

# Working with Children: Research Snapshot

## **Significant numbers of Australian children are exposed to family violence.**

The 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics' (2014) Personal Safety Survey found that 54% of women who had experienced violence by a current partner had children in their care at the time of the violence and 31% of the children had seen or heard the violence. Children do not have to be the target of the violence, simply being aware it is happening affects children's wellbeing.

Some LGA's in our region have significantly higher numbers than the state average and others are significantly lower. Demographics will impact this figure, meaning it is even more important for certain areas to have extra capacity.

Exposure to family violence affects children's development, wellbeing and schooling and is a major cause of homelessness. It is also often accompanied by child abuse including child sexual abuse (Campo, 2015).

## **Providing a trauma informed, culturally appropriate response.**

The response to children affected by family violence is complicated by the intersecting policy jurisdictions of child protection, family law and family violence sectors, making the whole process confusing and distressing for children. Further, research in Australia suggests that an unintended consequence of mandatory reporting is that women experiencing family violence are reluctant to call the police due to a fear of mandated child protection referral (Campo, 2015). This is particularly relevant in Indigenous communities, given the history of child removal, and for people with a disability. (Libesman et al, 2023).

## **Children's views**

Studies have shown that of most importance to children is their own and their family's safety and emotional wellbeing. Children perceive these two things as inextricably linked and the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of them and their family members is critical to assist them in overcoming the impacts of family violence.

Not only do children have a clear and coherent understanding of the violence that they and their non violent parents experience, but that their views on these experiences offer great insight into how best to support them and ensure they have some agency in negotiating safety. Children also expressed the need for opportunities to talk to someone who will really listen to them, take their concerns seriously, and involve them in the process, empowering them to build relationships with their family and friends, the people most likely to provide ongoing support ( Noble-Carr et al, 2017).

### **References:**

- Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, & Parenting Research Centre, 2013  
[www.aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/childrens-exposure-domestic-and-family-violence](http://www.aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/childrens-exposure-domestic-and-family-violence)
- Noble-Carr, D., McArthur, M., & Moore, T. (2017). Children's experiences of domestic and family violence: Findings from a meta-synthesis. Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies, ACU
- Libesman, T., Gray, P., Chandler E., Briskman, L., Didi A & Avery, S., (2023). Parents with disability and their experiences of child protection systems, Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability

# Working with Children: Practice Support

The most important aspect of working with children affected by family violence, is focusing on empowering and supporting non violent parents to improve attachment with their children. This is imperative in helping families recover from violence and rebuild their lives.

1) **Violence makes children fearful, worried and sad, and as such, they perceive their physical safety and emotional wellbeing to be linked.**

It is vital that workers respond to both of these aspects of children's lives, something which has unfortunately been shown to rarely occur.

2) **Provide a safe space for the non violent parent and child to talk about what they have experienced.**

Allowing non violent parents and their children to communicate the effect family violence has had on their relationship is incredibly healing and supports healthy attachment.

3) **Children will generally disclose issues if they feel they are genuinely being listened to that their concerns are taken seriously.**

Children appreciate and need, to be listened to, included, empowered and informed throughout the process. This gives them a sense of agency and control, which is often something missing in their life.

4) **Be sure to include children in family solutions and safety plans.**

When children are excluded from involvement in aspects such as safety planning, and decision making, their needs often remain neglected, leaving them feeling disempowered and isolated.

5) **Provide trauma informed, respectful, and culturally informed care.**

The importance of creating a space where children feel physically and emotionally safe cannot be underestimated. Children should be provided equivalent respect as adults, acknowledging that their needs may be different. It is also important to ensure services are culturally appropriate.

7) **Utilise secondary consultation for practice guidance where required.**

It can be helpful to involve a familiar person to the child, such as a family services worker, teacher or early childhood educator who is already known to the family.

8) **A focus on increasing and enhancing childrens relationship with family and friends is critical.** These people are children's preferred supporters, and are the best positioned to provide long term support for children recovering from the long term impacts of family violence.