **Contact:** Call your local police station for more information by visiting [police.vic.gov.au/contact](https://police.vic.gov.au/contact) or **call 000 in an emergency.**

‘I hadn’t wanted to admit it, even to myself. But in the end I stood in front of the mirror and said “Yes, you are a victim of domestic violence and you are going to do something about it.”’





# Different kinds of family violence

## Adolescents using family violence

Adolescent family violence involves young people using abusive behaviours towards parents, siblings, or other family members. This can include all types of the violence this booklet has discussed and requires a sensitive and trauma-informed approach to address underlying issues and provide appropriate support. There are services that can support the adolescent using violence and support you and affected family members with your safety.

‘Having to lie in my own bed at night and not go to sleep...[being] scared that your own child is going to come in and do you some harm during the night is no way to live, so I had to do something about that.’

- Mother of 15-year-old girl

## Services that can help



### Anglicare – Meridian Youth and Family Therapy Team (Victoria)

- Provides therapeutic support for the whole family, including the adolescent using violence.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 809 722 or visit [anglicarevic.org.au/our-services/family-violence/adolescent-violence-in-the-home](https://anglicarevic.org.au/our-services/family-violence/adolescent-violence-in-the-home)

### Uniting Vic. Tas, The Australian Childhood Foundation and EACH – Walking Together (Victoria)

- Uses therapeutic approaches with young people using violence that support healthy expression of emotions in the home.
- **Contact:** Call (03) 8792 8999

### Mackillop Family Services – Safe Relationships Program (Victoria)

- Supports young people who have a history of, or are at risk of, using violence at home or in a dating context, to reduce their use of violence and support therapeutic healing.
- **Contact:** Call on (03) 9699 9177 or visit [mackillop.org.au/programs/safe-relationships-program](https://mackillop.org.au/programs/safe-relationships-program)

# Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience family violence at higher rates and often face additional barriers in seeking help.

Cultural sensitivity and understanding is crucial in providing effective support and ensuring safety for First Nations women.

Family violence, rape and sexual assault are serious issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Research has shown that incidents of violence against women and children, by both non-Indigenous and First Nations men, continue to increase in communities. Some women may feel a reluctance to report or that they are unable to report the violence to the authorities.

Many First Nations women who have experienced family violence and/or sexual assault have identified difficulties in trying to obtain information, advice or support. Some of these include:

- a history of negative experiences with the legal system, including existing services being unsympathetic or giving unhelpful advice
- limited knowledge of existing services and their roles
- difficulties accessing these services
- a lack of appropriate services
- anxiety about approaching services
- difficulty in disclosing a history of family violence to people who are not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- a lack of trust that the courts will be culturally understanding
- the stigma attached to experiencing family violence, particularly in rural communities.

## Services that can help



### Djirra (Victoria)

- Support for those who are experiencing family violence. Services include legal advice, case management, and support groups.
- **Contact:** 1800 105 303 or visit [djirra.org.au](http://djirra.org.au)

### Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)

- Offers family violence support services including crisis support, case management, and culturally appropriate counselling.
- **Contact:** (03) 9287 8800 or visit [vacca.org](http://vacca.org)

# Violence against people who identify as LGBTIQ+



Individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual or other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQ+) identities may face specific forms of family violence. This can include threats of outing, discrimination, and isolation. Support services are inclusive and respectful of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

## Services that can help



### QLife (Australia-wide)

- Offers free telephone and web-based counselling, referrals and support for LGBTIQ+ people and their families.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 184 527 or visit [qlife.org.au](http://qlife.org.au)

### Rainbow Door (Victoria)

- A free helpline that provides information, support, and referrals to LGBTIQ+ individuals experiencing family violence, mental health issues, and other related problems.
- **Contact:** 1800 729 367, email [support@rainbowdoor.org.au](mailto:support@rainbowdoor.org.au) or visit [www.rainbowdoor.org.au](http://www.rainbowdoor.org.au)

### Thorne Harbour Health (Victoria)

- Offers a range of services, including counselling, support groups, and advocacy for LGBTIQ+ individuals experiencing family violence. They provide confidential and inclusive support tailored to the needs of LGBTIQ+ communities.
- **Contact:** (03) 9865 6700 or visit [thorneharbour.org](http://thorneharbour.org)

### WithRespect (Victoria)

- WithRespect provides specialist LGBTIQ+ family violence services, including counselling, case management, and support for individuals and families. They also offer resources and training for professionals working with LGBTIQ+ clients.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 542 847 or visit [nifvs.org.au/service/w-respect](http://nifvs.org.au/service/w-respect)

### Switchboard Victoria (Victoria)

- Switchboard Victoria runs various programs and services aimed at supporting LGBTIQ+ individuals. This includes a peer-led telephone and web-based counselling service, as well as support and referral services for those experiencing family violence.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 184 527 or visit [switchboard.org.au](http://switchboard.org.au)

# Violence against women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may encounter unique challenges in addressing family violence, such as language barriers, visa dependency and control, cultural stigmas, and isolation. Support services must be accessible and culturally appropriate to effectively assist multicultural women.

## Services that can help



### Refugee Legal (Australia-wide)

- Legal support for refugees and asylum seekers, including those who need family violence support, immigration advice and advocacy.
- **Contact:** Call (03) 9413 0101 or visit [refugeelegal.org.au](https://refugeelegal.org.au)

### InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (Victoria)

- Provides culturally sensitive support, information, and referrals for culturally and linguistically diverse women and children experiencing family violence.
- **Languages:** Offers services in multiple languages and access to interpreters.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 755 988 or visit [intouch.org.au](https://intouch.org.au)

### Legal Aid Victoria (Victoria)

- Offers legal assistance and advice tailored to the needs of culturally and linguistically individuals experiencing family violence.
- **Languages:** Provides interpreters for legal appointments.
- **Contact:** Call 1300 792 387 or visit [legalaid.vic.gov.au](https://legalaid.vic.gov.au)
- If you live outside of Victoria, visit [nationallegalaid.org/contact](https://nationallegalaid.org/contact) to contact legal aid in your state or territory.

**Remember:** You are never to blame for someone else using violence.



# Violence against women with disability

Women with disability are at an increased risk of family violence from intimate partners, family members, paid and unpaid carers, other residents in institutions and disability support workers. They may face additional obstacles in accessing support including the challenge of the perpetrator also being their carer.

## Services that can help



### Disability advocacy services

A disability advocate is able to support the rights of a person with disability and help guide them through the process of addressing their family violence. Specialist family violence organisations are also able to support such as The Orange Door and Safe Steps, as mentioned on pages 5-6.

### Women with Disabilities Victoria (Victoria)

- An organisation led by women with disabilities, for women with disabilities. Provides support, advocacy and can refer to specialist family violence services, and other community organisations.
- **Contact:** Call (03) 9286 7800 or visit [wdv.org.au](http://wdv.org.au)

### People with Disability Australia (Australia-wide)

- A national peak disability rights and advocacy organisation made up of and led by people with disability. Provides information, referrals, advocacy and support.
- **Contact:** Free call 1800 422 015 or visit [pwd.org.au/get-help](http://pwd.org.au/get-help)

### National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline (Australia-wide)

- A free, independent and confidential service for reporting abuse and neglect of people with disability.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 880 052 or visit [jobaccess.gov.au/complaints/hotline](http://jobaccess.gov.au/complaints/hotline)



‘Loyalty is one thing but in the end I realised my constant hopefulness was simply unrealistic.’

# The impact of family violence

Family violence can have profound and long-lasting effects on victim survivors, including physical injuries, mental health issues, and social isolation.

Children exposed to family violence are also at risk of emotional and behavioural problems.

Addressing family violence is critical to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all affected individuals.

‘I coped by trying to keep him happy so he wouldn’t do these things to us. For a long time I believed that it was my fault or the children’s. I cried a lot when he wasn’t home. I lost all my belief in myself. I was totally isolated and spoke to no one about what was happening. I don’t think I really did cope except to hide it from myself and the world.’

‘In the end I realised that you can’t make someone better no matter how much you love them. It is NOT your fault, it is theirs. You are a wonderful person and deserve so much better.’

## How family violence affects children

Children’s exposure to family violence may be direct or indirect. This may include them seeing or hearing family violence directly or being exposed to the aftermath. They may have to be conscious of their behaviour and presence to try and appease the person using violence. Children may be used as a manipulative tool between family members, or children may be neglected.

‘I couldn’t bring my friends home after school anymore in case Dad was in a bad mood.’

‘When the yelling started, I had to take my little sister upstairs and shut the door.’

‘It was pure hell – living like that.’



## Children's responses to family violence

Children can respond to family violence in various ways, depending on their age, personality, and the severity of the violence. It's essential to understand their responses and provide appropriate support.

### Emotional responses

Children may experience fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, or confusion. They may exhibit changes in behaviour, such as withdrawal or aggression.

### Physical responses

Some children may develop physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomach aches, as a result of stress and anxiety caused by witnessing or experiencing violence.

### Developmental impact

Family violence can affect children's development, including their social skills, academic performance, and emotional wellbeing. Early intervention and support are crucial to mitigate long-term effects.

### Coping mechanisms

Children may develop coping mechanisms, such as withdrawing from social activities or becoming overly compliant, to manage the stress of living in a violent environment.

### Need for stability

Providing a stable and nurturing environment is vital for children's recovery and wellbeing. Consistency, routine, and reassurance can help them feel safe and supported.

### Professional support

Seek professional support from child psychologists, counsellors, or therapists who specialise in trauma and children's mental health. They can provide strategies to help children cope and heal.

## Services for children and young people



### Kids Helpline (Australia-wide)

- A free, 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 55 1800 or visit [kidshelpline.com.au](https://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

### headspace (Australia-wide)

- headspace works with young people aged 12 to 25 in need of support with their general health, mental health, education and employment or alcohol and drugs.
- **Contact:** Visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)

# Breaking the silence

Family violence thrives in silence and secrecy. Breaking the silence is a courageous first step towards regaining control and safety. Speak to someone you trust, such as a friend, family member, or a support service. Remember, you are not alone, and there is help available.

'Before I told my best friend about the violence I was shaking inside, I thought I'd be blamed and feel so ashamed. Instead I felt this huge relief! It came as a surprise.'

# Deciding to leave

Deciding to leave an abusive relationship can be a challenging and complex decision. With support, professionals work with you to explore your current risk, what supports, or safety plans you may need to help keep you safe in (including the safety of your children) as well as provide information about services to support your emotional wellbeing.

'After I left I made it very clear to the kids, "Verbally abusing or physically hurting others is not okay."'

**It often takes multiple attempts before someone finally leaves a violent partner.**





# Help along the way



Numerous support services are available to assist you in escaping family violence. These include crisis helplines, counselling, legal advice, and refuges. Reach out to organisations like Safe Steps, which offer 24/7 assistance and support for women and children experiencing family violence.

We've provided information about a range of services on the following pages.

To find more services across Australia, use the 1800RESPECT service directory at [1800respect.org.au/services](https://1800respect.org.au/services)

## Family violence crisis helplines (24/7)

### **1800RESPECT (Australia-wide)**

- Call 1800 737 732
- Visit [1800respect.org.au](https://1800respect.org.au)

### **Safe Steps (Victoria)**

- Call 1800 015 188
- Visit [safesteps.org.au](https://safesteps.org.au)

See page 5 for more information on these services.

## Mental health crisis helplines (24/7)

### **Beyond Blue (Australia-wide)**

- Call 1300 22 4636
- Visit [beyondblue.org.au](https://beyondblue.org.au)

### **Lifeline Australia (Australia-wide)**

- Call 13 11 14
- Visit [lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)

## Refuges and shelters

A women's refuge or shelter is usually a cluster of secure units or rooms.

They offer confidential, safe, secure shelter, for between a couple of days to a few months, as well as a range of other services.

For information on refuges in Victoria, contact Safe Steps on the number listed above. For services in other states and territories, view the 1800RESPECT service directory.



## Financial support

### Centrelink – Family Violence Crisis Payment (Australia-wide)

- Centrelink can provide Crisis Payments for people leaving family violence.
- **Contact:** Visit [servicesaustralia.gov.au/crisis-payment-for-extreme-circumstances-family-and-domestic-violence](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au/crisis-payment-for-extreme-circumstances-family-and-domestic-violence)

### Uniting Vic. Tas – Escaping Violence Payment (Australia-wide)

- Access to cash or cash equivalent and goods and services. This program operates Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Eligibility criteria is listed on the website.
- **Contact:** Visit [unitingvictas.org.au/services/family-services/family-violence-services/escaping-violence-payment/](https://unitingvictas.org.au/services/family-services/family-violence-services/escaping-violence-payment/)

### Specialist Family Violence Services – Flexible Support Packages (Victorian Government)

- Holistic and personalised access to improve safety, wellbeing and independence. Flexible support packages must be applied for through a family violence service. Eligibility criteria can be discussed with your worker.
- **Contact:** Visit [vic.gov.au/flexible-support-packages](https://vic.gov.au/flexible-support-packages)

## Child support

### Services Australia (Australia-wide)

- Payments and services to help with the cost of raising a child, and information about child care and child support, including how to apply.
- **Contact:** Visit [servicesaustralia.gov.au/raising-kids](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au/raising-kids)



## Financial counselling

At times, particularly after separation there may be a need for a financial counsellor to assist you by talking about your financial situation. Financial counsellors are available at a variety of services.

### National Debt Helpline (Australia-wide)

- Free and confidential financial counselling.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 007 007 or visit [ndh.org.au](http://ndh.org.au)

### Financial Counselling Victoria (Victoria)

- Free, independent and non-judgemental information, advice, advocacy and support for people experiencing or at risk of financial difficulty.
- **Contact:** Call (03) 9663 2000 or visit [fcvic.org.au](http://fcvic.org.au)

## Legal advice

Understanding your legal rights is essential. Women's Legal Service Victoria and other legal aid services can provide free legal advice and representation. They can help you with intervention orders, custody issues, and other legal matters related to family violence.

### Women's Legal Victoria (Victoria)

- Provides legal advice and assistance, with a focus on family violence. They aim to help you navigate the legal system.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 133 302 or visit [womenslegal.org.au](http://womenslegal.org.au)

### Victoria Legal Aid (Victoria)

- Offers legal assistance and advice tailored to the needs of individuals experiencing family violence.
- **Contact:** Call 1300 792 387 or visit [legalaid.vic.gov.au](http://legalaid.vic.gov.au)
- If you live outside of Victoria, visit [nationallegalaid.org/contact](http://nationallegalaid.org/contact) to contact legal aid in your state or territory.

**Everyone has the right to live free of fear and violence.**

# Family Violence Intervention Orders

A Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO), as it's known in Victoria, is a court order designed to protect you from a family member who is using violence or threats. It can include conditions to stop the perpetrator from approaching you, contacting you, or committing further violence. These orders are enforceable by the police.

FVIOs are known by different names in different states and territories throughout Australia. They have different rules based on each state or territory's laws.

## How do I get a Family Violence Intervention Order?

To get an FVIO, you can apply through the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (online or in person). Legal assistance is available to help you with the application process. If you are in immediate danger, the police can issue a Family Violence Safety Notice, which provides temporary protection until a court can issue an FVIO.

For more information in Victoria, visit [mcv.vic.gov.au/intervention-orders/family-violence-intervention-orders/applying-intervention-order-fvio](https://mcv.vic.gov.au/intervention-orders/family-violence-intervention-orders/applying-intervention-order-fvio)

For more information in other states and territories, contact your local Magistrates' Court.

'I was terrified at the thought of going to court. But the people there really helped me through and explained what I needed to do. Now I have the Order and he knows he is not allowed to come to the house.'  
I feel so relieved!



# Safety plan

A safety plan is a personalised, practical plan to improve your safety while experiencing abuse, preparing to leave, or after leaving. It includes steps to take during violent incidents, safe places to go, and important contacts.

It's vital to develop a comprehensive safety plan, and regularly update and practice it. This includes preparing an emergency bag with essentials, making a list of important contacts, and identifying safe places to go.

Share your safety plan with trusted individuals who can help in an emergency.

## Be prepared to leave

Being prepared to leave an abusive situation is important.

Pack a bag with important documents (such as identification, bank cards, and legal/formal documents), clothes, medications, and any necessary items for you and your children.

On page 20 we provide a checklist that you can use to help prepare your emergency bag. Keep this bag in a safe place or with a safe person where you can easily access it.

You can also use the 1800RESPECT online escape bag checklist: [1800respect.org.au/help-and-support/escape-bag-checklist](https://1800respect.org.au/help-and-support/escape-bag-checklist)



## Safety and children

Ensure your children understand the safety plan and know where to go in an emergency. Teach them how to call 000 and give them a list of trusted contacts. Schools can also be informed about your situation to offer additional support.

## In your safe house/refuge

Once you are in a safe house or refuge, take steps to secure your privacy and safety. Change your phone number, secure your online presence, and inform the staff about any specific threats. Use the support services provided to help you adjust and plan your next steps.

## At work

Informing your employer about your situation can help create a safer work environment. Employers can offer support, such as flexible working arrangements, family violence leave, security measures, and time off for legal or medical appointments. Check if your workplace has policies to support employees experiencing family violence; many provide 20 or more days of family violence leave.

## My emergency bag checklist

- Money, debit and credit cards
- Forms of identification (or certified copies) for me and children (e.g. birth certificates and passports)
- Lease, rental agreement, mortgage papers
- Bank account details
- Insurance papers
- Any medication for me and my children
- Medical records, immunisation details and my Medicare card
- Centrelink information
- Legal papers and copies of Family Violence Intervention Orders
- Pet ownership paperwork
- Clothing and personal hygiene items for me and my children
- A spare key to my house and car
- Mobile phone and charger
- Laptop and laptop charger
- Jewellery and/or other personal treasures



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# Safety and technology

Technology can be a useful tool for staying connected and accessing support, but it can also be used by perpetrators to monitor and control victim survivors. Being aware of how technology can be used against you and taking steps to secure your digital footprint is crucial for your safety.

## Trust your instincts

If you feel unsafe or suspect that the perpetrator is using technology to track or harass you, trust your instincts. Take immediate action to secure your devices and seek professional advice. Your safety and peace of mind are paramount.

## Safety planning

Incorporate technology safety into your overall safety plan. This includes securing your devices, using privacy settings, and being mindful of the information you share online. Regularly update and review your safety plan to adapt to any changes in your situation.

## Passwords and Personal Identification Numbers (PINs)

Use strong, unique passwords and PINs for all your devices and accounts. Avoid using easily guessable information such as birthdays or names. Regularly update your passwords and consider using a password manager to keep track of them securely.

## Safer computers

Ensure the computer you use is secure. Use strong passwords, install anti-virus software, and regularly update your applications. If possible, use a computer that the perpetrator cannot access, such as one at a library or a trusted friend's house.

## Mobile phones

Secure your mobile phone by setting a strong password or PIN. Disable location services and Bluetooth when not in use to prevent tracking.

Consider using a separate phone that the perpetrator does not know about for sensitive communications. Consider tech safety by reading about how to safely set up and activate a new mobile phone. Keep this phone secure and hidden from the perpetrator. Regularly check your phone for any signs of tampering or tracking software.

More information on surveillance apps and tech safety strategies is available here: [techsafety.org.au/resources/resources-women/newphone](https://techsafety.org.au/resources/resources-women/newphone)

## Email, social media and instant messaging accounts

To protect yourself from a perpetrator, create new email and social media accounts they do not know about. Use strong, unique passwords and enable two-factor authentication. Be cautious about accepting requests or messages from unknown individuals.

## Protecting your privacy on social media

- **Review privacy settings:** Adjust settings to limit who can view your posts, friends list, and personal details.
- **Disable geotagging:** Turn off location services to prevent sharing your whereabouts through social media.
- **Avoid sharing personal details:** Avoid posting sensitive information like your routines or future plans.
- **Block and report:** Immediately block and report any accounts that harass or threaten you. Use strong passwords for all accounts.

## Search engines and social media

Be mindful of the information you share on search engines and social media. Regularly search for your name online to see what information is publicly available. Adjust your privacy settings to limit the visibility of your personal information.

## Geotagging

Geotagging attaches location data to photos and posts. Disable geotagging on devices and review social media privacy settings to control who sees your location information.

These steps help safeguard your privacy online and reduce the risk of the perpetrator tracking or contacting you through digital platforms.

## Baby monitors

Be aware that baby monitors can be intercepted. It can be worthwhile to consider using a digital baby monitor with encryption features. Regularly check for any signs of tampering or unusual activity.

## Video devices

If you have security cameras or other video devices, ensure they are secure and not accessible to the perpetrator. Change default passwords, use encryption, and regularly update the firmware. Be cautious about placing cameras in areas where they may compromise your privacy.



## Protecting your information with health and government services

Managing your health and accessing government services safely is essential when experiencing family violence. Here are steps you can take:

- **MyHealthRecord:** Ensure your MyHealthRecord is secure. Update privacy settings and review access logs to monitor who views your health information.
- **Medicare:** Update your Medicare details to a secure address. Notify Medicare if you require special privacy considerations due to family violence.
- **Centrelink:** Inform Centrelink of your situation to access financial support and ensure your details are kept confidential. Consider opting for electronic correspondence to a safe email address.
- **Governmental listings:** If you are listed in any governmental or electoral directories, request to have your details removed or hidden for safety reasons. Contact relevant authorities for assistance.

## Private post boxes and real addresses

Consider using a private post box or a trusted friend's address for your mail to protect your real address. This can help prevent the perpetrator from locating you through your postal information.

## Evidence and reporting abuse or stalking

Keep detailed records of any incidents of abuse or stalking, including dates, times, descriptions, screenshots, emails, text messages, and voicemails. Store these records in a safe place, such as a secure online account or with a trusted friend. This documentation can be crucial if you need to take legal action.

Report any incidents to the police and provide them with the evidence you have collected. Support services can also assist you in documenting and reporting abuse. There are phone applications that can support you to record this information.

# Safe parenting after separating

Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of your children after separating from an abusive partner is crucial. Seek support from professionals who can help you navigate parenting decisions and protect your children from further harm.

## Things you can do to help your children through

Helping your children cope with the impact of family violence requires understanding and support. Reassure them that they are not to blame, listen to their concerns, and provide a stable and nurturing environment. Professional counselling can also be beneficial for children affected by family violence.

## Child safety and the legal system

The legal system prioritises the safety and best interests of children. Family violence can impact custody arrangements and visitation rights. Seek legal advice to understand your rights and options for protecting your children through legal avenues.

## Parenting plans

A Parenting Plan outlines the arrangements for the care and upbringing of children after separation. It includes details such as living arrangements, visitation schedules, and decision-making responsibilities. Parenting Plans can be informal agreements or formalised through the Family Court.

## Help to prepare your parenting plan

Organisations such as Relationships Australia offer assistance in preparing Parenting Plans. They provide mediation services and support you in reaching agreements that prioritise the safety and wellbeing of your children.

## Services that can help



### Relationships Australia (Australia-wide)

- Relationship support services including family dispute resolution (mediation), counselling and family violence support. Relationships Australia has branches across Australia.
- **Contact:** Call 1300 364 277 or visit [relationships.org.au/contact](https://relationships.org.au/contact)

### Family Relationship Advice Line / Family Relationships Online (Australia-wide)

- Information for all families – whether together or separated – about family relationship issues.
- **Contact:** Call 1800 050 321 or visit [familyrelationships.gov.au](https://familyrelationships.gov.au)

## Services that can help



### Family and Federal Circuit Court of Australia (Australia-wide)

- Information and procedural advice, forms, brochures, and referral advice for community and support services. The website includes a free chat.
- **Contact:** Call 1300 352 000 or visit [fccoa.gov.au/contact-us](https://www.fccoa.gov.au/contact-us)

## Parenting Orders

Parenting Orders are legally enforceable arrangements made by the Federal and Family Circuit Court of Australia regarding children's care, welfare, and development. These orders can specify living arrangements, visitation rights, and other parental responsibilities. Seek legal advice to understand how to apply for Parenting Orders.

'My lawyer and the court support staff really helped me understand my rights and my children's rights. Now I feel clearer about how to keep us all safer when the kids see their dad.'

## Breaking a Parenting Order

Violating a Parenting Order is a serious matter and can result in legal consequences. If you have concerns for your children spending time with the other parent seek legal advice immediately. Be sure to document relevant information.

## When family dispute resolutions are involved

Family dispute resolution (FDR) is a mediation process aimed at resolving disputes regarding parenting arrangements without going to court. FDR services can help facilitate constructive discussions and reach agreements that are in the best interests of your children. However, there is also a risk of it being used as part of the violence from the perpetrator. It is recommended to proceed with caution and be sure to engage the right services.

'The day before my appointment I was really nervous but the support worker was great. She really listened and understood what living with him was like for me.'

'I didn't see my ex at all during the mediation. He was in another part of the building and the mediators moved between us.'

# Moving forward

Rebuilding your life after experiencing family violence takes time and support. Focus on your wellbeing, seek counselling if needed, and gradually establish a sense of safety and stability for yourself and your children. You have the strength to create a positive future.

## Remember:

### Your safety comes first

Prioritise your safety and that of your children above all else.



### Document everything

Keep records of incidents, legal documents, and communications related to family violence.



### Seek support

Reach out to support services, friends, and family for emotional and practical support.



### Know your rights

Understand your legal rights and options for protection under Australian law.



# Notes



# Feedback

We welcome feedback that will help us to improve this booklet for other women. If you would like to provide us with feedback or suggestions, please email us at [communications@rav.org.au](mailto:communications@rav.org.au) or provide feedback anonymously via our website [rav.org.au/feedback](http://rav.org.au/feedback)

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Relationships Australia is a leading, not-for-profit provider that supports individuals, couples, families and communities to have safe and respectful relationships.

We provide counselling, family dispute resolution, trauma support, mental health services, and a diverse range of other family and community support, professional training and education programs. These are delivered through a network of over 100 service locations across all Australian states and territories. Our work is informed by more than 75 years of experience and our knowledge of the crucial role of relationships in protecting and enhancing mental health and wellbeing.

As a community-based organisation with no religious affiliations, our services are for all members of the community, regardless of religious beliefs, age, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background or economic circumstances.

*Relationships Australia.*

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[www.relationships.org.au](http://www.relationships.org.au)

1300 364 277