

## A Parent’s Guide to Speaking to Your Child About Domestic Abuse

## Introduction

If you have been in an abusive relationship and are now free and safe, you may be wondering how to talk to your child about what has happened. Children can be deeply affected by domestic abuse, whether they have directly witnessed it or experienced its impact in other ways. You may be wondering if bringing the subject up will upset your child or if it’s better not to say anything at all. This guide will help you feel more prepared for that conversation.

## Address your own mental health and well-being first

It is important to prioritise your own self care needs and wellbeing. This might be through seeking GP advice, talking therapies or joining a survivor programme like Voice. (Voice is a free local programme that offers emotional support and helps adults process their experiences of abuse. Contact NDAS to find out more).Perhaps you had an interest or hobby that you can take up again or you might make time each week to see close friends. You could look for ‘grounding’ techniques readily available on the internet, that will help you when you feel overwhelmed or anxious.

You have a right to feel safe and happy. Please speak to our advice line if you need help.

## Understanding the Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children

Domestic abuse can have lasting effects on children, including:

* Anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem
* Difficulty in trusting others or forming relationships
* Behavioural changes such as aggression, withdrawal, or difficulties at school
* Nightmares or sleep disturbances
* Guilt or confusion about the abuse

While these effects can be serious, children are resilient and can heal with the right support. Open, honest conversations play a crucial role in helping children process their experiences.

## How to Talk to Your Child About Domestic Abuse

**1. Choose a Safe and Calm Environment**

Find a quiet time and place where your child feels secure and comfortable. Avoid discussing the topic when tensions are high or when they are distracted by other activities.

A common question parents ask is whether they should wait for their child to bring up the topic before talking to them. We recommend that you lead the conversation. Being open with your child will show them that the subject is not off-limits. If your child actively shows that they do not wish to talk, it’s ok. It might not be the right time for your child. Remind then that you are there for them, when they are ready.

**2. Use Age-Appropriate Language**

The way you explain domestic abuse will depend on your child’s age and understanding:

**Young children (under 7 years old):** Keep explanations simple, such as “Sometimes, people hurt others with words or actions, and that is not okay.” Reinforce that everyone has a right to feel safe and a responsibility to act in a safe way. Focus on what kindness looks like.

**Older children (7-12 years old):** Provide more detail while reassuring them that what happened was not their fault. This age group will usually understand that ‘abuse’ means harmful behaviour. Domestic means ‘in the home or family.’ Domestic abuse happens when one adult acts in a violent or aggressive way which makes the other adult feel frightened, hurt and worthless. The relationship does not feel safe or equal.

**Teenagers (13+):** They may already understand domestic abuse but need space to talk about their feelings and ask questions.

**3. Reassure Them That It’s Not Their Fault**

Children often blame themselves for what has happened. Let them know that domestic abuse is never their fault and that they are not responsible for adult behaviour. You may also need to reassure them that there is nothing they could do to stop the abuse from happening and that the most important thing was that they kept themselves safe.

**4. Encourage Them to Express Their Feelings**

Let your child know that it’s okay to feel sad, angry, confused, or scared. Encourage them to talk, draw, write, or use other creative ways to express their emotions. A child might say things like, “Was it my fault?” or “Why didn’t you leave sooner?” It’s okay to say, “That’s a really good question—I’m glad you asked…”

Some children may have conflicting emotions. They may continue to love the parent who was the perpetrator of abuse. This is normal and it is important for you to acknowledge this. They can love someone but not like how that person behaved.

**5. Be Honest but Reassuring**

You may have tried to hide the abuse from your children to protect them. Don’t feel that you must share every detail of the abuse with them once you are free. Decide what you want to tell them and be honest about the situation. Emphasise that you are now safe and that you are working together to build a positive future.

**6. Acknowledge Their Fears and Provide Stability**

Children may worry about future violence or losing contact with the abusive parent. Provide reassurance by explaining any safety plans and routines in place. NDAS can help you to write a safety plan. Please contact our Advice team for support.

**7. Teach Healthy Relationship Values**

Talk to your child about respect, kindness, and boundaries in relationships. This helps them develop a healthy understanding of what loving, respectful behaviour looks like. You can find resources and guidance by visiting the NSPCC (www.nspcc.org.uk).

## Supporting Your Child’s Wellbeing

**1. Create a Safe and Nurturing Environment**

Establish routines and boundaries to provide a sense of stability.

Encourage activities they enjoy, such as hobbies or time with friends.

Show affection and offer positive reinforcement.

**2. Seek Professional Support If Needed**

If your child acts in an aggressive way, this can feel overwhelming for a survivor of domestic abuse. Should your child be struggling to manage their behaviour and emotions, consider seeking help. Services such as NSPCC ([www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) )offer resources and guidance for families affected by domestic abuse. NDAS have two parent support programmes ‘You and Me Mum’ and ‘Who’s in Charge?’ that you can attend for free.

Remember, you have a right to feel safe in your home. Speak to our advice line if you need help. Be kind to yourself - you did what you could at the time to survive and protect your children.

**3. Educate Them About Support Services**

Your children may benefit from knowing where to turn for help. Organisations such as Childline (www.childline.org.uk) provide confidential support for young people. There is a wealth of information and guidance on the Childline website. Giving children the tools to seek information and support may help them if they have questions that they do not feel comfortable asking you.

**4. Build a Strong Support Network**

Encourage connections with trusted family members, friends, teachers, or community groups who can offer additional support and guidance.

**5. Recognise the signs of Post-Separation Domestic Abuse**

Post-separation abuse happens when an abuser continues to try to control, intimidate, or harm their ex-partner even after the relationship has ended. This can include emotional abuse, financial control, harassment, threats, or using children to cause distress. It often happens through legal systems, social media, or indirect manipulation. The aim is to maintain power over the victim, making it hard for them to move on.

Children may feel caught in the middle or confused by negative messages about the other parent. It’s okay to calmly explain that some behaviours are not safe, without needing to criticise the other parent directly.

If you’re experiencing this post-separation domestic abuse, organisations like NDAS, Women’s Aid and Refuge can offer advice and support. You’ve already taken a huge step by getting out of an abusive relationship. That takes strength, and it’s the start of something better for you and your family.

## Final Thoughts

Talking to your child about domestic abuse can be challenging, but open communication and reassurance are key to their healing. By providing love, stability, and access to appropriate support, you can help them process their experiences and move forward with confidence.

Remember, you and your child are not alone, and healing is possible with time and support.

 ***“I didn’t understand what was happening at the time, but talking to my mum made it feel less scary.”***

## Support services

**Local support:**

Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Service Helpline: 0300 0120 154

Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Service email: advice@ndas-org.co.uk

Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Service website: www.ndas.co.uk

**National Support:**

Women’s Aid (www.womensaid.org.uk)

National Domestic Violence Hotline (<https://www.thehotline.org>)

**Direct Links -**

NSPCC – Talking about difficult topics: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/talking-about-difficult-topics>

NDAS group work referral: <https://www.ndas.co/support-programmes-group-work>