

# Parenting Positively

Helping teenagers to cope with

# Domestic Abuse

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

  
**Barnardos**



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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.

Written by Margaret Rogers.

# Introduction

Domestic abuse is one of the most difficult situations parents and young people can face. It challenges our beliefs and values about family life. The secrecy and stigma that surround it make it difficult for people who experience it to seek help and support.

It is hoped that the information in this booklet will in some way help teenagers and parents to live a life free from violence and abuse.

It will also help you to understand:

- The ways domestic abuse affects young people and their development.
- How to listen to teenagers so that you know what is happening with them.
- How to talk to your sons or daughters about their experience to help them to understand what is happening in their lives.
- The impact domestic abuse can have on you as a parent.
- Steps you can take to try to ensure young people's safety while dealing with your situation.



There is information for teenagers on domestic abuse on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)

# What We Know about Domestic Abuse

## What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour used by one person (most often a male) to control and dominate another (most often a female) in an intimate relationship. Domestic abuse can also be inflicted on men by women or in same sex relationships, but the most common occurrence is abuse of women by men.

Research tells us that types of behaviour used in abusive relationships can include:

- Physical violence – hitting, pushing, shaking, kicking, strangling or use of weapons.
- Sexual violence including rape or being forced to have sex at times or in ways you do not want to.
- Psychological and emotional abuse such as continual criticism, name calling or threats.
- Social isolation – controlling where you go, who you see, what you wear.
- Financial abuse – controlling or not allowing access to money, work or other resources.
- Harassment and intimidation such as stalking, making abusive or threatening text or phone calls.
- Threats of violence to a partner, or other family members, including children and teenagers.

Physical, emotional and sexual abuse of other family members including children and step-children is higher in families where domestic abuse happens.

## How much does it happen?

A 2005 national study of domestic abuse in Ireland found that 15% of women (or one in 7) and 6% of men (or one in 16) had experienced severely abusive behaviour from a partner at some time in their lives ([www.crimecouncil.ie](http://www.crimecouncil.ie)). It found that women are:

- Twice as likely to experience physical abuse.
- Three times more likely to experience emotional abuse.
- Seven times more likely to experience sexual abuse.
- Twice as likely to need medical treatment.
- Ten times more likely to require a stay in hospital.

Adults whose parents were abusive have more than double the chance of being abused. Abuse is more likely where partners are isolated from family and neighbourhood supports. People who have a serious disability are almost three times more likely than others to experience serious abuse.

Domestic abuse can happen in relationships where couples are married, co-habiting, dating or even living apart. It tends to start early in a relationship and to get worse over time. At first it may appear to be isolated incidents, after which the abuser often promises not to do it again. But often a pattern develops where the abuse becomes more regular and more severe, eventually dominating the relationship.

Research also shows that often people, particularly women, who are members of minority groups such as Travellers, immigrants or other groups and who experience domestic abuse may be quite isolated and find it more difficult to get help and support.



# Domestic Abuse and Parenting

The vast majority of parents, both mothers and fathers, want what is best for their children and work very hard to meet their needs. In most situations, parents are rightly seen as joint carers and equal partners in the family unit. However, where there is domestic abuse it is not an equal partnership and to see it this way can in fact be dangerous to the abused partner and any teenagers involved.

It is crucial to consider this when decisions in relation to access or contact arrangements are being made. We know that violence often escalates after separation and that contact between fathers and children and young people can be used to continue the abuse unless a clear commitment to non-violence is made.

## Domestic abuse and young people

The effects on young people of witnessing or overhearing violence are similar to the effects on young people who have been abused. In families where there is domestic abuse, both mothers and fathers generally underestimate how much teenagers see and hear. In many studies, it has been shown that children or young people are either in the same or the next room in over 60% of cases when abuse occurs. Many more teenagers see the aftermath of violence, including injuries or damage to property.

Research tells us that domestic abuse and child abuse often happen in the same family. In more than 40% of cases, children who live with domestic abuse are also frequently directly abused, physically or sexually.

Children and young people are not passive witnesses, but are actively affected by their experience and often have to deal with difficult and often terrifying situations.



'I thought maybe they were safe from it all, but... it's not until you leave that you realise that they were actually experiencing it as well. I used to think, "oh I'll keep quiet, they won't know."'

Deirdre

## Getting help and support

You are not alone. It is not your fault. Just because you chose to be with this person at an earlier point does not mean you have to accept or suffer abuse by them, or that others will blame you when you tell them.

There are many organisations who can offer help and support. Given the unequal power relationships and risks associated with domestic abuse, services such as relationship counselling or mediation will often 'screen' prospective couples for evidence of domestic abuse by seeing each partner individually. In this way they can then decide how they can safely work with one or both partners. Talking to someone you can trust, a friend, family member or professional is the first step.

If you are concerned for your own safety or that of your family, it is essential to seek help as soon as possible to help you to decide the best options for you. It has been found that abuse tends to get worse over time and the effects on children and families become more difficult and damaging. The sooner you decide to look for help, the sooner you will be able to make changes to increase your safety and that of your children.

'Obviously, luckily for me, eventually we got out of the situation because my mum got help and advice in terms of what to do and it made everything better.'

Daisy

Everyone, adults, children and young people, has the right to be protected from domestic abuse. Children and young people, in particular, are entitled to protection from violence and abuse. Parents and other adults caring or working with children and young people have a duty of care to protect them from abuse and to ensure their welfare.

## Remember, domestic abuse is never justified.

In many cases (assault, intimidation, sexual violence) it is a crime against the person and it is always a violation of human rights.

You may be able to use legal remedies (such as safety or barring orders), Garda protection or emergency safety services, such as refuges. Contacting support services or people you can trust is always the first step.

Most people, women and men, who have experienced abuse, tell somebody – friends, family members or professionals. Breaking the silence and secrecy that surrounds abuse can be the first step to a life free from violence and abuse for you and your children.

**Information on some organisations where you will be able to get help and support is provided at the end of this booklet.**



If you are not at risk yourself, you may know or suspect that someone you care about is experiencing domestic abuse. If so, the information in this booklet may help you to help them. If you have a disability or are a member of a minority group, such as Travellers or asylum seekers, you may feel that it is more difficult to access help and support or that your options are more limited. If this is your situation, remember that you are not alone. There are many services available and you will find information on organisations that can help you at the back of this booklet.

## THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (which Ireland signed up to in 1992) provides many rights to all children and young people in order to protect them, promote their well-being and help them to develop their unique potential. These include the right:

- To be safe.
- To be protected and live free from violence, abuse or harm (this includes witnessing violence and abuse).
- To be brought up by their parents in a family, unless it is not in their interests.
- To express their views and to have them taken into account in matters that affect them.
- To have decisions that will affect them made in their best interests.
- To be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.
- To be free from discrimination, bullying and harassment of any kind.
- Children have the right to protection from harm and the right to talk about their concerns when they are living with domestic abuse.

## Teenage development

The teenage years are a time of dramatic changes. Physical growth and sexual maturity are the most obvious. But there are also huge changes in a teenager's emotional and social development and their reasoning and understanding of things. Mood swings are a common sign of puberty and young people experience a growing need for independence and self-determination. It is a time when young people renegotiate their identity and family relationships. Peer relationships become more important as teenagers begin to form emotional attachments and romantic and intimate relationships develop.

Negotiating these changes is a normal part of a teenager's journey towards independent adulthood and can be challenging. Strong family relationships and the support and understanding of parents provide a secure foundation from which teenagers can make these changes.

While each teenager will experience development at their own pace and in their own unique way, common behaviours can include:

- Seeking greater independence from parents and control over their own decisions.
- Relationships with friends becoming more important and more intense.
- Moodiness and mood swings.
- Appearing self-absorbed, self-conscious and more aware of differences between themselves and others.
- Valuing privacy and personal space. Personal feelings may be hidden from parents.
- Experimentation (e.g. with different identities and friends) and risk-taking.
- Forming emotional attachments, and often romantic and intimate relationships.
- Increasingly forming their own opinions and challenging the views of others, such as their parents and other authority figures
- Tending to return to childish behaviour, particularly when stressed.



For parents, this stage in their child's development is also a period of change and adjustment. Your parental influence may appear to reduce or disappear. You may feel 'shut out' of many aspects of your teenager's life. It is very likely (and normal) that your teenage child might be making more of their own decisions as they move towards independence. However, at times, you might feel worried, confused or challenged by their behaviour.

Remember, teenagers are not adults and do not see many situations in an adult way. Their perspective is mostly centred on their own needs. While you may find this upsetting at times, it is normal for their stage of development and you need to understand and respect it.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Do teenagers understand domestic abuse?

How teenagers understand domestic abuse differs according to their age, ability, experience and the response of those around them. It also depends on how long the abuse has been going on, how serious it is and how much they have witnessed or experienced themselves.

Teenagers may be clear that abuse involves an unequal relationship and an abuse of power, or they may attribute it to the personal relationship or circumstances of their parents. They may minimise both the violence and its impact.

Often in abusive situations, the abuser will blame his or her victim and this can add to a teenager's confusion. If either or both parents abuse alcohol, young people may see this as a cause, rather than a contributing factor.

## Are all teenagers harmed by domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse harms all children and young people who live with it.

When teenagers witness one parent harming another, their bonds of trust and security are broken and they grow up with an unhealthy idea of how adult relationships work. Each individual's experience and reaction is unique and some teenagers are affected more than others. If violence and abuse have been a part of their lives from early childhood, the effects can build up and increase over time.

Teenagers may have experienced a lot of disruption – having to leave their home or having the abuser leave and return, possibly many times. They may have been living with on-going fear, anxiety for many years.

The impact of domestic abuse may have affected their schooling, their social life and their relationships with extended family members such as grandparents, or other relatives.

## How does domestic abuse affect teenagers?

Teenagers who live with or witness domestic abuse tend to have more difficulties than young people from non-violent homes. They may have problems in school, in social relationships, in their behaviour or in their mental and emotional health.

As they become more independent, teenagers often try to physically and emotionally remove themselves from the situation through spending more time away from home, retreating to their room, or in some cases, using alcohol or drugs to escape their feelings.

In extreme situations, young people may leave home early, putting themselves at risk of homelessness.

Adults who experienced severe domestic abuse in childhood are twice as likely as other people to be in abusive relationships as adults. Teenagers may find it more difficult to develop trusting or healthy intimate relationships. In some cases, they may see violence or abuse as a normal part of relationship conflict, either as abusers or victims. Older teenagers may carry more worry and feel responsible for protecting their parent or young children in the family.

On the other hand, as teenagers grow physically larger and stronger, they are better able to defend themselves, and may be able to intervene or confront the abuser. Teenagers can feel more in control than younger children do and may be able to act in ways that help them to cope and overcome the effects of abuse. Teenagers may have more resources than younger children do. They may be better able to physically or mentally remove or screen themselves from the impact of violence. They can take a more objective view of the situation.



## SIGNS THAT TEENAGERS MIGHT SHOW INCLUDE:

### PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Injuries such as bruises or broken bones
- Self-harm
- Eating difficulties
- Having to leave home, friends, possessions
- Alcohol and substance abuse

### EMOTIONAL SIGNS

- Feeling guilty or that it is their fault
- Anger towards abuser, other parent or siblings
- Introversion, withdrawal
- Fear, tension, stress
- Emotional confusion
- Sadness, depression

### BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS

- Acting out anger, aggression
- Being protective, trying to stop the violence – putting themselves at risk
- Trying to protect siblings
- Running away from home
- 'mitching' from school

### SOCIAL SIGNS

- Social isolation
- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty trusting others
- Poor social skills
- Being bullied
- Aggression towards others
- Violence in dating or intimate relationships

# How will I know that domestic abuse is affecting my teenager?

Teenagers often show their feelings or worries through their behaviour, but at times it may be difficult to distinguish between normal changes in behaviour that teenagers exhibit and those that are a result of their experience of domestic abuse.

Some young people may find it easier to talk about their feelings than others. This often depends on how open a relationship they already have with their parents. They may try to hide their reactions because they feel afraid, ashamed or that they are to blame, or because their feelings are so powerful that they feel overwhelmed.

Teenagers may show their feelings by:

- Acting out their emotions in their behaviour.
- Being aggressive to you, their brothers or sisters or other people.
- Being sad and withdrawn.
- Being moody and sullen.

If you notice that your teenage children are behaving in ways that cause you concern or if you are finding them hard to cope with, both they and you may need help and support.

Teenagers may be torn between feeling love for both parents and anger at their behaviour. Some teenagers may be more able to talk about how they feel, but only when they feel safe to do so and often they need to be supported and encouraged to open up. Adults need to be prepared to accept their ways of expressing themselves.

There is information for teenagers on domestic abuse on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)

## Are there other ways young people can be harmed?

Teenagers may try to cope with their reactions through distancing themselves from the problem – staying away from home, retreating to their room, playing loud music or having the TV volume turned up.

Young people who have experienced domestic or other childhood abuse are known to be more likely to misuse alcohol or drugs. They may use alcohol or drugs to block or to help them to cope with strong emotions.

Young people may leave home at an early age to escape domestic abuse and are at greater risk of homelessness. Alternatively, within the home, they may try to take on a protective role. They may try to intervene when abuse occurs or challenge the abuser in order to protect their other parent and to develop a greater sense of control and feel less helpless. While this can be a natural or instinct reaction, it can place the young person at risk of being abused or assaulted themselves.

It is vitally important that young people are told that they are not responsible for making the abuse stop and that they should not place themselves in danger. Giving them the information and skills to seek help by calling the Gardai in an emergency is essential.

## Will my teenager be affected at school?

Yes. Domestic abuse can have a damaging effect on a teenager's schooling. The stress and anxiety they feel may make it difficult for them to concentrate. At times they may feel overwhelmed by feelings of anger, shame or fear.

On the other hand, school can offer young people a safe, stable break from the situation and give them the chance to build a trusting, supportive relationship with another adult or adults outside the home. School also provides teenagers with a place to be with friends and take part in activities, which allows them to escape, both mentally and physically, from the violence and abuse for a time.

If teachers know what is happening in a young person's life they will be able to understand and respond to his or her needs. If you feel that you can, it may be helpful to talk in confidence to the school teacher and or principal about the situation. However, teenagers may not be open to their school knowing details of their situation. Where possible, it is helpful to talk to them and agree what information will be shared.



## Will my teenager be more at risk of violence in their own relationships?

Not all young people who experience domestic abuse go on to have violent or abusive relationships but, sadly, some do. Violence in dating relationships is more likely where either or both young people have experienced abuse.

In some instances, young people have come to expect and accept violence as a part of intimate relationships. In other instances, young people may have learned to use violence or abuse in response to stress, rejection or jealousy. In other words, young people who have lived with domestic abuse in their family may be more at risk of being either victims or perpetrators of abuse in their intimate relationships.

## Will my teenage son or daughter blame me for not leaving?

In some cases, teenagers may question why a parent might stay in or return to an abusive relationship. Teenagers may not be aware of the difficulties or risks that may face someone when trying to leave. They may not understand that, at times, not leaving may be the safest course of action. However, teenagers have also told us that sometimes they would have preferred to leave, but parents were not ready to make that decision, for a variety of reasons.

Sometimes teenagers themselves put pressure on parents to return because they may miss their home or their friends.



Talking to your teenagers about the reasons for your decisions and listening to their views and feelings can help both you and them to come to the best decision for your family.

## What can I do to protect my teenagers from the effects of living with domestic abuse?

Young people cannot be fully protected when they live with abuse. You can best protect and care for them by getting support for yourself and your children. Teenagers are resilient and can recover and go on to live healthy and happy lives if they are protected from being harmed directly or from witnessing others being harmed and if they get support to deal with their experience.

Under Government guidelines, domestic abuse is identified as a form of emotional abuse of children.<sup>1</sup> If children or young people are directly abused, this may be physical or sexual as well as emotional abuse.

If you are concerned about the effect of domestic abuse on your children or teenagers, you can contact a duty social worker with Tusla (see contact details at the end of this booklet) to report abuse and access support services. Sometimes people can be worried about contacting a social worker, in case their children are taken into care (and indeed their abuser may have threatened them with this). However, taking the initiative to contact a duty social worker is likely to be seen as a protective action, where a parent is seeking help to deal with their situation and protect their children or teenagers from further abuse.

<sup>1</sup> *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children [2011]*

You can also support your children by maintaining open communication with them and by encouraging them to develop supportive relationships with trusted extended family members or other adults. When teenagers have good experiences and supportive relationships in their lives, it helps to build their confidence and self esteem and allows them to feel safe and secure.

Try to ensure that you know where your children are and who they are with when they are away from home. If you suspect that your son or daughter is involved in risky or dangerous behaviour, you may need to seek additional help and support.

### **WHAT DOES THE MOST HARM?**

- Directly witnessing serious abuse.
- Living with ongoing fear and anxiety for a long time.
- Being isolated and not having access to support outside the family.
- Having repeated disruptions to their lives – having to move homes, change schools, lose contact with friends and relatives several times (even though this may be necessary for safety).
- Confusion caused by denial, secrecy and by adults minimising the impact of abuse in their lives.

### **FACTORS THAT PROTECT TEENAGERS ARE:**

- Having someone to talk to who will listen and understand their feelings.
- Being reassured that the abuse is not their fault.
- Having their self esteem built up through praise, recognition and achievement.
- Spending time with friends and other adults in their lives who they like and love.
- Taking part in positive activities outside the home like hobbies and sports.

## **I TRY TO MAKE SURE MY TEENAGE CHILDREN DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING. WILL THEY STILL BE AFFECTED?**

Yes. Even when parents think teenagers are not aware of the situation, they usually know and witness a lot more than parents realise. Many studies have shown that young people are very aware of what is happening in their homes. Teenagers talk of feeling upset, frightened, worried or angry during and after episodes of violence. When the abuse is not happening, they live in fear of when it will start again.

## **Should I talk to my teenagers about domestic abuse?**

Yes. If you do not talk about what is happening in the home, teenagers get the message that it is not ok for them to talk about it either. They are left to carry the burden of knowing without being able to talk about their experience.

Teenagers need:

- Someone to talk to.
- Someone to listen to them and believe them.
- Someone in whom they can confide their feelings and fears.

Being able to talk about their experience helps teenagers to make sense of what is happening and to feel less alone, sad and overwhelmed. Teenagers also need to be involved in making decisions and helping to find solutions. Hearing their experience can help parents realise that young people need help and support. Being listened to and involved in decision-making helps them to feel more in control and less isolated.

There is information and support for teenagers around domestic abuse on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)

## How can I let my child know they are being listened to?

- Try to spend time with your teenage children.
- Take an interest in their friends and activities and know what is going on in their life.
- When speaking to and listening to your son or daughter, give them your full attention and allow them to express themselves in their own words.
- Let them know that you respect their views and feelings and that you take them seriously.
- Tell them that understanding how they are feeling is very important to you.

## How can I talk to my teenager about domestic abuse?

- Be calm, patient and open.
- Use clear, straightforward language to talk about events or feelings.
- Use words and examples that are easily understood.
- Find a time and a place to talk where you will not be interrupted and where you both feel safe and comfortable. Sometimes being outdoors can help relieve tensions that might exist in the house.
- Let your teenager know it is ok to express their feelings, for example to cry or be angry or ask questions.

## What should I say about the abuse?

The most important message to give teenagers is that the abuse is not their fault and that they are not responsible for it happening, or for making it stop.

- Tell your teenager that everyone has a right to be safe, to be treated with respect and that no one has a right to hurt him or her – not their parents, not their friends, not other adults – no one.
- Let your child know that it is ok to talk to someone they trust about the abuse – a teacher, a grandparent or other relative, a friend or a friend's parent perhaps.
- It is important to tell your child that they are not responsible for making the abuse stop.
- Reassure your son or daughter that they are loved, that their safety and happiness is very important to you and that you will always be there to give support.

## What stops teenagers telling someone who can help them?

- Teenagers may be afraid to tell in case they are not believed or in case telling results in more abuse.
- They may have been told that it is secret or even threatened in order to stop them telling anyone.
- Young people also may have been told that if they tell they will break up the family or lose one or both parents.
- They may feel ashamed and not wish to let others know what is happening in their family.
- They may worry that they will be judged or rejected if they talk about their experience.

## Does domestic abuse affect parenting?

Yes. Domestic abuse can make parenting more difficult. Physical injuries, stress, fear, emotional confusion and exhaustion can all affect how parents respond to their teenager's needs. Their attention may be focused on trying to manage their own feelings and trying to anticipate the mood and responses of their abuser. In some situations, parents may use medication, alcohol or other drugs and this can also lessen their capacity to take care of their children.

Parents may also find teenager's own behaviour challenging or difficult. Normal changes occurring during puberty and adolescence may put strain on their relationship and make communication more difficult. Teenagers' needs for more independence and privacy may clash with parents' concerns for their safety and welfare.

It can be difficult to know how much a young person's behaviour is a normal reaction to the physical and emotional changes they are experiencing or to other issues in their lives.

## Is my teenager more at risk of child abuse in a violent relationship?

Yes, it is known that children and young people who live with domestic abuse are more at risk for other kinds of abuse, physical, emotional and sexual. Violent parents are more likely to use physical punishment, threats or fear to discipline their children.

As children grow and mature, physically and emotionally, they may develop more coping skills. With increased independence, they may be able to protect themselves better than younger children can. However, some strategies they adopt may put them at greater risk of harm, such as running away from home, using alcohol or drugs or making suicide attempts.



## **ARE THERE THINGS I CAN DO TO TRY TO PROTECT MY TEENAGER WHEN THERE IS VIOLENCE?**

Yes, there are a number of things you can do. You can:

- Tell them to leave or stay out of the room where the violence is happening if possible.
- Tell them not to get involved or to try to protect you physically, as this could place them in danger.
- Tell them how to get help when needed. Ensure they know how to call the police or emergency services and what information they will need to give. Give them the name and number of a trusted neighbour or friend whom they can contact when violence starts.

## **How can I best support my teenage child?**

The best way to support your teenager and keep them safe is to try to ensure your own safety. Talk to someone who will support you or contact organisations who have expertise, skills and experience in dealing with the issue of domestic abuse. This is probably the first step in helping you to support and protect your teenager.

## **Will my teenager get over the effects of domestic abuse?**

Yes, many young people can and do recover once they are no longer exposed to the abuse, either by witnessing it or being victims themselves. This may be because the abuse stops, because the abuser leaves the home (possibly under a barring order) or because they are living in a safe environment away from the abuser.

While the effects of domestic abuse can be very damaging, when young people are safe and can begin to understand the experience and their own feelings, they can find ways to cope and recover. For this to happen, it is likely that they will need support and help from caring adults, such as family members or professionals who can help them to come to terms with their experience.

## What are my options?

Leaving the relationship and starting a new life may be the best choice for you and your teenage children. Organisations such as Family Resource Centres, refuges or domestic abuse organisations can support you to make that choice. This is not an easy decision and there may be many obstacles to overcome.

If leaving the situation is not an option for you then there are still a number of things you can do.

- You may be able to get a Safety Order, which prevents your partner being violent in your home, or a Barring Order, which prevents your partner coming into your home.
- Get support from as many people as you can and have a 'safety plan' for yourself and your teenagers when violence occurs.
- Contact your local domestic abuse support service or refuge. They will help you to identify the solutions which best suit your circumstances.
- Alert neighbours, family members and the Gardai to your situation. This can mean that help and support will be more readily available to you when you need it.



## How will it affect my teenager if we have to leave our home?

Leaving home can be a very hard decision for parents and teenagers. When teenagers have to leave their home they often have to leave behind possessions, friends and family members and a familiar neighbourhood. They may also have to change schools. Teenagers, like adults, find this difficult. However, if they understand that the reason for change is so that they and you can be safe, they will find it easier to accept and adjust.

If it is possible to plan for leaving, it will help if you can take some things that are important to you and your teenager. Some clothes and favourite possessions will help your teenager to accept the change and adjust to somewhere new. Birth certificates, school books and uniforms or social welfare information may also be needed.

Unfortunately, most refuges are not equipped to accommodate teenagers and many do not accept adolescent boys, in particular. This can create difficulties for families and in some cases, make it more difficult to find safe alternative accommodation. In this situation, it is worth considering whether other family members or family friends may be able to help by providing temporary accommodation. In some cases, refuge staff, social workers or domestic abuse support services may be able to help you to find an alternative solution.

## If one parent leaves, will the teenager have contact with them?

Contact between children and fathers who are or have been abusive is a difficult and controversial issue. A lot depends on the circumstances in which a parent leaves and on what is agreed between the parents or sometimes through the courts.

Teenagers generally tend to have more say and more control over the contact they choose to have with an absent parent. However, they may find this a difficult issue. Fathers have an important place in children's lives and most teenagers will have a strong bond with their fathers. However, where young people have been exposed to domestic abuse, that relationship is likely to be confusing, conflicted or fearful.

### GUIDELINES FOR CONTINUED CONTACT

- The safety and welfare of teenagers must be the primary consideration in any decision to allow or arrange ongoing contact so the first step is to ask:
  - Is it safe for my teenager to have contact with my abusive partner?
  - Will contact or access place me at risk of further abuse?
- Young people's own views and wishes must be listened to and taken into account.
- Where continued violence, threat of violence or intimidation exists, contact should be limited, supervised and only take place in a safe venue.
- In some cases it has been found that phone calls or texts have been used to intimidate or try to continue to control partners or their children. In this situation changing phone numbers or using call barring options may be necessary.
- Any existing Barring Orders, Safety Orders or injunctions must be upheld and not breached to facilitate contact.
- In many instances, it may be beneficial for contact to be maintained with the co-operation of a trusted and supportive friend or family member (grandparent, aunt or uncle) depending on their understanding of the situation. Contact should be in an environment where the teenager feels safe and secure.
- A safe parenting plan may be agreed through mediation.

## Where can I get help?

If your own family and friends understand your situation, they can be a source of support, help and safety.

Other services include:

- Your local refuge or domestic abuse support service
- Tusla duty social worker
- The Gardai, your GP, your local health centre
- Citizens Information Centre
- Your solicitor or Free Legal Aid Centre
- Women's Aid provide a National Freephone Helpline (1800 341 900) which provides free and confidential advice and information about domestic abuse services.

Many Family Resource Centres and community groups will have staff who are trained in how to respond to domestic abuse. If they cannot help you directly they can put you in touch with services that can. The most important thing is to talk to someone you trust.

There is information for teenagers on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)



## Safety Tips

If you want to talk to your teenager about your situation or are planning to leave or take some action about the abuse, make sure that the information will not put him or her or yourself at greater risk.

**Violence often increases if the abuser knows they are going to be challenged or if their partner decides to leave.**

If this is the case you may need to be extra careful and not draw attention to your plans.

If you are contacting any services for help or information, you may want to do it from somewhere outside your home, or from a phone on which calls cannot be traced. If you are using the internet to get information, make sure you clear your search history and temporary files before you log off. (Most sites dealing with this issue will provide instructions on how to do this.) Delete text messages and phone log records of numbers contacted. Your local library can be a very useful source of information and most libraries have internet access also.

Develop a safety plan for yourself and your children. Your local refuge or resource organisations listed in the back of this booklet can suggest ways that you can plan for your safety.

# Finding Help

## **Barnardos**

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.

Christchurch Square, Dublin 8

Tel: 01 453 0355

Email: [info@barnardos.ie](mailto:info@barnardos.ie)

[www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie)

## **Tusla - Child and Family Agency**

Tusla - Child and Family Agency is the State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It is responsible for child protection, early intervention and family support services in Ireland.

Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter,  
Dublin 8.

Tel: 01 771 8500

Email: [info@tusla.ie](mailto:info@tusla.ie)

[www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)

or

[www.tusla.ie/services/domestic-sexual-gender-based-violence/rape-crisis-centres/](http://www.tusla.ie/services/domestic-sexual-gender-based-violence/rape-crisis-centres/)

## **Family Mediation Service**

Family mediation is a service to help married and non-married couples who have decided to separate or divorce, or who have already separated.

For contact details of local centres see

[http://www.legalaidboard.ie/lab/publishing.nsf/content/Family\\_Mediation\\_Service\\_](http://www.legalaidboard.ie/lab/publishing.nsf/content/Family_Mediation_Service_)

## **Family Resource Centre National Forum**

A support network working with the Family Resource Centres (FRCs) located in communities throughout Ireland.

[www.familyresource.ie](http://www.familyresource.ie)

## Support for parents

### **Accord (Catholic Marriage Care Service)**

Tel: 01 505 3112  
www.accord.ie

### **AMEN (advice line for male victims of domestic abuse)**

Tel: 046 902 3718  
Email: info@amen.ie  
www.amen.ie

### **Disability Federation of Ireland**

Tel: 01 454 7978  
Email: info@disability-federation.ie  
www.disability-federation.ie

### **Citizens Information Service**

Tel: 0761 07 9000  
Email: info@ciboard.ie  
www.citizensinformationboard.ie

### **Dublin Rape Crisis Centre**

Tel: 1800 778 888  
www.drcc.ie

### **COSC**

The National Office for the prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence  
Tel: 01 476 8980  
Email: cosc@justice.ie  
www.cosc.ie

### **Focus Ireland**

Tel: 01 881 5900  
www.focusireland.ie

### **Free Legal Advice Centres**

Tel: 01 874 5690 / 1890 350 250  
www.flac.ie

### **HSE Infoline**

Tel: 1850 241850  
www.hse.ie

### **Immigrant Council of Ireland**

Tel: 01 674 0202  
Email: admin@immigrantcouncil.ie  
www.immigrantcouncil.ie

### **Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)**

Tel: 0761 07 2000  
Email: helpline@mabs.ie  
www.mabs.ie

### **Move Ireland (Men overcoming violence)**

National Office  
Tel: 065 684 8689  
Email: move@moveireland.ie  
www.moveireland.ie

### **Pavee Point Travellers and Roma Centre**

Tel: 01 878 0255  
Email: info@paveepoint.ie  
www.paveepoint.ie

### **Rape Crisis Network**

Tel: 091 563 676  
www.rcni.ie

### **Respond! (Housing Association)**

Tel: 051 840 200  
Email: info@respond.ie  
www.respond.ie



### **Safe Ireland**

Tel: 090 647 9078

Email: [office@safeireland.ie](mailto:office@safeireland.ie)

[www.safeireland.ie](http://www.safeireland.ie)

### **Samaritans (24 hour confidential emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair)**

Lo-call: 116 123

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### **Sonas Voluntary Housing Association**

Emergency help number: 01 866 2015

For Advice, Outreach,

Court Accompaniment:

087 952 5217

[www.domesticabuse.ie](http://www.domesticabuse.ie)

### **The Irish Refugee Council**

Tel: 01 764 5854

Email: [info@irishrefugeecouncil.ie](mailto:info@irishrefugeecouncil.ie)

[www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie](http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie)

### **Threshold**

Tel: 1890 334 334

[www.threshold.ie](http://www.threshold.ie)

### **Treoir**

Lo-Call: 1890 252 084

Email: [info@treoir.ie](mailto:info@treoir.ie)

[www.treoir.ie](http://www.treoir.ie)

### **Women's Aid**

Tel: 1800 341 900

Email: [info@womensaid.ie](mailto:info@womensaid.ie)

[www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)

### **WOVE**

(support group for women experiencing/ who have experienced domestic violence)

Tel: 01 454 9474 (Fri mornings)

Contact details for your local Garda Station, Health Services Executive or Hospital can be found in the Green section of your local telephone directory.

## **Support for teenagers**

Barnardos has support and information for teenagers on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp).

### **CARI Foundation – Children at Risk in Ireland**

Tel: 1890 924 567

Email: [helpline@cari.ie](mailto:helpline@cari.ie)

[www.cari.ie](http://www.cari.ie)

### **Childline**

Tel: 1800 666 666 [www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie)

### **Children's Rights Alliance**

Tel: 01 662 9400

Email: [info@childrensrights.ie](mailto:info@childrensrights.ie)

[www.childrensrights.ie](http://www.childrensrights.ie)

### **Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)**

Tel: 01 676 7960

Email: [ispcc@ispcc.ie](mailto:ispcc@ispcc.ie) [www.ispcc.ie](http://www.ispcc.ie)

**National Youth Council of Ireland  
Child Protection Unit**

Tel: 01 478 4122  
Email: info@nyci.ie  
www.youth.ie

**The Office of the Ombudsman  
for Children**

Tel: 01 865 6800 / 1800 20 20 40  
Email: oco@oco.ie  
www.oco.ie

**SpunOut.ie**

is an independent, youth national charity working to empower young people to create personal and social change.  
www.spunout.ie

**Youth Information Centres**

are available in many towns and cities  
www.youthworkireland.ie/what-we-do/  
youth-information

## Useful reading

**Lean on Me: An information guide for  
women living with domestic abuse**

ADAPT Services (2001) Available from  
ADAPT Services, Rosbrien, Limerick

**Listen to Me! Children's Experience  
of Domestic Violence**

Buckley, Whelan, and Holt (2006)  
Available from the Children's Research  
Centre, Trinity College, Dublin

**Domestic Abuse of Women and Men  
in Ireland.**

Report on the National Study of Domestic Abuse from the National Crime Council in association with the Economic and Social Research Institute. Dorothy Watson and Sara Parsons (2005) The Stationary Office, Dublin  
www.crimecouncil.ie

**Challenging the Misconceptions of  
Violence against Minority Ethnic  
Women, including Travellers, in  
Ireland**

An Information brochure for service providers

**Pavee Beoirs: Breaking the Silence,  
Violence against Traveller Women****Parenting a Child Affected by  
Domestic Violence**

Hedy Cleaver (2015) British  
Association for Adoption and Fostering

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Every care has been taken in preparing the content of this booklet, however Barnardos and Tusla - Child and Family Agency do not assume legal or other liability for inaccuracy, mistake or other errors. Information in this booklet is general information only and is not intended to be used as a substitute for advice and treatment from a qualified professional. Organisation contact details are shown for the convenience of the user and do not mean that Barnardos or Tusla - Child and Family Agency endorse these organisations. All photographs posed by models.

Notes: All quotes in this booklet are reproduced from *Lean on Me*, an information guide for women living with domestic abuse published by Adapt Services, Limerick, 2001 with kind permission.

This booklet is one in a series on Parenting Positively. Parenting is a very rewarding job but one which can be difficult at times, especially when parents are faced with challenging situations. The aim of this series is to provide information and guidance to you, as a parent of a teenager, to help create a positive, loving and supportive relationship between you and your child.

The series covers teenage well-being as well as the complex life issues of death, separation and domestic abuse. The booklets outline teenager's understanding of the particular issue and how you can support them through this difficult time. Each booklet also gives further resources that you can follow up for more information and help on the issue covered.

There is also information for teenagers on these issues on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)

Also in the series: Parenting Positively for parents of children aged 6–12. Booklets in this range cover a range of topics including death, bullying, separation and domestic abuse. For more information see [www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie)

Tusla - Child and Family Agency, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8  
T: 01 771 8500 E: [info@tusla.ie](mailto:info@tusla.ie) [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)

Barnardos, Christchurch Square, Dublin 8  
T: 01 454 9699 E: [resources@barnardos.ie](mailto:resources@barnardos.ie) or [training@barnardos.ie](mailto:training@barnardos.ie) [www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie)