

# Inside Trauma



## A word from the editor

It can be challenging to draw the line between physical discipline and child abuse. When does punishment cease to be a style of parenting and become an abusive behaviour that is potentially traumatising for its child victims in the long term? Many child abusers are not aware when their behaviour becomes harmful to a child or how to deal with their overwhelming thoughts before they lose their tempers. Any type of abuse of children is defined by an exploitation of a child's dependence and attachment to the parent.

Many people are under the impression that you should get over things that happened many years ago, or that the cliché 'time heals all wounds' is true for everyone. This is not always the case; sometimes we just grow scar tissue over these wounds but they will always be there.

People from all walks of life can find themselves in situations they could never have imagined. Some were born into the cycle of abuse and blindly end up in one abusive relationship after another, with little insight into how they got there. Other are strong and independent, yet are in the wrong place at the wrong time and become trapped in the most unexpected violence.

Why do people not come forward even though they are enduring abuse? Shame is often a reason they remain both silent and stay. Hope is another factor. There is a belief that one day everything would return to being the same. There comes a time, however, when one must see things for the way they truly are and reject being a psychological victim.

If you or a loved one may be suffering from delayed or ongoing effects of trauma, I encourage you to make a therapy appointment with someone who specialises in trauma and who can put you on a path of healing.

*Elizabeth Lourenco*  
*Provisional Psychologist*

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## What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is an act by parents or caregivers which endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development. Child abuse can be a single incident, but usually takes place over time. In Victoria, a child or young person is defined as a person under 18 years of age (Children Youth and Families Act 2005).

### Physical abuse

Injuries may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures. Generally abusers are 50/50 male and female.



### Sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity. It includes fondling of the child's genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object or exposure of the child to pornography. Sexual abuse rarely occurs as a single event and often starts with a caring relationship. 90% of sexual abusers are male.

### Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when a child's parent or caregiver repeatedly rejects the child or uses threats to frighten the child. This may involve name calling, put downs or continual coldness from the parent or caregiver, to the extent that it significantly damages the child's physical, social, intellectual or emotional development.

### Neglect

Neglect is the failure to provide the child with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision, to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.

*"... you don't have to wait for someone to treat you bad repeatedly. All it takes is once, and if they get away with it that once, if they know they can treat you like that, then it sets the pattern for the future."*

– Jane Green, Bookends

*"Childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun; not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul."*

– Dave Pelzer, A Child Called "It"

*You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem...*

– A. A. Milne.





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## Effects of child abuse

Children may experience a range of emotional, psychological and physical problems and trauma as a result of being abused or neglected.

## Emotional and Psychological symptoms of trauma:

- Shock denial or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling disconnected or numb

## Physical symptoms of trauma:

- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being easily startled
- Racing heartbeat
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess and agitation
- Muscle tension



Experiencing trauma in childhood can have a severe and long-lasting effect. Children who have been traumatised see the world as a frightening and dangerous place. When childhood trauma is not resolved, this fundamental sense of fear and helplessness carries over into adulthood, setting the stage for further trauma. The biggest effect of child sexual abuse is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

**Gary Dalton**  
**Undergraduate Counsellor**

*“We should meet abuse by forbearance. Human nature is so constituted that if we take absolutely no notice of anger or abuse, the person indulging in it will soon weary of it and stop.”*

*- Mahatma Gandhi*

*“The greater the power, the more dangerous the abuse.”*

*- Edmund Burke*

*“There are far too many silent sufferers. Not because they don't yearn to reach out, but because they've tried and found no one who cares.”*

*- Richelle E. Goodrich*



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## Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence is more prevalent than one would imagine. According to recent statistics, one in three individuals experience domestic violence, the most common form being sexual and or physical assault. Contrary to popular belief, domestic and family violence covers a range of abusive behaviours which can include sexual abuse, emotional and other psychological abuse. The term 'domestic' is applied as it typically occurs in households, families or spousal relationships. Another common misconception is that males are the sole perpetrators.

Evan, a male prisoner who experienced inmate sexual assault contacted the domestic violence helpline only to be told that if he wasn't a female victim or identified as being a 'male perpetrator' there



would be no support available for him. Another example is in the case of Ron, whose wife has a gambling problem and often leaves their young kids at home to go down to the pokies. When he goes to see her, she is often drunk and throws glasses at him or kicks and punches him. According to Cook (2009), domestic violence against women is such a documented and widely known issue that we often find it hard to believe that women can be the abuser. Statistics such as -'a women is beaten every 15 seconds by her intimate partner' (p.g 1) are well versed. Supporting someone or working with domestic violence can be confronting as it can often challenge our own value and belief system.

For health or psychological professionals, there are a number of referral services that can assist such as the National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Line, a 24 hour counselling service

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(1800 737 732) and also Relationships Australia (1300 364 277). In the case of assisting someone you know, basic support such as helping them to consider their safety options and ensuring that they feel they are not alone can assist them toward change.

*Claudia Stans*  
*Undergraduate Counsellor*

## The Impact of Abuse

Abuse has a devastating impact on all involved. It can have long lasting physical, emotional and psychological scars. Physical forms of abuse can be broken bones, bruises or tearing, stab wounds and infections. Emotional and psychological forms of abuse could include but not limited to low self-esteem, feelings of loneliness and worthlessness, addiction, suicidal thoughts and depression. Being an observer of abuse can also have an impact. For example, children witnessing other children in a school yard being bullied.

### Reactions to abuse

Immediate reactions to abuse are survival orientated. Once threatened, the autonomic nervous system sets in motion the emergency or stress hormones of adrenaline and cortisol. Adrenaline is responsible for the instant rush feeling or increased heart rate, increased respiration rate, sweating, muscle tension, blood flow moving away from the face, hands and feet to large muscle groups. Digestion is suspended for a while. Cortisol is facilitated into energy flows in the blood-



*“Verbal abuse is not a form of entertainment.”*

*J. E. Brown*

*“In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure no one listens.”*

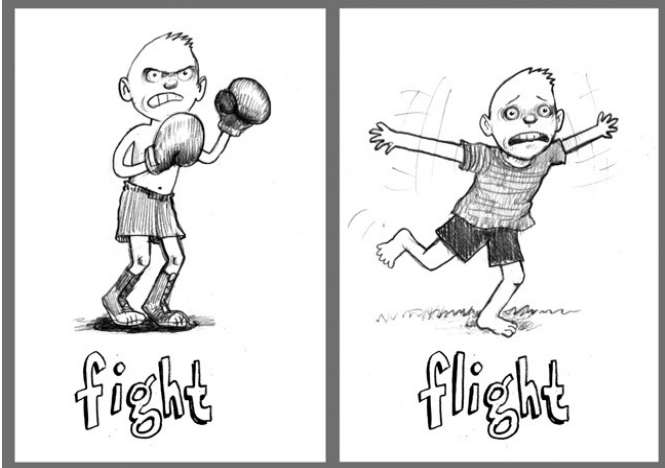
*– Judith Lewis Herman*

*“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but your words... they’ll destroy me.”*

*- Cassandra Giovanni,*



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stream. With the increased oxygen and glucose available to our large muscles we prepare for the 'fight or flight' response.

## Breaking the cycle of abuse with the help of Health Practitioners

1. *Finding support and compassion.* It requires a great deal of courage and determination to break the cycle of abuse and neglect. Support can be obtained from a health professional, friends and family. This will help you to feel heard and understood with empathy and compassion in a safe environment.
2. *Education.* Being aware of the effects of abuse and neglect. Understanding how the abuse you have experienced has affected you. Until you can recognise exactly how you are affected by the abuse, you will not be in the position to see things differently.
3. *Ongoing strategies.* Activities that build self-esteem, learning to communicate your needs and desires in constructive ways instead of erupting in rage or projecting anger onto others.
4. *Abuse prevention strategies.*
5. *Long term recovery strategies.*
6. *Information and referrals for further help if required.*



**Susan Buhagiar**  
**Undergraduate counsellor**

*“A word from the mouth is like a stone from a sling.”*

*- Spanish Proverb*

*“Injuries from verbal and emotional abuse can run deep and leave lasting scars. Many emotionally and verbally abused people reason that, because there are no bruises or broken bones, their abuse must not be serious. But it is. ...If pain motivates you to act against emotional and verbal abuse, then listen and act. You may be saving more than your life.”*

*- Beth J. Lueders*

*“If you can't be thankful for what you have, be thankful for what you have—escaped.”*

*- John Wayne*





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## Abuse Word Search

P H Y S I C A L E D N L P L W  
 V H V V C Y B C A U I A D T B  
 L I P P E Z N R F B H U R U Y  
 V O O S X A C X X J R X U P E  
 Z S U L T F I G H T W E G L B  
 U B X S E V A U F E X S V G H  
 A V B I N N C N N Z A T I Q L  
 V U T S E Q C O G D E U N W R  
 S G G J G C H E N R R R R M I  
 I I X I L T R E D D Y Y P Z W  
 M F W I E X S P A F J F Q J H  
 K E M S C S D J A H C T I C U  
 I Y M F T R K Y N T A Q F Z A  
 V B F B W A A M U A R T K P D  
 S E D K O U A N A L E Z C Q J

ABUSE	ANGRY	DRUG
FIGHT	NEGLECT	PHYSICAL
SADNESS	SEXUAL	SUBSTANCE
TRAUMA	VERBAL	VIOLENCE

*“No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow.”*

*- Alice Walker*

*“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, “I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along... You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”*

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

*The consequences of your denial will be with you for a lifetime and will be passed down to the next generations. Break your*

*Silence on Abuse!*

*- Patty Rase Hopso*



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