

ADOLESCENT VIOLENCE TO PARENTS



A resource booklet for parents and carers

Kent & Medway
domestic abuse
Strategy Group

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescent violence to parents is a serious issue. Anecdotal evidence suggests it is increasing.

Adolescent violence can be perpetrated against mothers, fathers, siblings and carers by daughters and sons. There are many reasons why it occurs. These include children witnessing or experiencing family violence or other forms of violence and repeating abuse patterns towards others, parenting styles, in times of conflict, traumatic or stressful situations, mental health or drug and alcohol issues and other contributing factors. Sometimes there is no apparent reason why it happens.

This booklet provides a resource for parents who experience violence from their adolescents. We hope it will help to increase the safety and wellbeing of parents and carers, and provide strategies to support them to parent their adolescents in ways that promote caring, responsibility and non-violence.

1. ADOLESCENT VIOLENCE TO PARENTS

Parents struggling with their adolescents' violence are often confused when confronted. It can be hard to find ways to keep everyone safe including the adolescent whose behaviour is posing the risk to positive family relationships and safety. It can be difficult to know how to make things better.

You are not alone!

- 77% of all parent victims were female
- 87% of all perpetrators were male
- 66% of cases involved son to mother (APV key findings for Youth Justice Service, September 2013)
- Adolescent violence is not just against parents. Many adolescents are also violent to their siblings.
- Adolescent violence exists across all sections of society irrespective of gender, race, culture, nationality, religion, sexuality, disability, age, class, or educational level.

Adolescence is the time between childhood and adulthood. It is normal during this time for adolescents to challenge parents and authority as they head towards an independent life. Adolescents will exhibit healthy anger and conflict along the way, which is distinct from violent behaviour.

2. TYPES OF VIOLENCE

Violence is not the same as anger. Anger is an emotion; violence is about control and power.

Adolescent violence is any behaviour used by an adolescent in the family to control, dominate, threaten or coerce a parent or sibling. It can include any of the following:

Physical

- spitting, shoving, hitting, kicking
- throwing things, breaking things and punching holes in walls or doors
- bullying or physical violence to siblings
- cruelty to pets
- any action or behaviour that threatens a person's sense of well-being and safety.

Emotional, Psychological and Verbal

- verbal abuse, yelling, screaming, swearing, 'put downs' and humiliation
- verbal intimidation
- whispering campaigns
- emotional and psychological intimidation
- playing mind games
- making threats to hurt or kill themselves or run away, in order to get their own way or to control you and the family.
- social media threats
- e-violence

Financial

- demanding money or things you cannot afford
- stealing money or possessions from you, your family or friends
- incurring debts that you are responsible for.

3. WHEN TO KNOW IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE

Listen to your own warning bells. You know when things are not right so go with your own feelings and thoughts.

You may have experienced adolescent violence if:

- you feel afraid of upsetting your adolescent and you change your behaviour to avoid it.
- you are 'walking on eggshells' trying to predict your adolescent's wants and needs.
- your adolescent pushes, hits, punches or hurts you or his or her siblings, throws things or damages your possessions or those of other family members.
- your adolescent threatens to hurt you, themselves or others (such as children, family, friends, pets) if you do not meet his or her demands.
- your adolescent ridicules or tries to humiliate or embarrass you, your family or friends.
- your adolescent constantly criticises you and puts you down.
- your adolescent threatens you that he or she will leave home if you do not do what they want.
- your adolescent blames you for his or her behaviour.

4. IS YOUR ADOLESCENT DEMONSTRATING VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR?

How do you know if your adolescent is displaying normal adolescent behaviour and 'acting out' or being violent?

- Although most people know about domestic abuse and its effects, less attention is given to adolescent violence and its impact on the family. This makes it very hard for parents to recognise their adolescents' behaviour as violence and to seek out services that can support them.
- Violence from adolescents is not a normal part of growing up. Most adolescents will 'act out' in some way at some time during their adolescence. When this behaviour is controlling, threatening, or intimidating, it stops being 'normal'.
- Adolescent violence is a complex issue, particularly when adolescents have experienced family violence themselves, have suffered grief or loss, or have an illness or disability. Whilst these issues mean adolescents and their families need support, it does not mean that adolescent violence should be excused.

5. WHAT YOU MAY BE FEELING

Denial

- Most parents have difficulty accepting that their child is violent towards them. You may think your child's behaviour is part of growing up or dealing with stress. You may think that the behaviour is just normal mood swings.

Despair and isolation

You may feel:

- totally alone and isolated.
- unsupported and solely responsible for your situation.
- you have 'hit the wall' and that nothing can help.
- hopeless and helpless because you cannot bring the situation under control.
- totally unsupported by a lack of services or information available to help you.
- despair at not having a harmonious family life.
- you cannot talk or think about anything else but your adolescent.
- your adolescent's behaviour seems to be a replica of your abusive partner's (current or former) violence towards you.

Fear

You may feel:

- like you are living in fear, both in the present and of what might happen in future when your son or daughter is bigger and stronger than you.
- 'unsafe' in your own home.

Shame and humiliation

You may feel:

- like a failure and experience a great sense of shame.
- confused about where you went wrong and questioning your parenting abilities.
- you are entirely responsible for your child's violent behaviour.
- you are to blame and you are a 'bad' parent.

Loss

You may feel:

- heartbroken and a huge sense of loss because the child you used to know, love and enjoy, seems to be driving a wedge in the relationship.
- grief if your adolescent has had to leave home.
- the loss of friends and family who do not want or know how to assist you.
- worried the young person will leave home and sever the relationship entirely.

Relationship stress

- Adolescent violence often leads to arguments between adults in the home, as to how the behaviour should be dealt with. You may have different ideas on what helps or on what caused the violence. This can place enormous stress on family and partner relationships.

- You may hate it when people give you solutions, as they do not know what you are going through.
- You may feel undermined by your adolescent's other parent who may take your adolescent's side (particularly if you are a sole parent).

Loss of trust

- You may feel unable to trust your adolescent especially when you are not at home to supervise. You may be worried your child may have damaged or stolen property and whether the other siblings are safe. You may find it difficult to leave the home at all.

Sibling concern

- Other children may be affected by their sibling's violence. Many adolescents who are violent to their parents are also violent to their siblings. Siblings may be unsafe because of the violence.
- You may not have the time or energy to give to other siblings because you are dealing with the violent adolescent.
- Your adolescent may also use drugs or alcohol or engage in illegal activities. This may mean their siblings are unsafe or at risk of harm.

Health issues

- You may be depressed or anxious and this may impact on your health and well-being. You may experience insomnia, physical illness and fatigue.

Work issues

- Your worries and anxieties may extend into your workplace where you may find it hard to concentrate.
- You may find that you need to take time off from work to seek support.
- You may experience the additional cost of counselling, legal fees and fixing damage to property caused by your adolescent. This can increase financial pressures.

6. POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

It may be difficult to understand why your adolescent is being violent.

Some explanations include:

Family violence

Adolescents who witness or experience domestic violence or abuse to a parent may behave in a similar way to the abusive parent or family member. This may still happen if the adolescent was a baby or young child when the violence occurred.

Social issues

Adolescents may be influenced by the society and culture in which they live.

Some influences may include:

- societal exposure to violence
- ideas about the role of women and sex role stereotyping
- availability of pornography.

Adolescent issues

Adolescents may be violent because they:

- have an over-developed sense of entitlement
- lack respect for women
- have been bullied at school
- have experienced trauma such as war or family violence
- are influenced by their peer group
- misuse alcohol or drugs
- have mental health issues
- have been abused themselves.

Parenting

Parents may be influenced by their culture or the society in which they live.

Parenting practices that can sometimes result in adolescent violence include:

- feeling you should sacrifice everything, including your own happiness and well-being to make your child happy
- feeling guilty for breaking up the family (if you are a sole parent) and compensating by giving everything to your adolescent
- parenting that gives a child too much freedom
- parenting that is authoritarian
- being unavailable to your child (either physically or emotionally)
- conflict in parenting styles so that the adolescent can manipulate his or her parents
- parents' own psychological makeup e.g. fear of conflict which prevents parents taking action

7. THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR

- It won't go away! Violence generally worsens over time.
- There are no simple answers.
- You don't have to know why things are happening to enable change to happen. Even a small change may feel like an improvement in the situation.
- The adolescent will not be able to stop their violent behaviour on their own. With support from others, you can help to facilitate the change.
- All types of violence are inappropriate and physical violence and property damage are criminal offences.
- Violence may not happen all the time. It may occur in cycles or as isolated incidents. Adolescents may apologise after the violence, giving you a false sense of hope that things may improve. They usually need more help to change.
- Violent behaviour is the responsibility of the adolescent. The violence is never an acceptable or healthy way for the adolescent to solve difficulties in their life, their family or community.
- You may not want to report violent behaviour to the police because you are concerned for your adolescent's future. You may not want to compromise his or her life chances and opportunities. You may feel you may not be believed, you may be blamed or may lose family and friends' support if you bring the adolescent to the attention of the Police or other services.
- Remember that it is better for your adolescent, your family and you if the violence stops. If nothing else works, reporting it to the police may be the only way to stop the violence.
- Adolescents often blame their parents for provoking them or not giving in to their demands. Remember the person being violent is always responsible for their behaviour.
- You have probably tried to talk to your adolescent about their behaviour. Give yourself credit for all the things you have tried.
- We all experience stress and anger, from time to time. However, the adolescent may use these feelings to excuse violent behaviour. It is important to separate your adolescent's feelings from their behaviour. All feelings are acceptable; violence is not!

8. WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOUR ADOLESCENT IS BEING VIOLENT?

- Talk about the violence with someone you trust, such as a friend, family member or counsellor.
- Use the contact list at the back of this booklet to identify services.
- If you are at any time in fear for your own or another's safety, call the police. Violence, threats of violence and assault are crimes that can be reported to the police.
- You may feel that calling the police is totally unacceptable. No parent likes to consider this possibility but the readiness to do so, clearly explained to the adolescent, may indicate you will not tolerate the violence.
- Develop a safety plan for you and your family should you need it.

PREPARING A SAFETY PLAN

Sometimes an adolescent's violence may mean family members' safety is at risk.

In the event of a crisis, where you may have to leave home in a hurry, it can be useful to have a safety plan in place. Here are a few suggestions for preparing a safety plan.

- Think about where you could go and who could support you if an emergency arose.
- Always carry a list of numbers you would need to call e.g. police, family members, support services.
- Ensure you have access to a phone or mobile.
- Try to keep some money aside so that you can use a taxi, train or bus if needed.
- Keep a spare set of house and car keys in a safe place.
- Ensure other children can use a phone and know emergency numbers.
- Keep notes or a diary with dates and brief details about the violence. These may be needed in the future if you take protective or legal action.
- It is important to inform yourself about your legal rights and rights of your child so that you are clear about the full range of options available to you, even if you choose not to take legal action.
- Call the services listed at the end of this booklet for more information and to discuss your options.

9. HOW CAN FRIENDS OR RELATIVES HELP?

Emotional Support

If a parent experiencing adolescent violence tells you about it or you suspect they are experiencing difficulties, there are a number of things you can do to support them.

These include:

- Don't be afraid to express your concern to them and offer support.
- Be there to listen to them and believe in their experience without minimising, blaming or judging it.
- Listen to, believe and offer practical support to a parent who confides in you about adolescent violence. Ask: "How can I help you?" or "Are there any steps you can take to increase your safety and the safety of family members?"
- Don't criticise their management or lack of management of the situation and don't excuse the violence.
- Be aware that it is a very difficult family situation to be in and reinforce to them that you will be there should they need support.
- Respect their privacy and keep the information confidential unless they give you permission to tell others or you feel someone is at risk of harm.
- Encourage parents to care for themselves and to consider their own needs.
- Stay in regular contact with them to show your ongoing support.

Support the parent to be confident to make their own decisions and don't tell them what to do.

Practical Support

Providing someone with practical support help them feel more in control of their situation and better able to make the necessary decisions to start taking control of the family situation.

Practical ways to assist include:

- Encourage them to think about safety planning in the event of a crisis.
- Help the parent find helpful resources or information they may need.
- Accompany them to counsellors or other services.

What NOT to do

If you are supporting a friend or family member experiencing adolescent violence there are a number of things you should avoid:

- Don't tell them what to do.
- Don't confront the adolescent – this can lead to further complications and may increase family conflict.
- Don't give solutions or lecture to parents, as you do not know what they are going through – 'you are not living through it'.
- Getting involved does not mean you have to solve the situation. If someone turns to you for help and support, it means helping them find their own answers. It is important not to be disappointed if they do not do what you think they should.

10. USEFUL STRATEGIES

It is best to start making changes when you are feeling strong and if possible, supported by others. Firstly, think about what you expect from your adolescent:

- Be clear in your own mind about what behaviour is reasonable & unreasonable. Write this down to remind yourself.
- You may decide that it is reasonable for your adolescent to wash the dishes two nights a week. You may decide that it is unreasonable for your adolescent to swear at you when s/he wants something.
- Use 'I' statements - 'I will be very upset if you are not home when you agreed you would be'.
- Clearly state the expectations to your adolescent - "I need you to speak respectfully to me if you want me to drive you to your friends. If you swear at me, I will not be taking you" or "I will not tolerate you breaking possessions. In the future your pocket money will be used to replace broken things".
- Your adolescent may try and negotiate you down – don't feel bullied into changing your expectations. Stand firm!
- Don't start with too many expectations. Two or three related to stopping their violence and behaving responsibly is a good start.
- Explain to your adolescent that you love them but will not tolerate being abused.
- Try to keep a sense of humour!!!

Secondly, think about what consequences you can put in place to support your adolescent meeting your expectations.

- Consequences must be relevant and important to your adolescent.
- Decide how and when you can use these consequences.
- Explain to your adolescent that if they do not meet your expectations you will put the stated consequences into action.

Some examples of consequences

- Withdrawal of privileges such as internet access, television, iPod or mobile phone use for a certain number of days.
- 'Grounding' in general or stopping your adolescent doing something they want to do like staying the night at a friend's house.
- Cutting back or stopping pocket money or mobile phone use.
- Undertaking a compulsory activity such as extra household chores.

Remember

- It is often difficult to start using a different approach and it might take some time to implement. Your adolescent may rebel against any new approach, so for a time things may become worse before an improvement becomes evident.
- Your words lose all impact if the adolescent does not believe you will follow through. If you have been in the habit of making threats that never happen (or only half happen) then your adolescent knows not to take you seriously.
- Ignore the behaviours you can live with. Choose your battles.

Changing your own behaviour

It is important to think about your own behaviour. You cannot expect your adolescent to change his or her behaviour if your behaviour is inappropriate. It is hard to tell an adolescent not to smoke when a parent does! Similarly if you swear at your adolescent or use violence yourself it is highly likely that despite what you say, your adolescent will feel justified to also behave this way.

- Think about how you respond to your adolescent's behaviour – does it make them angrier or calm them down?
- Understand what your adolescent says or does to make you angry – know your own triggers.

- Be quiet and calm – not angry. (This can be hard to do!)
- Don't think about 'winners' and 'losers' – think about building more harmonious family relationships.
- Always treat your adolescent with respect no matter how angry, disappointed or frustrated you are.
- Try to remain verbally and physically affectionate.
- Recognise when you are stressed. Think about how stress affects how you parent and communicate with your adolescent.

If you or your family members' safety is threatened

If you try to make changes and your adolescent's behaviour worsens and you or family members feel unsafe, you need to put safety before using consequences or other strategies. If you are unsafe walk away and leave the home if necessary.

If your adolescent's behaviour escalates it is your right to call the police. Everyone, including parents, has the right to feel safe. Your other children have the right to feel safe too. Calling the police is one of the strongest consequences but it is often one that works. The police will respond in a positive and helpful manner.

11. REGAINING CONTROL AND MOVING FORWARD...

Adolescent violence to parents is still a taboo subject in the community. Breaking through the isolation and secrecy is the first step in restoring and healing the relationship with your adolescent. You can regain some control over the family situation.

Often the adolescent will blame you or others for their behaviour and refuse to take responsibility for their actions. They see it as 'your' problem and usually refuse counselling or other help.

Adolescents need clear and consistent rules and expectations to feel safe and secure. By holding the adolescent accountable for their actions, you are teaching them how to behave and respond appropriately.

By caring for yourself and seeking help you can regain your confidence, work on your own behaviour and responses and effect changes in your adolescent's behaviour.

It may be useful to participate in a group programme or individual, couple or family counselling to explore ways to keep you and your family safe, look after yourself and stop the violence.

The sooner you take action the sooner things will improve.

12. USEFUL SERVICES TO CONTACT

If you have any concerns about what is happening in your family, the following services will treat you with respect, ensure confidentiality and provide advice and support to talk things through with you.

DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES

Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Website – Provides advice and information on domestic abuse services across Kent and Medway; includes a children and young people's section.

www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk

Kent Police – In an emergency ring **999**
For all other enquiries ring **101**

National Domestic Violence Helpline

– 24hr service offering advice and support to anyone experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

Tel: **0808 2000 247**

Men's Advice Line – Advice and support for male victims of domestic abuse.

Tel: **0808 8010327** (helpline)

www.mensadvice.org.uk

Broken Rainbow – Support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic abuse.

Tel: **0300 999 5428** (helpline)

www.brokenrainbow.org.uk

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Family Action – A national charity offering family support with some local projects across Kent and Medway.

Tel: **020 7254 6251** (office enquiries)

www.family-action.org.uk

Family Lives (formerly known as Parentline Plus) – A national charity offering help and support in all aspects of family life.

Tel: **0808 800 2222** (helpline)

Live online chat with staff:

www.familylives.org.uk/how-we-can-help/online-chat

Email support:

www.familylives.org.uk/how-we-can-help/email-support

Family Rights Group – A national charity offering advice to families who need extra support from Children's Services.

Tel: **0808 801 0366** (advice line)

www.frg.org.uk

KCC Early Help and Preventative Services (EHPS)

– EHPS aims to target early help services for the most vulnerable children, young people and families with complex needs who require additional and intensive support, with a focus on delivering better outcomes.

Email: earlyhelp@kent.gov.uk

Telephone: **03000 41 92 22**

www.kelsi.org.uk/earlyhelp

Mediation Services – Can work with parents and young people in order to try to help resolve differences and resolve disagreements that have arisen between them.

- Maidstone: 01622 692843
- Canterbury/Thanet: 07970 500097
- Sevenoaks/Tonbridge & Malling/Tunbridge Wells: 01322 615774
- Medway/North Kent: 01634 832285
- Ashford: 01233 896237
- Dover/Shepway: 01303 227296
- Swale: 01795 471415

Relate – Information leaflets and support for parents of teenagers
Tel: **0300 1001234** (helpline)
www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting/parenting-teenagers

Ministry of Justice
www.justice.gov.uk/courts/mediation

SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Childline – To get help and advice about a wide range of issues.

Tel: 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

Relateen – For young people worried about the breakdown of their parents' relationship

- Medway & North Kent: 01634 380038

www.relatemnk.co.uk

- East Kent: 01227 766094

www.relate-eastkent.org.uk

- West Kent: 01892 529927

www.relatewestmidkent.org.uk

The Site – An online guide to life for 16–25 year olds. Advisors available 24hrs a day.

www.thesite.org

YoungMinds – YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

www.youngminds.org.uk

Kent Youth Hubs and House – We have a number of places for young people to come meet friends, hang out, with lots of things going on. You can also drop in and meet with local advisers and get specialist support.

www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/young-people/youth-hubs-and-house

Medway Youth Centres and Projects

– Medway has many places for young people to meet friends, join in activities and events and get involved in the community.

www.medway.gov.uk/leisurecultureandsport/youthcentresandprojects.aspx

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

24 HOURS 7 DAYS A WEEK

Emergency Services

Tel: 999

Samaritans

Crisis intervention & counselling, support & information for those experiencing feelings of distress or despair

Tel: 08457 909 090

Childline

Telephone counselling for children & young people

Tel: 0800 1111

NSPCC

(National Child Protection Helpline)

Child Protection

Tel: 0808 800 5000

National Domestic Violence Help Line

National support & refuge referral

Tel: 0808 2000 247