

May 2024

Domestic Violence is a Parenting Choice

# DV WEST BULLETIN



Perpetrators who engage in patterns of violence and control create an unsafe and unstable family and home environment for their children and partners. This can impact negatively on the children's physical and emotional wellbeing.

# Domestic Violence is a Parenting Choice

It is important to note that Domestic violence perpetrators choose to expose their children to violence. They participate in acts of violence, power and control while denying or minimising the impact it has on their children. Some of the ways this violence is perpetrated by a parent is by: involving their children in the abuse itself, through active demands that the children watch the abuse; involving the children in the abuse by targeting them as a way to hurt and control their partner; directly physically, sexually or emotional abuse to the children; targeting the children as part of controlling the entire household environment.

A parent's violence and control of their partner has varied and far-reaching impact for the children in the family. It can result in financial stress due to loss of employment for either or both parents; housing instability resulted in forced moves or homelessness; loss of support and connection with friends and families; educational disruptions such as school attendance and changing schools.

## STOP: Failure to Protect Approaches to Domestic Violence & Children

### PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY STARTS WITH LANGUAGE

**STOP** referring to domestic violence as harming children and start referring to domestic violence perpetrator's behaviours harming children.

**STOP** talking about domestic violence as something that occurs just between the adults and start referring to domestic violence perpetration as a parenting choice.

**STOP** talking about children witnessing domestic violence and **START** talking about how perpetrator's patterns impact child, partner and family functioning.



## Controlling Tactics In A Domestic Violence Relationship Which Makes Mothering Even Harder

Mothering is a very challenging and full-time job, even when in a healthy and supportive relationship and with extended family for support. There are many additional difficulties faced by mothers who are being controlled in a domestic violence relationship (this same type of abuse can also occur in same-sex relationship). Listed are some of the tactics of a controlling partner which they may use to make the job of mothering so much harder. A controlling or abusive partner puts the well-being of a child at risk.

### Perpetrator Patterns of Abuse

**Creating Distance** – If the mother's partner is controlling, he will drive a wedge between the mother and her children. He might order the mother to work extra hours so she has less time with her children. He might try to persuade the mother that her attachment to her children is unhealthy or unnatural.

**Making Her Choose** – A controlling partner often forces his partner to choose between siding with her child and siding with him, or between spending time with her child and spending time with him. He might deliberately schedule “couple time” for moments when he knows she wants to be with her child.

**Undermining Her Parenting** – Controlling partners undermine women's parenting by finding ways to become the only authority in the house and by encouraging children to disrespect their mother. They may do this subtly by breaking the mother's rules. Or they may do this overtly by calling her names, criticizing her, or physically abusing her in front of the child. Sometimes controlling men will tell children to respect their mother, while at the same time doing whatever they can to reduce her influence in the home. Children come to see the abuser as the source of “real” power and their mother as weak. Children then cease to follow the mother's instructions and seem out of control, making her feel less and less capable.

**Overly Harsh Discipline** – Controlling partners often tell a mother that she is too “soft” with her children. He might order a mother to use harsher discipline than she thinks she should. Or if the children are frightened of his discipline, they may blame the mother for not shielding them from this mistreatment.

**Threatening the Children** – An abuser often controls a woman by threatening her children's well-being. The father or father figure may refuse to spend money on a child's medical treatment, clothing, or other expenses. He may threaten to hurt the children, take the children and disappear, or report the mother to child protective services for imagined offenses. He may throw things, stomp around, drive too fast, or threaten violence including suicide. Mothers often give in to their controlling partners, to protect their children.

**Sexualizing the Relationship with a Child** – Some controlling partners may flirt with their partners' daughters (and sometimes with their own daughters). This flirting alienates a woman from her daughter as it makes one or both of them uncomfortable.

**Sexually Abusing a Child** – An abuser will create rifts between a woman and her child if he plans to sexually abuse that child. The more strained the relationship between the mother and child, the greater the likelihood that he will be able to sexually abuse the child undetected. The child feels forced to lie to the mother to cover up the abuse and then grows angry with the mother for failing to protect them.

**Turning Children Against Their Mother** – Children learn to accommodate the behaviours of a controlling person in their life as a survival strategy. To satisfy the adult they perceive as powerful and possibly dangerous, children often laugh at a controlling partner's putdowns of their mother and gang up with him against her. Children may be bribed, pushed, or just inspired into degrading or spying on their mother or even hurting her physically.

**Case Study:** This is a story of an incredible woman and mother who was supported by DV West Outreach team. This woman continues to build safety and nurturance for her two children despite the fear and instability their father created. Her name is Lisa\* (All names have been changed).

This is Lisa's story: Lisa\* is a mother of 2 children with autism and high care needs. She survived 22 years of violent and controlling behaviour from her husband Steve\*. Six months ago she left with her children and they went to live with her sister.

Steve continued to repeatedly stalk, harass and intimidate Lisa and the children. He did not stop to think about how his actions were impacting on his children's ability to concentrate at school and feel safe in their own home.



### Lisa's Courage and Resilience

- Sought support from DV West
- Continued to report AVO breaches to the Police
- Informed school, friends and neighbours to keep an eye out for Steve and report to the Police
- Maintained the children's sports activities and appointments
- Applied for and was granted a divorce
- Applied for additional NDIS support for her children



### Steve's Pattern of Behaviour

- 22 years of violence and abuse
- Continuing to stalk and harass Lisa and the children
- Breaching the AVO
- Calling the children excessively and waking them during the night
- Intimidating by driving past their home and parking in the street
- Monitoring them by parking at the shops near the school

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# To contact us:



**Call** 02 4732 2318



**Mail** [info@dvwest.org.au](mailto:info@dvwest.org.au)



**Web Address** [www.dvwest.org.au](http://www.dvwest.org.au)

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**In an emergency, call 000**

## Important numbers

Police	000
Domestic Violence Line	1800 656 463
Victims Services	1800 633 063
Relationships Australia	4728 4800
1800 RESPECT	1800 737 732
Lifeline	131 114
Child Protection Helpline	132 111
Kids Helpline	1800 551 800
NSW Sexual Violence Helpline	1800 424 017
ACON (support for LGBTQI)	9206 2000
Women's Legal Service	1800 810 784
Wiira Baiya Aboriginal	9569 3847
Women's Legal Service	
Women's Domestic Violence	1800 938 227
Court Advocacy Service	
Link2Home	1800 152 152

