

Family Violence

The Family Law Act says; Family violence means violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family or causes the family member to be fearful.

Family violence is deliberate and is rarely an isolated event. Over time, the violence tends to increase in frequency and severity.

Protecting family members, and particularly children, from the effects of family violence, is central to all determinations of what is in a child's best interest. Family Violence can be a range of behaviours, including:

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is not only an act that causes physical harm. Threatening to harm someone is also a form of physical abuse. All the following are forms of physical abuse, even if the violence is threatened but not carried out:

- Hitting, punching, pulling by the hair, choking, pinching, pushing, stabbing or restraining you in any way.
- Using weapons to frighten you or causing damage to property.
- Drive dangerously to scare you.
- Not letting you sleep, eat, or take your medication.
- Harming pets.

Verbal abuse

- Harassing or threatening you.
- Saying things to frighten you. e.g. telling you that they will kill themselves if you leave.
- Calling you insulting names.
- Undermining you as a parent in front of the children.

Social abuse

- Putting you down in front of others.
- Lying about you to other people, (a *Gaslighting* tactic).
- Isolating you from your family, friends, culture or people who support you.
- Not letting you use the phone or social media such as Facebook or Messenger.
- Not letting you visit a doctor or not let you go on your own.
- Controlling your life. e.g. not letting you have a life outside the home.

Sexual abuse

- Forcing you to have sex or engage in sexual practices you are not comfortable with.
- Making you wear clothes you are not comfortable with.
- Making you look at, or pose for, pornographic photos or videos.

Financial abuse

- Controlling the money so you are dependent.
- Forcing you to sign for loans you might not agree with.
- Questioning you about every purchase you make.
- Using joint finances for personal use or incurring debts for which you are also responsible.

Spiritual abuse

- Preventing you from practising your own religious beliefs or cultural practices or forcing you to follow a religion you don't want to.

Emotional abuse

- Withdrawing from you and not giving you support.
- Controlling you through anger or not speaking to you.
- Expressing extreme jealousy.
- Threats to have the children taken away from you.
- Not giving you an opportunity to choose or make decisions for yourself.
- *Gaslighting*; Make you doubt your own judgement, self-worth or sanity.

Stalking

- Constantly making phone calls to you or sending text messages, emails, messages or posts social media, letters or unwanted gifts to you.
- Loitering near your home or workplace.
- Checking your phone, email account or social media account.
- Using fake social media accounts to follow your activities.
- Spying on you or following you, including using electronic means to follow you.

Family violence and children

Children are affected by family violence, even if the violence is not directed at them. For example, if they hear, witness or are exposed to the behaviour or its effects, such as distressed adults, an injured or frightened person or damaged property.

Sometimes, violent and controlling behaviour falls into more than one type of abuse, or it might not seem to fit into any of the categories listed here. What matters is whether someone is controlled or is fearful because of the behaviour. Any behaviour or action that constitutes family violence is unacceptable, even if it is not a criminal offence. Behaviour may constitute family violence even if the behaviour would not constitute a criminal offence. Everyone has the right to feel safe and free from family violence in their relationships, especially children.

Support services

1800Respect A 24-hour, national, confidential information, counselling and support service for women experiencing family violence. Call 1800 737 732 or visit www.1800respect.org.au for more information.

MensLine Australia A 24-hour, national, confidential telephone and online support, information and referral service for men experiencing family and relationship concerns. Call 1300 78 99 78 or visit www.mensline.org.au for more information.

See information sheet; **Gaslighting**