





Rotary
District 9800



Stopping
Abuse in
Families
Everywhere

Building a Culture of Peace



DO WE UNDERSTAND OUR YOUNG PEOPLE?



Rotary **SAFE** Families

SAFE = Stopping Abuse in Families Everywhere

‘Rotary SAFE Families’ was established in 2018 to help prevent all forms of family violence by addressing its underlying causes. It has evolved into an international peace program with valuable resources and tools including short films, Guide for Prevention of Family Abuse available in 9 languages, to inform and assist Rotarians and global citizens to be aware of how to prevent family violence and play their part in Stopping Abuse in Families Everywhere.

We promote that family abuse NOT be a "taboo" topic and that we all have a moral responsibility to call out and report abuse and support a victim applying our "3R's". We provide guest speakers to provide presentations and workshops. Contact us:

info@rotarysafefamilies.org.au



Youth is a time in life when you are filled with energy, spirit, and endless curiosity. Young people are the backbone of every country and the future of every nation.

“I would so much like young people to have a sense of the gift that they are.” – John Denver

Introduction

Nurturing children and supporting adolescents on their growth journey is both a privilege and a challenge. As parents and grandparents, we all want the young people in our families to thrive—emotionally, socially, and physically. However, in today’s fast-paced world, filled with new pressures and distractions, it can sometimes feel overwhelming to know how to best support them.

This booklet is not an exhaustive academic study on child development. Instead, it is meant to serve as a conversation starter and a source of practical ideas for nurturing the well-being of the children and adolescents in your family. Through simple yet meaningful insights, we hope to provide guidance that will help you foster strong relationships, encourage positive habits, and create an environment where young people feel safe, supported, and empowered.

Every child is unique, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to parenting or grandparenting. The goal of this booklet is to offer food for thought—some key principles, strategies, and reflections that can help you navigate the joys and challenges of raising children. We invite you to take what resonates, adapt it to your family’s needs, and, most importantly, engage in open, loving conversations with the young people in your life.

Let's embark on this journey together, with curiosity, compassion, and a shared commitment to helping the next generation grow into confident, resilient, and well-rounded individuals.

Today

The need for resilience and how to build it



The figures tell a grim story about what's been dubbed the “anxious generation”.

One in seven Australians aged four to 17 suffered a mental illness in the 12 months to April 2024.

And mental disorders in 16 to 24-year-olds soared from 26 per cent to 39 per cent between 2007 and 2020²⁰²², an Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report found.

The pandemic, social media, overprotective parenting and too much screen time, are among the factors being blamed for what *The Lancet Psychiatry*

Commission on youth mental health has called “a dangerous phase” for our youth.

If parents and the community don’t take urgent action, we risk raising a generation affected by mental and physical health issues.

Maria Ruberto, a member of Medibank’s mental health reference group, warns, “What we are seeing is a serious lack of emotional competence in children and a lack of ability to problem-solve for themselves.”



Ms Ruberto claims: “It is critical well-meaning parents refrain from shielding their children from challenging situations or struggles, as it ‘robs’ them of their ability to problem solve. We are seeing parents

own a child’s distress because they are so incensed by what has occurred, but it’s taking away from allowing the child to learn and problem solve,”

This does not mean that parents should abandon their children to cope with the many challenges and uncertainties they face, nor should they endure relentless and repetitive bullying or abuse without support.



Rather, parents need to recognise when to allow their child to manage independently and when to intervene for

safety's sake. Parents must also take an active role in fostering resilience by developing their child's sense of competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, and control.

Dr. Ken Ginsberg's 7Cs of resilience development approach is worthy of consideration

<https://parentandteen.com/building-resilience-in-teens/>

Hugh Van Cuylenberg suggests an alternative path to resilience in the Resilience Project, in which children and adults are encouraged to foster resilience by developing positive emotion through fostering gratitude, empathy, mindfulness, emotional literacy, connection and physical health.

There are many approaches to resilience development, yet they share many core similarities.

Understanding the importance of resilience and how to develop it means that parents can aid their children in their preparedness to face the challenges of today and tomorrow.

While parents play a foundational role, schools and communities must collaborate to equip young people with the skills to navigate life's inevitable challenges. By fostering a culture of support, growth, and mental wellbeing, we can ensure that children develop the resilience needed to lead lives filled with happiness and fulfilment.

How Do We Keep a Young Person Safe?

Ensuring a young person's safety requires emotional support, education, boundaries, and strong community ties. Safety encompasses more than physical protection—it includes mental, emotional, and digital well-being.

Adolescent Development of Self-Identity

Self-identity development is a crucial aspect of childhood and adolescence, shaping how young people perceive themselves and their place in the world. From early childhood, children start to form a sense of who they are based on their interactions with caregivers, peers, and their environment.

They explore their likes and dislikes, strengths and challenges, and the roles they assume in various social settings.

As children enter adolescence, this process becomes increasingly complex. Teenagers seek independence, test their boundaries, and refine their personal values and beliefs.

Family, friends, social media, and cultural expectations influence their evolving sense of self. This period is marked by questioning, experimenting, and, at times, struggling to reconcile internal and external expectations.

The journey to a positive and constructive self-identity is not always smooth. Children and adolescents may face challenges such as peer pressure, unrealistic societal standards, bullying, and exposure to harmful online content.

These factors can distort self-perception and lead to insecurity, self-doubt, or the adoption of destructive behaviours. A lack of supportive relationships or experiences of neglect, rejection, or trauma can also contribute to the formation of a fragile or conflicted self-identity.



In some cases, young people may develop antisocial or pathological identities, aligning themselves with destructive behaviours, harmful peer groups, or ideologies that foster aggression, resentment, or entitlement. This can manifest as chronic defiance, lack of empathy, self-destructive tendencies, or even involvement in delinquent activities. The absence of positive role models and meaningful connections can make them more vulnerable to seeking identity in rebellion or isolation.

To mitigate these risks, it is essential for parents and grandparents to remain actively engaged in their children's lives, offering guidance, emotional support, and opportunities for healthy self-expression. Encouraging critical thinking, resilience, and positive social interactions can help young people develop a sense of self that is confident, adaptable, and grounded in constructive values.

By fostering open communication and showing unconditional love and support, caregivers can help ensure that a child or adolescent's self-identity leads to personal fulfilment and positive contributions to society.

Open communication fosters trust, allowing young people to share their concerns without fear of judgment. It is crucial to recognise mental health warning signs and provide access to support, whether from parents, teachers, or counsellors. As mentioned earlier, teaching healthy coping mechanisms, such as problem-solving and mindfulness, enhances resilience.



Safe environments at home, school, and in public spaces are essential. Young people should understand personal safety, body autonomy, and how to

navigate public spaces securely. Promoting healthy habits such as exercise, good nutrition, and adequate sleep supports overall well-being and reduces risky behaviours.



In the digital realm, educating young people on online privacy, cyberbullying, and managing screen time helps safeguard

their mental health. Digital literacy empowers them to recognize misinformation and avoid harmful content.

A strong support network, including family, mentors, and community programs, provides stability. Encouraging participation in extracurricular activities nurtures social connections and confidence.

Empowering young people to assess risks, resist peer pressure, and make informed decisions prepares them for real-world challenges.

Crisis preparedness is key. Knowing when and how to seek help for bullying, abuse, or mental health struggles ensures they can access support when necessary. Again, reinforcing resilience and problem solving skills enables them to navigate setbacks with confidence.

Liana Buchanan, former Victorian Commissioner for Children and Young People said: "The state needs to do a better job intervening with at-risk children early, such as when a child protection order was made or when they were no longer attending school", said Liana Buchanan, former Victorian Commissioner for Children and Young People.

More than half the young people in custody have been the subject of a child protection order at some point in their life. "The risk that these reforms will be capturing children who are themselves victims ... I find it really distressing". There are significant issues to overcome, including the "mindboggling" exploitation of children in residential care. The state needs to do a better job intervening with at risk children early, such as when a child protection order was made or when they were no longer attending school.

More than half the young people in custody have been the subject of a child protection order at some point in their life.

The risk that these reforms will be capturing children who are themselves victims ... I find it really distressing. In the worst of those cases, the children are killed. I still see cases where children are known to be living in family violence and the subject of report after report to child protection, and each one of those reports is closed.

We like to think of ourselves as a society that really values children and nurtures children."

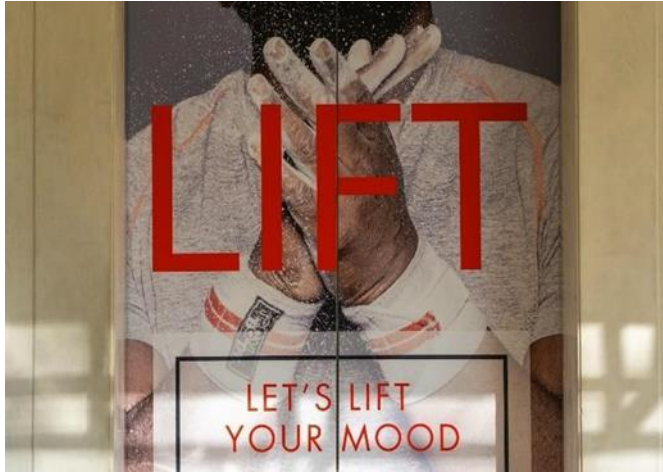


One particular concern for Buchanan is the rate of sexual exploitation and abuse for children in residential care. In April 2023, she warned organised crime figures and predators were routinely abusing children in care and 165 minors had been sexually exploited within less than two years.

"It should be something we are outraged about as a state," she said. "It is mind-boggling that as a civilised, well-resourced state, we will allow that to happen. They're out of sight and out of mind. That makes it hard work to get the government to invest in improved responses for them.

Keeping young people safe isn't about eliminating all risks—it's about equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and support to thrive independently.

Failure to find the right balance and provide adequate support risks potentially allowing the child to drift into harm's way.



Schools

It is important not to generalise about schools. Sadly, schooling, like much in life, is a lottery. Two schools in the same area, drawing from the same demographic, can vary greatly not only in teaching and learning but also in their cultures and, consequently, in the effectiveness with which they nurture the development of children's social and emotional well-being.

Some schools are peaceful and calm places, while others are like zoos. It's not just the school, but teachers vary greatly. Many people can identify a teacher who positively impacted their lives, or who diminished their passion for a subject, or whose offhand remark was so hurtful that it stayed with them throughout their lives.

Research presented to the *Australian Association for Research in Education* revealed that variations in classroom practices and teacher effectiveness within the same school can be as significant as differences between separate schools. Furthermore, a study published in *Teaching and Teacher Education* found that a teacher's effectiveness can vary across the classes they teach. This variation highlights how the composition of a class group significantly influences a teacher's performance.



It is reasonable to extrapolate these differences in a teacher's effectiveness to their ability to foster a positive classroom environment—one characterised by a culture of respect, a sense of safety, increased student productivity, enhanced self-

efficacy, reduced instances of violence, and greater overall academic and social success.

Considering all this, it's essential for parents to closely observe their children's school experiences and make balanced and informed decisions. Although changing schools can be a challenge, and should not be taken lightly, it can also offer a child a fresh start in a more suitable environment.



What do Young People Face in the World Today?

- The pathways to a career are much more confusing and fragile
- Influence of social media
- Failure to succeed in the education system
- Issues related to body image
- Family problems and parental pressure
- Substance abuse
- Pressures of materialism
- Lack of affordable housing
- Negative stereotyping
- Academic problems
- Peer pressure
- Depression
- Bullying
- Raised by single parents
- Lives are very insecure compared to, say 20 - 30 years ago
- Work conditions are much more insecure
- Concerns about climate change
- Political unrest around the world. A serious issue that affects the entire world



Youth violence

is a serious issue that affects the entire world, with a growing number of deaths occurring every year among people 15 to 29 years old. It's not enough, however, to respond to violence; the goal is to prevent violence in the first place. The only way to do that is to understand why youth violence happens.

What Is Youth Violence?

Youth violence refers to violence that people between 10 and 29 years of age commit. It's the intentional use of power or physical force to harm or threaten others, and it can include gang-related activity, violence with a weapon, sexual assault, fighting, and bullying.

This serious public health issue affects countless people all over the world. It doesn't just impact the families of the victims or the perpetrators but the communities that surround them as well.

The perpetrator of child abuse is “now more likely to be a young person than an adult” – Jess Hill



We need to understand why youth violence happens.

Five Causes of Youth Violence

Youth violence causes can vary. In many cases, a combination of factors leads to the development of various types of youth violence.

1. Mental Health Issues

A child or teenager with untreated mental health concerns can pose a danger to themselves and others. They may struggle to manage their emotions and not be able to de-escalate confrontations, leading to violence.

Trauma is a serious issue that increases the risk of perpetrating violence, with youths who suffer from PTSD being unable to process what they feel in a healthy way, making lashing out more likely.

2. Child Abuse and Domestic Violence

Child abuse and domestic violence can significantly impact young people by creating a cycle of aggression and trauma.

When children witness or experience domestic violence, they may internalize violent behaviours as coping mechanisms, perpetuating a pattern of aggression in their own lives.

The modelling of violent behaviour, coupled with the emotional and psychological impact of abuse, increases the risk of these individuals engaging in youth violence as they may struggle with impulse control, low self-esteem, and disrupted attachment patterns.

Children who have suffered abuse are also more likely to perform poorly in school, which can lead to negative interactions with teachers and other authorities. This can quickly cause a feeling of isolation for the child that only worsens the way they see the world around them. All these factors can lead them to lash out.

3. Drug and Alcohol Use

Another potential cause of youth violence is substance use. Drug and alcohol use affects the brain's structure, which is a huge problem in children and teenagers.

Their brains are still developing, and the areas that substance use affects are the ones that impact impulse control, judgment, emotions, and motivation. A teenager who uses alcohol or drugs will be less able to manage moods and emotions, making self-regulation more difficult.

This can lead to outbursts of anger and impulsive actions that put them and those around them at risk.

4. Neighbourhood and Surroundings

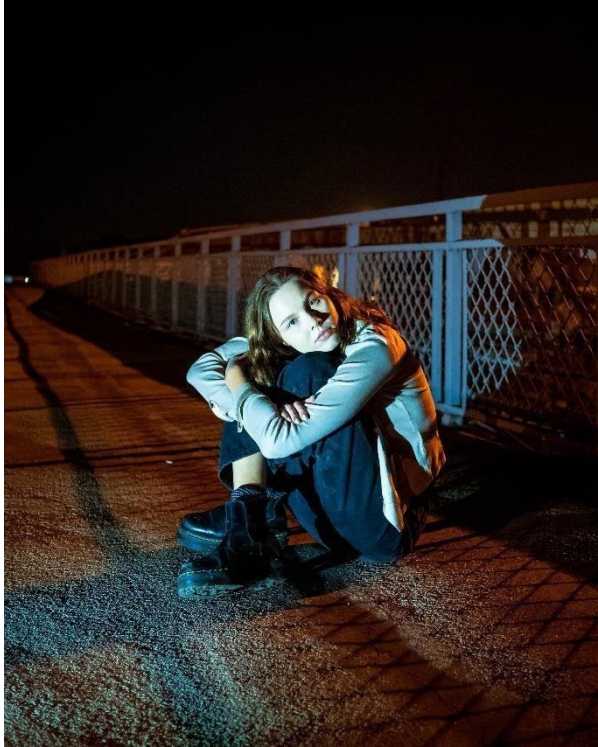
A child's environment helps to define their behaviour. If they live with daily experiences of violence, stress, and hardships, the risk that they'll engage in negative and violent behaviours grows. In fact, seeing violence in the home increases a child's chance of becoming violent by 40%.

A negative environment also puts a child in contact with peer groups that exert negative peer pressure. This leads to a higher risk of engaging in violence and criminal activity.

5. Low Level of Parental Supervision

Children who lack sufficient parental supervision don't have the right foundation on which to develop healthy social behaviours. They may not know what's expected of them or not understand why their behaviour is problematic.

“It's easy to stand in the crowd, but it takes courage to stand alone.” Mahatma Gandhi



Other Risk Factors of Youth Violence

- Academic problems. A young person's future usually depends on their academic career. Unfortunately, one of the primary reasons our youth may become troubled is the lack of proper education and the early departure from school.

- Many students drop out of high school every year, much less pursue a degree, significantly impacting their professional careers and earning potential.
- Other risks and causes of youth violence include behavioural issues such as ADHD and hyperactivity, which can create tension between students and teachers, as well as with other authority figures.
- A low level of attachment between parents and children is another contributing factor, as a child in this situation will lack the support necessary for emotional development.
- Low family income could be considered another factor because it contributes to a stressful family environment, as do parental mental health concerns and substance abuse.
- Behavioural issues like ADHD and hyperactivity can create tension between students and teachers, as well as other authority figures.
- Social media has no filters. Children model what they see on social media eg. Violent Pornographic videos! These videos are easily downloaded and watched by children and teens and often include choking and strangulation of the woman. Young people believe that violence behaviour is a normal part of intimacy.

- Technology and indulgence in social media take it to a whole new level. One can get so much exposure to another person's life that it can put a lot of peer pressure. Sharing explicit photos or information on social media due to peer pressure are major concerns since they lead to lifelong consequences.



A young person is vulnerable to being bullied on social media to make him feel ugly and is exposed to incel messaging and skewed views on sexual violence. He doesn't have the filters to understand what's appropriate.

At this age, with all these different pressures on him and with the peculiarities of his society around him, he starts to believe that the only way to reset this balance is through violence



The Reality Today of Youth Crime and Refugees

Refugees often:

- have had limited formal education and perform at a lower level than their Australian peers.
- have been mentally scarred by experiences in war-torn situations where they have witnessed horrific scenes that we cannot imagine.
- have lived up to a decade in refugee camps and in conflicted situations.
- arrived in Australia with PTSD which is not treated but often compounded.
- struggle to find their identity in their new country
- tend to identify with those of similar age from the same ethnic group
- experience financial hardship and family violence.

These are all issues providing challenges with very poor support and resources in Australia.



How Does Primary Attachment to Primary Caregiver Relate to the Development of the Teenager and them Becoming an Abuser?

John Bowlby theorised that attachment can be categorised into four main types: secure, anxious, preoccupied, avoidant and disorganized (Bowlby, 1978):

1. **Secure Attachment:** Those with secure attachment tend to have responsive and nurturing caregivers. In adulthood, they are more likely to develop healthy relationships.
2. **Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment:** Those who experience inconsistent caregiving may develop an anxious attachment. They often seek excessive closeness and reassurance while fearing abandonment.
3. **Avoidant Attachment:** This attachment style is often developed due to being raised with caregivers who are emotionally unavailable or dismissive. As a result, survivors learn to suppress their emotions and avoid intimacy, often leading to challenges in forming close relationships as adults.
4. **Disorganised Attachment:** This attachment style often arises from trauma or neglect. Adults with disorganised attachment may struggle with emotional regulation and relationship stability.

Those with avoidant or disorganised attachment are at greater risk of mental health issues and a tendency towards dysfunctional social behaviour.

Alongside Attachment Theory, which encourages parents to consciously build secure attachments through responsiveness, consistency, and affection, there are other well-recognised theories of child and adolescent development that can offer guidance for parents in assisting their children in growing into mentally healthy, socially responsible citizens. These theories share many things in common and underpin much of the guidance in this booklet.

Theory Name	Theorists	Advice for Parents
Psychosocial Development Theory	Erik Erikson	Provide emotional support, encourage independence, and guide identity formation.
Cognitive Development Theory	Jean Piaget	Set realistic expectations based on abilities and current knowledge level and encourage exploration.
Sociocultural Theory	Lev Vygotsky	Guide child’s learning, advancing in challenging but manageable steps, encourage social interaction and verbal communication.
Social Learning Theory	Albert Bandura	Model positive behaviours, be mindful of media influences, and reinforce good behaviour.



Youth Violence Prevention Strategies

Preventing youth violence depends in great part on a combination of strategies that have to be implemented in the home, school, and community.

In the Home

It all begins in the home, where the child has to feel safe. Parents must engage with their children, creating a supportive environment that allows them to ask for help if they need it. Calmly addressing problems teaches children to do the same, helping them learn self-regulation skills.

In the Community

Programs must be in place in the community at large to help with mental health concerns. Youth programs need to target at-risk children, offering that same sense of community so that they don't feel they're on their own.

In Schools

Counselling must be available in schools, and students should have an incentive to turn to counsellors for help. Teachers and administrators can also aid by increasing positive interactions with students, which boosts self-esteem and builds a sense of community. If a child feels like part of a group, they are less likely to act out against it.

“Everything will be ok in the end. If it’s not ok, it’s not the end.” John Lennon



How to Engage With A Teenager

Show interest in what they do: Immerse yourself in and learn about the things that they love. For example, if you have a teenager that loves gaming, sit with them one day while they play and show up with a keenness to learn about the game and what they love about it.

You'll be surprised at the other mental health conversations that can come up once you've established that mutual connection and interest in what your teenager loves to do.

Setting boundaries: While it's important to set up safe spaces to connect with your teenager, it's also important to set boundaries around which family rituals are a must.



For example, having dinner together as a family for 30 minutes each night might be something that you set up as a non-negotiable – no screens, no distractions.

These small things, over time, are building genuine connections and creating a safe space for your teen to feel like they can talk to you about their mental health and/or other struggles as they need to.

Modelling openness and vulnerability: We can show others that it's okay to talk about feelings by being open about our own emotions and mental health, and our own struggles.

Being vulnerable yourself as a parent (within reason) can be so helpful to share with your teen. For example, when you have trouble with difficult thoughts or feelings – share how you manage these.

Share stress through SMS: Send them a text message. Sometimes teenagers will sit in another room at home and text their parent from there and can engage in a mental health conversation that way. It can be much more powerful than parents think.

Connect through music: Share songs on Apple Music or Spotify to build connection. A parent may find a song that they could send to their teen that may show that the parent knows how their child may be feeling.

Having a shared playlist is also another way for parents to be connected to their kids while also keeping up to date with the music their children are into, and also a conversation starter: “I really liked that song you added to the playlist today”. "

Be a safe space for your teen: When your teen does finally open up and share, it’s crucial to be an active listener and to respond without judgement. You need to create a safe space for all family members.



This non-judgement needs to occur in the context of “active listening”, which is about encouraging all family members to listen without interrupting, dismissing or offering immediate solutions.

After someone shares something vulnerable, it's so important to respond with reassurance or comfort, rather than immediately trying to “fix” the problem or find a solution.

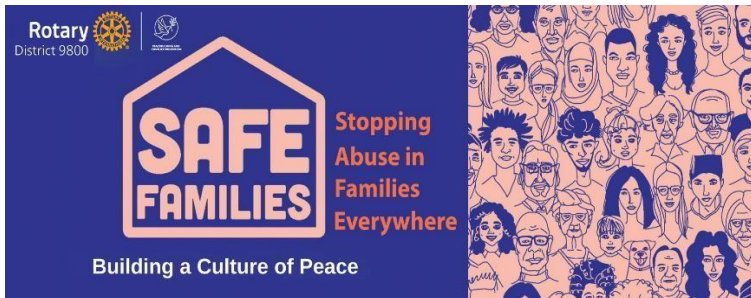
Parents can help by talking to their children about their expectations and encouraging them to do their best. Parents should also provide emotional support and help their children identify activities they enjoy outside of school.



Finally, parents should be open to discussing options such as taking a gap year or taking a course at a community college, which could help reduce the pressure of having to attend a prestigious university.

“We may not be able to prepare the future for our children, but we can at least prepare our children for the future.” Franklin D. Roosevelt

How Can Rotary SAFE Families Help Promote Healthy Respectful Families



Rotary **SAFE** Families – Building a Culture of Family Peace

Rotary **SAFE** Families promotes awareness and prevention of abuse by applying the "3R's" to any form of abuse to anyone, anywhere, anytime. This includes children, young adults, men, women, elderly of any diversity.

As Rosie Batty said: *“I want to tell people that family violence happens to anybody, no matter how nice your house is, no matter how intelligent you are.”*

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-26/rosie-batty-quotes/>

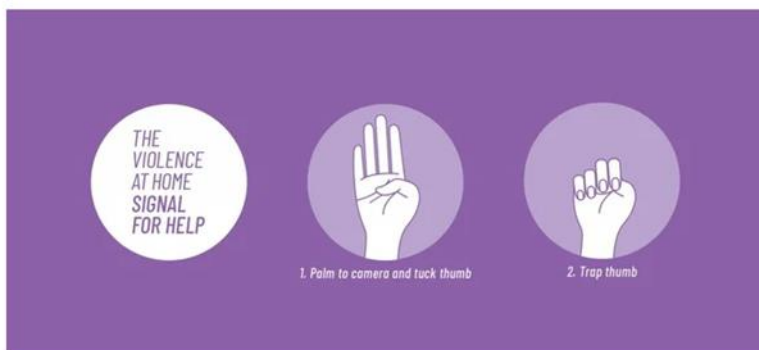
1. **R**ecognise signs of abuse; Become informed
2. **R**aise your concerns “safely” with victim, Never the perpetrator
3. **R**efer victim to 000 (Emergency) or a Support Agency Or Make the call yourself!

www.rotarysafefamilies.org.au

Remember: Prevention of family violence begins with YOU and ME!

Abuse is difficult to talk about but feel the fear and talk about it anyway!

It involves a simple two-step movement of placing their palm forward with their thumb tucked in before ‘trapping’ their thumb under their four fingers.





We Need Young People to Become Role Models in Changing the Story of Family Violence

- Respecting each other and themselves - ensuring healthy relationships
- Make violence and abuse a conversation
- Young people need to consult with professionals instead of being influenced by social media for mental health support.
- Challenge and prevent all forms of racism, ignorance, indifference and disrespect
- Apply the “3R’s” of prevention – simple, versatile and they work!



What Can WE Do to Promote Young People to Become a Good Role Model for their Peers

I believe in recovery, and I believe that as a role model I have the responsibility to let young people know that you can make a mistake and come back from it. Ann Richards

- Research shows that positive contact with adults other than parents is important to young people during adolescence. Young people need significant others who can guide and support them.
- According to psychologist Michael Carr-Greg, two of the most important factors in building young people's resilience to life's challenges are access to a charismatic adult and the chance to be around people who are socially capable.



- A positive connection with at least one adult is particularly important in fostering success at school: successful students have access to a whole range of knowledgeable and caring adults other than their parents and teachers.

- A supportive relationship with people outside the family is an important protective factor against the risk of underachievement and early school leaving.
- Positive role models and mentors who inspire, assist or motivate young people can have a powerful effect on student motivation, engagement and achievement in school.
- Because they may have different skills and knowledge than family members and teachers, they can bring new examples of career and life trajectories as well as new insights into the wider world and the possibilities it can offer.
- Effective mentoring and role model programs for young people need to be well organized, adequately resourced and strongly supported by the school.
- Their many benefits include engaging new people outside the school to support the learning of young people and building stronger links between schools and their communities.
- There is a growing trend towards business involvement in mentoring and role model programs, where employees volunteer to work with young people over a short or long period, supported by the company.

- A combination of good Home, Community and School can be a positive combination for a young person to become a role model for their peers whilst creating a positive, healthy development of the young person.



“If parents want to teach their children “self-control”, they must first form the habit themselves.”

Anonymous



SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS for YOUNG PEOPLE

Headspace - <https://headspace.org.au/>
1800 650 890

Department of Social Service -
<https://www.dss.gov.au/towardsadulthood/help-and-support-young-people>

Raising Children Network -
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grownups/services-support/services-families-of-teens/mental-health-services-teens-children>

Lifeline – 13 11 14

Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800

Beyond Blue - <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>
1300 22 4636

13yarn - <https://www.13yarn.org.au/> - 13 92 76

Orygen - <https://www.orygen.org.au/> - 1800 888 320

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<http://www.educationfoundation.org.au/>

Jack Thorne, via Ian Youngs, BBC News
<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/health/mentalhealth/maria-ruberto-details-how-to-raise-a-resilientchild/newsstory/a490c39c15648153fcd83751dafaabf6>

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Created by Dorothy Gilmour & Ian Bentley

Rotary **SAFE** Families: www.rotarysafefamilies.org.au

**ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS
AND CULTURES
ARE NOT THE NORM**
