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NEW JERSEY CARES INSTITUTE

The Art & Science of Healing Children

# FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING INFORMATION SHEET (CHILD)

*WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING?*

Family violence/fighting are when an adult family member is hurting or being violent to another family member. There can be physical violence such as hitting, kicking, punching, or biting. There can be verbal or psychological violence, such as name calling, threatening to hurt or kill the person or themselves. There can be sexual violence, such as touching the person in their private parts or making the person touch them in their private parts when the person says no or is showing that they don't want to.

*WHAT CAN CHILDREN DO ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING?*

Children can tell an adult they trust about family fighting, so the adult can try to get help for the child's family. Children can also get to a safe place and call 911 if there is violence/fighting going on.

*HOW MIGHT A CHILD FEEL WHEN FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING HAPPENS IN A CHILD'S HOME OR FAMILY?*

Children feel many different feelings when family violence/family fighting happens in their home. Some children feel sad, scared, angry, depressed, ashamed, or embarrassed. Children also have different feelings about the person being hurt and about the person who is violent. Some children miss the violent person and some don't; some have mixed feelings. No matter how a child feels, all feelings about family violence/family fighting are OK to have.

*WHY DON'T CHILDREN TELL ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING THAT HAPPENS IN THEIR HOME OR FAMILY?*

Children don't tell about family violence for many reasons. Some children don't tell because they are too ashamed, embarrassed, sad or scared to tell. Some children are told by the person who was violent, or by the person who was hurt not to tell about the violence. Other children have seen so much violence in their family, they may not realize it is wrong, and don't know that they could get help to stop the fighting.

*WHY DOES FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING HAPPEN?*

Family violence/family fighting happens because the person who is violent has a problem with how they show anger. They have learned to show anger by being violent and that is not okay.

*WHEN SHOULD YOU SUSPECT FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING?*

You cannot tell by looking at a person that violence/fighting has happened in their home or family. Sometimes you can tell by the way a child or adolescent is acting that something is bothering them, but you do not know what it is. That is why it is so important for children and adolescents to tell an adult who can help them with this problem.

*WHO CAUSES THE FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING TO HAPPEN (whose fault is it)?*

Family violence/family fighting is always the fault of the person who is violent. In many families, it is the male partner (i.e., husband, boyfriend) who is violent, but in a smaller number of families, it can be the female partner (i.e., wife, girlfriend), or both partners can start violence at different times. It is NEVER the fault of the victim (person who is hurt) or the children, even if they did something wrong, such as make dinner late, talk back, or get in trouble in school. It is OK for grown-ups to get angry at each other or their children, but it is NEVER OK for grown-ups to be violent with each other or their children.

*HOW DO CHILDREN DEAL WITH FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING IF IT HAPPENS IN THEIR HOME OR FAMILY?*

Some children deal with family violence/family fighting by trying to stop the violence, by yelling, getting into the middle of the fight, or calling 911. Other children deal with it by talking to a grown up they trust, or going to counseling. Some children leave their home whenever they think or know that a fight is going to start. Still other children try to distract their parents, believing that they can prevent the fight.

Since these children are around violence in their family, some of them become violent themselves, and others are scared of showing any anger at all. Neither of these is healthy and children need to learn safe ways of expressing and tolerating anger.

*WHO HAS FAMILY VIOLENCE/FAMILY FIGHTING HAPPEN IN THEIR HOME OR FAMILY?*

People think that family violence/family fighting doesn't happen in a lot of families, but it really does. In fact, 3.3 million children are exposed (see, hear, or deal with the aftermath such as cleaning up, going to the hospital, maybe even lying about or covering up after violence happens). Family violence/family fighting happens in every town, city, state, and country. It happens in all kinds of families Family violence/family fighting happens in families of all races, ethnicities, religions, and regardless of how much money

a family may have, what they look like, and how much they may love each other when there is no violence happening. You can't tell by looking at a child if there is family violence/family fighting in the child's home or family.