



## **Parenting after Domestic Violence - Myths & Facts**

### **MYTH**

The abuse is over and our family is safe. There's no reason to discuss the violence with my children now. It's best to forget about it and move on.

Children are resilient. Once the domestic violence has stopped and the family is safe, the children will be fine.

The less the children know about the domestic violence in their family, the better off everyone is in the family.

### **FACT**

Most often, when there is violence in a home, the children are aware of it. They may see actual incidents, hear threats or fighting, or observe the physical consequences of the abuse such as bruises, tears, or broken items. They may have been victims of the abuser as well.

When children see, hear or know about abuse by one parent against the other, they often have many feelings, thoughts, and questions. It may be difficult for you to discuss the abuse with your children. It is not easy to hear about your children's bad feelings and fears. It is also OK to acknowledge to your children that it is uncomfortable and even scary for you to talk about the violence.

But, it is critical to the healing process that your children are able to express their thoughts and feelings and ask questions of you, the caring parent. Talking to them and listening to them is the best way you can help them to recover.

When you talk to your children about the violence, you can:

- Help them to feel safer
- Reassure them that the violence isn't their fault
- Teach them that violence is never the way to solve problems
- Make them feel cared for and understood
- Teach them that it is healthy and natural to talk about their feelings and their experiences with you

## **MYTH**

Women who take their children and leave the abuser and the family home are thinking only of themselves.

## **FACT**

Your safety and the safety of your children is your priority. Removing yourself and your children from the abusive home situation is the only way to protect and keep safe you and your children. Ensuring their physical safety is the first and most important step that you can take to help them move forward through the healing process.

## **MYTH**

It's impossible for the children to love both the abuser and the caregiver.

## **FACT**

Many children who have witnessed domestic abuse in their home have complicated feelings about both the abuser and the caregiver. They may think that they have to choose between loving one parent or the other. They may be angry, sad, or afraid. They may be confused because the person who was abusive was also loving and fun at other times. They may feel guilty because they believe the abuse was their fault or they could have stopped it. These are all very normal feelings for children in this situation.

Don't expect your children to have the same feelings that you do about the abuser. Instead, listen to them and accept their feelings. Reassure them that you want them to talk to you honestly and that you won't be angry to hear that they love and miss their other parent.

## **MYTH**

In certain family scenarios, violence is an acceptable and perhaps even necessary tool.

## **FACT**

Violence is never acceptable within a family. A home should be a haven for safety and security. A feeling of safety and security is unlikely in a violent home. In any family, the parents and the children should be able to tell others what they need, express their feelings and talk out problems in a respectful, non-violent way.

## **MYTH**

Women who have been abused by a partner are bad parents.

## **FACT**

Often, when someone leaves an abusive relationship, they experience serious financial hardships, physical problems, and emotional difficulties. These issues make their lives and the job of parenting much more challenging.

Parenting children who have witnessed domestic violence carries additional challenges. It is imperative for every parent who leaves an abusive relationship to recognize that living with violence, with threats of violence, and with a lack of control over their own life may have affected their behavior toward their children and their ability to be the kind of parent they want to be. And the reverse is also true. Often, the domestic violence affects the way that children treat their non-abusive parent.

None of this means that the survivor is a bad parent. Rather, it may mean that the parent starting a new life free of violence may want to develop, learn and practice new parenting practices. To do this, the parent may seek out help from mental health practitioners who work with survivors of domestic violence.