

How To Help Children Recover: For Mothers

The following section is reprinted from Advocacy Matters by Lonna Davis

Even if you do not understand everything there is to know about child development and the effects of violence on children, you can share some basic information with mothers.

Here are some guiding principles you can share with mothers to help them with their children¹:

- Give children permission to talk about their fathers, the family, and the violence, even if it is hard for you to hear.
- Listen carefully to their perspective. It probably will not be the same as yours. Children understand events in different ways, depending on their age. By listening carefully, you can understand what was scariest for them, what they feel guilty about, and what worries them still.
- Reassure them that the violence/fighting was not their fault. They did not cause it, and it is not up to them to solve the problem.
- Remember that children may be loyal to both parents. Do not expect your child to take sides with one parent over the other, even if you are very angry at your partner.
- Reassure your child that you are working to keep them safe. They need to know that the adults are aware of how frightened the children may feel, and that the adults are trying to make things better.
- Do not worry if your child does not want to talk about what happened. Children are different. Some may be more hesitant to talk and may be dealing with their feelings in other ways. As long as your child knows that it is OK to talk about the violence, you can keep an “open door” for future conversation when, an if, the child is ready.
- If your child is extremely frightened or worried, or has behaviors that concern you, consult a pediatrician or counselor. Sometimes it may be helpful to have your child talk with a counselor about his/her feelings.
- Remember to take care of yourself. Parenting and healing require attention to the mind, body and soul. Do something small each day to remind yourself that you are worth it!

¹ These principles were developed by Betsy McAllister-Groves of the Child Witness to Violence Project of the Boston Medical Center.