

HEALING & STRENGTHENING THE MOTHER/CHILD BOND



for
Women

If you are starting a life free of violence and abuse, you and your children have come a long way together. Moving forward means leaving the past behind. But some parts of the past may have to be dealt with.

There is information in this resource to help mothers understand what their children might have been thinking and feeling about the violence back then, and what they might be thinking and feeling today. See pages 50 to 57.

Re-assure

Children need to know these things. They must...

- trust you will take care of them and protect them
- know you won't leave them
- believe nothing that happened was their fault
- be sure you love them, forever and unconditionally



Robert Munsch (1986). *Love You Forever*. Firefly Books.

Don't be afraid to talk about the violence

As parents, our instinct may be to leave unpleasant events in the past. If children want to talk about what happened in your home, don't pretend it never happened. On the other hand, they may not want to talk precisely at the same time that you bring it up. Let them know you are open to a discussion when they are ready.

Ask how the violence made them feel

One way to start a conversation about a difficult topic is by asking how it made them *feel*. Depending upon their ages, children might have felt scared, angry, sad, guilty, embarrassed, concerned, or confused.

- respect and accept their feelings / don't tell them how to feel
- acknowledge those feelings are okay
- help them put words to the feelings if they are having trouble
- be prepared to hear things that may surprise you or hurt you

Sometimes, when children are safe, all the emotions come tumbling out, including anger.

Listen

Just let them talk and show you are ready to hear whatever they need to say.



Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish (1999). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*. Avon Books.

Dominic Capello (2000). *Ten Talks Parents Must Have with their Children About Violence*. Hyperion.

Encourage healthy ways to cope

In this resource, on page 42, there is a list of ways that children cope with stressful events at home. Some of these strategies are things you want to encourage while some might worry you. Help your child find healthy ways to cope with stress.

Be the best “you” possible

Your children learn a lot by how you live your life. Leaving an abusive partner and starting a new life shows you respect yourself and care about them. Don't rush into a new relationship just because you think children need a father. Consider going back to school or doing something else for yourself. Be the best “you” you can possibly be.

A few things NOT to do...

- don't confide in children or use them for emotional support: if you need to talk to someone, find a supportive adult
- don't be drawn into a competition with your ex-partner for your children's love
- don't tell them bad things from the past they don't already know about



If your son or daughter is behaving abusively in your home, see page 68.