

SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH FAMILY VIOLENCE



Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society

PLEASE TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES



WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family violence is any violence that occurs in the family unit against another member of the family. It includes but is not limited to violence by one partner against another, by a parent against a child, by a child against a parent, between brothers and sisters, grandparents or other family members.

Family violence is an abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency. It always involves someone using their power over another person in a way that is hurtful.

Family violence is not dependent on income and educational levels; gender or sexuality; or religious, racial and cultural groups.

FAMILY VIOLENCE STATISTICS

MEDICINE HAT APRIL 2020-NOW

| Program | Adults | Children | Total |
|-------------------|--------|----------|----------------|
| PSH | 184 | 94 | 278 |
| Outreach | 85 | 139 | 806 |
| Musasa House | 24 | 47 | 71 |
| SAFE Program | 0 | 14 | 21 |
| Treehouse | 0 | 63 | 109 |
| Housing First | 73 | 10 | 83 |
| Total | | | 1,070 |
| | | | |
| # of Crisis Calls | | 1,163 | 16,679 minutes |

TYPES OF ABUSE

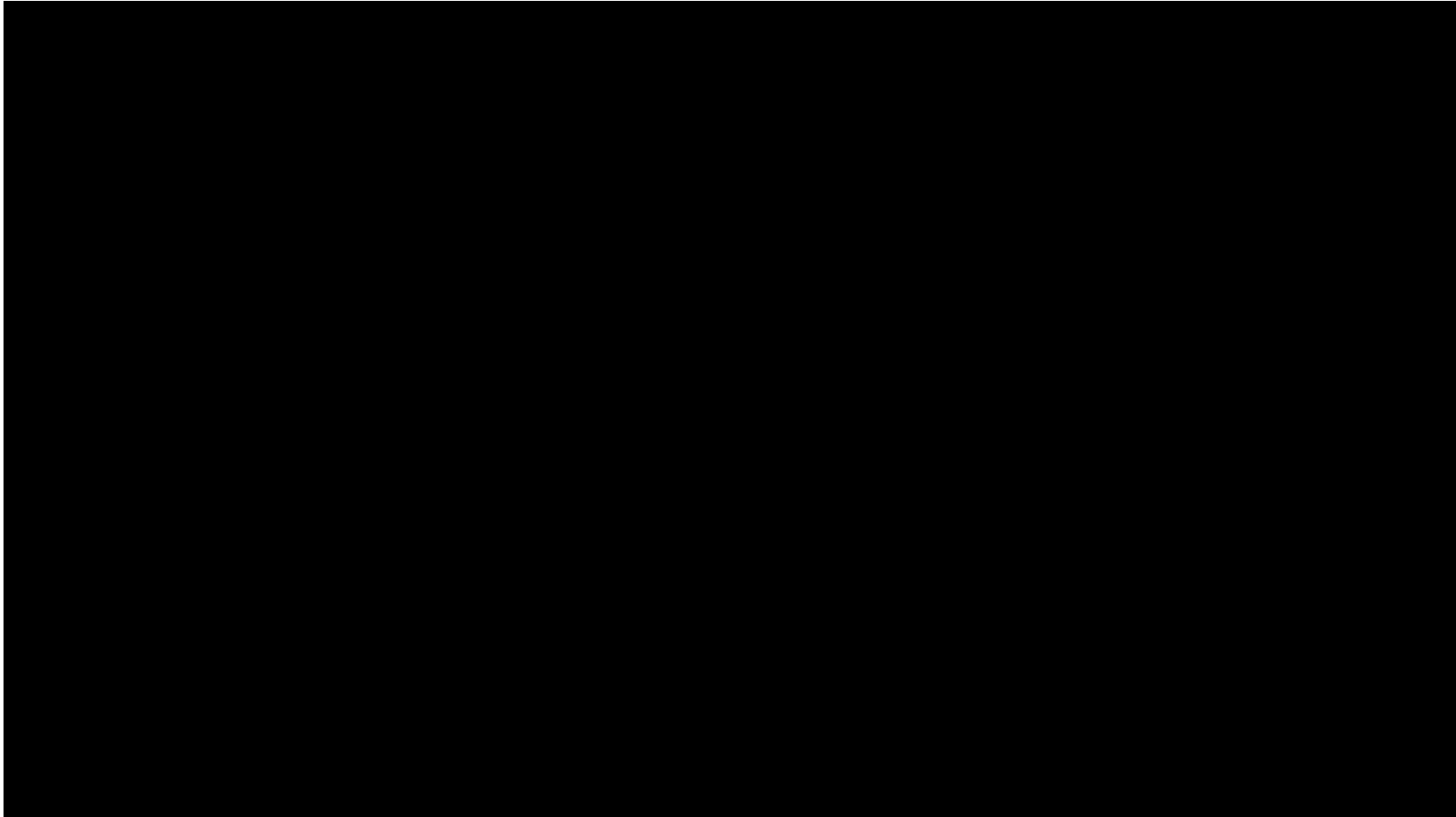
- Family violence is extended beyond physical violence and comes in many forms.
 - Physical Abuse
 - Sexual Abuse
 - Emotional Abuse
 - Financial Abuse
 - Neglect
 - Stalking/Harassment
 - Electronic Abuse
 - Verbal Abuse
 - Trafficking
 - Spiritual and Cultural Abuse

RECOGNISING SIGNS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

- ◉ Physical
 - Signs of physical neglect
 - Bruises or marks, unexplained or unlikely injuries
 - Developmental delays or regression
- ◉ Emotional
 - Highly emotional, sensitive to others emotions
 - Change in baseline emotional behavior (over emotional or under emotional)
 - Hypervigilant, lack of trust
 - Fear of going home
 - Easily startled and upset by loud noises
 - Fear of sharing feelings or keeping the family violence a secret
- ◉ Social
 - Withdrawing from school, friends, or social interaction in general.
 - Isolated play
 - Aggression or acting out
 - Possessiveness (toys, pets, or family member etc.)
 - Acting older than their age
 - Boundaries outside of what you'd typically expect

Please note that many of these symptoms are not ALWAYS related to family violence and could be a reaction to something else

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AND A CHILD'S DEVELOPING BRAIN



A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ACTIVITY

- ◉ Feelings of tension starting to build
- ◉ Violent outburst
 - Physical, verbal, emotional, etc.
- ◉ Apologies and promises
 - Gifts
- ◉ Who's fault is it? Who is to blame?
- ◉ Excuses that the abuser offers

LESSONS CHILDREN CAN LEARN FROM EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Children learn what they live. The experience of living with violence teaches lessons. A loving parent's reaction to violence is also a learning experience.

- **Children who live with family violence can learn some things that are not true...**
- **Children can learn good lessons from a parent's actions to leave and be safe...**

ROLES

Caretaker

Victim's Confidant

Abuser's Confidant

Abuser's Assistant

Perfect Child

Referee

Scapegoat

Examining family roles is important because...

ROLES CHILDREN MAY ASSUME WHEN FAMILY VIOLENCE OCCURS

In our family, we can adopt or be given “roles” we willingly or unconsciously play while interacting with others in the family.

Roles that develop reflect the unique ways each person adapts and copes with their experiences.

- **Key points about family roles...**

HOW FAMILY VIOLENCE CAN AFFECT CHILDREN AT DIFFERENT AGES

When upset, children may act out their feelings rather than talk about them. In a home where tension is normal, children are less likely to talk about how they feel. Children may not speak up when they are feeling afraid, angry, guilty, sad, worried, or confused. These feelings come up in other ways.

The following reactions have been observed in children from where abuse has occurred...

INFANTS / TODDLERS (BIRTH – 2 YEARS)

- ❑ Excessive screaming
- ❑ Lack of attachment with their parents or caregivers
- ❑ Distressed or scared at loud noises such as yelling
- ❑ Scared to explore and play
- ❑ Sensitive to emotions – sense stress and tension, cry when they hear someone else crying, etc.

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT INFANTS / TODDLERS

- ❑ Soothe and support the child when they are frightened.
- ❑ Reassure them frequently that they are safe.
- ❑ Provide noise canceling headphones or a quiet space when the room gets loud.
- ❑ Give the child lots of time to warm up and adjust to new spaces, new people, and changes to the room.
- ❑ Encourage the child to explore and play, but allow them to do so at their own pace.
- ❑ If the child starts crying for an unexpected reason (ex. Another child is crying, another child has been picked up, etc) soothe and support without telling them “you’re okay”.

PRESCHOOLERS (3 – 5 YEARS)

- ❑ Separation anxiety
- ❑ Quickly upset that they are not getting their needs met when they want them met
- ❑ Worry about their safety and getting hurt
- ❑ May feel responsible because at this stage they think that everything in the world is related to them
- ❑ May become obsessed with a TV character or superhero with hopes that they will come and save them
- ❑ Worry about people going away (ex. If daddy was arrested)

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT PRESCHOOLERS

- ❑ Encourage more time for drop off, so that the child is settled and engaged before the parent leaves.
- ❑ Encourage and role model safe and healthy expression of angry feelings.
- ❑ When cuing or redirecting the child, reassure them that they are not in trouble.
- ❑ If the child is struggling separating from the parent or siblings, consider asking the parent to provide a picture and / or comfort item.
- ❑ Reassure them that it's okay to miss the safe parent and that (she/he) will be back. Be careful not to make this promise with the abusive parent in case they are removed from the home.

SCHOOL – AGE CHILDREN (6 – 12 YEARS)

- ❑ Depression, withdrawal, anxiety, confusion, loss of self-esteem
- ❑ Perfectionist behavior or irrational fear of failure / abandonment
- ❑ Tries to find a way to explain or understand the abuse and may be willing to accept reasons / excuses for the violence that seem plausible to them (ex. alcohol, job stress, etc.)
- ❑ May blame themselves for the fight especially if they hear themselves talked about during the fight
- ❑ May feel that arrest / incarceration / or having no contact are not fair consequences for the abuser
- ❑ Stereotype males as perpetrators and females as victims

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

- ❑ Give lots of compliments, reassurance, praise, and positive reinforcement.
- ❑ Discuss and show how there are many different kids of families.
- ❑ Reassure them often that it's not their fault.
- ❑ Talk about the police as a safe and positive presence in the community, perhaps arrange a tour of the police station
- ❑ Consistently reinforce positive gender roles

ADOLESCENTS (13 AND UP)

- ❑ Feel responsible for caring for siblings and keeping them safe
- ❑ Embarrassed by their family
- ❑ May try to intervene in fights and violent incidents
- ❑ Fantasize about leaving home, may attempt to follow through with this
- ❑ May blame the parent who was being abused
- ❑ Difficulty establishing healthy relationships and identifying unhealthy relationships
- ❑ Inappropriate stereotypes regarding gender roles (men are perpetrators / women are victims, men are in charge, women are subservient, etc.)

ADOLESCENTS (13 AND UP)

Adolescents who have grown up in violent homes are more vulnerable to at risk behaviors such as;

- ❑ Drug and alcohol abuse
- ❑ Running away from home
- ❑ Suicidal ideation / attempts
- ❑ Criminal activities
- ❑ Early sexual activity, promiscuity

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT ADOLESCENTS

- ❑ Lessen the amount of adult responsibilities they take on, without completely cutting them off from their role.
- ❑ Reassure them that every family is different and that the family violence is not something they can control and it's not their fault.
- ❑ Encourage them to put their personal safety first.
- ❑ It is important for the youths to have positive relationships with safe and healthy adults
- ❑ Have open and honest conversations about healthy relationships.
- ❑ Check in often, encourage open and non-judgemental communication

HOW FAMILY VIOLENCE CAN AFFECT CHILDREN AT DIFFERENT AGES

Children and youth's behaviors are a good indicator of how they are coping with the family violence that they have witnessed and experienced. New behavior concerns can present that are commonly observed by families with children that have been exposed (either directly or indirectly) to violence and abuse.

SOME BEHAVIORS THAT COULD BE SEEN AT ANY AGE OR LEVEL INCLUDE:

- Physical
 - ❑ Headaches, stomach aches
 - ❑ Irregularity, constipation, diarrhea
- Changes in eating
 - ❑ Eating habits and / or patterns
 - ❑ Food preferences
- Changes in sleep
 - ❑ Nightmares, night terrors
 - ❑ Restlessness
 - ❑ Reversed sleep schedule
 - ❑ Fear of the dark
- Changes in emotions
 - ❑ Over sensitive, inappropriate responses / reactions
 - ❑ Temper tantrums
 - ❑ Crying
 - ❑ Whining
 - ❑ Stubbornness

SOME BEHAVIORS THAT COULD BE SEEN AT ANY AGE OR LEVEL INCLUDE:

- Changes at school
 - ❑ Truancy, refusal to go
 - ❑ Drop in performance
- Changes in social interactions
 - ❑ Withdrawal
 - ❑ Stranger anxiety
 - ❑ Shyness
 - ❑ Clinging to mom / siblings
 - ❑ Role reversal (taking on a parenting role)
- Abusive behaviors
 - ❑ Physically abusive (fighting, hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, destruction, etc.)
 - ❑ Verbally abusive (yelling, put downs, swearing, talking back, etc.)
- Regression
 - ❑ Bed wetting
 - ❑ Wanting a bottle
 - ❑ Baby talk
 - ❑ Having accidents
 - ❑ Thumb sucking

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH AT ANY AGE

- ◉ Be consistent and predictable
- ◉ Be mindful of boundaries
- ◉ Every day is a new day
- ◉ Have clear and reasonable expectations and provide frequent reminders
- ◉ Whenever possible offer choices
- ◉ Provide reasonable and age appropriate responsibilities
- ◉ Always focus on their positives traits and point these out to them often
- ◉ Cue them for what you want to see
- ◉ Be mindful to provide plenty of time, support, and understanding during transitions
- ◉ Don't make any promises that you can't guarantee you'll be able to keep

SAFETY PLANNING

Things that we take into consideration:

- ◉ Animals
- ◉ Important items to take with you when you leave
- ◉ Warning signs of abuse
- ◉ Escape plan or hiding places
- ◉ Restraining or Protective Orders
- ◉ Technology
- ◉ Stalking/ harassment
- ◉ Documenting incidents of abuse
- ◉ Living in the community

HOW TO CREATE A SAFETY PLAN

- ◉ Possible things you're already doing to keep yourself and others safe
- ◉ Are other's around you aware of your situation
- ◉ Reason to leave your house at any moment
- ◉ Phone number list
- ◉ Safe place
- ◉ Do your kids know how to call for help if it's needed?

MHWSS RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

→ 24 hour Help Line

- ❑ 403 – 529 – 1091
- ❑ 1 – 800 – 661 – 7949

→ Phoenix Safe House

- ❑ Short term emergency shelter for men, women, and children fleeing family violence
- ❑ Drop in appointments with a Crisis Intervention Worker

→ Musasa House

- ❑ Second stage shelter
- ❑ Secure residence and programming for women with children to heal from the affects of family violence for up to 1 year

MHWSS FAMILY OUTREACH PROGRAMS

→Children's Outreach

- ❑ Typically ages 6 – 12 years
- ❑ One to one appointments
- ❑ Education & support

→Youth Outreach

- ❑ Ages 13+ years
- ❑ One to one appointments
- ❑ Education & support

→ MHWSS Outreach Services at the Ridge

- ❑ One to one appointments
- ❑ Education & support
- ❑ Group programming

→ACWS Children's Project

- ❑ Research-based attachment activities
- ❑ Parent and child participate together

MHWSS GROUPS PROGRAMMING

→ Children's Support Group

- ❑ Ages 6 – 8 years
- ❑ Closed group (intake necessary)
- ❑ Wednesday's @ 6:00pm – 7:00pm September – June

→ Tween Group

- ❑ Ages 9 – 12 years
- ❑ Closed group (intake necessary)
- ❑ Thursdays @ 6:00pm – 7:30pm September – June

→ Youth Group

- ❑ Typically ages 13+ years
- ❑ Closed group (intake necessary)
- ❑ Every other Tuesday @ 6:00pm – 7:30pm

→ Kids Kitchen

- ❑ Every other Tuesday @ 6:00pm – 7:30pm
- ❑ Closed group (intake necessary)

→ Growing Together

- ❑ A 6 week group for parents and children who are recovering from the impacts of family violence

SUPPORTING SOMEONE WHO DISCLOSES FAMILY VIOLENCE

- ◉ No matter what someone might tell you, listen to them. What they have to say is important to them.
- ◉ Believe them that are telling you the truth. Don't laugh at them, you could be possibility be the first person they are sharing their experience with.
- ◉ Offer support to be able to get them connect with resources in the community. Not everyone is ready for things to change, telling what is happening is a huge step.

REFERENCES

Government of Canada. (2017) About family violence. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/fv-vf/about-a-propos.html>

Helping Children Thrive – Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System

www.lfcc.on.ca

THANK YOU!!

PLEASE REMEMBER TO TAKE
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