

# Family violence

## Information for immigrants and refugees



the women's  
the royal women's hospital

This information explains how family violence can affect your health. It also tells you how to get help - where to go, who to talk to, and what to expect when you talk to a health worker about your situation.

### Talking about family violence

Talking about family violence can be really hard. You might not want to talk about it because:

- you don't want to believe it's happening
- you're worried it might lead to changes in your life that feel scary
- you're afraid of how the person using violence (like your partner or family member) will respond
- you want to keep quiet to protect your family and community.

### Describing violence

"My husband would hit me so that it wouldn't show. He wouldn't let me use the phone or let me have money."

Violence is when someone acts in a way that makes you feel scared, sad, alone, separated from your family or community, or like you don't matter. Violence also includes any behaviour that threatens the safety, security, and wellbeing of your children.

Violence can take many forms, and it can happen in any kind of relationship — with a partner, family member, carer, or friend.

Family violence is the most common form of violence in the home. Most often, the person causing harm is a man, and the person being hurt is a woman.

But violence can happen to anyone, no matter their gender or sexual identity.

Violence is:

- **physical** - hitting, punching, slapping, pushing, or being aggressive, like screaming and yelling at you.
- **sexual** - rape, forcing you to have sex, or do sexual things you don't want to do. It also includes unwanted sexual comments or touching. This can happen even if you're in a relationship or married, and the person hurting you is your partner.
- **emotional or psychological** - putting you down, making you feel stupid, telling other people you're useless or stupid, swearing at you, or calling you mean names.
- **controlling** - stopping you from seeing your family or friends, not letting you take part in community or religious events, forcing you into marriage, or threatening to deport you or take your children away.
- **economic** - keeping money from you, not letting you have money of your own.
- **coercive** - using their power to make you do things you don't want to do.

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Family violence is against  
the law in Australia.

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## Family violence can cause serious health problems

Family violence is one of the main causes of illness, injury, and early death, especially for people aged 15 to 44. It's also a major cause of depression and anxiety.

Family violence can cause serious and lasting harm to your body, your mind, and your emotions. It can affect your social wellbeing, your friendships, your ability to work, your involvement in the community, and your money situation. It can also affect your family, children, and the people around you.

## The health effects of violence

"If I hide and don't talk, I am only killing myself. If I become mad or if I die, how will this help my kids?"

If you've experienced family violence – now or in the past – you're more likely to have health problems, including:

- unplanned pregnancy
- sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- tummy pain
- problems with eating
- pregnancy complications
- depression, anxiety, and panic attacks
- trouble sleeping or having nightmares
- traumatic and post-traumatic stress disorders
- some types of cancer
- eating disorders
- smoking, drinking, and taking drugs, including illegal drugs and overusing prescription drugs
- self-harm and suicide
- ongoing health problems like asthma, heart disease, obesity, stroke, high blood pressure, and pain.

Family violence also causes physical and emotional harm to children.

## Immigrants, refugees, and family violence

In Australia, young women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally diverse backgrounds, women with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ people face higher rates of family violence compared to other groups.

As an immigrant or refugee, you may face other challenges that can make it harder to stay safe.

For example:

- you might not speak English well, or know how to find services that can help you, like health care, welfare services, legal advice, or social support
- you might feel alone or you rely on the person who is hurting you for money or housing
- you may have had bad experiences with authorities like police or health professionals in the past, which makes it hard to trust them now
- you may have used services that didn't respect your culture or made you feel uncomfortable
- you may feel like it's your responsibility to manage the other persons behaviour and to tolerate it
- you may not be sure if what you're experiencing is violence – especially if it's not physical
- you may be worried about your residency or fear being sent back to your country of origin
- you may be scared for the health and wellbeing of your children
- you may worry about being judged by other people in your community.

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Asking for help can be hard  
but it's an important first  
step to getting well.

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## At the Women's

"I went to a women's service in the end.  
I felt more brave to speak with them  
(than to family and friends), but it took  
a long time."

If you tell a health worker that someone is hurting you, they will ask some questions to find out what support you might need.

They will ask if the violence is still happening and if you or your children are in immediate danger.

### If the violence has stopped and you're safe

The impacts of violence can last a very long time. Many people still have health problems years after the violence happened.

Your doctor or health worker may ask about any violence you experienced in the past. This helps them understand how it might still be affecting your health.

They will talk with you about your current health needs and make sure any treatment you receive is done with care and respect.

### If the violence is still happening

The doctor or health worker will help you stay as safe as possible. If you don't feel safe, and you agree, they can refer you to a social worker or family violence worker. This person will give you support, information, and help you make decisions.

**Note:** Health workers must follow rules about keeping your information private. Anything you tell them about your past experiences of violence will be confidential.

However, if you or your children are in immediate danger, the law says they must discuss your safety with other professionals. They will involve you in

## Social Work

Our social workers can help you if you're experiencing family violence.

You can ask the social worker questions, like:

- How can you help me and my family?
- What support can I get?
- How can I protect my children and myself?
- Where can I live if I decide to leave?
- What can I do about money?
- What are my legal rights?

Call (03) 8345 3050 to make an appointment.

## Legal

You can also speak with a lawyer.

**Inner Melbourne Community Legal** gives free and confidential legal help if you're a patient at the Women's. Legal clinics run every Tuesday and every 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday. You can book a time to talk to them in person, or you can call to ask questions about your legal rights.

Call (03) 9328 1885 to make an appointment.

## FARREP (Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program)

FARREP workers are experienced female health workers who support people affected by female genital cutting (also called female genital mutilation). They help with appointments, give information and support after childbirth, connect people to other services, and speak up for patients when needed.

T: 8345 3058

E: [Farrep.program@thewomens.org.au](mailto:Farrep.program@thewomens.org.au)

## Consumer Liaison

You can talk to Consumer Liaison staff if you have any feedback, including complaints, about the staff or services at the hospital.

We take all complaints seriously, and we use them to make things better.

Making a complaint won't affect your care or your baby's care. You can also make a complaint after you leave the hospital.

**Call** (03) 8345 2291 or (03) 8345 2290 to speak with Consumer Liaison.

Or you can send an email to [consumer.liaison@thewomens.org.au](mailto:consumer.liaison@thewomens.org.au)

## Do you need an interpreter?



You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

## Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)

T: 131 450

W: [www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)

TIS can help you contact services and get information in Australia if you have limited or no English.

When you call, you'll be asked which language you need.

Once you're connected with an interpreter in your language, they'll ask you:

- your name
- the name of the organisation you want to call
- the phone number of that organisation

The interpreter will then help you make the call.

You can call TIS any time of day or night.

## The Women's Interpreter Service (for patients)

T: (03) 8345 3054

## Crisis support

If you're thinking of leaving a violent or unsafe situation, you can talk to a crisis support worker. You can ask them questions, like:

- What are my options if I leave now?
- Where can I go for safety?
- How long can I stay in emergency accommodation?
- Can my children come with me?
- What will I do about money?
- Will the person I'm leaving be able to find me?
- Will we be safe?
- What support is available to help me leave?

## Emergency

**Call triple zero (000) if you're in danger or need urgent help.**

## Planning for safety

### Pack a 'Go Bag'

Pack a small bag and have it ready so you can leave quickly if you need to. Make sure you include:

- important papers like passports, birth certificates, visa documentation, and other identification documents
- any medicines you or your children need
- a change of clothes for you and your children
- money
- keys
- phone numbers of people and services who can help you
- your children's favourite toys or books.

## Support services

“I didn’t know that everybody has a right to support - even if you are not a permanent resident.”

### Safe Steps

Free and immediate support for anyone in serious danger.

You can call any time of day or night.

T: 1800 015 188

W: [safesteps.org.au](http://safesteps.org.au)

### 1800RESPECT

Free family violence counselling.

You can call any time of day or night.

T: 1800 737 732

W: [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

### The Royal Women’s Hospital

The Women’s provides support to people who’ve experienced sexual assault.

You can call any time of day or night.

- **Centre Against Sexual Assault - CASA House**  
Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm  
T: (03) 9635 3610  
W: [www.casahouse.com.au](http://www.casahouse.com.au)  
E: [casa@thewomens.org.au](mailto:casa@thewomens.org.au)
- **Sexual Assault Crisis Line - SACL**  
For after-hours support, including weekends and public holidays  
T: 1800 806 292  
W: [www.sacl.com.au](http://www.sacl.com.au)

## Legal advice

### Inner Melbourne Community Legal

T: (03) 9328 1885

W: [imcl.org.au](http://imcl.org.au)

You can call Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm.

### Federation of Community Legal Centres

Visit [www.fclc.org.au](http://www.fclc.org.au) to find a community legal centre near you.

### Victoria Legal Aid (VLA)

T: 1300 792 387

W: [www.legalaid.vic.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au)

You can call Monday to Friday between 8am and 6pm.

You can talk to someone and get legal advice in English or you can ask for an interpreter. This service is available in the following languages:

- عربي / Arabic: (03) 9269 0127
- Bosanski / Bosnian: (03) 9269 0164
- 普通話 / Mandarin: (03) 9269 0212
- 廣東話 / Cantonese: (03) 9269 0161
- Hrvatski / Croatian: (03) 9269 0164
- Ελληνικά / Greek: (03) 9269 0167
- हिंदी / Hindi: (03) 9269 0487
- Polski / Polish: (03) 9269 0228
- Српски / Serbian: (03) 9269 0332
- Español / Spanish: (03) 9269 0384
- Türkçe / Turkish: (03) 9269 0386
- Urdu: (03) 9269 0389
- Việt-ngữ / Vietnamese: (03) 9269 0391

If your language isn’t listed here, call the **Translating and Interpreting Service** on **131 450** and ask to speak to **Victoria Legal Aid** on **1300 792 387**.

You can ask legal services about your rights, how to keep your family safe, how to get access to money or documents, and how to fix any issues with your residency or visa.

## Support for immigrants and refugees

### Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

T: 1800 656 421

W: [www.mcwh.com.au](http://www.mcwh.com.au)

You can call any day between 10am and 4pm.

### InTouch

Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

T: 1800 755 988

W: [www.intouch.org.au](http://www.intouch.org.au)

You can call Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm.

## Support for LGBTQIA+ people

### Rainbow Door

T: 1800 729 367

W: [www.rainbowdoor.org.au](http://www.rainbowdoor.org.au)

You can call any day between 10am and 5pm.

## Support for children

### Kids Helpline

A free and confidential counselling service for anyone aged 5 to 25. It's available online or by phone.

W: [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

T: 1800 551 800

You can call any time of day or night.

### Berry Street

Support for children, young people, and families who've experienced violence, abuse, or neglect.

W: [www.berrystreet.org.au](http://www.berrystreet.org.au)

T: 03 9429 9266

You can call Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm.

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Teach your children to call  
triple zero (000) in an  
emergency.

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