

# What is Family Violence?



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FAMILY VIOLENCE is the repeated use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour against a family member or someone the perpetrator has or previously had an intimate relationship with, which may include carers<sup>1</sup>.

Family violence happens to women, and less often to men, from all cultures and all walks of life. Most often it involves men abusing their current or former female partners, girlfriends or wives.

Abuse can also occur in gay and lesbian relationships, or between parents and older children, siblings or any other family members. People with disabilities can be abused by carers, who may or may not be family members.

Family Violence is behaviour by a person towards a family member that:

- is physically or sexually abusive
- is emotionally or psychologically abusive
- is economically abusive
- is threatening or coercive or dominating
- causes fear.

This definition also includes behaviours that cause a child to witness or hear or otherwise be exposed to the effects of family violence<sup>2</sup>.

People who perpetrate family violence assume they have the right to be in charge and dominate people close to them. Their behaviour causes people to fear for their own safety and sometimes for the safety of other family members, or pets.

<sup>1</sup> This definition, from the Victorian code of practice for specialist family violence services for women and children, has been endorsed by the Australian Association of Social Workers.

<sup>2</sup> Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)