

There is no excuse for violence

Violent people often try to excuse their use of violent behaviour as a „lapse“, or pass responsibility for the violence to their victim by maintaining that they provoked the situation. However, the responsibility for the violent act and its consequences always remains with the person who committed the act.

Help for women who are involved in violent relationships

It is often difficult for women who are living in a violent relationship to seek help. They don't want to break up the family or are afraid that they may lose their children. Many women have got used to the situation over a period of years and have lost hope that they might ever have a life without violence.

Some women are financially dependent on their partners and don't know how they would manage without them. Others are unaware of the support facilities which are available.

➤ „I had always thought that I had to stay with Juri's father for Juri's sake. It's only now that it has become clear to me how much he was actually suffering through the situation at home. If I had known that ... I would have sought help much sooner.“ (Quote from a mother who experienced domestic violence)

Protection of the parent who is the victim of violence is also a form of child protection

The best way of protecting the child is to offer help and support to the parent who is the victim of violence. If you know a child who is living in a situation of domestic violence or you find out that a woman is being beaten by her husband/partner, get some advice as to how you can best help in this specific case.

If it is possible, speak to the person who is the victim of the violence. Give her information about advice centres and support facilities. It may be that the person will not be able to accept help immediately, but perhaps at a later point in time – when she feels ready to get support for herself and for her children. But sometimes you simply can't wait for this point in time to arrive; in this case someone from outside needs to step in. Child protection should always be of the highest priority!

The BIG hotline, women's advice centres, the Child Protection hotline, the Youth Welfare Office and advice centres for men with violence issues all give support to women, children and men in finding their way to a non-violent future. They can also get advice on the phone from all of these centres, without having to give their name.

Domestic violence – Advice centres and support facilities

BIG Hotline

Domestic violence – help for women and their children

Phones manned daily from 8.00 am–11.00 pm, including weekends and public holidays.
Available in several languages
Tel.: 030 / 611 03 00

Child Protection hotline

For people who are worried about children

Around the clock
Tel.: 030/61 00 66

Advice for men with violence issues

Social training courses and one-to-one counselling for men with violence issues

Mon–Fri 10.00 am–3.00 pm
Tel.: 030/7 85 98 25

Material and literature on the theme of domestic violence

BIG e.V. (publisher): Website for children and young people, www.gewalt-ist-nie-ok.de

BIG e.V. (publisher): DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: YOUR RIGHTS – Protection options by the police, criminal law, and civil law (available in a number of languages: Arabic, Bulgarian, German, English, Farsi, French, Italian, Croatian, Kurdish, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Somali, Spanish, Thai, Turkish, Vietnamese) free of charge apart from the cost of postage, or download www.big-koordinierung.de

Federal Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (publisher): Mehr Mut zum Reden – Von misshandelten Frauen und ihren Kindern (available in German and in Turkish) can be obtained free of charge from the publications mailing service of the Federal Government, Tel: 030 182 722 721 or www.bmfsfj.de

Cream e.V. (publisher): Website with information for persons affected by violence, www.gewaltschutz.info

Kavemann, Barbara/Kreyssig, Ulrike (publishers): Handbuch Kinder und häusliche Gewalt, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften (publishers), Wiesbaden, 3rd edition 2013

Strasser, Philomena: Kinder legen Zeugnis ab – Gewalt gegen Frauen als Trauma für Kinder, Studienverlag (publishers), Innsbruck, Vienna, Munich, 2001

Imprint:

BIG e.v.

Bei häuslicher Gewalt
Hilfe für Frauen und
ihre Kinder

BIG HOTLINE

BIG KOORDINIERUNG

BIG PRÄVENTION

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Letter for parents on the theme of domestic violence

BIG PRÄVENTION

Domestic Violence – help for women and their children

► „Sometimes my mother has bruises. She says she has fallen over. But once I heard my father beating my mother up in the night.“

Dear parents,

This is the statement of 12-year old Jamie in the film „Is it the same for you?“ We ask ourselves – How does Jamie cope with this situation? Why doesn't his mother leave his father if he keeps hitting her? Is Jamie's case just a one-off?

Sadly Jamie's situation is not an exception. A study carried out by the Federal Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has shown that one in four women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of their husband/partner at least once in their life. More than half of these women live or were living with children.

This form of violence within a partnership is known as domestic violence. 80% of domestic violence is carried out by men towards women. But there are also men who are the victims of violence at the hands of female or male partners. Violence can also occur in lesbian relationships. Domestic violence is a worldwide problem that affects the whole of society. It arises in various different forms.

► Types of domestic violence

! Physical violence

All actions that cause pain, e.g. hitting, choking, pushing someone down the stairs or throwing objects at them

! Sexual violence

Ranging from coercing someone to carry out sexual acts to rape

! Psychological violence

Being offensive or intimidating, humiliating someone with words, making threats, taking away their children, forbidding them from visiting relatives or friends, also stalking of an ex-partner (constant harassment, calls to check on them, lurking around waiting for them)

! Economic violence

Financial dependance, e.g. the partner refuses to let his wife have her own money and monitors all outgoings, the wife is forbidden from getting a job to earn her own money

Children suffer from the effects of domestic violence

► *“It hurt me too when he hit her (my mother), I had a terrible feeling in my stomach.” (Sabina, 11 years old)*

Sometimes children have to watch while their mother is mistreated by their father, or they hear her in the home screaming and begging him to stop. They try to help their mother and maybe even try to protect her from being attacked. The children are frightened that something might happen to their brothers and sisters and fear for their own safety, as it is often the case in these

families that the children are also the victims of physical or psychological violence.

Children in these situations often feel responsible for the domestic violence and are tormented by feelings of guilt. They are afraid to speak about the things that happen at home because they are worried about their parents' reputation, feel ashamed of their behaviour or cannot find the words to describe what they have experienced. They are also afraid that the family will be torn apart if they reveal the “family secret” to anyone. The feeling of helplessness and the fact that they are constantly thinking about the violence they experience at home may lead to behavioural problems, e.g. a drop in performance at school, aggressive behaviour, depression.

► Condemnation of violence in bringing up children
According to section 1631 of the German Civil Code (BGB), children have the right to be brought up without violence. Experiencing domestic violence constitutes serious psychological damage.

Violence leads to violence

Children learn by example: If domestic violence is occurring between the child's parents and nothing is done about it, then children will view this as something that cannot be changed. They will accept violence as an effective means of asserting your own will at the expense of a weaker individual.

In an attempt to escape from their feelings of helplessness, children may in turn develop their own aggressive behaviour and use violence as

a way of asserting themselves. These children often use violence in their relationships when they become adults.

Other children may become anxious and frightened on account of the situation in their family; they become very quiet and withdrawn. In relationships, they have a tendency to subordinate themselves or to allow people to act violently towards them.

This means that the violence between the parents not only represents a burden for their children in their everyday lives, it is also repeated in their own relationships as adolescents and adults and may in some circumstances be passed on from generation to generation. It is important to stop this spiral of violence.

BIG Prevention shows domestic violence the red card

There are two aspects to the prevention of domestic violence. The first aspect is to undertake measures to prevent it from happening: If children learn at an early age how to solve conflicts without violence, there is a higher probability that they will not tolerate or use violence in later partnerships. The second aspect comprises informing and educating children in a way appropriate to their age: They are taught where and how they can get help for themselves or for others in cases of domestic violence.

It is precisely these two aspects that BIG Prevention addresses in their work with children. In the school project „Red card for violence“, we present the children with seven key statements. We encourage them to take these into consideration in their everyday family lives.

Seven key statements in the prevention of domestic violence

It's okay to be angry!

Anger is often seen as something negative, because it can trigger aggressive or destructive behaviour. Try to help your child to find ways to deal with their anger without destroying anything or hurting anyone. When children have learnt to accept anger as a normal feeling and know how to express it in a constructive way, there is a lower probability that they will resort to violence.

Stay fair in an argument!

Arguments and conflict are part of every friendship or relationship. But it is important that those involved stay fair; otherwise one party may be injured. Try therefore to encourage your child to stick to the rules, even in an argument (e.g. letting the other person finish what they are saying), and help them to try out non-violent strategies to find joint solutions to problems.

Violence is never okay!

There is no justification for violence as it doesn't lead to the problem being solved but rather to it being suppressed at the expense of the other person. Those who resort to violence bear sole responsibility if others are harmed. For everyday parenting, this means: Do not resort to violence in your parenting because you are a role model for your children. Be sure to step in if there is any violent behaviour between the children and try to find joint solutions instead.

Violence between parents damages their children!

Growing up in an atmosphere of violence is always damaging to children. If the first signs of violence have arisen in your relationship or you are experiencing domestic violence in your surroundings, then get help and advice quickly.

It is equally important that children are also provided with age-appropriate information about domestic violence and that they know where they can get help.

Children are never responsible for violence between their parents!

Even if an adult gets annoyed with a child, there is no reason for them to behave violently towards their partner or the child. This is an important message for children as experience shows that they feel guilty and responsible for the violence of their parents. It is important that we take away these feelings of guilt from children.

Tell someone your unpleasant secrets!

Violence within the family tends to be viewed as a private family concern and „telling tales“ seen as betrayal. This means that children in fact suffer doubly. It is important for them to learn that, if they have a secret which is troubling them, they are allowed to tell someone about it.

Children have a right to get help and support!

For children, experiencing domestic violence represents psychological abuse and is to be viewed as endangering their well-being. Children have a right to get help and support and a right to have the violence brought to an end.

► *“The atmosphere in the classroom has already improved noticeably after the second day of the project. For example, the children are reminding each other of the rules for having arguments.” (Class teacher, after the prevention project “Red card for violence”)*