

Domestic and Family Violence Government 'Asks'

Summary

All children have the right to grow up in a safe home, free from violence and abuse. Children and young people thrive when they grow up in safe and supportive environments and are connected with appropriate support needs.

Almost every family that is referred to Barnardos Australia (Barnardos) has experienced domestic and family violence (DFV) and/or coercive control. These Asks have been prepared in response to new evidence and key findings from our 2022 research report, *Truth is, the abuse never stopped*.

The devastating effect of DFV on children and young people has been increasingly researched, and its lasting impact acknowledged.

Yet, despite the evidence, children and young people continue to be regarded as onlookers who 'witness' DFV, rather than as victims who directly experience DFV. Indeed, recognition of children and young people experiencing DFV as victim survivors in their own right and with their own unique needs is long overdue.

Nationally 1 in 4 children experience domestic violence.¹ One child per fortnight is killed in Australia by a parent or step-parent.²

¹Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse 2011 - The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children: A Literature Review
²See Lang, J. (2020) "How many children die from family violence in Australia?" Actuarial Eye. <https://actuarialeye.com/2020/02/29/how-many-children-die-from-family-violence-in-australia/>; citing Hill, J. The Drum. Family Violence Special 21 February 2020 drawing on the findings of Brown, T., Lyneham, S., Bryant, W., Bricknell, S., Tomison, A., Tyson, S., & Fernandez Arias, P. (2019). *Filicide in Australia, 2000-2012: A national study*. Report to the criminology research advisory council.

It is time to recognise children and young people as equal victim survivors with their own safety and support needs, and to establish appropriate DFV support policy and programs which reflect the presence of multiple victims of DFV.



Barnardos Australia asks that the Federal and all State and Territory Governments:

1. Recognise children and young people as equal victims of domestic and family violence in policy, programs and service delivery nationally in every Territory and State and ensure that this is prioritised and implemented as part of the First Action Plan 2023-2027 under the National Plan to End Violence Towards Women and Children 2022-2032.
2. Prioritise children and young people who are victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, and ensure they receive immediate and effective trauma-informed counselling and therapy.
3. Provide funding for domestic and family violence child specialist workers in all seven Barnardos Children's Family Centres to ensure children and young people are supported in their own right with case management and support.
4. Increase funding for safe, secure and affordable social housing for children and families fleeing domestic violence situations, including crisis, transitional and long-term housing in order to directly prevent children needing to enter out-of-home care.
5. Review the legislation to give children a say about whether they wish to see a perpetrator parent after an AVO or court order is issued.
6. Prioritise primary prevention and fund age-appropriate domestic and family violence education programs which are nationally consistent across early childhood education, primary and secondary schools.



About Barnardos Australia

Barnardos Australia is here because every child needs a champion. We listen, we act, and we advocate for the safety of children at risk of abuse and neglect, providing family support programs and services that empower children to reach their full potential. When it comes to protecting vulnerable children from abuse, we never give up. We are dedicated to the prevention of trauma in children, and support families to be the best parents they can be. As an organisation, we are child-focused in our approach and we provide integrated programs and services to 'wrap around' families and support them through the trauma caused by domestic and family violence (DFV).

Domestic Violence Program

Barnardos works with families that have experienced or are experiencing domestic and/or family violence and have children living at home. The service works with families to identify their needs and strengths to provide tailored support for each family member. The support is reviewed every three months and is designed to empower families to make long-term meaningful changes.

The aim of the program is to keep children safe, reduce parental stress and strengthen families. The service provides:

- Home visiting
- Safety planning
- Domestic violence education
- Court support
- Parenting support and education
- Budgeting and household management
- Practical assistance and coordination of specialist assessments and referrals
- Group work
- Referrals to programs within Barnardos.

Learn to Live Again – Women's DFV Support Group

This is an eight-week program delivered in a group setting (meeting once per week) designed for mothers who have experienced DFV. A therapeutic style group, rather than a psychoeducational group, this helps women identify the skills they have within to cope with and heal from trauma. The group helps reconnect women to themselves, their bodies, their family and to the community around them. The group aims to heal and strengthen the bond between women and their children, and in turn provide a platform for women to support their children's experiences of lived trauma.

DFV Phone Support

LINKER is an after-hours telephone support service for women in Western NSW who have left DFV situations. It proactively offers telephone and text message support to women (and most often their children) who have accessed emergency short-term accommodation as the result of leaving a DFV environment. The LINKER worker proactively contacts the client by phone and offers personalised and consistent support as required during their time of crisis and transition through homelessness to post-crisis stability, at times of the day and week when there are few, if any other forms of support available. LINKER offers flexible out of hours phone contact (5pm-9am every day of the week) from a specialist DFV worker to clients referred by emergency accommodation providers. Clients particularly value the LINKER Service capacity for phone-based support from another town, allowing for a more anonymous relationship, thus respecting confidentiality concerns, which can be challenging in small communities.

About Barnardos Australia Continued...

The Safe and Together™

The Safe and Together™ Model is an internationally recognised suite of tools and interventions designed to help child welfare and their partners become DFV-informed. This child-centred model derives its name from the concept that children are best served when we can work toward keeping them safe and together with the non-offending parent (the adult domestic violence survivor). The model provides a framework for partnering with DFV survivors and intervening with perpetrators in order to enhance the safety and well-being of children.

Right across our agency, in every program and every support role, we are seeking to embed a Safe and Together 'lens' or approach in how we respond to and work alongside of families, children and young people who are survivors and resisters of DFV.

Domestic and Family Violence Education Program

Barnardos conduct eight-week groups called 'Healthy Relationships' which explore what DFV is and how it impacts on children.

Children and Young People's Education

Barnardos facilitates 'Love Bites' respectful relationship programs for young people aged 11-17 years.

Love Bites is based on best practice standards for education programs as recommended by the Federal Government funded Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House and other leading academics in the area of violence against women.



Thank you for reading.
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