



## Help and Support for parents experiencing child to parent violence and abuse?

**A UK booklet containing advice and information for parents and carers**

We acknowledge The Walking on Eggshells project, Australia in being able to bring this booklet to you, who have given us permission to adapt the content for WIC? in the UK

## Introduction

# You are not alone!

### **Covid-19**

**At this time whilst the UK is on lockdown as a result of COVID 19 and you face 24-hour isolation with a child or children it may absolutely feel that there is no help to be found. You are not alone there a few agencies across the UK who are responding and supporting parents with this issue. Further information can be found at the back of leaflet.**

Child to parent violence an abuse in any family is a very serious issue. Mothers are most likely to be the targets of this violence; however, all family members can be at risk. And the issue cuts across all of society.

This booklet offers some suggestions and resources for parents and carers who are living with violent and abusive behaviour from their child or adolescent.

The violence and abuse may be verbal, psychological, physical, or financial with young people engaged in a variety of behaviours designed to dominate, threaten or coerce parents or other family members.

Abuse is never okay!

While it is generally accepted that there will be occasional conflict within a family who live together which can be between parents and their children or children squabbling between themselves, this conflict becomes abusive when one person uses threats, force or manipulation to gain power over the other. Violence is not the same as anger. Anger is an emotion while violence is about power and control.

Child and adolescent violence has many similarities to domestic violence, but while domestic violence between adults in the UK is generally well recognised, child to parent violence and abuse in families often remains hidden and unacknowledged because of the shame associated with it and the fear of what could happen if it is reported.

It's important to remember that child to parent violence and abuse in the family exists across all communities, social classes, cultural background and geographic area. It can happen in any family!

## What is child to parent violence and abuse?

**The UK government guidance produced in 2015 addressing adolescent to parent violence states: What is adolescent to parent violence and abuse?**

1.1. Adolescent to parent violence and abuse (APVA) may be referred to as ‘adolescent to parent violence (APV)’ ‘adolescent violence in the home (AVITH)’, ‘parent abuse’, ‘child to parent abuse’, ‘child to parent violence (CPV)’, or ‘battered parent syndrome’.

1.2. The cross-Government definition of domestic violence and abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse. While this definition applies to those aged 16 or above, APVA can equally involve children under 16, and the advice in this document reflects this.

1.3. **There is currently no legal definition of adolescent to parent violence and abuse.** However, it is increasingly recognised as a form of domestic violence and abuse<sup>1</sup> and, depending on the age of the child, it may fall under the government’s official definition of domestic violence and abuse<sup>2</sup>.

1.4. It is important to recognise that APVA is likely to involve a pattern of behaviour. This can include **physical violence** from an adolescent towards a parent and a number of different types of abusive behaviours, including **damage to property, emotional abuse, and economic/financial abuse**. Violence and abuse can occur together or separately. Abusive behaviours can encompass, but are not limited to, **humiliating language and threats, belittling a parent, damage to property and stealing from a parent and heightened sexualised behaviours**. Patterns of **coercive control** are often seen in cases of APVA, but some families might experience episodes of explosive physical violence from their adolescent with fewer controlling, abusive behaviours<sup>3</sup>. Although practitioners may be required to respond to a single incident of APVA, it is important to gain an understanding of the pattern of behaviour behind an incident and the history of the relationship between the young person and the parent.

Within the UK currently, there is no legal definition and we are not yet clear about causes, it is always multi-causal and there is rarely a single reason.

**Physical abuse** may include pushing, hitting, punching, slapping, kicking, throwing things, punching holes in the walls, wrecking other parts of the structure in the home and harming pets.

*“she gave me a black eye and I couldn’t go out, I felt helpless”*

*“He had my younger son held at knifepoint”*

**Verbal abuse** is a form of psychological abuse and may include shouting and yelling; arguing; challenging, being critical and belittling; name calling and swearing.

*“The constant name calling and swearing every day, just grinds me down”*

**Psychological/emotional abuse** includes intimidating parent; causing parents to feel fearful; maliciously playing mind games; making unrealistic demands on parents; lying; threatening to injure family members; withholding affection; threatening to run away, harm themselves or commit suicide; leaving the home without stating where they are going; using offensive text messages; relentlessly pursuing parents around the home.

*“she texts me constantly, wherever I am, making demands on me”*

**Financial abuse** includes stealing money or belongings; demanding goods that parents cannot afford; incurring debt that a parent cannot cover (e.g. using credit card to shop online & school fines for non-attendance) and destroying property in the home.

*“She got hold of my credit card details and ran up a bill on line for clothes and makeup”*

**It can be hard for parents to recognise whether the behaviour of their child is or adolescent is violent or abusive. As a parent, always trust your instincts!**

You know when things are not okay. Violence from children and adolescents is NOT a normal part of growing up. Most children will act out at some stage however when the behaviour becomes controlling, threatening, intimidating or unsafe it is stops being normal.

**Behaviours may include:**

- You changing your behaviour to avoid confrontation with your child
- You are fearful for your safety or the safety of other family members
- The child lashes out verbally or physically causing fear or distress to them
- You feel you are walking on eggshells to keep the peace
- The child is stealing or damaging other family members possessions
- The child threatens you or others.
- The child threatens to harm themselves or engage in risky behaviour. Always take threats of self-harm seriously
- The child is critical and dismissive of you and your interests
- The child blames you or others for their behaviour
- The child is cruel to pets
- The child threatens to run away from home if you don't meet their demands
- The child threatens to call others i.e. ChildLine, a social worker or other professional if their demands are not met.

As a parent you may be feeling any of the following:

Helpless Hopeless **Guilty** Powerless

Isolated Anxious **Despair**

**Shame** Blamed

## There is help available!

In this booklet you will find a list of useful contacts

Remember! This is not your fault

There are many factors that influence your child to behave violently and abusively. It's difficult to pin point an exact reason; reasons are usually in our experience multi-causal and have built up over a period of weeks, months or years.

Some influences may be:

- They have witnessed or experienced adult family violence
- Has seen violent or abusive behaviour can be a successful way to control others and get their own way
- Is being influenced by peers
- Has mental health or drug and alcohol issues
- Has other health, behavioural or learning difficulties
- Has an inflated sense of entitlement and feels that others should cater to their needs and wants
- Has a difficult temperament and is easily angered

There are no simple answers to the issues that are experienced and many and varied explanations. Remember it is not necessary to know causes in order to be able to make changes.

There is **NO EXCUSE FOR ABUSE OR VIOLENCE**, but understanding some of the issues affecting a child may help you to respond in a way that is firm and strong, but also supportive. It may be helpful to remember the things that you like and love about your child that are separate from the violence and abuse.

Below you will find a set of considerations to help you to move forward.

## Parenting styles and practice

Some parenting styles and practice may inadvertently support the violence and/or abuse. These may include:

- Compensating for family breakup by trying to give the child everything
- Constantly sacrificing your own needs or interests for those of the child
- Giving a child too much freedom
- Fear of conflict, which prevents you from taking action and helping the child to be accountable and responsible
- Parenting that is permissive or indulgent
- Conflict in parenting styles between parents

- Trying to make the child happy regardless of your sacrifice
- Feeling overly responsible for the child's emotional well-being and that of other family members

## **Taking action**

It can be difficult for parents to seek support

- You may feel that there is nothing that can be done and no one can help
- You may be hesitant to seek help because you are feeling ashamed about the violence or you may be worried that you will be blamed.
- You may feel that you should be able to deal with the situation yourself
- You may feel that you are responsible for the behaviour
- You may have tried to get support and found that your experience was trivialised, misunderstood, minimised or dismissed.
- You may find it hard to acknowledge that your child is violent and you might be excusing or minimising the behaviour because your child is going through a difficult time.

## **Take a stand!**

- Acknowledge the problem, don't try to hide it or hide from it
- Naming what is happening is a good start to taking action
- Talk about the violence or abuse with someone that you trust, such as a friend, family member or counsellor or check out the Who's in Charge? website.
- Use the contact list at the back of this booklet to identify services that you can call.
- Plan strategies to deal with the problems
- Seek out support services for you, your child and your family.
- Develop a safety plan for you and your family in case you need it
- Be kind to yourself

Remember, you have a right to feel safe

## **Be persistent in finding support**

Although child to parent violence and abuse is still not widely recognised in the community there is help available. We at Who's in Charge? are constantly training practitioners across the UK to address the issue.

In the following notes there are some suggestions for taking a stand to change the child's behaviour; using consequences; reflecting on yourself; having a safety plan.

## Consequences

All our actions and decisions in life have consequences. In parenting an out-of-control child or adolescent, introducing consequences for abusive or violent behaviour can sometimes be used successfully to regain more confidence, power and control in the relationship.

Consequences are a way for parents to say, “we’re not putting up with this any longer and we are taking steps to get you to stop”

When parents develop a strategy based on consequences it should be:

Related to the unacceptable behaviour

Respectful of the child and also the parent or others who have been affected by the behaviour

Reasonable and proportionate to the behaviour (consequence fits the behaviour)

The consequences, ideally will result in an improvement in the child’s behaviour and encourage them to take personal responsibility for that behaviour

It’s also important to give choices not orders or threats. As an example of choices “you can either throw the remote control or you can lose a third of your pocket money what do you choose to do? “

**When children behave violently there is NO negotiation – violent and abusive behaviour is unacceptable!**

## Setting consequences

Do this when you are feeling strong and supported. Make a plan and think about what you can expect from your child.

What behaviours are reasonable and unreasonable. It’s useful to write them down as a reminder.

Deciding what’s reasonable and unreasonable will be individual to every parent/s. For example, you may decide that it’s unreasonable for your child to steal money from you and that may be the focus for the starting point of your consequences. However, another parent may choose to focus their consequences around a child’s continual swearing or verbal abuse of other family members. It will be different for each family

Using ‘I’ statements can be very powerful. Saying “I will not tolerate verbal abuse from any family members. If you use this language, I will not drive you to your friend’s house” or “If you steal from me, I will deduct what you stole from your pocket money” can help you to feel in control of the situation.

The child may try to negotiate or undermine you and your resolve. **Stand firm! Do not allow yourself to be bullied. When children behave violently there is NO negotiation – violent and abusive behaviour is unacceptable!**

**Start with small steps.** Two or three consequences related to stopping the violent or abusive behaviour is a good start. Never fall into the trap of trying to tackle too many things all at once. Be consistent in the two or three that you start with.

Examples

If a child is persistently engaged in technology and constantly on a phone/tablet/Xbox

Consequence: You can put your phone aside for 2 hours a day or I can turn the internet off, which would you prefer? (Start small and try to engage them for the two hours or make suggestions about how they can fill their 2-hour time consequence)

Consequence: If you continue calling your sister names, I will deduct £1 for each time you speak unkindly from your pocket money.

Consequence: You can throw the remote control and the tv will go off for an hour or you can put it down and continue watching.

In each of these scenarios they may still choose poor behaviour but they are making a choice. This helps a child to be accountable and, in that moment, they are taking responsibility for their own behaviour. Phrasing consequences calmly in this way helps you to remain calmer and more in control.

Always work out the consequences in advance if you can and tell your child what the consequence will be.

Explain to the child that it's their behaviour that is unacceptable and that you won't tolerate this behaviour but take your opportunities to remind them that you still love them. And remember even the worst behaved child is usually doing what they are supposed to be doing for about 30 percent of the time. Even if it's only sleeping or eating.

Continue to implement and state consequences even if the child seems not to care about them. Try to make them things that you have some control over.

In the face of difficulty, if possible, try to hold on to your sense of humour as this can be a really good way of breaking tension.

## **Things may get harder before they get better**

Changing your approach as a parent can be hard, it takes motivation, conviction and **a lot of** practise.

- Your child may rebel and the behaviour violent behaviour may increase initially
- Things might get worse before they get better**
- You must be prepared to follow through with consequences you have set and the child must believe that you will

- You will need to be consistent when applying consequences. This can be hard especially if you are feeling upset, angry or under threat. To help you with this here are three helpful tips.
- state the consequence clearly and firmly and walk away rather than waiting for a response
- If you are unable to put your consequence in place immediately, tell your child that there will be a consequence and you will let them know what it will be within the next fifteen minutes
- Always resist setting a consequence during the height of an escalation – always wait until things have calmed down
- Ignore the behaviours that you can live with – **choose your battles**
- Start with something simple so that you can have small successes to begin with
- Small changes carried out consistently and persistently will eventually create change!

## Reflecting on your responses and beliefs

- Focus on self-care and your own wellbeing – you are important
- As a person and a parent, you deserve to be treated with respect
- Reflect on how you respond to your child – remember sometimes our response may not be as helpful as it could, as we are all capable of behaving differently when we are stressed versus when we are calm and relaxed
- What are the triggers that can cause you to react negatively? Learning to recognise the triggers can help you to change your response
- Develop a calm presence. Meditation and relaxation techniques may help achieve this. What small things are you doing for yourself throughout the day. Just taking 5 minutes out to focus on your own self-care can be hugely beneficial
- Try not to think of your relationship with your child as a battleground with winners and losers – remain focused on ways to build respectful relationships
- Acknowledge the role stress can play in each relationship within the family. Develop ways to decrease or diffuse stress where possible
- Try and externalise - the problem is the child's behaviour, not the child.

Celebrate any improvements in the relationship. This is a great opportunity to use 'I' statements to acknowledge the changes in behaviour. for example, "I feel happier when you speak to me nicely because your words don't hurt what I'd like you to do is carry on speaking kindly"

Try to ignore outside influences other than those that are supportive and helpful to you as a parent

## Believe in yourself and your parenting ability!

## A safety plan

It is important to have a safety plan. We use safety plans in various areas of life just like we use a baby monitor to alert us if our baby is not sleeping soundly or a smoke alarm to recognise when our house is on fire. It's also important to recognise when our child's behaviour has moved beyond what is safe for you, other family members or the child themselves. You need a safety plan in case you need to leave the home suddenly. You need to be clear in advance what you are going to do.

- Think about where you could go or who could provide assistance in an emergency
- Make sure you have a list of easily accessible phone numbers written down as well as in your phone
- Ensure that your mobile phone is always in credit
- Always have a spare set of keys for the home and car in a safe place that only you know about
- Make sure that your other children know how to dial 999 in an emergency
- **If you consider that you or other family members are at risk you must call the police** (No parent wants to criminalise a child and this is generally not the first step that the police will take)
- Always keep a record of dates and times and brief details about any violent behaviour in case of any legal action involving older children

Contact support services listed in this booklet for more information

## What if I call the police?

### **If you are concerned for your safety or that of any family members call the police**

Many parents hesitate calling the police even when the situation is critical because:

- They do not want the child to get a criminal record (the age of criminal responsibility in the UK is 10 years old)
- They do not know if the police will take the situation seriously
- They may have had a negative experience with calling the police previously
- They feel guilty
- They worry about what others will say
- They worry about the child or other children being moved into care

Calling the police will not necessarily result in a criminal conviction

## Is it a crime?

If your child aged 10 years or over were to hit or assault someone else in the community that would be considered a criminal offence. If you or any other family member are experiencing an assault or violence as a direct action of your child's behaviour, this should be viewed no differently.

This behaviour can be reported to the police and will be investigated as would any other police reported incident.

Calling the police to come is extremely difficult. However, it is important to keep yourself and your family safe. You might feel like you are betraying your child, that you will damage your relationship with them or that this will put their future at risk. You may also be experiencing feelings of guilt, anger, sadness or fear. Calling the police may help to calm the situation.

## More about police involvement

At what age can a child be charged?

The criminal justice system treats children and young people differently from adults and significant weight must be attached to the age of the suspect if they are a child or young person under 18.

### Age of criminality

The age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10 years old. This means that children under 10 can't be arrested or charged with a crime. There are other punishments that can be given to children under 10 who break the law.

Children between 10 and 17 can be arrested and taken to court if they commit a crime.

[www.cps.gov.uk](http://www.cps.gov.uk)

So, a child between the ages of 10-17 years of age is considered to be capable of committing a crime and is therefore responsible for their actions. Young people of this age are dealt with through the youth justice process.

People over the age of 18 are considered adults and are dealt with through the Magistrates Court.

Children under the age of 10 years of age cannot be charged, but police can still be called for assistance, advice and to diffuse situations.

## How can family and friends help?

Support from family and friends is very important for parents experiencing child to parent violence. Both emotional and practical support can be very useful

### Practical support can take the form of:

- Screen time with a family member or family friend to alleviate tension
- Encouraging the parent to make a safety plan
- Helping the parent find useful resources and services
- Attending counselling sessions or support groups with them
- Accompanying the parent to a social occasion to ease the pressure
- Preparing a meal or providing a special treat for the parent

### Emotional support can take the form of:

- Listening to them and believe what they tell you
- Being empathic and trying to really hear what the parent is experiencing
- Asking them what you could do that they would find helpful
- Expressing your concern for them
- Respecting their privacy
- Encouraging them to care for themselves

**It is equally as important to be aware of what is NOT helpful in these situations:**

#### **DO NOT**

- Tell them what to do
- Blame them or imply it is their fault
- Criticise the way they are managing the situation
- Confront the young person

*An understanding and supportive person can make a very positive difference in the life of a parent experiencing violence and abuse from a child.*

## What Support is Available?

**If you or someone you know, is in immediate danger always call 999 and ask for the police**

### Who's in Charge?

Who's in Charge? a 9-week programme for parents, which is run across the UK so a programme of support maybe available near you. We have programme facilitators in the following areas so please contact us at [admin@whosincharge.co.uk](mailto:admin@whosincharge.co.uk) for full details.

England		
Bedfordshire Berkshire Buckinghamshire East Sussex East Yorkshire Essex Greater London	Hampshire (including Isle of Wight) Hertfordshire Lancashire Leicestershire Lincolnshire Middlesex Norfolk Northamptonshire	Oxfordshire South Yorkshire Suffolk Surrey West Sussex West Yorkshire
Wales		
Anglesey Flintshire		

## National Helplines for Families

**If you or someone you know, is in immediate danger always call 999 and ask for the police**

### National Domestic Abuse Helpline

**0808 2000 247**

<https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/Contact-us>

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### Family Lives

Family lives.org.uk

[askus@familylives.org.uk](mailto:askus@familylives.org.uk)

Family Lives offers a confidential and free\* helpline service for families in England and Wales (previously known as Parentline)

**0808 800 2222**

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### NSPCC Helpline

[help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

**0808 800 5000**

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### Citizens Advice National Helpline

**03444 111 444**

You can also contact your local office by phone, email and some provide a web service. Check your local office website for the most up to date information on contact details.

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### Childline

**0800 1111**

If you believe that your child needs support due to increased behavioural or emotional needs, they can speak confidentially and anonymously to Childline which may help to alleviate the situation if they feel able to speak someone outside of the family.

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### Who's in Charge?

**07814 378 325**

**07966 592 632**

If you would like further help or information please call  
email [admin@whosincharge.co.uk](mailto:admin@whosincharge.co.uk)  
[www.whosincharge.co.uk](http://www.whosincharge.co.uk)

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### Holes in the Wall

[Holesinthewall.co.uk](http://Holesinthewall.co.uk)

<https://holesinthewall.co.uk/resources/directory/>

Helen Bonnick is a social worker, activist and blogger who has been researching child to parent violence and abuse across the UK,

Europe and internationally. Helens website offers a wealth of information including research, reading, support service details and other resources

for both parents, carers and professionals

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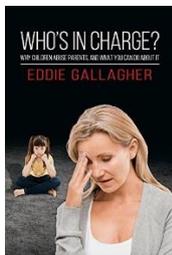
## Eddie Gallagher

Eddie Gallagher is the developer and author of the Who's in Charge? programme and all materials are copyrighted. He is a psychologist, social worker and family therapist who has been helping parents experiencing child to parent violence and abuse in the home for over 35 years. His website contains some useful information and can be found at <http://www.eddiegallagher.id.au>

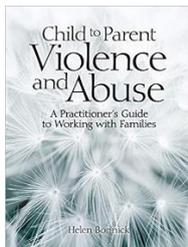
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## Helpful Reading

There are a host of useful reading materials on the Holes in the wall website but a couple of useful books to get you started on understanding the issue.



**Gallagher, E.** (2018) *Who's in Charge? Why children abuse parents and what you can do about it*, Austin Macauley Publishers, London



**Bonnick, H.** (2019) *Child to Parent Violence and Abuse, A Practitioner's Guide to Working with Families*, Pavilion Publishing

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