

# Keeping Families Safe Keeps Children Safe

In an ideal world, violence would not exist. Children would not have to witness violence, or be a victim of it. Yet, this is not what happens in the real world. In the real world, children may see their parent hit someone, or being hit, or hear their parent cry after being hit. They might also see fighting, hitting, and yelling in their neighborhoods. This takes a great emotional toll on children.

The list below explains the emotional needs of a child who has violence in their family.

## Feelings

### Child needs to:

- Know that it is normal and OK to feel angry about this.
- Be able to talk about the feelings with someone they trust.
- Be able to express anger in safe ways.
- Learn that it's OK to feel both anger and love toward someone.
- Know it is OK to love their parent even when they hate the behavior they see.
- Know they are not bad if they love the abuser.
- Know that it is OK to love both parents at the same time.

## Safety and Security

### Child needs to:

- Learn ways to keep themselves safe and to have a plan for what to do when there is violence.
- Have a feeling of control in the situation ("I will go over to my neighbors when it happens.").
- Find areas in their lives where they can have control and make plans and decisions.
- Make a safety plan with someone they trust.
- Create structure and stability where they can (daily routines help provide a sense of control).

## Support Systems

### Child needs to:

- Talk about feelings with someone they trust.
- Set up a support system of extended family or friends outside the home.
- Know that the violence is not their fault, and that it is an adult problem for the adults to work out.



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## Support Systems, continued

Children need and deserve to be safe. In an unsafe family, it is best if their parent could leave the situation and take their children to safety. Ideally, children could have adult models of ways to deal with anger and frustration.

It is common to hear from women who are being abused that they stay in a relationship because, “The kids need a father,” or “I want us to be a family.” An important message for all parents in this type of situation is to hear that they can parent alone. Single-family homes can be perceived by society as positive and healthy. The first step is to take action for the children to live in a safe and protected place.

## For More Information

These are people and places that offer help to families in violent situations:

- Washington State Domestic Violence Hotline: 1 (800) 562-6025
- Health care providers
- School counselors
- Children and Family Services: 1 (800) 562-5624
- Children’s Home Society: (253) 854-0700
- Catholic Community Services: (253) 854-0077
- Consejo Counseling & Referral: (206) 461-4880
- Best Beginnings through a Public Health Nurse: (206) 284-0331
- Children’s Response Center: (425) 688-5130
- Harborview Medical Center, Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress: (206) 521-1800
- Children’s Resource Center: (206) 987-2500 or 1 (866) 987-2500 toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children’s Hospital. However, your child’s needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child’s health care provider.



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