

## HOW AN ABUSIVE PARTNER CAN AFFECT A WOMAN AS A MOTHER

- The woman comes to believe she is a bad parent
- The woman may lose the respect of some or all children
- The woman believes the twisted excuses the abuser provides for his behaviour (e.g., abuse is justified by religion or caused by alcohol)
- The woman changes her parenting style in an unhealthy way in response to the abuser's parenting style
- The woman's capacity to manage the day-to-day caretaking of children is overwhelmed
- The woman may use survival strategies with negative effects on her parenting (e.g., abusing drugs or alcohol)
- The woman's emotional bond with her children may be compromised
- The woman gets trapped in competition with father for children's loyalties, especially after they separate



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The views expressed herein are those of the Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System and do not necessarily reflect those of the government of Ontario.

### Other Resources:

**Assaulted Women's Helpline**  
(24 hours) 1-866-863-0511 (Ontario)  
(416) 863-0511 in the GTA  
1-866-863-7868 TTY

**Parent Help Line**  
(24 hours) 1-888-603-9100

**ShelterNet**  
[www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca)

**Education Wife Assault**  
[www.womanabuseprevention.com](http://www.womanabuseprevention.com)

**Ontario Women's Directorate**  
[www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca)

The material in this pamphlet is taken from:

***Helping Children Thrive:  
Supporting Woman Abuse  
Survivors as Mothers***  
(2004), by Linda L. Baker and  
Alison J. Cunningham.

The entire document can be found on  
the Internet at [www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca) or ordered from:

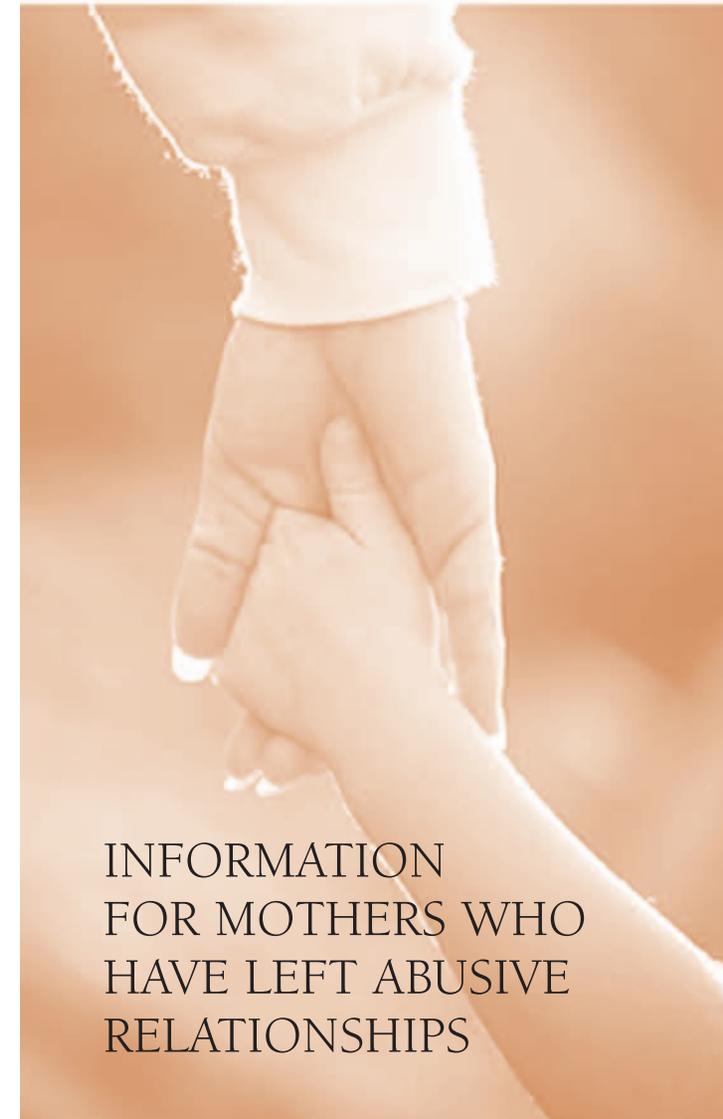


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# Helping Children Thrive



INFORMATION  
FOR MOTHERS WHO  
HAVE LEFT ABUSIVE  
RELATIONSHIPS

*Basic parenting principles such as these are particularly important when children have lived with violence against their mothers.*

### 1 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 emotions, non-sexist points of view, or any behaviour or attitude you want to see in them.

### 2 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:** “Don’t hit the kitty!”

**try:** “Pat the kitty nicely”

**instead of:** “Stop that whining!”

**try:** “Use your words to tell me what you want”

In other words, when you ask for one behaviour to stop, say which behaviour should replace it. This doesn’t work in every situation. For example, “Don’t play with matches” is still good advice.

### 3 Praise good behaviour

Misbehaviour sometimes gets more of our attention than good behaviour. Praising good behaviour encourages more good behaviour.

*“Good job putting your toys away!”*

*“I like how you share toys with your sister.”*

*“Thanks for calling to say you’re going to Tina’s house after school. Now I won’t worry.”*

Parenting experts say to use 5 “praise statements” for every 1 time you correct misbehaviour.

### 4 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 livingroom.”

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 “you are just like your father!”, **STOP**.

### 5 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.

### 6 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.

### 7 Give chances to choose, but not wide-open choice

**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. 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.

### 8 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.

### 9 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 your friend or someone to confide in. They need you to be in charge.

### 10 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 you need to make time to play, talk or just hang out. If you have more than one child, try to find some one-on-one time with each.