

Parenting

After
Domestic Violence
And Abuse



COPE Galway
Let's help together



SURF (Service Users Refuge Forum)

SURF is a group of women who have left an abusive relationship and are rebuilding their lives.

It was set up by COPE Galway to help women who have experienced Domestic Violence and Abuse and who have stayed at Waterside Refuge or attended the outreach support service.

Women who used these services want to help other women to begin to heal themselves from the inside out—they want to share their experiences and the tips they have learnt along the way.

Domestic Violence Refuge & Outreach Support Service

24hr Free and Confidential help is available. Someone is available to answer your call no matter what time of day or night it is.

Phone: 091 565 985

Email: waterside@copegalway.ie
watersideoutreach@copegalway.ie

If you are in danger now, call the Gardaí on 999 or 112.

While much has been written about parenting skills and challenges generally, less has been shared in respect of parenting under stress, and particularly so in the context of Domestic Violence and Abuse. Not alone has the voice of women who are parents experiencing Domestic Violence and Abuse been unheard, their expertise and wisdom about coping remains untapped and unshared.

This booklet is both welcome and timely in that it firstly outlines the challenges and solutions of trying to parent well while living with Domestic Violence and Abuse but also its authorship includes those with first-hand experience.

We are most appreciative to the set of authors from COPE Galway Waterside House and SURF (Service Users Refuge Forum) who have come together to create this pragmatic and 'real world' booklet.

Professor Pat Dolan

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre
Institute for Lifecourse and Society,
National University of Ireland, Galway.

Foreword by Service Users Refuge Forum (SURF)

Being a mother under normal circumstances is hard but being a mother after experiencing Domestic Violence and Abuse is even harder.

We can do it though! Have belief in yourself and trust your instincts. Remember always how far you have come.

We, the mothers of the COPE Galway Waterside Service Users Refuge Forum (SURF), hope this booklet *Parenting After Domestic Violence and Abuse* will help you no matter what age your child. Reclaiming yourself, and reclaiming the parenting role after leaving Domestic Violence and Abuse, takes time.

(continued...)



Put to rest feelings of guilt and self-doubt. You may feel that you have to prove to the world, your friends, your family and extended family that you can parent and show them you can stand up on your own two feet. This pressure you put on myself is not right – it takes time to overcome Domestic Violence and Abuse. Give yourself 'me' time too even if it is only a morning or a couple of hours a week.

Be kind to yourself. Parenting is not a straight line nor ever will be perfect. It is full of zig-zags and ups and downs. Talking with your child and setting good boundaries are key. We have put this booklet together with staff at COPE Galway Waterside, building on our own experiences, so that it will help you to cope with these zig-zags and ups and downs. It is a vibrant booklet full of tips and advice, in an easy-to-read format.

Help is always here if you ever feel like you are struggling and overwhelmed. We are doing it: we are parenting, and you can too. Never, never give up!

SURF Mothers

November 2017

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Parenting After Domestic Violence and Abuse



Parenting is important and rewarding, but it can also be a demanding job at the best of times. Parenting alone having left an abusive relationship can involve grappling with issues that are especially challenging as they are specific to Domestic Violence and Abuse. Recent research from NUI Galway reported that 100% of women interviewed still experienced abuse post separation and this impacted their ability to parent consistently (Melvin, 2016).

For this reason, women who are on the COPE Galway Waterside Service User Panel (SURF) felt that a booklet outlining tips for mothers in this situation might be helpful. Their hope is that by sharing both their experiences of parenting in the aftermath of an abusive relationship and by outlining what worked for them, they may be of some help to women going through similar experiences. This booklet does not claim to be by experts for experts—it acknowledges that every situation is different and each woman will know what works best for her in her particular circumstances.



“There are no perfect mothers. Deal with the day. Say, ‘I did the best I can do today’ before you go to sleep.”

“Trust your gut. It’s there telling you what is wrong or right. You have already shown you have the courage and self belief to make an important decision for you and your family.”

**Learning to be a mother is a life-long process.
You can change the lives of your children for the better, one day at a time.**

“You will learn as you go on – you will learn. Whatever help you can get, grab it!”

“Don’t stop. Never, never, never give up. Continue. Move on and keep on moving.”

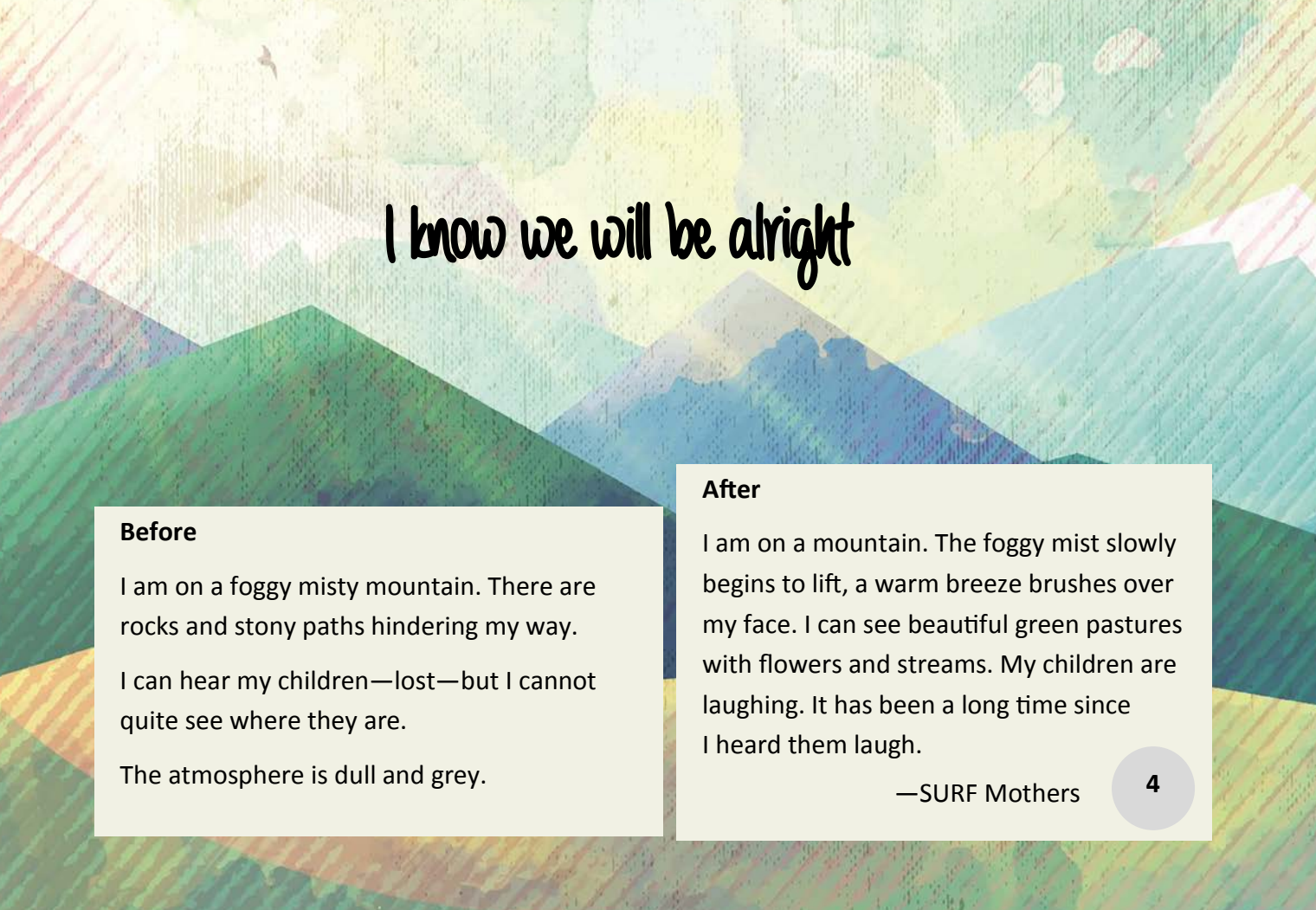
Children are resilient and can thrive—having lived with and survived violence as a child is not a “life sentence” for a bad future.

“You have to unlearn your ex-partner’s constant reminders that ‘You are not the important parent’ and that he knows best. You have to unlearn that you do not have to keep the peace. He put a voice of self-doubt into your head—you can stop, and say to that voice: ‘No. I’m not talking to you.’”

“You dream and wonder if he will someday apologise for all the hurt and pain he caused, but we must accept that this may never happen and that we cannot change others. We can only concentrate on ourselves and being the best we can for our own well-being and our children’s well-being too.”

—SURF Mothers





I know we will be alright

Before

I am on a foggy misty mountain. There are rocks and stony paths hindering my way.

I can hear my children—lost—but I cannot quite see where they are.

The atmosphere is dull and grey.

After

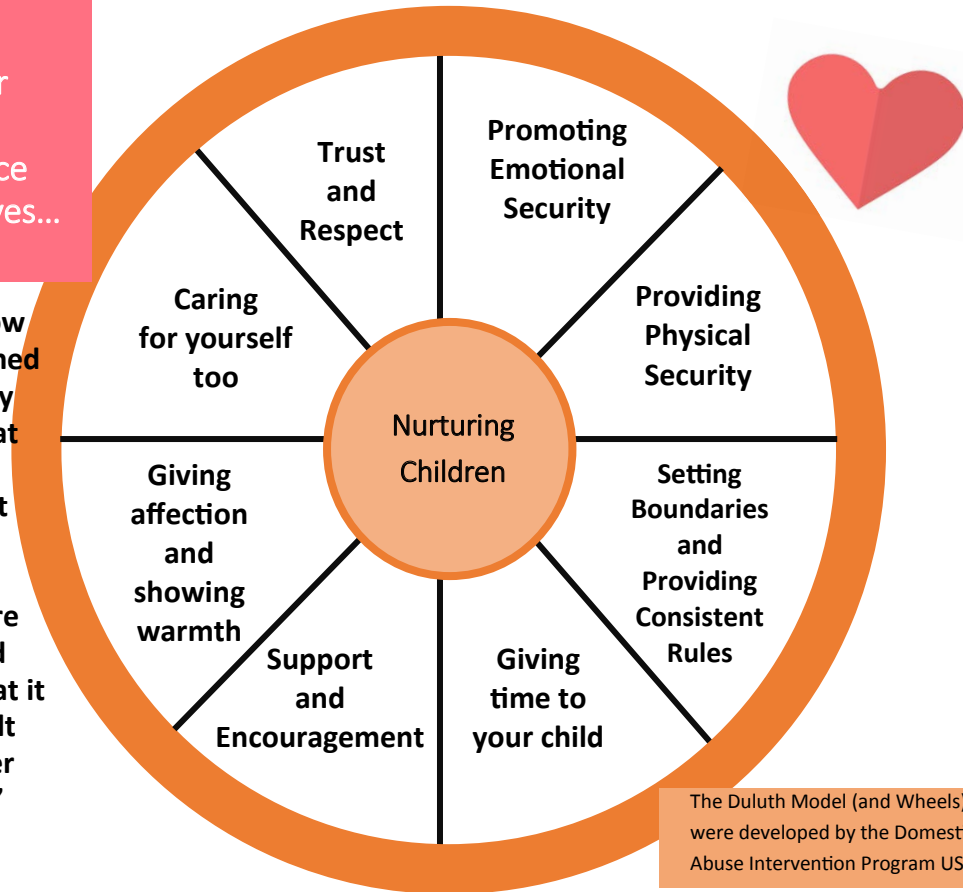
I am on a mountain. The foggy mist slowly begins to lift, a warm breeze brushes over my face. I can see beautiful green pastures with flowers and streams. My children are laughing. It has been a long time since I heard them laugh.

—SURF Mothers

Love and care for your child after Domestic Violence and Abuse involves...

“I did not realise how much my child blamed herself, in some way deep down, for what happened. It was only years later that it all came out, and we talked about it. You have to reassure your kids again, and again, and again that it was never their fault and they must never blame themselves.”

—SURF Mothers



The Duluth Model (and Wheels) were developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program USA



“Life isn’t perfect. Life can be hard at times— there will always be disappointments and bumps. Encouraging resilience and healthy ways of living, rather than perfection, makes it easier for kids to learn how to get on with getting on.

If they’re feeling sad or worried after something disappointing, or if something is going on with them (they seem preoccupied or distracted), sit beside them, and agree to turn off the TV, or put down the phone for a few minutes, and say: “What’s going on? Want to chat about it?” Be honest and open. If they don’t want to chat, then say you’re here when they are ready to.”

—SURF Mothers



**Change can,
and will feel
slow, but you
are safer now,
and better
placed to
further
protect you
and your
children.**

With the right support and understanding, children can and do recover from living with Domestic Violence and Abuse.



Babies

**0-3
years**



“There’s a lot to be said for taking a rest and enjoying it! Rather than guilt-tripping yourself with ‘I should be doing this, I should be doing that’ —if doesn’t need to be done immediately, take a rest for a few minutes and relax.”

—SURF Mothers

Babies (0-3 years)

We like...

- Attention and affection
- Playing with others and showing an interest in them
- Using simple gestures
- Making 'baby talk'
- To copy facial expressions—smiles, frowns
- To use different cries for different needs.
A 'hungry' cry can be different to a 'tired' cry.

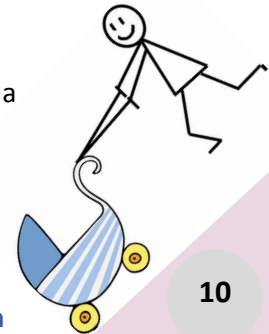
Effects of Domestic Violence and Abuse

- Startles in response to loud noises
- Can be withdrawn and have raised anxiety
- Can be irritable—wakefulness and disturbed sleeping
- Can pick up on others' stress levels



Keys: five senses, explorers, learn by moving, hearing, and seeing

- ♥ Keep each day as simple and routine as possible
- ♥ Find trusted adults who can help you care for your child
- ♥ Take some special time together to play and interact with your child
- ♥ If you're having a bad day, take time to relax and calm—even if it is only for a few minutes
- ♥ Seek opportunities to meet other mothers for a chat over tea or coffee
- ♥ Joining a mothers and toddler group can be a wonderful support.



See 'Parenting Supports' on Page 74.

Common Concerns...

“Since leaving the relationship, my 10 month old baby has become more and more clingy. I can’t seem to put her down or leave her with anyone without her crying hysterically”

Babies feed off mother’s anxieties and emotions. Try to hold, kiss and cuddle her so she feels secure. Try to reassure her by talking to her about what you’re doing, and what she’s doing, while you are going about your daily jobs and work. It’s important that she can see you—this will reassure her that you have not gone anywhere. It is easy to stay at home but mixing with other people will help you and your baby get used to being around other people. For example, going to visit a family member, or a friend’s house, or joining a mother & toddler group can be a nice way to do this.

“My 2 year old boy is lashing out all the time—he kicks and bites me”

For young children who have witnessed Domestic Violence and Abuse in the home hitting can be a

learned behaviour. At this age, children are trying to make sense of their world and figure out right from wrong. They may feel that acting out aggressively gets them what they want because they may have seen this works. Children need to learn from a young age that violence is not acceptable; you need to be clear and consistent in your response to your child. Tell the child that it is never OK to hit someone and that ‘No means No’.





Pre-school 3-5 years

“You always have to put yourself in your child’s shoes. Little problems occupy their minds, and they are learning how to make sense of what is fair and not fair. If you explain or justify why something cannot happen or why you cannot buy something (do not fob them off), they will understand it better and are less likely to keep asking ‘why?’ ‘why?’ ”—SURF Mothers

Pre-school (3-5 years)

Play is necessary for children of this age as they learn, develop and process their world. They...

- Want to and need to spend time with you, but also need to develop socially with other children
- Explore their environment, the world around them, and have new experiences which are very important to them
- Like to play through their senses— touch, feel, sight, hearing, smell, taste. For example: touching sand, splashing water, using modelling clay
- Like to dress-up and roleplay such as playing house, mimicking TV characters
- Like to climb, run, jump. Playing outdoors is a fun and healthy opportunity for them to explore!



Effects of Domestic Violence and Abuse

- Trouble with sleeping, nightmares and food issues
- Not feeling well—stomach aches and headaches
- More fearful and clingy or afraid of being left by their mother
- Noticeable change in behaviour i.e. mimicking abusive behaviours, particularly after access
- Child may regress i.e. toileting, baby talk, looking for a comforter such as a bottle or soother
- Thinks the violence is caused by something they have done. Learn unhealthy gender roles —that boys are ‘controlling and aggressive’, while girls should be ‘agreeable and submissive’.



Keys: need structure, predictable routines, and love to roleplay

Books can be taken out for free from your local library or bought cheaply in charity shops.

♥ **Read to your child.**

Books help kids learn how to understand and relate to theirs and others' feelings and worries: what makes them feel sad, angry, happy?

♥ **Talk to your child.**

It's important to help them to name their feelings, for example: "You are feeling angry right now because I said no more TV."



♥ **Spend time with your child** where they can relax and have fun with you. Taking a walk together outside can be great exercise and time spent together

♥ Try to include your child in everyday tasks—such as setting the table for dinner, or preparing meals, or washing-up. They may pretend to bring you a cup of tea or that they are a chef!

Common Concerns...

“My 4 year old daughter has started to hit me and use bad language towards me”

It is normal for children to try out these behaviours where they have been witness to Domestic Violence and Abuse. It is your response to this behaviour that will form your child’s thinking as to whether it is normal to behave like this in order to get what they want.

As the parent, this is your time to put boundaries in place. Explain that this type of behaviour is not OK and that if it continues, there will be a consequence such as ‘no time on screen time’.

Setting weekly goals for your child may help you to put these boundaries in place. Having helpers like a rewards chart can help your child to see if they are receiving a treat at the end of the week or not. This is not an easy task for either you or your child as you are changing the way you used to engage with them, and are now becoming more assertive in your role as a parent.

Do not expect behaviour to change overnight—consistency is key and ‘No means No’. It is crucial at this stage that your child is not receiving mixed messages from you.

Use puppets to talk to your child about difficult behaviours



Tip: Worry eaters for under pillow at night.

A 'worry eater' is a teddy bear companion that chews up any worries before and during sleep.



Tip: If you cannot afford to buy a worry eater, you can make a worry eater using old clothes and a zip. Online tutorials can show you how to make one.

Common Concerns...

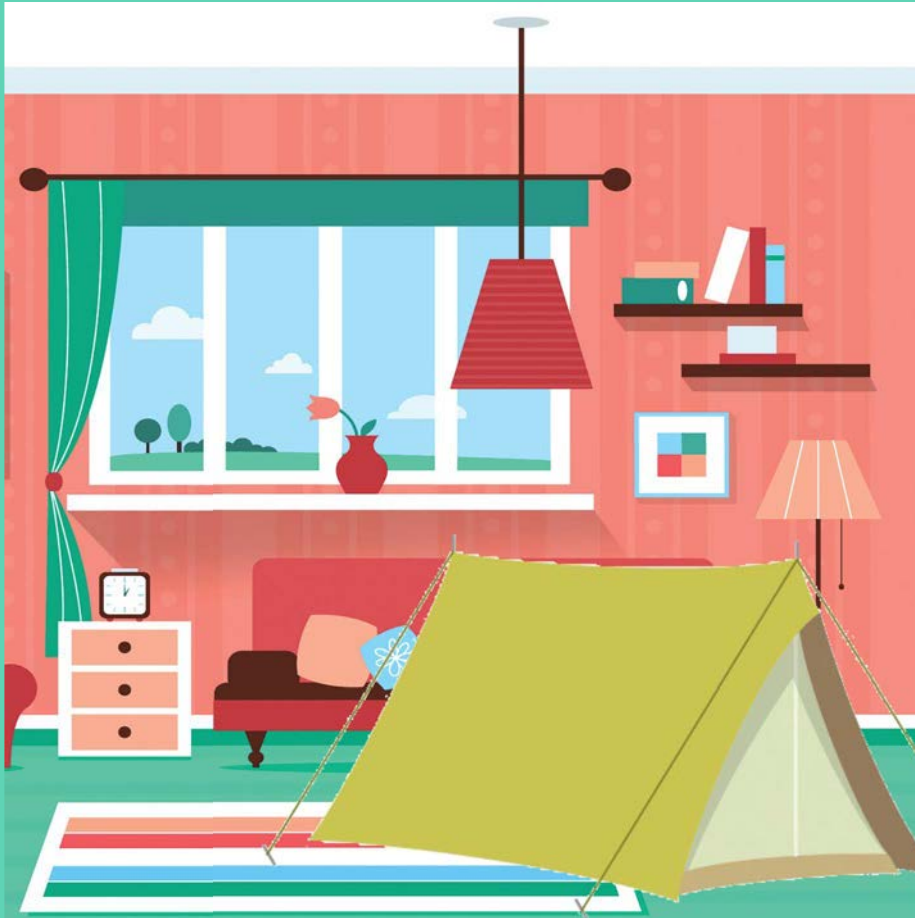
“My 5 year old son has started wetting the bed again and has wet himself twice in school”

It is normal for children to have an emotional reaction to upset in their lives. Children who experience Domestic Violence and Abuse, or who are separating from a parent, often experience emotional upset—such as bedwetting or disturbed sleep—as they try to come to terms with what is happening in their life.

Often they need extra reassurance and support by way of listening to what they are saying and ensuring that you have time together where they can express their feelings.

Let the school (or playschool) know of any change in circumstances in your child’s life so that they can support your child also.

It will pass but it is important not to ignore it. If you think it is more than emotional upset, go to your doctor to rule out any possible medical issues.



Practicing how to get along in a new home

Something that worked for a Mum was to put up a small tent in the living room and spend time in there with the kids, talking and playing. It makes the new home feel safe and everyone feel closer.



School Age

6-12years

“If you love yourself, your kids pick up on this and they learn to love and show kindness to others. My daughter shows kindness rather than aggression when playing with other kids—it’s wonderful to see because I was afraid because of the Domestic Violence and Abuse, she’d have picked up negative ways. But she hasn’t.”

—SURF Mother

School Age (6-12 years)

- School age children are more independent, physically active and like to be outdoors
- They are more involved with friends and concerned with what their friends think and do. They can also have more conflicts with their peers and siblings
- They may be more financially demanding—they may want brand name clothes, gaming consoles, expensive toys etc.
- Kids like to move and many become restless if they sit for too long which is why school can be difficult for some children.



Effects of Domestic Violence and Abuse

- Children need extra reassurance and emotional support which can look and feel like annoying attention-seeking behaviours
- Behaviour in school can change: children can become quiet and withdrawn or display difficult behaviours
- Children may test your patience and limits and be physically abusive or refuse to do what is asked
- Some children find it hard to regulate their feelings: they may become angry, sad, withdrawn or pretend to be really happy
- Sometimes children can have an unusual relationship with food. They may refuse foods they ate before or they start to comfort eat and may also be picky.



Keys: thinking more about their feelings and others. Obsessed with friendships.



“I find bedtime and waking-up time is positive for us all. I put each one of them to bed in different ways – depending on what they like (hear a story or chat for 5 minutes) but I always tickle or hug them in the morning so they wake-up with a giggle and a smile. It’s a good way to start the day!” —SURF Mothers

Tips

- ♥ Routine and consistency is important—children need predictability and stability
- ♥ Communication is key to building a positive relationship with your child. Children need to know what is happening in their life. Use words that are age appropriate without burdening them with adult problems
- ♥ Have clear boundaries on what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Stick to your decisions (No means No)
- ♥ Spend special time with your children individually so as to continue to strengthen your relationship and offer continued reassurance to them.

Common Concerns...



“My 8 year old daughter has recently started saying to me that it is ‘all your fault that we don’t live with daddy anymore.’ What do I say?”

Sometimes children say things out of frustration or because they don’t know what’s going on in the first place. Be open and honest with your child in an age appropriate manner.

It is OK to be open with your daughter and explain that, “When mommy lived with daddy she was afraid because daddy was angry all the time,” and the reason that you stopped living with daddy was to keep you both safe. Often a response like this will reassure your daughter that abusive behaviour is never acceptable.

“My son’s teacher has informed me he is having difficulty playing with other children and maintaining friendships in school.”

This is not uncommon where children have been exposed to Domestic Violence and Abuse. There can be a number of reasons for same. Do not go in and try to fix the situation straight away—children need time to adjust and this may be your son’s way of adjusting to his new situation. Ask the teacher at school to keep an eye on him but not to single him out. Be more aware around him while he’s having play dates, and encourage him to play with his friends, but not to the point where he feels uncomfortable. Let him know if anything bothers him, he can talk to you or his teacher or another trusted adult.

**What SURF
Mothers found
helpful...**

**Encourage
your teen to
keep a diary**

**Take time to talk
through their
feelings and fears**

**Set clear
boundaries and
trust your teen to
prove they can be
responsible**

Teens 13-16 years

Teens (13-15 years)

Teens...

- Spend more time on Social Media, watching TV or reading— focus more on phones and tablets
- Focus more on friendships and want to spend more time with them
- Find an identify with particular interests in sports, fashion, drama, music, books (the list is not exhaustive!)
- Like to be spoken to more like a young adult and less like a child
- Like to spend time alone, sleep a lot and may have a growing appetite.



Effects of Domestic Violence and Abuse

- Teens can often suffer from low self esteem, anxiety and lack of confidence
- Conflicted feelings about the abuse that happened which can lead to increased aggression towards peers, siblings and parents
- May have angry feelings about the abuse which can manifest as challenging behaviours such as stealing, fighting, drinking and using substances
- May withdraw from school, friends and family. Young people can sometimes suppress their feelings around the abuse and do not want to talk about anything to do with home or family.

See pages 76 & 77 for a range of supports and advice for teens about mental health, sex education, LGBT identity, misuse of drugs and alcohol, eating disorders, and Travellers support.



Keys: Friend circles, developing identity, building their self esteem, thinking more critically about their world

- ♥ Routine and consistency is still vital for teens. They need clear boundaries as to what is acceptable and unacceptable for a teen under your roof i.e. money, behaviours, screen time, phone time



- ♥ Try to have open and appropriate conversation. Taking time to talk to your teen can keep them informed of any changes in arrangements—for example, access

- ♥ Spend special time with your teen—ideally doing activities that are your teen likes to do. It can be a match, a play, cinema, shopping, going to a gig, or going for tea or coffee

- ♥ Give your teen space. They do not always want to talk about what is going on in their life but do let them know if they want to talk about anything, you are there to listen.

SURF says:

“The primary focus of a day out should always be on quality time together. If you use the promise of buying the teen something as a reward rather than a treat, it can take the focus off the reason for a day out in the first place: special time together.”

Common Concerns...

“My 14 year old son tells me that he has more fun with Dad because he doesn’t have as many rules at his house, and has asked to spend more time with Dad because of this.”

Teens often push for the same rules in Mum’s house as in Dad’s house making you feel guilty about being the ‘strict’ parent while dad is seen as the ‘fun’ parent. It is crucial, in the long-term, to stick to the rules you have made and set clear boundaries. Teens need at least one parent who is predictable and consistent with rules.

Talk to your son about different rules in different houses. If you stick to your rules, even if they are not popular at first, at least your son will know where he stands with you and will find stability in the certainty of your consistent and clear rules. Remember: teens learn to model good behaviour as well as bad behaviour.



“One night a week is time just for us. We have a sleepover type night where we’ll bring our duvets down to the living room and watch movies and chat. Being together for a few hours every week is a lot of fun!” —SURF Mothers

Common Concerns...

“My 15 year old daughter has become quite verbally aggressive towards me and has started to put me down in front of her other siblings. She has started questioning me a lot about why we don’t live at home anymore and says, ‘What did you do wrong Mom?’ ”



It sounds like your daughter is angry and unfortunately is directing this anger towards you. This is not uncommon following separation after abuse. Your daughter may be angry with both parents but only feels safe expressing it with you. Try taking your daughter out of the house for lunch, coffee or a walk together so you can talk in a neutral setting. You could begin by talking to her about the separation—why it happened—while putting particular emphasis on the abusive behaviour and explaining why that was not acceptable to you. Try not to criticise her father—criticise his behaviour. Ask her what she thinks and feels; really listen and acknowledge what she says even if you don’t agree with it.

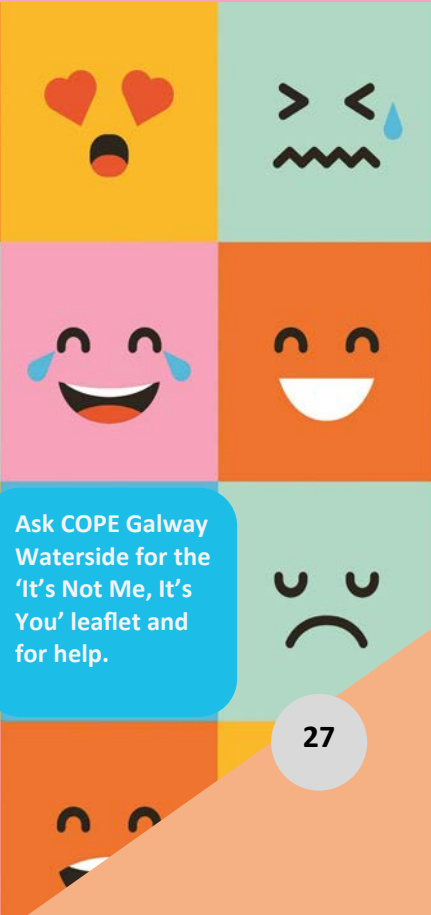
Set clear boundaries with your daughter and tell her that you understand she is feeling angry but that it is not acceptable to be aggressive or verbally abusive towards you. Instead, agree some healthy ways she can express her anger, or identify someone that she could talk to outside of the family if she is willing to do so. If the problem persists, you may need to impose sanctions such as taking her phone away for a couple of days or not allowing her to go out with friends. Be consistent in your message that aggressive behaviour is simply never acceptable no matter how angry we are.

Common Concerns...

“I think my teen is in a stressful, bad relationship and seems to be bothered and upset by it. What can I do?”

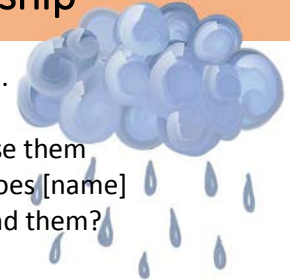
If you're concerned about your teen's relationship, try to understand where they're coming from— remember what it was like to be manipulated? They're hooked in and may not understand yet that certain ways their girlfriend or boyfriend show 'love' is controlling and obsessive, for example:

- Constantly 'checking-in' by text or call, or constant comments on social media, to see what they're doing or who they're with;
- Calls them names or putting them down in front of their friends, and plays mind games;
- Wants to spend 'special time' together and gets annoyed if they want to do something with friends;
- Forces them to do anything sexually they do not want to do, and it feels like personal space is being invaded;
- Makes them feel uncomfortable or bad about themselves;
- Criticises their choice of clothes or how they look;
- Pinches, kicks, slaps, shoves them and then apologises profusely saying they 'cannot help it because they love them so much'.



Ask COPE Galway Waterside for the 'It's Not Me, It's You' leaflet and for help.

How to Help Your Teen... With an Unhealthy Relationship



- ♥ Express concern and let them know that things won't get better on their own. Reassure them it is not their fault (and it is also not your fault!) Try not to react angrily. Take a step back and press pause. Rather than criticise them or the abusive boyfriend or girlfriend, ask questions and listen. "How often does [name] text you? ... Does it feel overwhelming? Do you feel bad about yourself around them? Do they say something mean and then take it back?"
- ♥ Be patient with them—it may take time for your teen to leave the relationship rather than realise it is over. They may push you away because they are embarrassed—assure them you are always there for them to talk when they are ready.



- ♥ Identify people that they can talk to (i.e. family / friends / close relative / guidance counsellor / youth worker / support worker) if they are uncomfortable talking to you
- ♥ Do not confront the abusive boyfriend or girlfriend or get caught in the middle. Concentrate on your teen's needs
- ♥ Do not ask your teen what caused the abuse – there is simply never any reason for abuse
- ♥ Help your teen to understand what healthy boundaries are and what behaviours are unacceptable. COPE Waterside can assist with their healthy relationships programme for teens.

Talking to the School

“Talking with teachers about my worries for my daughters at school (after leaving the Domestic Violence and Abuse) was a huge help to my life, and parenting, and in turn my daughters’ lives in school. It was a relief to have the school on my side and be willing to help in a way that suited us. The fear of stigma was so great. I worried they’d think it was my fault. I decided to tell my daughter and let the school in on what was going on. It was the best decision – they were in our corner now.”



“I’ve talked to the school about making sure they represent all family types in their lessons, cartoons, posters so it makes me and my daughter, as a family, feel normal. This has been great because when all the kids know there are other forms of families, they talk more openly to each other in an everyday-like way about what’s going on: separation, access visits, and it’s great for her to feel she has support – and I do too – from loads of different places.”

—SURF Mothers



Older Teens

16-18
years



“I think after Domestic Violence and Abuse, it’s more than being overprotective, it’s almost being *superprotective*. As mothers, we need to accept and allow our children to be their own selves who can lead their own lives.

For example, my teenage daughter wanted to go to a friend’s house for a couple hours after school — I know the house and we have mobiles to keep in contact but I was still so wound-up with worry. She turned to me in the car and said, “You have to stop – you have to let go!” I realised then that she was actually fine and it was me who wasn’t fine: I was putting fear into her and needed to stop putting all my anxieties into her world too.

Letting go of your children as they grow up can be tough – we must trust them to do their best, as they trust us that we’re also trying to do our best. ”

—SURF Mother

Older Teenagers (16-18 years)

Older teens...

- Seek more independence and have an increased focus on romantic relationships
- Continue to find their identity. They might change how they look and be more concerned with self-image
- May spend a lot of their time on social media
- Feel like they are an adult and expect to be treated and spoken to like an adult
- Like to socialise more and may want to spend time independently with friends at discos, gaming nights, teen events, hanging out in town and so on.

Effects of Domestic Violence and Abuse

- Older teens may spend little time at home so as to avoid any conversation about their behaviour, access, or their feelings
- Some older teens can take on the role of the “minder” of the family and feel they need to be there to take care of their younger siblings and support their mother
- Older teens can blame the protective parent for the abuse and say that they were the one that caused the family to break up. This can be done by way of verbal abuse, physical violence towards the parent and making the protective parent feel guilty for breaking up the family
(continued on next page...)

See pages 76 & 77 for a range of supports and advice available about teen mental health, sex education, LGBT identity, misuse of drugs and alcohol, eating disorders, and Travellers support.

Effects of Domestic Violence and Abuse

(continued from previous page)

- Older teens can focus on their own romantic relationships too much so as to distract themselves from the abuse that happened at home
- They may spend all of their time with or speaking to their girlfriend or boyfriend, which could lead to an unhealthy relationship
- Older teens with unmanaged challenging behaviours could make bad choices that may lead to a criminal record (assaulting another person, misuse of drugs and alcohol or vandalising property).

See pages 27 & 28 for advice if it seems your teen is in a bad relationship

Disco Scenario

You say, “you can’t go” to your teen but then my ex-partner says they can go— now you have an angry teen on your hands. What do you do?



- ♥ Weigh-up the pros and cons
- ♥ Make your own rules around it
- ♥ You know your teen best so trust your gut!

SURF Mothers say...

“We must let go. We cannot fix our ex-partner’s relationship with our daughter or son. Teens will come to their own conclusions eventually. Be honest with them in an appropriate way – always ask yourself: ‘What do they *really* need to know?’ ”



Keys: Older teens strive to be more independent; they are finding out who they are and want to be, and can be interested in a variety of things in this ‘figuring out’ stage of their life

- ♥ Keep open communication with your older teen, letting them know that you are there to talk but also will not pressure them to talk all of the time
- ♥ Older teens consider themselves as adults so trust them with responsibility that comes with clear boundaries—they continue to know what is acceptable and not acceptable



♥ Ensure they are aware of what is right from wrong in a dating relationship and the importance of not feeling pressured into doing things they are not comfortable with. See pages 27 & 28 for advice.

♥ Find and encourage ways that can be helpful for your teen to manage stress and conflict in a safe way i.e. mindfulness, yoga, music, sports, walking, swimming, dancing, singing or any physical activity.



Common Concerns

“My 17 year old daughter refused to return from access and now says she wants to live with her dad. I know this is because he lets her do whatever she wants, but she is refusing to talk to me or answer my calls. I’m so worried about her—what can I do?”

This is a painful issue to cope with and you will be feeling deeply hurt and rejected by your daughter. Try not to take this as a personal attack and remember what it was like when you lived with your ex-partner and how he used control and manipulation to get you to do what he wanted. This is most likely what your daughter is experiencing and if you fall out with her, you will feed into the hands of your abuser who will be happy to isolate you from your daughter. The best thing you can do in this situation is to keep the line of communication open.



Even if your daughter is not responding to phone calls, let her know you still care by sending her a message at least once a week. Try to keep the message brief, for example: “I hope you are well, I love you and I am here if you ever want to talk”. You could also try keeping things light by commenting on things you know she likes, for example, “I heard the latest song by... what do you think about it?” or “Did you see the new film by... what do you make of it?”

Occasionally invite her to the cinema or somewhere you know she likes to go but do not push her if she says no. You may not get a reply for a long time but it is essential to be consistent and to keep it up. Continue to send birthday cards and special occasion cards, and to keep linked-in with her school.

Show her that despite what her father might say about you as a mother, you are not giving up on her and that your love is unconditional.



Cactus symbolise endurance, protection from danger and threats, warmth and care—especially from a mother to a child. Children are resilient and can thrive—and so can you!

Post Separation Issues and Tips on How to Handle Them



“I suffered for eight years, always thinking it's only a step in my life and after that we will live happily. Unfortunately, life became more hard and more sad, and I couldn't take any more of it. Enough is enough, I decided.

I remember before that day, I didn't have enough power and courage to do what I did; I always hesitated worried ‘What my family will say?’ And hesitating to separate the kids from their dad.

I packed my small bag, my son in my arms and holding my daughter's hand, and I walked to the refuge. I was so nervous and afraid—I didn't want him to follow me—so I ran with my babies, dreaming to finish with all my problems.”

—SURF Mother

Managing An Ex-partner

Sometimes it can feel the abuse does not stop, even when going through separation. This is especially true when you have to maintain contact with your ex-partner because of your children.

Abusive partners often use children as a way to get back at you and can behave in a variety of ways to try and maintain control over you and undermine you as a mother—especially when you are trying to cope with a painful and difficult separation.

They can:

- Tell the children not to listen to you
- Undermine your authority
- Tell the children lies to increase their fear and anxiety over what is happening
- Try to ‘buy’ the children with expensive gifts. Intentionally contradict your style of parenting

Tip: Keep a separate number and phone purely for when you need to contact your ex-partner.

- Threaten to take your children away
- Portray themselves as the ‘fun’ parent
- Use the children to check-up on you.

Most abusers will continue to ‘push your buttons’ and the best way to manage this is to set clear boundaries. This takes practice as most abusers do not respect physical or emotional boundaries but if you persevere it will be worth it in the long run.

“It can be difficult not to be bothered by the constant little battles. We are human after all! But, it is much easier for you to focus on the larger issues at hand such as medical needs and choice of schools. Confide the smaller frustrations to a friend or a diary. Trust us, it will help with stress and preserving your self-esteem.”

—SURF Mothers



A photograph... and knowing change will happen!

“My ex-partner messaged my teenager to say he was going on a weekend trip to my home town. When I found out that he would be there, it started to bother me deeply.

So much time had passed that I felt I could not speak about these bothering thoughts to anyone except my brother. It bothered me and bothered me until I had an epiphany where I asked myself: ‘Why should I be worried?’ Why should I be stressed?’

I talked about it to my daughter and we decided that we would not let it bother us, and that instead we’d have some fun together. We went to the playground—me, my teen, and my youngest child.

There is a photograph of me and my two kids together on a slide, big smiles on our faces. When I look at it, I think of how that day could have been ruined by my ex-partner getting into my head again, but I didn’t allow it. I let it pass by and got on with having a nice time.

I put this photograph on my fridge and it acts as a reminder about how far I have come. I can feel the change—I get out and do not let my ex-partner control my emotions anymore.”

—SURF Mother



Setting Boundaries

Boundaries are reasonable, safe and respectful limits and ways for other people to behave towards us, and a guideline for how we respond if someone steps past those limits. Limits come from our beliefs, opinions, attitudes, past experiences and learning.

There are two types of boundaries:

Physical is defined by how close we allow people to get to our body, and what our personal space is.

A physical boundary can depend on your relationship to the person, for example: your child sitting on your knee compared to a stranger sitting too close to you on the bus.

Emotional boundaries are how we are treated by others. Having healthy boundaries means taking responsibility for your own actions and emotions while not taking responsibility for the action and emotions of others. Learning to set healthy personal boundaries is vital for our self-worth and self-respect.



Ways to set up strong boundaries with your Ex-partner

Tip: Use e-mail or text message to talk with your ex-partner. Not only can you choose when you make contact, you also have a written record of the contact made.

Try to have as little contact with him as possible

Abusers have poor boundaries and any contact with you may be viewed as a 'foot in the door'

Accept that he is not likely to change and change the way that you interact or respond to him. This does not mean that you accept abusive or bad behaviour. What it does mean is accepting that your ex-partner is not going to change—let go of any expectations that he will. This leaves you with more energy to focus on your responses to him.

Reacting versus responding to him

Reacting is an automatic reflex and is usually driven by our emotions. Count to 5 before you respond. Responding is a thoughtful, reflective response that considers alternatives, options and consequences before you speak. State clearly what your wishes are, and assert them repeatedly and calmly.

Plan ahead for contact and what you will say to him Keep any contact short and simple.

Write down what you need to say and rehearse it—this helps you to not get sucked into his emotional abuse and attempts at side-tracking you. Stick to your message.

Ways to set up strong boundaries with your Ex-partner (continued)

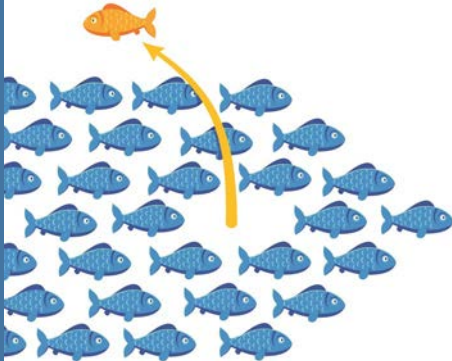
- **Do not allow your ex-partner too much access and/or telephone contact with the children** Some mothers do this because they feel guilty about the separation – this only confuses children and allows him to maintain control
- **If you are unsure about a request or demand, tell your ex-partner that you need time to think about it and that you will get back to him.**
- **If you are frightened of him, or find that you give in too easily, try to imagine yourself in another way.** Put on an imaginary suit of armour. Don't give him any eye contact. Think of ways that will help you to stay strong or that have helped you, in the past, to deal with him.
- **Friends and family** might try to persuade you to give him another chance. If you cannot avoid spending time with people who 'see his side of things', tell them clearly that you do not wish to discuss your personal issues with them and **get support from people who believe you.**



Family Occasions

After separation, family occasions such as birthdays, milestones in your child’s life, weddings and religious holidays can be difficult to plan for.

Your ex-partner may contest everything and not make compromise on a plan easy. He may use family occasions to undermine you in front of your children.

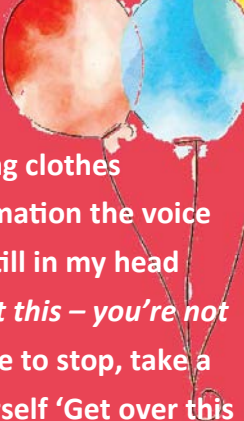


What can you do?

- ♥ One of the best things you can do is have a plan in place—one that you want and are happy with
- ♥ Talk to your child about the plan for the occasion. For example: “Daddy has been told about your birthday plan... this is what will be happening on the day, and we will not be changing any plan last minute for him.”
- ♥ It is better to have separate celebrations. Do not allow your ex-partner to come into your home.
- ♥ If you decide to have a joint birthday party for your child, have it in a neutral location and invite friends and family along as a support to you.

SURF Mothers’ Advice:

- ♥ **Keep it simple. Invite close family or family friends. You will have to say ‘No’ to some people**
- ♥ **You do not have to take care of his guests too! It is no longer your duty. Focus on your own needs.**



“Anxiety and self-doubt can be so deep-rooted, it can be hard to stop it. For example, when buying clothes for my daughter’s confirmation the voice [of my ex-partner] was still in my head saying *You’re not good at this – you’re not good at fashion.* You have to stop, take a moment, and say to yourself ‘Get over this voice. Your sense of fashion is good.’ And continue on with the clothes shopping, and let your voice be the voice in your head. It’s the voice of self-doubt that he’s put there – you can stop, and say to it ‘No. I’m not talking to you.’ ”—SURF Mother

On Big Days...

- ♥ Reassure your child there is a plan.
- ♥ Dad has been told about the time so it is his responsibility to get there
- ♥ Talk to your child about their expectations for the day. You have no control over what he does. Keep it simple. Do not go over and above to compensate even if he buys large gifts or holidays
- ♥ When talking to your child, acknowledge their feelings. Listen but do not push them to feel a certain way
- ♥ Do extended family support you? They need to respect your wishes.

“My daughter wants both me and her Dad at her birthday party. I don’t want to disappoint her but also do not know how I will get through it with him there”

Make the decision about what is best in this situation. If it is likely there will be hostility or arguing, or you are simply not ready to spend time in your ex-partner’s company, then you need to explain this to your daughter. Explain, in an age appropriate way, that you would rather the day went smoothly—without any arguments or tension—as this would be more upsetting and disappointing for her if this happened.

Do not have the party in your home if your ex-partner will be there as this this can cause confusion for your children and give mixed messages.

Suggest two separate birthday celebrations: one with you and one with her father—or, have the party in a neutral place. Invite friends and family to the party to act as a support to you. You will need to talk to your daughter about what the plan is for the day. For example: if it’s not access time for her dad, she will not be going to his house after the party.



Two Houses, Different Rules

“He knows that they go to bed at 8pm but he never has them in bed before 10pm”

“The kids come back to me full of sugar, after loads of treats—I only give a treat occasionally”

Many women struggle with different rules for their children in their ex-partner’s house. Children often push for the same rules in mum’s house, and you may feel guilty about being the ‘strict’ parent while dad is the ‘fun’ parent.

Stick to your own rules and set clear boundaries, repeat to your child that: “In this house you go to bed at 8pm” or “We have a treat only on Friday night.” This may sound repetitive and difficult to keep up but children need consistency, especially when there have been a lot of changes in their lives.

Clear boundaries and routine helps make them to feel safe and secure.

Children need at least one parent who is predictable and consistent in their care. Parenting is not a popularity contest; do not be drawn into one with your ex-partner. Talk to your children about different rules in different houses. If you stick to your rules even if they are not popular initially, your children will know where they stand with you. Remember: they learn to model good behaviour as well as bad.



Try not to get worked up about small issues; you have no control over what happens while the children are at their dad’s house.

Focus on what you do have control over: how to you parent your children and instil values that are important to you.



“He will attempt to use the children as a bridge to get to me but I must show him that this is unacceptable, and that I will not do the same: they will not be used or be put in the middle” —SURF Mother

Our children want...

- ♥ Things to be fair
- ♥ Not to be put in the middle
- ♥ To be asked our views
- ♥ To have lots of time with you
- ♥ To have fun
- ♥ To be loved
- ♥ Not to see you argue or fight.
It is an adult problem
- ♥ Not to hear you
criticise each other

How to Talk to the Children About Separation

“The question ‘Why is Daddy not here?’ can come back around. My kids spent some time in foster care and I still feel a sort of guilt for their time spent there so when they ask this, old feelings of self-blame come back up”

—SURF Mother



- Tell children the truth, in an age appropriate way, about why you are separating. Not telling the truth can lead them to make up their own story of the separation. They do this to make sense of it and they may even blame themselves.
- Never give out about your child’s father. This may be difficult but will only cause the child to feel they must take a side.
- Tell the children that abusive behaviour is not acceptable—you left the relationship so you could be safe enough to take care of them.
- Criticise the behaviour, not the person i.e. your ex-partner’s abusive behaviour, not their father: “When your father used violence and/or threatening words, I was frightened. This behaviour is not right and I don’t want to live in a place where I don’t feel safe or where I worry about your safety.”
- If you are caught off-guard by a question, and are not sure how to answer it, be honest and say, “I need time to think about this but I will answer it when I am ready” and make sure that you do.

Everyday Tips for Taking Time to Talk from www.parentfurther.com

It takes time to talk with your family, and it seems like everyone has less of it to spare these days. Parents are working more, teenagers seem to be increasingly busy, and it gets more difficult to find the energy that it takes to have a good conversation. Setting some time aside to talk is one of the most important things you can do to start building communication again after Domestic Violence and Abuse.

Here are some ideas:

- ♥ Share a meal together every day or at least once or twice a week
- ♥ Children often don't like "just talking," but will chat while doing other things such as playing, taking a walk in the woods, doing jobs around the house with you, and sitting in the car with you



- ♥ Don't insist on eye contact if it seems to make your child uncomfortable
- ♥ Remember that everyone is comfortable with different situations; some kids may prefer talking in public places like restaurants, fitness centres, or parks, while others prefer the privacy of home
- ♥ Eliminate distractions during family time; turn the radio off when you're driving, or play a board game instead of watching TV
- ♥ Designate regular family time—have a weekly family night or meeting, a monthly family outing, or a daily check-in before bed. Do what works best for your family.

Talking Tips (continued...)

Start conversations in new ways Instead of always asking how school was, greet your child with something about your own day, such as: “You’ll never guess what happened at work today...” or “Tell me something about your day.”

Be willing to stop and listen to your child if they have something to say. If you can’t stop to listen, explain why and make a plan to talk later. For example, you could say, “I want to hear more about this, but I’m running late for work. Will you tell me more about it during dinner tonight?”

Talking about Domestic Violence and Abuse

- Talk to children about the abuse when they are ready. Accept that they may not be willing or able to talk about it right away

- Encourage children to talk about their feelings and experiences. Even if they are not ready to talk, initiating the conversation sends an important message that you are ready to listen when they are ready to talk
- Recognise that sometimes the way children communicate is nonverbal (behaviour) and not just talking. Pay close attention and spend time with them even if they are not talking
- Listen without interruption or explanation. Acknowledge that it is hard/scary for them. Show understanding. Let them know it is not their fault. Remind them that you love them. Let them know you will try to keep them safe and act in a way that is safe.



Having a meal together at least once a week is one of the best and easiest ways to have time to chat and catch-up with your children.

Agree that it is a TV and phone-free time.

Get your kids involved with shopping and/ or preparing the meal—even if at first it is them sitting at the table.

Sometimes teenagers may be more shy and prefer to talk when you are busy—it feels less self-conscious to them and less about ‘making a big deal’ out of family time together.

Court and Access

It is best not to discuss court business with your children and they shouldn't have to know that their parents are in court so try to avoid involving them if you can.

There may be times, however, when you cannot avoid discussing court with them such as:

- If their father has told them that you are taking him to court
- If another family member/adult has told them
- If they overhear you or their father talking about it.

Most children have no experience of court and any impressions they have about it will probably have come from unreliable sources such as TV and the Media.

How you respond to questions or statements about court will depend on the age of the child and what they have been told or know already.



- ♥ Respond in an age appropriate way and keep it factual and brief.
- ♥ Focus on the issue of safety and the fact that violent and abusive behaviour is wrong. Try not to criticise their father: focus on his behaviour.
- ♥ Your children may report to you that their grandparents or other relatives are talking about you and blaming you for taking their father to court. Teach them to respond by saying: "Court business is adult business and I don't want to talk about it."

Common Concerns...

“Daddy said you are bringing him to court and that the Judge will throw him in jail and he won’t be able to see me anymore” (Aaron, aged 8)

You could respond to this by saying: “Being violent and hitting someone is wrong.

The court has made laws to protect people from being hurt and they are called protection, barring and safety orders.

The judge will not throw your daddy into jail but he will tell him that he cannot hurt me/us anymore. It is my job to keep myself safe so that I can look after you and keep you safe.”



“Daddy said we can stay up late and watch films when we stay in his house. He said the Judge will make you have us stay with him when you go to court tomorrow” (Kate aged 11, younger brother Thomas aged 9)

You could respond by saying: “We will have to wait and see what the judge thinks is best for this family. It is my job to keep you safe and right now I don’t think it’s safe for you to stay in your daddy’s house overnight.

Your daddy does not agree with me so sometimes when adults can’t agree, the Judge makes the decision that they think is best for the family.”

Arranging Access

You can arrange access informally but beware your ex-partner might prefer this and use it as another way to control you. While most people would like to avoid having to go to court to arrange access formally, often it is the best solution following an abusive relationship.

Formally arranging access sets a clear boundary for everyone involved and it counteracts an ex-partner calling uninvited to the home. Access creates consistency for the children and can also be a way to monitor how things are going. It is useful to keep a record of access in case you need to go back to court.

- Has your ex-partner showed up for every access?
- Does he bring the children back on time? How are they when they return?



Where should access take place?

It is best to avoid access taking place in your home as this may not be safe or it could cause complications and confusion for the children, especially if they still hope that you will get back together.

If you have concerns for your safety:

- Avoid access handover at your home or your ex-partner's home
- Meet in a safe public place such as a restaurant, hotel lobby, shopping centre or other places that have surveillance and safety cameras
 - Bring a friend or relative to the handover or ask them to do it for you
 - Plan to have your ex-partner pick up the children from school at the end of the day so you do not need to see him unnecessarily.

Helping Your Children Cope with Access

- ♥ Use a calendar to mark the days your child will be going to see their father. Remind them a couple of days in advance that they will be going.
- ♥ Involve them in packing for the visit as this will help ensure that they do not forget a favourite teddy, book etc.
- ♥ Don't ask the child lots of questions when they return from access as this can make them feel as though they have to choose sides...

It is advisable to keep a diary about access visits and of any incidents or concerns you have about it that relate to your child's emotional wellbeing, safety and adherence to the access arrangements.

... This can be particularly difficult if their father is asking a lot of questions about you. Model good behaviour—this will help them to build up trust with you. Encourage your children to come to you with any problems they may be having in access.

- ♥ If the child is angry or upset on return from access time, try not to load them with questions but focus on the feelings instead. For example, "You seem angry, do you want to talk?" If the child doesn't want to talk, do not push the issue. Sometimes, all they want is good hug.



After Access

- ♥ Try to pick a fun quiet activity to do together or you could have their favourite meal ready each time they return
- ♥ If your child's behaviour is extreme (either physically or verbally abusive) after access then you need to be clear that this behaviour is not acceptable. It is important to be consistent with this from the beginning.
- ♥ If you are concerned about your child's safety during access or if the child does not want to go to an access visit, you need to contact a social worker or a solicitor to discuss your concerns.

“My son doesn't want to see his father outside of access times. He said he doesn't want him to come to any events but I know his dad will turn up, what can I do?”

How you respond depends upon whether there is a court order in place. If access is court-ordered, and your son's father shows up uninvited at events, you could contact your solicitor and inform them that this is distressing to your son and that your ex-partner is in breach of the access order.

You could go back to court but you need to be aware that the Judge may agree that your ex-partner should be allowed at family events. If that is the case, or if there isn't a court order, it's important to have a plan in place that you have discussed with your son.

Part of the plan could be to check in with each other before the event and let other significant adults—for example, a teacher, soccer coach, or other trustworthy family members—know what the situation is.

Self-Care for Mothers

“You can’t stop the waves but you can learn to surf”

—Jon Kabat-Zinn

Trying to manage an abusive relationship, coping with the worry of making the right decisions for you and your children, experiencing the grief, pain and loss of separation, worrying about the effects of the abuse and the separation on your children, along with the continued suffering that comes from being in an abusive relationship can take its toll on your physical and mental health.

You may have gotten used to putting everyone else’s needs before your own; your abuser’s needs because he demanded it, your children’s needs because you’re constantly trying to make up for the abuse and want to make a better life for them—and you may not even know what your own needs are.

It may be the last thing on your mind right now but your own self-care is a vital part of your, and your children’s, well-being. Taking care of yourself helps you to develop confidence and strength to set clear boundaries with your ex-partner and children. Be a positive role model for your children; remember children learn more from what you do than from what you say.





Guilt cannot change the past and worrying cannot change the future.

It is all a process—dealing with feelings of guilt and self-doubt, second-guessing yourself—these feelings come and go.

Learning to open up and ask for help when you need it, no matter how much time has passed, is so important.

It is okay to not be okay. It is normal to be afraid of the uncertainty—it will pass, slowly but surely. And when you feel overwhelmed, there is help.

Self-Care Tips from SURF Mothers

“Say no at least once today. I had a habit of saying yes to every single request and soon found myself overwhelmed and resentful, so I had to practice saying no in order to establish stronger boundaries. Once I strengthened my boundaries, I changed ‘say no’ to ‘make satisfying decisions’. There are many people and activities vying for my time and by selecting those which are important, fulfilling and beneficial to me and my children, we refrain from becoming drained and overwhelmed.”



“My advice to women going through or trying to get out of an abusive relationship is to take up some form of exercise. Go for a run, a swim, a cycle, a walk... it clears the mind and gets rid of the cobwebs on the bad days.”

“I still try to overcompensate for what happened. I feel like I have to love and show my children love even more. In the end, it is you who loses out emotionally — you need to take care of your well-being too. When my bones are sore and I feel tense, I feel the stress, emotionally, in my body. I know I need good sleep, space to unwind and time for myself.”



Connect. This is one of the most important self-care habits we can have. Create meaningful connections with others (even with pets) and allow those connections to nurture you. These connections are part of your support circle. Having someone who you can share your victories and your burdens and who can offer a listening ear and clarity when needed helps us.

Relax. Often we move from activities an interactions without taking a moment to unwind and process our day. If we fail to do this, we can take this to our sleep and stay awake with worries. Mindfulness, keeping a journal and exercise are all great ways to clear your mind.



Treat Yourself. By taking time out to treat ourselves once-in-a-while, we are saying to ourselves, 'I am worth the effort.' Our bodies serve us well and deserve time and attention.

“You don’t have to be wonder woman! It’s okay not to be everything all the time. If you decide to sleep-in one morning and your kids are old enough to manage an hour or two without you, then this time will not be the end of the world!”

—SURF Mothers

Laugh! There is no quicker, better way to de-stress and reenergize than laughing! Find something or someone in your life to make you laugh at least once a day!



Things to do with your children

Simple, fun and free things to do!

Spending time playing with your child is a great way of helping them learn. The shared attention between you and your child and the repetition that takes place in these situations builds your friendship with them.

- ♥ Games like "Simon or Simone Says" and "One, two, three red lights" are great fun. There are lots of activities you can do like playing card games or board games when you can have quiet time together.
- ♥ An important thing to learn is that you don't always win. It can be good for young children to win—to give them confidence but learning to lose is important too. There will be many times in life when you don't win and learning to cope with that is a good life skill you can teach your child too.



SURF Mothers say...

"You don't have to be an expert parent with serious strategies all the time, you can be a silly parent too! When things are bad, for whatever reason, having a sense of humour and fun amid it all, is a big help. Throw socks, dance, sing, watch a funny film or look at a funny meme. It can be as short as two minutes together just laughing."



- ♥ Young children love to count, name colours, find letters in the alphabet. Help your child find letters and numbers on cereal boxes, posters.
- ♥ Trips to the beach, playing in the sand, going to the playground are great exercise. Fresh air is healthy for your child!
- ♥ Play with blocks, puzzles, commenting on what they are doing, “You picked beautiful colours for your picture”
- ♥ Routines, such as setting the table or shopping, are ideal opportunities for your child to understand and learn about new things.



SURF Mothers say...

“When it comes to money, give options and alternatives rather than an outright ‘NO’. For example, “This is all I have money-wise this week, and here’s what we can do with it. We cannot afford the cinema but we can watch a film at home and have popcorn. We cannot afford to go to the café but we can buy some doughnuts and have a little picnic in the playground- an outdoor café!”

Things to do in Galway

- ♥ Galway City Museum is free to visit. It offers a mixture of history, art and usually a place where children can play with gadgets and learn by play. The view from the 2nd floor window is magical.
- ♥ Galway Arts Centre is free. It also hosts arts, writing and acting classes for a small fee
- ♥ Galway City Library hosts free lunchtime events. Its noticeboard is full of groups, events, and free things to join or do
- ♥ Many community groups exist in Galway ranging from women's groups to arts or sports groups—most are free to join
- ♥ Tourist Office can give ideas for free guided walks, including one of Galway's medieval history
- ♥ Barna Woods or Merlin Woods are great places to stretch the legs. The Wildlife Trust do nature walks and kids events.

SURF says...

- ♥ Take a bus together on Sundays, have a bite to eat or bring food with you and see somewhere different. Sit by somewhere scenic, people watch together—go out and beyond!
- ♥ Browse windows— look in some shops. Concentrate on colours, feel, excitement. Even the smallest treat can make it feel like a special day together
- ♥ Get outside in the fresh air! Go to an Animal Petting Farm. Play a little bit of football on a green area.



Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30



SURF Mothers Tip: A calendar and/or chalk board in the kitchen

A calendar is a huge help – it allows everyone in the house to plan and visually see and know what is going on, and know that you’re all on the same page. Place it somewhere for all to see – most find that in the kitchen beside the fridge is the best place. Write-up where, what, who on the calendar. Take 30 minutes, every Sunday evening, at the kitchen table, with your kids to talk about the week ahead.

Chalkboards are handy too for notes and messages, or put a sheet of paper up on the fridge door. Make it a habit that anything that is on the calendar is something that has been discussed and agreed.

“As a mother you can be more childlike, show wonder, innocence, silliness. Explore imagination and play. Our kids show us how to live in the moment and the wonder of the world. It is fun to be childish and playful with our kids once in a while.

Here are some ideas of things that you can do together:

- **Roll socks into a ball and have a sock fight – no one can get hurt because they’re soft**
- **Arrange a sleepover with friends**
- **Have a movie night where everyone chooses a movie, and make your own popcorn**
- **Put a tent up in the bedroom/living room**
- **Put on some music and dance together**
- **Mimicking TV – “My daughters pretended that they were in an episode of ‘Come Dine with Me’, and made dinner and served it to me. It was so much fun and we used what we had in the house.” —SURF Mothers**





Set time aside each day, even a few minutes, to focus completely on your children.

Let them take the lead on what you do together whether it is a snuggle, a talk, playing, singing, dancing or something else.

Read, or tell, or listen to stories with your children about lots of different kinds of people and families.

Social Media and Internet Safety

- ♥ Do not disclose personal details—Age/sex/location—to anyone on a social media app
- ♥ Connect only with other people who you know IRL (in real life)
- ♥ Log out of your app when finished
- ♥ A strong password is essential. Never share your password with anyone—only share it with a trustworthy parent.

Barnardos' Advice: 5 steps to stopping cyberbullying

D= Do not reply to a bullying message

K= Keep a record of the message! Very important.

T= Tell someone

B= Block the sender!

R= Report the problem to the host/website.

Remember... Bullying using a device can be traced. Do not be afraid to ask for help if you do not know how to manage a situation. See 'Parenting Supports'.

What is the basic 'TMI' aka 'too much info' when it comes to the internet? Location, date of birth, telephone number and your name

Three questions to ask yourself before you post:

1. Would Mum be happy to see this post?
2. Would Teacher be happy to see this post?
3. Having asked yourself the above questions, would you be happy for non-friends to see this post?

Spotting problems

- Mood of the person changes; they are more upset/agitated/ angry after using their phone or computer
- Keep an eye open for increasingly abnormal, avoidance behaviour. For example, hiding the device when you walk into a room or very sudden click down of a screen followed by intense silence or agitation.

Television and Other Screen Time

While TV and gaming can be a welcome and useful distraction—it can be fun and educational—it is critical it is only a part of the way your child spends free time.

- ♥ Balance TV and other screen time (phones, tablets, laptops) with time playing outside, hanging out with other kids, and time doing things together. Balance what your child watches or plays. For teens, encouraging them to watch the news or listen to the radio (or podcasts) helps them develop critical thinking.
- ♥ Set limits and consequences that take pressure off you. By setting boundaries such as “If you don’t turn off the game when the timer goes off, there will be no more screen time this weekend,” the responsibility is placed on your child.



- ♥ Kids start to perceive and be affected by advertising at a young age. Pay attention to the media messages and images that your child is exposed to.
 - ♥ Support your child’s ability to be logical and think about what they are watching: how do the characters think about the world around them?
- ♥ Help them to see and understand how things fit together—and understand that there can be hurtful stereotypes, unreliable news sources, along with discrimination on TV shows, games, films, and social media.
- ♥ Question them how they came to their conclusions and whether their assumptions are correct. Kids need guidance on what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’.

Top Ten Tips for Mothers *from* 'Helping Children Thrive'

10 suggestions that can help you to be a good enough parent.

Be a good role model

Children do as you do. You can model respect (and self-respect), politeness, honesty, good choices, compassion, healthy expression of emotion, non-sexist points of view, or any behaviour or attitude you want them to adopt.



Be clear on what you want them to do

Life with young children can be an endless string of “no” and “don’t” and “stop that.” It is important to teach children what not to do, but also show which behaviours are valued.

Instead of: “Stop that whining!”, try: “Use your words to tell me what you want.”

Instead of: “Be home by 10 or else!”, try: “When you get home at 10, we can watch TV together.” In other words, when you ask for one behaviour to stop, say which behaviour should replace it. This doesn’t work in every situation. “Don’t talk to strangers” is still good advice.

Praise good behaviour

Misbehaviour sometimes gets more of our attention than good behaviour. Praising good behaviour encourages more good behaviour. For example, “Good job putting your toys away!” or “I like how you share toys with your sister” or “Thanks for calling to say you’re going to Tina’s house after school. Now I won’t worry.” Parenting experts tell us to use 5 “praise statements” for every 1 time you correct misbehaviour.



Focus on the behaviour



You love your children but you don’t always love their behaviour. When you praise them (or correct misbehaviour), focus on the behaviour rather than the qualities of the child. Instead of: “You’re a messy boy!”, try: “I don’t like this mess in the living room.” Instead of: “You are beautiful”, try: “You know how to pick clothes that look great.”

When there has been violence in the family, don’t assume boys will grow up to be abusers and girls will be victims. If you catch yourself wanting to say these kinds of things—stop.

Give the reason behind your request

Instead of: “Turn that TV down!”, try: “Mommy has a headache. If the TV isn’t so loud, I can take a nap.” Instead of: “Get down from there!”, try: “I need you to stop climbing on the bookcase because it could fall over on you.” Knowing the reason, they may comply quicker, or maybe not. But over time they learn that behaviour has effects and consequences. They also learn to see the view points of other people.

Keep emotion out of discipline...

All mothers get tired, frustrated, and irritable sometimes. When children misbehave at the same time, that can be a bad combination. Before you react, count to three, take a deep breath, and think out your next words.



Discipline should be a well thought-out strategy to teach children, not an emotional reaction. ...And keep your voice down. Children ignore yelling if it’s all they hear. Living with arguing and yelling, they tune it out. Make requests in a normal tone of voice and let the words, not the volume, get your point across. When yelling is used only in emergency situations—like chasing a ball into traffic—they will take notice.

Instead of: “Do you want to go to bed?”, try: “Time for bed. Should we read this book or that book?” Going to bed is a given. There is no choice so don’t give a choice.



Give chances to choose, but not wide-open choice

Getting a child to bed may be easier when they know it is not negotiable and is a predictable part of the day. Giving a choice between two options (red or blue pyjamas) may distract them from the impulse to resist.

Expect what is reasonable

Take a young child shopping during nap time and expect he will be cranky. Expecting a teenager to obey an 8 p.m. curfew may not be realistic.

Set your expectations at a level consistent with age.

Keep adult matters among adults

Children too young to understand adult issues can be upset to hear about them.

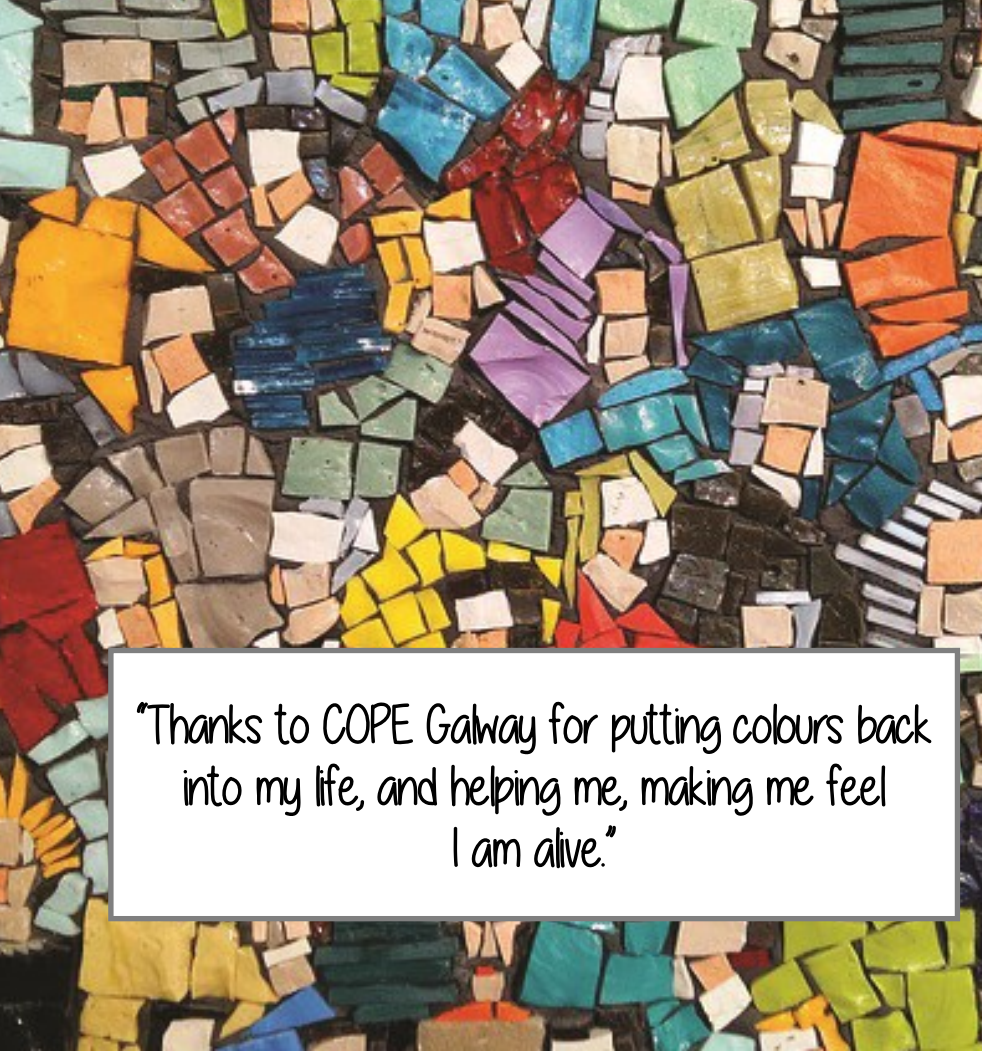
Keep a clear line between what you tell children and what you might tell a family member or friend. Likewise, it is not fair to expect a child to be the person in whom you confide your problems. They need you to be in charge.

Make the time to spend some time playing or talking

Children may act out to get your attention: if misbehaviour is the only way to get your attention, expect the misbehaviour to continue.

Life is busy with many demands. So we need to make time to play, talk or just hang out. If you have more than one child, find one-on-one time with each.





Parenting Resources And Supports

"Thanks to COPE Galway for putting colours back into my life, and helping me, making me feel I am alive."

Resources

You are not alone. Some things you have to do for yourself, but not by yourself. For support, call COPE Galway at 091 565985

If you are unsure who to call for advice, call COPE Galway Waterside on 091 565 985.

SURF & COPE Galway Waterside Booklets

- ♥ Moving On: It's My Life Now
- ♥ Managing Access
- ♥ It's Not Me, It's You (Dating Abuse)

Tip: The library has loads of books—for free! And the staff are very helpful :)

- *A Place for Starr: A Story of Hope For Children Experiencing Family Violence* By Howard Schor (kidsrights)
- *A Safe Place to Live: A Story for Children Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence* By Michelle Harrison (kidsrights)
- *A Bargain for Frances* By Russel Hoban
A book to help children recognise and understand manipulation.

Parenting Books and Web Resources

- *When Dad Hurts Mom – Helping Your Children Heal the Wounds of Witnessing Abuse* by Lundy Bancroft
- *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids will Talk* By Adel Faber and Elaine Mazlish (Avon)
- *The Courage to Raise Good Men* by Olga Silverstein and Beth Rashbaum
- *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* by Mary Pipher
- **Helping Children Thrive** (free pdf online) https://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/documents/Helping_Children_Thrive.pdf
- **Helping My Kid Learn** www.helpmykidlearn.ie
Free newsletter sent to your email address. Ideas for fun things to do with your children and help them learn through talking, playing, reading, writing and counting.

Supports and Information

- ♥ **Barnardos** Information and Advice Children and Youth **W:** www.barnardos.ie **Callsave:** 1850 222 300
 - ♥ **ChildLine** **W:** www.childline.ie **T:** 1800 666 666 or text 'Talk' to 50101 or text 'Bully' to 50101
 - ♥ **Citizens Information** www.citizensinformation.ie **T:** 076 107 7600
 - ♥ **Family Resource Centres** Local community-led centres offering a range of classes and family support www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/family-resource-centres
 - ♥ **Foroige** Youth clubs and youth mentors **W:** www.foroige.ie **T:** 01 630 1560
 - ♥ **Free Legal Advice** **W:** www.flac.ie **T:** 1890 350 250
 - ♥ **Intreo** Employment and Income Welfare and Support **W:** www.welfare.ie **T:** 091 500800
 - ♥ **Irish Immigrant Support Centre** **W:** www.nasc.ie **T:** 021 450 3462
 - ♥ **MABS Money and Budgeting Service** **W:** www.mabs.ie **T:** 076 107 2000
 - ♥ **Migrant Rights Centre** **W:** www.mrci.ie **T:** 01 889 7570
 - ♥ **One Family** askonefamily helpline offers information and listening support for those parenting alone, sharing parenting or separating **W:** onefamily.ie **Helpline:** 01 6629212
 - ♥ **ParentLine** Information and guidance on parenting **W:** www.parentline.ie **LoCall** 1890 927277
 - ♥ **Rollercoaster.ie** website For the ups & downs of pregnancy and parenting
 - ♥ **Spunout** Youth information and advice by young people **W:** spunout.ie
 - ♥ **Teenline** **W:** www.teenline.ie **T:** 1800 833 634
 - ♥ **Treoir** Information and advice for unmarried parents **W:** www.treoir.ie
 - ♥ **Time4Us Access** space for children to meet parent **W:** www.time4us.ie **T:** 091 860018
 - ♥ **Tusla Child and Family Agency Parenting 247:** www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven
- There are a number of breastfeeding support groups, and parenting support groups locally. Ask COPE Galway Waterside for advice and information. T: 091 565 985**



Teen and Young Adult Supports

Youth Mental Health, Disorders, Disability, Depression and Anxiety

- **Aware** Help for Depression and Anxiety W: www.aware.ie T: 1800 80 48 48
- **Bodywhys** Eating Disorders W: www.bodywhys.ie Helpline 1890 200 444
- **Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)** Disability organisations W: www.disability-federation.ie T: 01 4547978
- **Jigsaw Youth Mental Health** W: www.jigsaw.ie/galway T: 091 549252
- **Pieta** Help for those with having suicidal thoughts and who self-harm. Suicide bereavement support W: www.pieta.ie Freecall: 1800 247 247
- **Samaritans** A safe, neutral space to talk about what is on your mind W: www.samaritans.org **Call 116 123** E: jo@samaritans.org
- **Step Out Ireland Social Anxiety** W: www.stepoutireland.com

Sexual Health and Education, Unplanned Pregnancy

- **Positive Options** W: www.positiveoptions.ie Freetext 'list' to 50444
- **Your Sexual Health** Information W: www.yoursexualhealth.ie
- **Irish Family Planning** Association W: www.ifpa.ie T: 1850 49 50 51

Internet Safety Resources

www.webwise.ie

www.watchyourspace.ie

www.internetsafety.ie

www.hotline.ie

YouTube is an invaluable resource for tutorials on Internet Safety/ Apps etc.

Information/ guidance for parents & children

Teen-orientated. Teaches about privacy settings

Publications/ research. Facts/ guides etc.

Report illegal inappropriate content to be taken down/blocked

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender + (LGBT+) SupportS

BelongTo

W: www.belongto.org

Teach Solais LGBT+ Resource Centre

www.amachlgbt.com/teach-solais/

Youthwork Ireland - shOUT

LGBT Youth Galway

W: youthworkgalway.ie

T: 091 561637

Travellers' Support

Pavee Point

W: www.paveepoint.ie 01 8780 255

Galway Traveller Movement

W: gtmtrav.ie T: 091 765 390

Drugs & Alcohol

Drugs and Alcohol Helpline

1890 459 459

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p.66 Internet security advice taken from **Barnardos Cyberbullying Workshop** See www.barnardos.ie for workshop details

p.68-72 'Top Ten Tips for Mothers' from **Helping Children Thrive** (2004) Centre Children And Families Justice System. www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/documents/Helping_Children_Thrive.pdf

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Parenting After Domestic Violence And Abuse



COPE Galway
Let's help together

**Domestic Violence Refuge
& Outreach Support Service**
091 565 985

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