

# Parenting Positively



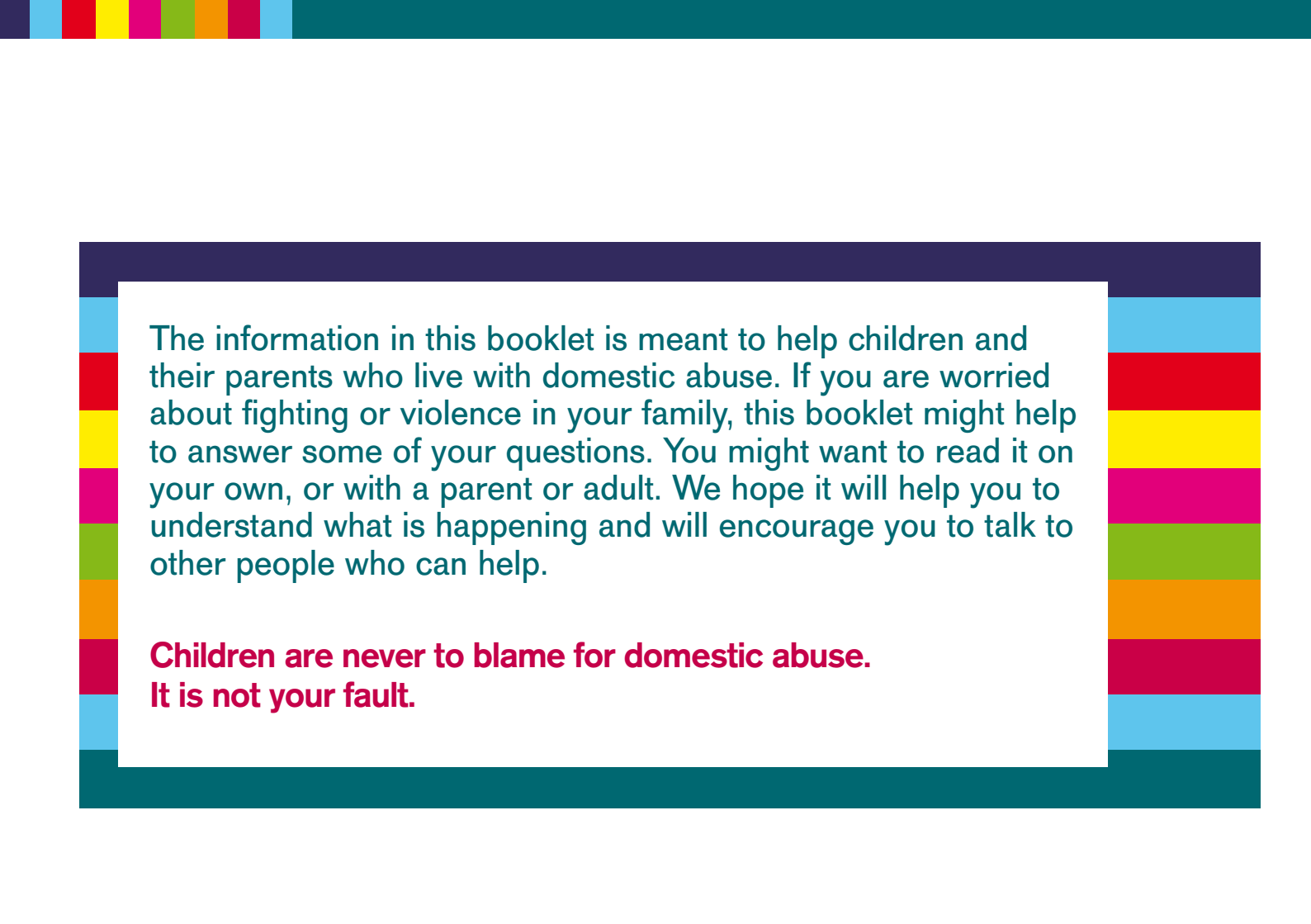
## Coping with Domestic Abuse

**For children**

aged 6 to 12

**TÚSLA**  
An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

  
**Barnardos**



The information in this booklet is meant to help children and their parents who live with domestic abuse. If you are worried about fighting or violence in your family, this booklet might help to answer some of your questions. You might want to read it on your own, or with a parent or adult. We hope it will help you to understand what is happening and will encourage you to talk to other people who can help.

**Children are never to blame for domestic abuse.  
It is not your fault.**

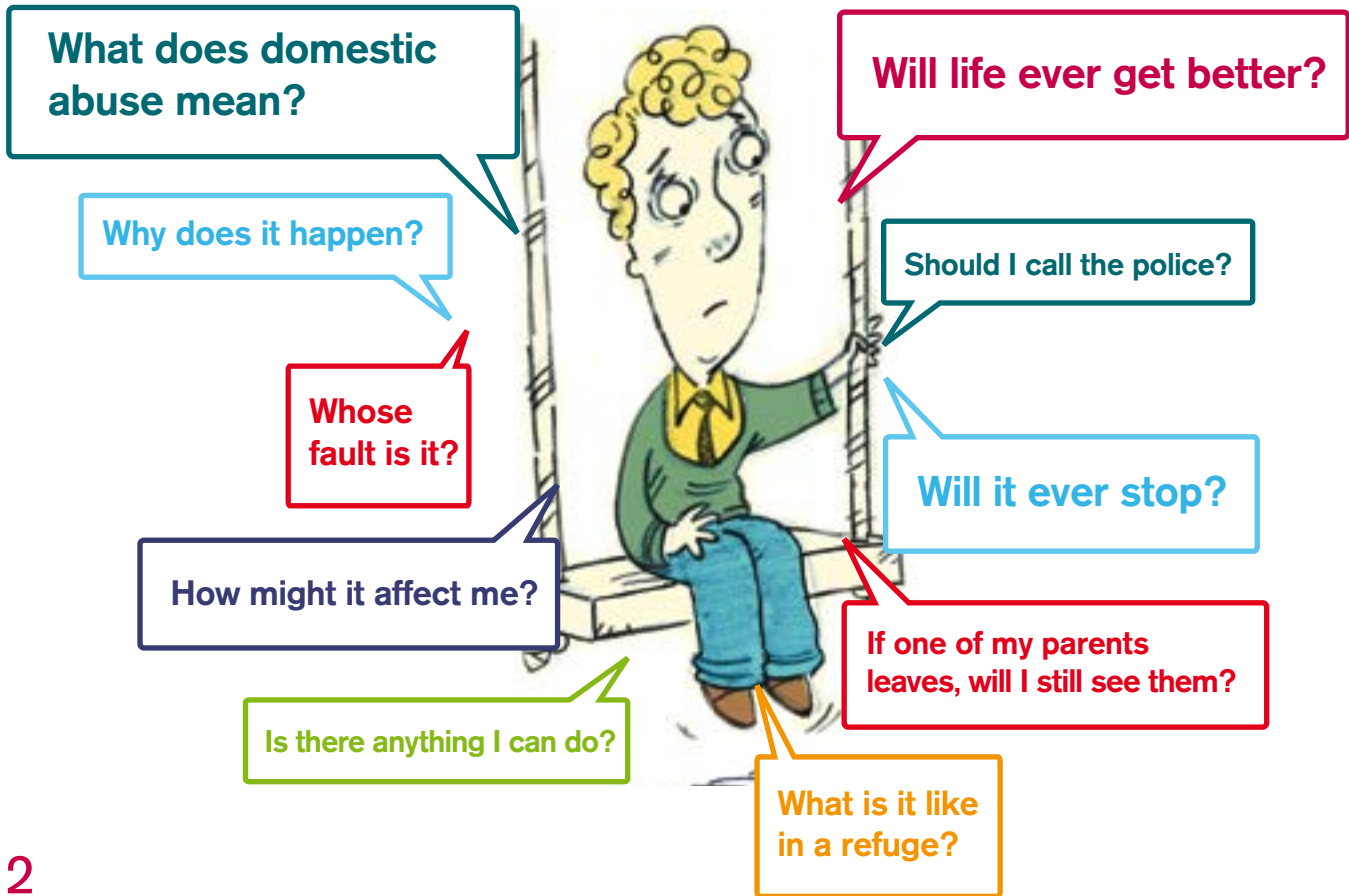
# Children's rights

Parents and adults who look after children are responsible for making sure they are safe and cared for and they usually do a good job. All children have the right:

- To be safe, cared for and protected from violence, abuse and neglect.
- To be brought up by their parents in a family where they are safe.
- To have their wishes taken into account in matters affecting them.
- To be treated with dignity and respect.



# I have so many questions



## I have heard people talk about ‘domestic abuse’ – what does it mean?

In some families, parents sometimes argue or fight and may hurt one another. If one parent uses violence (hitting, punching, kicking or using weapons) or bullying (criticising, name calling, shouting) to hurt or control another parent this is called ‘domestic abuse’.

Domestic abuse can cause children in the family a lot of worry, upset and even danger to themselves. If this is happening in your home or you know someone it is happening to, you will need to talk to an adult you can trust, (this could be your parent, your granny or grandad, another adult or a teacher) so that they can help you.

It is never okay for anyone to hurt another person, child or adult, in this way.



## Why does it happen?

No one really knows why domestic abuse happens in families. Many people think it is because one person wants to have power and control over another so they get their own way.

More men are violent to women, but some women are violent to men. Because men are often stronger, women tend to get hurt and injured more seriously.

Because it usually happens inside someone's home, domestic abuse is often kept secret so other people cannot help to stop it happening. That is why it is important to tell someone outside your family what is going on.

## Whose fault is it?

The person who uses abuse is always the one to blame for his or her behaviour. It is never okay to hurt another person in this way. No one should use violence or bullying to hurt or control another person.

## How might domestic abuse affect me?

When children see or hear domestic abuse it can make them feel frightened, worried, angry or sad. In some cases children can also be hurt or injured by the violence. This is called 'child abuse'.

If this is happening in your family or home, you will probably be feeling very bad some of the time. You might be feeling:



These feelings can be very strong and can sometimes make it hard for you to sleep or eat or think about other things like school or having fun with friends. If this happens it will help if you have someone to talk to about how you are feeling.

## Is there anything I can do to make these feelings go away?



- Spend time with friends or other people in your family who make you feel good about yourself.
- Spend time doing things you enjoy like sports, hobbies or in clubs.
- Talk to your non-abusive parent when things are calm and tell them how you feel.
- If you have brothers and sisters, you can do things together that will make you all feel happier.
- Have some quiet time, so you can relax.

Remember, the violence is not your fault and you are not to blame. Keeping it a secret will not make it stop. Talking to adults you can trust, like grandparents, teachers or a friend's parent, who will listen to you is probably one of the best things you can do to help yourself.



## Is there anything I can do to help my family?

Not getting involved in fights and trying to stay calm are the best ways to help. If you can, talk to your non-abusive parent and let them know you care about them and want to help. If you are worried, it is best to talk to other adults you can trust and ask them to help.

## I don't want anyone to know this is happening in my family, I feel so ashamed.

Children often feel ashamed, but there is no need for you to feel ashamed. It is not your fault and you are not to blame.

**I don't want to go to school – I can't concentrate and I am afraid something bad might happen when I am not at home.**

If you find it hard to concentrate, maybe you could talk to your teacher and tell him or her what is happening. Your teacher can help and support you.

It is not your responsibility to stop bad things happening and it is important that you do not miss school.



## When the fighting starts I get very scared. Is there anything I can do to make it stop?

Hearing or seeing violence is very scary. If you are in the room when it happens, move as far away as possible. Stay in another room or go outside, maybe to a friend's or neighbour's house. Do not try to make it stop and do not get between adults – you could get hurt or injured.

## Should I call the police or an ambulance?

If someone is hurt or injured you might need to call the police or an ambulance. If possible, ask an adult to do it for you. If you know how to use the phone you can dial 999 or 112 and tell the person you need help and why. You will need to be able to tell them:

 Your name and address

 Why you need help

 Your phone number

Do not hang up until they tell you. Remember 999 / 112 calls are for emergencies only so only use this number if you need the police, an ambulance or the fire brigade.

# My dad is very mean to my mum, why does she stay with him?

There are many reasons why a parent might stay:

- She may feel she has nowhere else to go.
- She may feel ashamed and want to keep it a secret.
- She may be afraid.
- She may feel she has to stay to keep the family together.
- She may hope he will change.
- She may love him and hope the abuse will stop if she stays.

Even if your mum stays, she will still need help and support, and that is why is it so important to talk to someone who can help.



## Will it ever stop?

If the abuse happens often and has gone on for a long time, it is likely that it will continue. Sometimes, if a parent who is abusive realises how they are hurting and upsetting other people, especially their children, they may stop. But in many cases the abuse does not stop until one or other partner decides to get help or has to leave.

## Can the law or police help?

Yes. The law and the police are there to protect children and adults who are abused. It is against the law to harm another person with violence. If someone is violent they can be arrested and may be sent to prison.

In some cases, one person can go to court to get a **Safety Order** to stop the other person hurting them or the children when they are in the same house, or a **Barring Order**, which means the violent person has to leave the house and live somewhere else.



## What if the abuse still goes on?

If the abuse does not stop and it is not safe to stay, sometimes one of the adults, usually the mum, may leave and take the children to a safer place. This might be a new house or flat, someone else's house, or a refuge. A refuge is a place for women and children who have to leave their home and stay somewhere else where they can be safe.

## If one of my parents leaves, will I still see them?

If one parent leaves, both parents may agree when and where you can see them. If parents cannot agree, sometimes they go to a mediator for help or ask a judge in court to decide. A mediator is someone who helps people to find a way to agree when making important decisions.



It is very important that you tell an adult you can trust if you want or don't want to see an abusive parent. If you do not feel safe to see them, let the adults in charge know.



I don't want to leave my home; I just want the fighting to stop.

No one wants to leave their home and children especially want to stay near their friends, their school and all the things that they enjoy, like their toys and other things. But sometimes being safe and living a life without violence or abuse is more important and means that you will have to move, at least for a while.

I want to have a say too!

Yes, you are right, you should have a say. You have a right to have a say in all decisions that affect you and for your opinion to be listened to. That is why it is important to talk to adults who you trust and who will listen to you. Tell them what you think and ask them to explain what is happening.



## What is it like in a refuge?

Refuges have bedrooms or maybe small apartments where mothers and children can sleep. They have kitchens and places to have meals. Most will have a playroom or somewhere for children to play and spend time. Staff in the refuge will listen to women and children and will help them to make decisions about what to do.

## Will life ever get better?

Yes, life can get better and it is important that you believe that it can. There are lots of people who want to help and support you and make sure you are safe. But in order to help you they need to know what is going on.

The most important thing to do is to:

**Keep safe.**

Tell someone who can help.

**And remember**

**IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT.**



Compiled by Margaret Rogers

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This series was produced by Tusla - Child and Family Agency and Barnardos.

Tusla - Child and Family Agency is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. Tusla has responsibility for the following range of services: child welfare and protection services, including family support services; family resource centres and associated national programmes; early years (pre-school) inspection services; educational welfare responsibilities; domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services; and services related to the psychological welfare of children.

Barnardos supports children whose well-being is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity.

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