



Department for
Community Development

Helpful hints for parents,
families and friends

How to keep children safe

Danger signs

Information about
child abuse and neglect

Ways to help

Protecting Children

Information for parents,
families and friends





*Families have the
most important role
for ensuring the
safety and well being
of their children.*

Keeping our kids safe

Families have the most important role for ensuring the safety and well being of their children. Raising and caring for children is not always easy and all families need support from their friends, families and communities.

Sometimes families have hard times and need extra support to keep their children safe and well. This is the time when help from families, friends and communities are most important. Those close to a child and family can and should help. Sometimes organisations in the community can help too.

This booklet has information to enable families and friends to mobilise their strengths and resources and know how to find and use the assistance that is available.

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Being a parent

Becoming a parent is a big change in anyone's life



Parenting is not always easy and there is really no 'best way' to bring up children – people and families are all different. The way we raise our children depends on many factors, like how our parents brought us up, our cultural and social background, whether or not we have a partner or a supportive extended family.

But we know that if we praise children and build up their self confidence, they grow up healthier and happier. When we are the best parent we can be, there is a good chance that our children will be good parents themselves.

As parents we can often feel unsure of what we are doing since most of us have never been taught how to look after children. Sometimes it seems as if there is nobody around to talk to or give support.

It is important to find someone in our family or community to call when we need to talk. Support from people around us can make a big difference in sharing both the good and bad times all parents experience.

Sometimes if family and friends can't help, you might want to talk to someone outside your family such as the child health nurse. Other organisations in the community can also help and some of these are listed at the back of this booklet.

There is nothing wrong with asking for help. It often takes more courage to talk to someone than to struggle on trying to cope. This will not make you a failure. All parents sometimes feel uncertain.

If you are family or friend of someone struggling to cope with parenting, offer assistance without 'telling them what to do'. Be there to listen. Offer a hand, or advice if asked. Aim to build up the parent and child's confidence.

Positive discipline

Learning is an important part of growing up. Children learn from what they see around them and from what they see others do. That is why it is important for parents to act in ways we want our children to act.

Disciplining children is a normal part of parenting. As many of us have been smacked during our childhood, we may think that a 'good smack' will not do any harm.

Discipline works better when it helps the child choose what is right, rather than forcing the child to act in a certain way. In fact, the first meaning of the word 'discipline' is about learning and training, rather than punishing.

Simple, positive discipline works well:

- Talk and listen to children.
Remember, they are children.
We should keep things simple and not expect too much.
- Set clear rules and stick to them.
- Praise and reward good behaviour with hugs and smiles.
- Talk about unacceptable behaviour rather than tell the child that she or he is bad.
- Tell children what you want them to do, not just what they are doing wrong.
- Let children help in some decisions.



There may be a child we find more difficult than others. We may think of these children as difficult because we feel they try our patience and wear us down. We tend to treat them with less affection.

This is unfair on the children. They don't know why they make us angry, and it makes them feel unsure or bad about themselves.

You need to remember that children don't think like adults. For example they don't behave badly to take revenge or spite us. When they wet their pants just after you change them, they don't do it on purpose to make you feel miserable. Children do not and cannot behave like adults.

If you expect too much from your children things can go wrong. We lose patience with them and often they don't feel appreciated.

Children are also affected by what is happening around them. If there is violence happening in the family, or other

issues leading to serious problems for the family, they will notice. They might think these things are their fault. It will harm them and affect their behaviour. Adults need to take responsibility for sorting out what is happening.

If a family is affected by these stresses, how the children are treated might relate more to how parents are feeling than what the children are actually doing.

There are many people that can support and help with your parenting. These can start with family and friends, and include child health nurses, your local doctor, schools, neighbourhood watch safety houses, child care services, religious organisations and local groups like nursing mothers. Many groups can be found through your local paper, library or child health nurse. Or you could call the parenting line to get information on what is available.

Children with disabilities (or special children)

All families have strengths, but the extra demands of a child with special needs or a disability mean extra support may be needed from families, friends or local services.

It is important not to feel you have to do it alone. Other parents, friends and community groups have knowledge, skills and resources which can help you through the good and bad times. There are also specialist services available. Talk to your child health nurse or contact the Disability Services Commission.

Caring for yourself

Children – especially young children – take a lot of time and energy. That is why parents need to feel confident and healthy.

A good diet and regular exercise for you and your children can help you keep up and feel energetic.

Information about health, diet and lifestyle are available from your local doctor or child health nurse.

It is important to keep adult friendships, rather than see yourself as only a parent to your children. Getting involved with local groups and activities is a good way of meeting new friends.

If you drink a lot or take drugs this will affect how well you look after your children. Excessive use of alcohol and drugs can mean there are worries or hurtful experiences in your life. It is important to seek help from a doctor or other trusted person.

Families and friends who notice excessive use of alcohol or drugs by parents may worry about the well being of the children. It might be time to talk to the parents about your concerns. You could offer to go with them to a doctor or other health professional.

Survival Tips

- Pursue a sport or hobby that interests you. Many sport or recreation centres have child care facilities.
- Meet with your friends often.
- Take regular time out without your children.
- Offer to mind someone else's child and they will offer back.
- Get to know the parents of your children's friends. Swap stories and hints on parenting.
- Families and friends; offer to take the kids and help out. Ask parents what they would like you to do.



A supportive partner, family and friends

Living with a supportive partner who is also a good parent means you can work as a team. It helps to have another adult to talk to, enjoy the fun times with and help resolve problems.

Talk with your partner about sharing the tasks of bringing up children and household chores.

Sharing the workload means more time to spend doing fun things with the children.

When you have a new partner, relationships with stepchildren may not always be easy.

New partners and/or new family members learning to live together can cause quite a bit of stress. Children are easy targets in times of stress.

Some people have partners who are not supportive or even hurt them. If your partner is hurting you or your child, help is available.

You and your children have a right to be safe, especially in your home.

If you are having difficulties talking to each other about sensitive topics and if your relationship is under strain talk to someone you know and trust or turn to the back of the booklet for a list of contacts that can help.

What you can do if your relationship is under strain:

- **choose a quiet time to talk to your partner about your relationship and your feelings**
- **talk about what you like in the relationship**
- **be open about what you would like to change in the relationship.**

Especially for dads and stepdads

Dads are important. As well as the love and security they provide, dads provide children with examples of how to be a man or what to expect in relationships. All dads want their children to love and respect them. There are times however when pressures might mean dads do things they later regret and feel bad about.

If you

- find it hard to show any feelings except anger or sexual feelings
- never feel like going home
- are hitting or threatening your partner or children
- always feel frustrated after dealing with your boss or others
- feel you have no power over your life

talk to someone you trust like your doctor. Or ring one of the helplines listed in this booklet. The Men's Domestic Violence Helpline has experienced male counsellors who will listen and help.

Sleeping with your baby

Many parents share their bed with their babies and children. This brings a wonderful warmth and closeness and helps the bond between parent and baby grow stronger.

However if you take alcohol or drugs, even prescribed medications, this can affect your awareness and may create some danger for the baby.

It is best at these times not to keep a baby in the bed, but place him in a separate cot nearby. If you are staying away from home, it is best to plan ahead for this if it is likely you will be drinking or taking any drugs.



Children can be harmed when things get out of hand

- Child abuse and neglect may happen when stressed parents or caregivers lack support.
- Physical and emotional effects of abuse on children can last for many years.

It is not unusual for families to go through bad times. Fortunately most parents cope with problems without taking them out on their children.

In some families children can get hurt when things get out of hand. People who know a family well, such as grandparents or close friends can often see when things are bad.

Families need to be supported to stay together through difficult times. The family is nearly always the best place for children to grow up – even if things are not perfect all the time.

There are some times, however, when children are emotionally and physically harmed by the people who look after them and they are not safe at home any more. This harm may be caused by physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse or neglect.

In some cases children are seriously injured or killed.

Protecting children from harm is everyone's responsibility. Children, who are harmed, come from all parts of society, as do the people who hurt them.

Children who are abused usually know the person who hurts them. It can be a parent, step parent, close relative or someone else they know well and trust.

It is important to do everything to prevent children from being hurt.

Child abuse is not usually a single incident. It often takes place over a period of time and more than one type of abuse can be happening at the same time.

Danger Signs – when it's time to ask for help

It is normal to feel upset or angry sometimes. Everybody suffers stress from time to time for different reasons.

If these feelings are starting to build up or take over, it is time to talk about them and ask for help.

Some of the warning signs

It's time to ask for help when you:

- have more bad feelings than good feelings
- can't face getting out of bed in the mornings
- cry more than usual
- the baby's crying makes you angry and you feel you might shake the baby
- are too exhausted to think of fun things to do with your children
- feel alone and no one understands
- often fight with your partner
- are afraid to be alone with your children
- often leave the house when the children are arguing
- are drinking too much or taking drugs to feel better.

Family and friends need to offer help at these times and be honest with the person who is struggling about their concerns.

What you can do when anger takes over

- Take a deep breath to calm down.
- Try talking about how you feel rather than screaming at your children. For example "I don't like you doing that, I want you to stop." This is a better way to get the message through.
- Give yourself and your children some time out by saying, "I am too angry to talk about this now. I'll talk to you when I have calmed down."

Hitting a child can often cause problems:

- when you are angry or have been drinking or taking drugs you can't tell how hard you hit
- after a while you seem to need to hit more often and smacks just don't work
- hitting children doesn't make them learn, it makes them frightened, angry and aggressive
- you feel guilty after hitting.





Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when a child is seriously hurt or injured by an adult. It can also be the result of putting your child at risk where they are likely to be injured. For example, leaving a small child alone in a car.

Most parents do not want to hurt their children but it can happen in a moment of uncontrolled anger. Losing control when you are angry or frustrated can often lead to punishment which gets out of hand. It is also easy to lose control if you have been drinking too much or taking drugs.

Hitting, shaking, punching, burning and scalding are just some of the things which can seriously hurt a child.

Children are much more fragile than adults. If you lose control you run the risk of seriously hurting your children. Being hurt can cause a child a lifetime of suffering especially if it is by someone they love and trust.

Physical abuse may lead to bruises, cuts, welts, burns, fractures, internal injuries, dehydration or poisoning. In extreme cases physical abuse can kill a child.

If you see unexplained injuries on a child please talk to someone you trust like a child health nurse, doctor or Department for Community Development officer. Addresses and telephone numbers are at the back of this booklet.

It is particularly dangerous to shake a baby. Shaking a baby can cause serious damage inside his or her head even when there is no visible sign of injury.

Never...

- Never hit a baby – hitting can break bones.
- Never shake a baby – shaking can cause brain damage.
- Never hit a child when you are angry.
- Never hit a child around the face, head, chest or back.
- Never use a stick or cane to punish.
- Never ram bottles or spoons into a child's mouth.
- Never push a child on to anything hot or put them in a bath without testing the water.



Here are some things grandparents, relatives and friends can do:

- Listen to the child and show your support.
- Seek advice on the best way to help parents or caregivers who may need it.
- Make sure the child, parent or caregiver know that they can come to you if things start to go bad and that you will help them.
- Offer to give parents some 'time out' by looking after the children.
- If you are very worried that a child is being hurt, contact your local Department for Community Development office.

Emotional or psychological abuse

Emotional abuse is when a parent significantly harms a child's development or when they cause the child's behaviour to be disturbed.



This happens when a parent is uncaring or rejects or blames the child over a period of time.

Constant threatening, scaring a child, often putting a child down (saying things like "You're dumb, lazy, hopeless") and often leaving a child alone for long periods of time are things that can emotionally hurt a child, as can violence in the home.

The wounds of emotional hurt stay inside and last a long time. If you were emotionally harmed as a child you are probably still hurting. This may make it harder for you to be the parent you want to be.

Parents lose their temper sometimes and nag or shout at their children. If it happens all the time children start to feel they are bad or not worthy of being loved. Remember children often can't tell you how they feel and may express this by being withdrawn, acting up or showing physical signs like wetting the bed.

Remember, it is never too late to ask for help both for you and your children.

For families and friends

If you see that a child is hurt emotionally, you can make a difference by taking an interest in the child. Also by supporting the parent to see positives in their child. The love and support of a grandparent or family friend can make all the difference to a child's life.

If you remain very concerned for a child please talk to someone you trust like a child health nurse, doctor or Department for Community Development officer. Addresses and telephone numbers are at the back of this booklet.

Things might become difficult for a family because of family and domestic violence. This damages children by exposing them to the violence, even if they are not in the room. They may believe the violence is their fault and be emotionally hurt. They may try to protect a parent and be physically hurt. The harms of living with violence are severe and long lasting. They might cause a child to use violence against others or to become withdrawn or be a future victim.

Ways families and friends can help a child who has witnessed family and domestic violence:

- tell them that the violence is not their fault
- give them an opportunity to talk about the violence
- help make a safety plan which they can follow
- let them know that others have had similar experiences
- ring and discuss the situation with a domestic violence helpline listed in this booklet to find out how else you can help the children.



Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse happens when children are touched in sexual ways, or used in a sexual way by someone older.

Children cannot be expected to protect themselves. That is the responsibility of adults. But we can assist them to know

- 'good' and 'bad' touching
- their body belongs to them
- they can and should say 'no' when they don't want to be touched
- they should tell someone they trust if bad touching happens to them.

Letting children watch pornographic videos or computer graphics and read adult sex material, forcing a child to masturbate or watch sexual acts, genital exposure (flashing) to a child, oral sex with a child and sexual penetration are some examples of sexual abuse.

Children are usually sexually abused by someone they know. It often happens in the children's own homes with the offender a close family member, family friend or other person who has a relationship with the child and family. The abuse often goes on for years because either the children are too scared to tell anyone or, if they do tell someone, nothing is done.

In a few cases children are sexually assaulted by strangers.

People who sexually abuse children work hard to gain the trust of the family when their goal is to be close to the children so

they can sexually abuse them. This is particularly harmful because the person the child may have learned to trust is the one hurting them.

All sexual abuse is hurtful to children and causes harm, which includes significant emotional trauma, physical injury or impaired development. All sexual abuse is a criminal act.

Children need cuddling and loving. This is 'good touching'. When the touching is sexual and not appropriate for their age it is 'bad touching'. Children need to know whom they can trust and talk to if 'bad touching' happens to them.

There are signs when a child is suffering sexual abuse.

Children may find ways of hinting about or telling us what is happening to them.

They may complain of pain or irritation in their private parts or get infections and urinary problems. But often the only sign is some slight emotional upset. You may notice the child has nightmares and is scared of things or people they were not scared of before.

A child may suddenly start doing things they have grown out of, like crying a lot, wetting their pants or clinging.

These behaviours and problems may often be the result of something other than sexual abuse. But it is also important not to dismiss the possibility of sexual abuse and to make it easy for the child to talk to you about what is happening. It is very important you take action to stop the abuse.

Why doesn't the child say anything?

If the person hurting the child is a close relative, family friend, or person in authority, the child may feel very mixed up and not know what to do. Often the abuser makes threats to the child such as "The family will break up" or "I will go to jail and it will be your fault."

Sometimes children may think that telling about being hurt is too risky. They may not be believed or supported and even told they are lying. It is important to remember that children do not usually make up stories about sexual abuse. Although some children may feel embarrassed to talk about what is happening to them.

Believing children through this difficult time is essential. If children say they are frightened or that something has happened we need to listen and hear what they say. They may not be able to explain why they are scared – all they know is what they feel. We need to help them feel safe to talk about what happened.

If the abuser is a partner our first reaction will be shock and disbelief. We may want to believe the explanation given by the person hurting the child and blame the child. However we must remember that the person who is hurting the child is older (usually an adult), stronger and totally responsible for the harm done to the child.

Families and friends

If you are family or a friend and a child or young person has let you know that he or she is being sexually abused, it is very important to contact the Department for Community Development or the Police – even if the young person doesn't want you to. The abuse must be stopped. The numbers to contact are in the back of this booklet.

Neglect

Neglect is when children do not receive adequate food, shelter, medical treatment or supervision to such an extent that their development is damaged or they are injured.

Neglect which causes significant harm often includes a combination of factors such as:

- regularly leaving very young children alone
- not giving children enough food
- leaving children's injuries untreated.

Children need food, love and care to grow up happy and healthy.

All families are different and there are many ways of being a good parent.

There are also many cultural differences in the way people bring up their children and what they believe is important for their children.

Whatever the culture, parents are responsible for making sure children have enough food, love, care and shelter.

Neglect is when adults responsible for a child are able to, but don't fulfil these responsibilities. Sometimes their capacity to care well is affected by gambling, drugs or too much drinking.

Children who are neglected are hurting. Like adults, if they are tired and hungry they can't work and may do badly at school. Often these children feel bad about themselves and don't get on with their classmates very well.

If you are concerned for your ability to care well for your children please seek help from someone you trust like a child health nurse, doctor or Department for Community Development officer. Addresses and telephone numbers are at the back of this booklet.

Families and friends

Some parents don't know how to ensure their babies gain weight, or how to give basic care. You can be supportive and offer help and guidance.

If parents have drug or alcohol problems, families and others may need to step in and ensure children are looked after.

If you are extremely worried, talk to someone you trust such as a child health nurse, doctor or Department for Community Development officer. Addresses and telephone numbers are at the back of this booklet.

Keeping children safe

Why does child abuse and neglect happen?

There are many reasons why child abuse and neglect happens. Sometimes parents have problems with alcohol or drugs which means they lose control, and this contributes to children being hurt or neglected.

Some people have not had loving parents or caregivers themselves and may not know how to be a good parent. Some parents may have serious psychological problems.

Sometimes stress and pressure build up and this is taken out on the children. People under stress can hurt children. It does not mean they have failed but it does mean they need help. It is time to ask for help when you feel that you are losing control. Family and friends should offer help if they see someone starting to lose control.

Parenting is learned from our parents or caregivers. If a person has been abused or neglected as a child, then there is a tendency to repeat the pattern. Under pressure it is possible to treat our children like our parents treated us – even though it is the last thing we want to do.

Child abuse and neglect can also have other causes. Sometimes there is family and domestic violence or a parent is on their own and they find it hard to cope. Perhaps there are housing or money problems, which add to stress.

Maybe a child is often sick or has other problems that make them difficult to parent. It is easy to compare one child with other children and start to believe your child is not good enough or is naughty on purpose. All children are different and comparisons need to be fair and balanced.



It takes courage to ask for help, but it is better to ask for help than to harm your child.

You can start with talking to family and friends. Perhaps there are mothers or fathers groups or community centres in your area which provide support. There are also helplines listed in this booklet which can link you to local support services.

Talking to your doctor, child health nurse or Department for Community Development officer can be an important step in keeping a child safe from further harm and in getting help for the child, family and the person hurting the child.

Parenting is not easy. Asking for help can only strengthen your skills as a parent.

You can get advice for yourself and for family and friends you want to help. If you are worried that a child you know is being hurt it is important to trust your 'gut feelings'.

In an emergency

If you think you might harm your child:

- Make sure your child is in a safe place and, even if the child is following you, go to another room to calm down. Walk away and don't go toward the child.
- If you have a telephone, call a neighbour, family member or friend and ask them to help you take a break.
- Call the child health nurse, your doctor, Crisis Care or the Family Helpline.
- If you call someone and don't get through the first time, keep trying. Numbers you can call are all listed at the back of this booklet.
- If you have no telephone stay away from the child until you feel calm. Talk to someone you trust about what happened and ask them to help you plan what you can do in the future.
- Remember: alcohol and drugs stop you thinking clearly and only make things worse.

Parenting Line

9272 1466
1800 654 432 (free
for STD callers)

Family Helpline

9223 1100
1800 643 000 (free
for STD callers)

Crisis Care

9223 1111
1800 199 008 (free
for STD callers)

Women's Domestic Violence Helpline

9223 1188
1800 007 339 (free
for STD callers)

Men's Domestic Violence Helpline

9223 1199
1800 000 599 (free
for STD callers)

Services and organisations which can help

Listed below are some places to contact for help, advice or support. A good way to find out what is available in your area is to contact your local council or shire offices, a local Department for Community Development office, parent information service, local Aboriginal services, or speak to your child health nurse or community centre.

Parenting and care of babies and children

Child health nurses provide free consultations, support and advice about health and care of babies and children from birth up to the age of six years.

Addresses and telephone numbers of local child health centres are listed alphabetically by suburb in the white pages of the telephone directory under 'Child Health Services'.

Ngala Family Resource Centre

Tel Kensington (08) 9368 9368
1800 111 546 (country callers)
Ngala provides services for

parents and children up to six years of age including practical help and support for issues such as sleeping, feeding, routine and behaviour management. Ngala also has a Dads service.

Hey Dad WA

Tel 1800 111 545 (country callers)

Meerlinga Young Children's Foundation

Tel (08) 9424 5210
Meerlinga has a centre where parents can find resources, information and parenting support focus is on the care, health and education of children up to the age of 12 years.

Grandcare

Tel 1800 008 323 (freecall 10.00am–3.00pm, Mon–Fri)
Grandcare is a grandparents caring for grandchildren support service, delivered by Wanslea Family Services Inc.

Princess Margaret Hospital for Children

Tel (08) 9340 8222
Princess Margaret Hospital provides medical, emergency and counselling treatment for children up to 15 years of age.

Child health services

Child health services are located in the State in Child Health Centres. They are listed in the white pages of the telephone directory under Child health centres.

Community health nurses and school health nurses

Community health nurses are listed in the white pages of the telephone directory under community health nurses. School health nurses are located in some state schools and provide support and advice regarding the health of children from six to 18 years of age. School health services are listed in the white pages of the telephone directory under community health nurses.

Your **Department for Community Development** office provides, funds and knows many services that can assist families in your local area. Offices are located throughout the state.

Metropolitan offices

Armadale	(08) 9497 6555	Kalgoorlie	(08) 9022 0700
Cannington	(08) 9351 0888	Karratha	(08) 9185 0200
Fremantle	(08) 9431 8800	Katanning	(08) 9821 9000
Joondalup	(08) 9301 3600	Kellerberrin	(08) 9045 4203
Midland	(08) 9274 9411	Kununurra	(08) 9168 0333
Mirrabooka	(08) 9344 9666	Laverton	(08) 9031 1104
Perth	(08) 9214 2444	Leonora	(08) 9037 6132
Rockingham	(08) 9527 0100	Mandurah	(08) 9535 6688

Country offices

Albany	(08) 9841 0777	Manjimup	(08) 9771 1711
Broome	(08) 9192 1317	Meekatharra	(08) 9981 1104
Bunbury	(08) 9721 5000	Merredin	(08) 9041 1622
Busselton	(08) 9752 3666	Moora	(08) 9651 1100
Carnarvon	(08) 9941 1244	Mullewa	(08) 9961 1004
Collie	(08) 9734 1699	Narrogin	(08) 9881 0123
Derby	(08) 9191 1577	Newman	(08) 9175 1051
Esperance	(08) 9071 2566	Norseman	(08) 9039 1129
Fitzroy Crossing	(08) 9191 5002	Northam	(08) 9622 0170
Geraldton	(08) 9921 0768	Onslow	(08) 9184 6005
Halls Creek	(08) 9168 6114	Roebourne	(08) 9182 1208
		South Hedland	(08) 9140 2433
		Tom Price	(08) 9189 1592
		Wyndham	(08) 9161 1110

Useful names and addresses

Department for Community Development office

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Local police station

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Your doctor

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Local fire station

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Your child health nurse

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Hospital

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Other useful contacts

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____



Department for
Community Development

Helplines

Child Abuse Services WA

9223 1111

Crisis Care

9223 1111

1800 199 008 (free for STD callers)
24 hour telephone serve for people
in crisis and needing urgent help.

Family Helpline

9223 1100

1800 643 000 (free for STD callers)
24 hour confidential telephone
counselling and information service
for families experiencing relationship
difficulties.

Kids Helpline

1800 551 800

Men's Domestic Violence Helpline

9223 1199

1800 000 599 (free for STD callers)

Parenting Line

9272 1466

1800 654 432 (free for STD callers)
Parenting information and advice
about caring for children up to
18 years of age.

Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)

Crisis line 9340 1828

1800 199 888 (free for STD callers)

Counselling line 9340 1899

Women's Domestic Violence Helpline

9223 1188

1800 007 339 (free for STD callers)