A man in a dark room, looking distressed with his hand on his head. The lighting is dim and warm, creating a somber atmosphere. The man is wearing a dark jacket and is sitting on a couch or chair. His expression is one of pain or frustration.

HOW
TO
DEAL

WITH DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

A SELF-HELP BOOKLET FOR MEN WHO WANT TO CHANGE



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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SELF-HELP BOOKLET

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"I had a great job, great social life and a great family life, or so I thought. Recently, right out of the blue, my wife Phillipa told me that if I didn't stop treating her badly, she'd leave.

I hadn't really been that honest with myself. I tried to convince myself it was all in Phillipa's mind and that this would all blow over.

But then I could see how withdrawn Phillipa was and how it had started to affect my son, Matt.

The best thing I could do was be more aware of how I was treating Phillipa. I may not have been hitting her, but I knew that I had been trying to control her and I wanted to stop."

ADRIAN [40 years]

If you're reading this booklet, it's probably because:

- you're worried about how your behaviour is affecting your children or you've seen your own behaviour in your kids;
- you're feeling pretty bad about some things you've said or done to your partner;
- you're worried she might leave you; or
- she's just left you and you're worried she won't come back.

Adrian got the help he needed. But before he went looking for help, he needed to recognise that he had to make a change. Perhaps you are going through something like what Adrian experienced.

Adrian realised that his behaviour towards Phillipa was abusive. Just because he hadn't hit her, it didn't mean he wouldn't in the future. He saw that Phillipa and Matt were becoming more withdrawn. Phillipa had said that if Adrian's behaviour did not change, she would leave him and Adrian believed her.

All couples disagree and argue from time to time. Adrian and Phillipa were no exception. But when Adrian was prepared to abuse Phillipa in order to get what he wanted, a major change had happened.

What's happening in your life right now?

Perhaps you have recently hurt your partner? Maybe she has left you? You might be overwhelmed by feelings of anger, guilt, loss or fear of a future without her. Do you worry about the effect of your violence on your kids?

Perhaps you haven't hurt your partner, but you're worried that you will?

If you're worried, ask yourself these few important questions:

1. Do you often call your partner names and constantly criticise them?
2. Have you ever tried to stop your partner doing something that they wanted to do? (For example, going out with friends, having a job, doing some study.)
3. Do you take control of the finances, so your partner is not allowed to have money for their own personal use?

4. Have you ever threatened to hit or throw something at your partner?
5. Have you ever unfairly accused your partner of paying too much attention to someone else?
6. Have you ever slapped, hit, pushed or shoved your partner?
7. Have you ever pressured your partner to have sex when they didn't want to?

If you want your relationship with your partner and children to be without fear and violence, here are some ideas to start with:

- There may be lots of things you and your partner don't agree on. However, the most important thing is to remove fear from the relationship. You cannot resolve those other issues until your partner feels safe to discuss them with you.
- You may want to blame others for what is happening to you. This is not going to help you. Focus on what *you* can do differently, NOT what you want other people to do differently.
- Lasting change takes time. If your partner and children are scared of you, it will take considerable time before they recognise the change in you and begin to feel safe. Accept that this cannot be rushed or achieved overnight.

Above all else...

If you've made a concrete decision to change your behaviour, you have taken an important step. You have just made it over the first difficult hurdle! You've shown a great deal of courage to get this far.

This booklet will provide you with some information and ideas that could help you make the changes you need to make.

Other men, like Adrian and Rick, have been down a similar path. We've included some of their experiences in this booklet.

Many men who are abusive to their partners describe feeling angry and needing to stay in control, even when they're not around their partner. If this is happening to you, then you know how uncomfortable, exhausting and terrible this feels.



"I work hard, 10 or 12 hour days. I look forward to catching up with my mates when I'm not working.

Maybe I enjoy catching up with them too much. Well, that's what my girlfriend Steph tells me.

She also tells me I'm selfish, thoughtless and not interested in her or the kids. It's hard to handle the stress sometimes.

I know I get angry with her too easily. I know it's time to sort things out. I don't want her to feel afraid of me anymore. I owe it to her AND I owe it to myself."

RICK [24 years]

"If someone knocked on the door while I was pushing Nicola around, I would instantly become Mr Nice Guy, but the second they left, I would start exactly where I had left off."

STEVE [37 years]

Many men who are abusive report feeling helpless because they want to change but feel they can't do it by themselves. At times they feel overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, shame and remorse as they see the look of fear and hurt in the faces of their loved ones.

Partners of men who are violent report that they feel like they are walking on eggshells, monitoring everything they say, and living in fear of what sort of mood their partner will come home in.

Research is now showing the severe effects of domestic violence on children. Children who witness domestic violence may display nervous and withdrawn behaviour, poor school performance, bedwetting or aggressive language and behaviour.

Some people think that men who have behaved in violent and aggressive ways must be mentally ill or 'crazy'. Sometimes the men themselves think this. But the majority of men who are violent to their partners are, in all other respects, leading normal lives. Most men are not violent or controlling outside the home. They *choose* when, where and how they are violent or abusive.

WE ALL HAVE CHOICES.

HOW DOES YOUR BEHAVIOUR AFFECT OTHERS?

Nº 3

You may think domestic violence involves only two people – you and your partner. But it impacts on everyone in the family, especially your children.

Some people think that children don't worry about adults fighting at home; that they'll soon forget things they see, like mum being hit or parents screaming and yelling at each other. But children don't forget! They suffer a lot of harm from living with violence. Some children, particularly older ones, may step in to try and help their mum and may try to restrain the violent partner. Children are often stunned into silence by what they see.

Children tend to see the world as revolving around them. They may feel the violence is their fault; that they have caused it. They may feel guilty and confused about loving their dad, while at the same time not liking the violence.

Children know how they feel inside, but they may find it hard to tell adults because they may be too scared or because they do not know how to put their feelings into words.

Children have no power to stop the violence happening. They have little choice but to live with it until one of the adults makes a decision to leave or change. The home is usually the place where a child feels safest, but unfortunately, sometimes it's the place where a child feels the most afraid.





Changes in your child's behaviour

Have you noticed that your child/children have started to display any of the following behaviours?

- increased anxiety/worry
- behaving in a nervous or withdrawn way
- having few interests, few social activities or not doing well at school
- bedwetting
- restlessness
- headaches, stomach cramps, asthma or stuttering
- being cruel to animals
- acting aggressively when they play
- running away from home.

Young children learn by watching how adults deal with their problems. If parents deal with disagreements and conflict by shouting and yelling, then that is what children learn. If children are punished by being beaten or hit, or see this happening to their mum, then that is what they learn and believe is the right or 'normal' thing to do.

Patterns of violence and abuse are learned early on and can become a pattern for life. As children grow up and start relationships of their own, they may act in the way they have learned. In this way, violent behaviour may be passed on from one generation to the next.

Taking responsibility for your own violent behaviour and doing something about it means that you have a good chance of breaking this pattern.

A whole new generation of children, including your own sons and daughters will benefit from the choices YOU make now.

"Matt's school teacher asked me if everything was OK at home. She said she was concerned about his behaviour over the past term at school. She explained that he was no longer interested in doing well in class and had become quite disruptive.

This got me thinking, how much does my behaviour affect my son?"

ADRIAN [40 years]



Domestic violence is about more than hitting. It is behaviour that results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage; forced isolation; economic deprivation; or behaviour that causes the victim to live in fear.

"I never stopped to think about how hard I'd made it for Phillipa to catch up with her friends and have a life of her own. I realise now how much I would control her; it made Phillipa feel really lonely and isolated for five whole years."

ADRIAN [40 years]

Domestic violence takes many forms. These include:

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Punching, choking, hitting, pushing, shoving, throwing things, smashing things, damaging property, hurting pets and threatening to do any of these things.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Demands for sexual intercourse when one person does not want to participate, threats of physical violence during sex, or forcing a person to participate in acts they do not wish to perform.

VERBAL ABUSE

Continued verbal harassment, including put-downs, insults, name-calling and swearing.

SOCIAL ABUSE

Not letting your partner have friends, isolating your partner from family, not letting them use the car or the phone.

ECONOMIC ABUSE

One person takes total control of the family income, so that the other person isn't allowed to have any money, or is only allowed to have money for household expenses and none for personal use.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Humiliation, threats, insults, harassment or constant criticism. This may include verbal abuse, as described above.

Adrian is still trying to get his head around the sorts of things that he has done for such a long time that he now knows are abusive behaviours.

Phillipa is really willing to give Adrian a go but she says he must be genuine or she will leave.

Think back to a situation where you were afraid of someone, really afraid that you might have been hurt physically and emotionally.

Now imagine having to go home and sleep with that person.

Is this what it's like for your partner?

"Yeah, there have definitely been times when I knew Nicola wasn't interested in having sex. Oh, I'd try to persuade her, but if that didn't work, I'd get angry and start yelling at her. Sometimes I'd grab her by the neck and threaten her. I realise now I have no right to demand sex from my wife. No wonder she left me. It was like I needed to own her. She was mine and everything seemed right when she was around doing things how I wanted them. I realise now that that is not what being together is about."

STEVE [37 years]

It is important that Steve gives Nicola space and no matter how desperate he feels, he accepts that their relationship may be over.



"Taking time out to reflect is one of the best skills to become more aware of my own behaviour. Steph and I can talk about our problems more openly now. She seems less frightened of me. I've noticed that my relationship with my son has improved too."

RICK [24 years]

Men who have been violent to their partners may describe themselves as being 'out of control' when the violence happens. Yet many men have described how they can 'turn off' their behaviour when there are other people around.

You have a lot more control over your behaviour than you might think. In the heat of the moment, you may not be aware of the choices you make, but you still make them. You choose the way you speak and act with other people. Even when you are very angry or distressed, the choice is still there to be abusive or to find another way to deal with the situation.

Feeling overwhelmed and scared of losing control?

If you've just separated from your partner or your relationship is close to separation, you will almost certainly be feeling highly distressed or maybe completely overwhelmed by your feelings. Now is a high-risk time for violence.

The decisions you make now about how you will behave are very important for the future.

If you are violent or abusive now, it will reduce your chances of working things out with your partner. It will also impact on arrangements over contact with kids or property, if things don't work out with your partner.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, you must find immediate support from friends, family or a professional counsellor. Be honest with the people you trust about how distressed you feel. Don't blame your partner. Remember, the first step to recovery is taking responsibility for your behaviour. This is not a sign of weakness. Needing support at times like this is natural and normal.

Consider taking extended time out from the situation. Going away to stay with a friend can help. You may feel like taking some time off work. Taking this time off may be hard to organise, but remember there is nothing more important right now than looking after yourself. This will give you time to think about your behaviour and how it is affecting your family.

What can I do to be more aware of how I am treating my partner?

Did you know that when you criticise or put your partner down, you attack those things that are important to her, that make her special? These are also the same things that you admire about her when you are not bullying her.

By being nasty, mean, cruel and vindictive or by using personal information to hurt your partner, you are seriously damaging your relationship and undermining the trust between you. Trust is the most important ingredient for maintaining a close, intimate relationship.

Emotional abuse comes in many forms and is always destructive. Always think about what you are really trying to do. Are you really trying to make her feel bad, to feel less than you? Be honest with yourself. Even if other people can't tell that you're hurting your partner by what you're saying or how you're treating her, **you know**.

The result of your abuse will be that your partner will most likely distance herself from you to protect herself from being hurt. Is this what you want?

If you find yourself wanting to hurt your partner by criticising her or by using cruel and hurtful words in a way that you know will hurt – **STOP!**

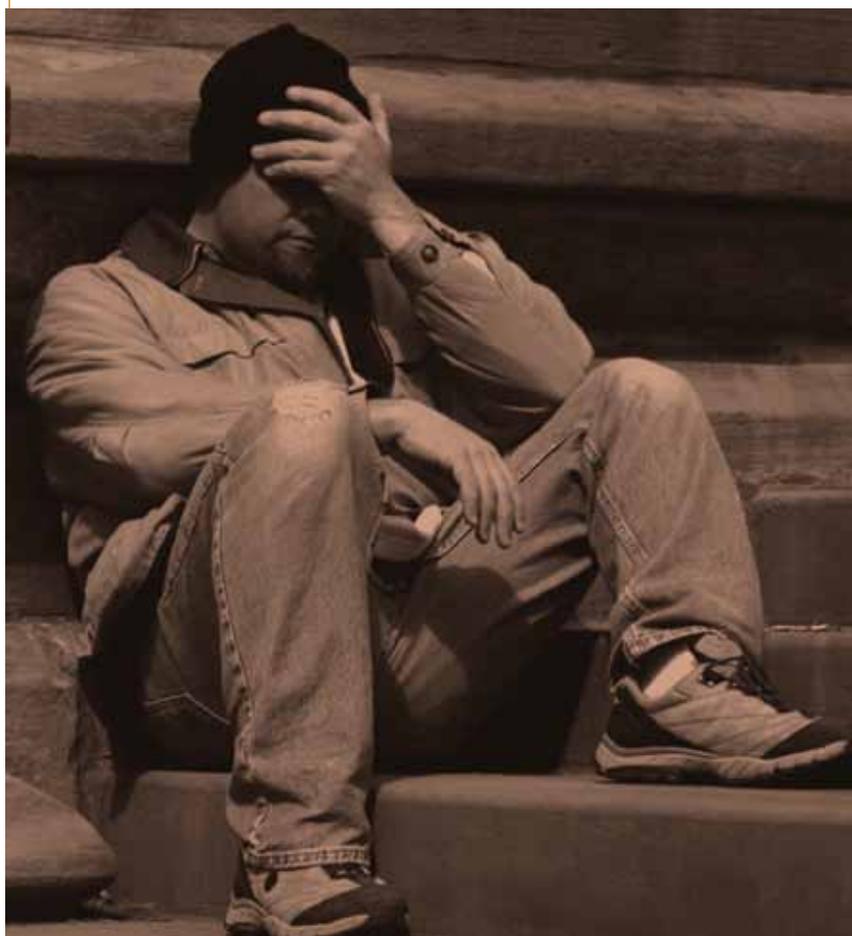
Take five slow deep breaths – **THINK!**

Do I want to hurt the person who matters most to me? – **FOCUS!**

I must control myself, not her.

If violence in relationships is ignored, things keep getting worse. Sooner or later it happens again ... and again ... and again ...

You may recognise that you go through cycles with your behaviour. Your partner may also be aware of these cycles. You may buy flowers or presents for your partner, write letters, promise it won't happen again or promise you will change. Then the violence begins again and another cycle starts.



WHY DOES VIOLENCE HAPPEN?

N° 7

There is considerable pressure in society for men to be strong, to be the provider, to be powerful. When someone has grown up with these ideas of what 'men are like', it may be hard for them to change.

Historically, women were viewed as subservient to men. In the early nineteenth century, it was legal for a man to beat his wife, provided he did not use a stick broader than his thumb. Things have changed enormously. It is now a criminal offence to assault anyone, including your partner.

THE POWER IMBALANCE.

Many couples in intimate relationships disagree about things and fight. Disagreements are a part of normal, healthy relationships. Problems arise if one partner feels too threatened or scared to have their say. When this happens, the balance of power is no longer equal.



"I'd never really given it much thought before I started going to the Men's Domestic Violence Group. We talked about how abusive behaviour can be much more than hitting our partners. It isn't just physical violence that guys use to control their partners. I wouldn't give her money or even let her see her friends. I realised the way I was controlling Phillipa's life was making her feel like she was going crazy."

ADRIAN [40 years]

"I'd get home from work exhausted. Steph would ask me why I was late and then ask me to spend some time with the kids before dinner so they wouldn't forget who their dad was. To me she was nagging – if it wasn't one thing it was another."

RICK [24 years]



Alcohol, drugs and violence

Some men believe they only become violent after they've been drinking. However, this doesn't mean that alcohol causes the violence. It just makes it easier to avoid taking responsibility for the violence. In other words, drinking can give someone a convenient excuse to say, "It wasn't me, it was the alcohol." Some men who blame alcohol for the violence are violent even when they're not drinking. On the other hand, there are men who are violent who never drink or use drugs.

There are also many men who enjoy drinking and are never violent. If you think you drink too much or you have a problem with alcohol or other drugs, then you need to realise that this is a separate problem to your violence. You need to get help for both problems.

BEING DRUNK OR HIGH IS NEVER AN EXCUSE FOR VIOLENCE.

"I used to blame the drink. But then I realised I would come home and smash things up whether I'd had a few with the boys or whether I was stone cold sober. The only difference was I tended to do more damage when I was drunk. Drunk or sober, the effect on Steph and the kids was always the same – it terrified them."

RICK [24 years]

Rick has the opportunity to become more aware of the impact of his actions on Steph and the kids.

WHY ARE RELATIONSHIPS SO IMPORTANT?

N° 8

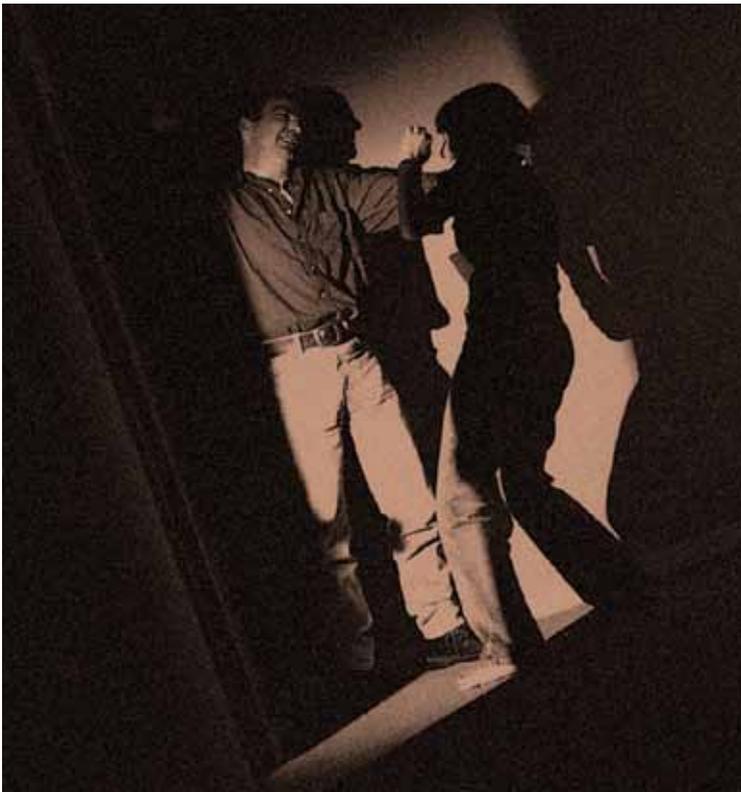
Think back to the last time you had a fight with your partner. How did you feel after it? How did it affect the rest of your day?

Our ability to face daily challenges may be affected if our personal relationships are not strong and supportive. Strong and supportive relationships will help you enjoy a good overall quality of life, so getting it right is very important.

“One day I realised, I had to do more than just apologise and promise the violence wouldn’t happen again. I had to take responsibility for my violence and work hard to change my attitudes and behaviour. I am relieved that I’ve sorted things out. I would’ve been devastated to lose my family or have a criminal record.”

RICK [24 years]

Rick has the opportunity to become more aware of the impact of his actions on Steph and the kids.



Throughout this booklet, you have heard from Rick, Steve and Adrian. Let's find out what choices they made and how they got on.

Rick [24 years] participated in two domestic violence programs over a twelve-month period. He has changed his life quite considerably. He now enjoys spending more time at home with Steph. Steph is confident that Rick has made a permanent change in his behaviour. She is amazed at how much better he is at communicating. They can now discuss problems without Rick flying off the handle. Rick acknowledges that he has some more work to do to make sure that he doesn't revert to his 'old self'.

Steve [37 years] attended counselling with a private practitioner, once a week for three months. In the meantime, Nicola had organised a violence restraining order against Steve. So far, he had given Nicola space and not called or visited her. Steve's family found it hard to believe Steve's behaviour. Steve realised he had been doing one thing and telling his family the opposite. He had said it was Nicola's fault because of the way she had treated him and they believed him. The counsellor said that Steve might be able to see Nicola in the future, but there was a lot of work to do in the meantime. It would need to be Nicola's decision about whether she felt safe enough to be in the same room as Steve and she would need to seek some changes to the violence restraining order.

Adrian [40 years] did a lot of reading before going to a Men's Domestic Violence Group. He found this helped prepare him for some of the issues they discussed at the group. He is no longer so jealous of Phillipa and encourages her to be involved with many activities outside the home. Their son is feeling much safer too. Phillipa and Adrian have decided to have another child.

What are your options?

Getting help to change the way you behave is not easy. It takes a lot of courage to face up to what you have done to your partner and children. That said, there is nothing stopping you from changing your abusive behaviour. Is it time you took up the challenge?

There are no quick fixes to getting help. It takes a lot of hard work over a long time, if you are really serious about changing your behaviour for life.

Many men say that they don't need help, and that they can work it out on their own or with their partner. Domestic violence isn't about 'working it out with your partner'. It's about having the courage to face up to how you have been hurting loved ones, and doing something about it **yourself**.

If you want to take responsibility for your actions, you have several options for help:

- You can make an appointment to talk to a trained **counsellor** on a one-to-one basis;
- You can enrol yourself in a program that is designed for men who are trying to change their violent behaviour. These programs are usually carried out in **groups with other men** who are trying to deal with the same sorts of issues as you. While some men find the idea of group work daunting, for most people it is a more effective way of dealing with issues than one-to-one counselling; and
- You can call the **Men's Domestic Violence Helpline on 1800 000 599** and talk anonymously to a trained professional, who will listen to you and give you some options on what you can do.

ALL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS UNACCEPTABLE AND SOME FORMS ARE A CRIME.

All domestic violence is wrong and some forms of domestic violence are considered criminal offences. Criminal offences include any threat to harm, shoving, slapping, choking, hitting or other assault, sex when the other person doesn't want to or stalking.

If there is a complaint about your behaviour, Police will conduct an investigation. Police will proceed with charges against you even if your partner does not wish to take action or does not want criminal charges to be laid.

Did you know that even if there is insufficient evidence to arrest and charge you, you will be held accountable for your actions? Police have the power to remove you from your home, even without the consent of your partner.

GROUPS FOR MEN

Many men who attend groups decide to keep working at changing their abusive behaviour. It's important to remind yourself that this is long-term work.

Many men who attend group counselling comment on the amount of support and encouragement they receive from the other men in the group. Men who are dealing with a problem of violence often feel alone, odd or even crazy. To know that you're not alone makes a world of difference.

If you want further help and advice about domestic violence, **please call the Men's Domestic Violence Helpline 24 hours a day from anywhere in the State on 1800 000 599.**

"I thought maybe, I'll go to the group and just listen. I did listen, but I also found it useful to talk about my situation. I feel like I'm now slowly becoming more aware of the consequences of my behaviour. I'm glad I made the decision to get help – if I'd stayed the way I was, I would've destroyed everything that's important to me. Now I've given Phillipa, my kids and me the chance to be happy."

ADRIAN [40 years]



KEY AGENCIES + CONTACTS

WHERE TO GET HELP

Getting help is a sign of strength and courage. Deciding to get help shows that you are ready to take control of your situation and take a positive step towards sorting things out.

24 HOURS

MEN'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HELPLINE 1800 000 599

The Men's Domestic Violence Helpline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can call and talk anonymously to a trained professional, who will listen to you and give you some options on what you can do.

CRISIS CARE (24 hours) **(08) 9223 1111** or free call **1800 199 008**

OFFICE HOURS

The following organisations have offices and services across the State.

Centrecare (08) 9325 6644

Communicare (08) 9439 5707

Kinway (Anglicare WA) (08) 9263 2050 or STD free call **1800 812 511**

Relationships Australia 1300 364 277

LEGAL INFORMATION

Aboriginal Legal Service (08) 9265 6666 or free call **1800 019 900**

Central Law Courts (08) 9425 2222

Family Court of Western Australia (08) 9224 8222

Legal Aid 1300 650 579

OTHER AGENCIES THAT MAY BE USEFUL

Family Court Counselling Service (08) 9224 8248

Centrelink 131 794

Department for Child Protection (08) 9222 2555

or STD free call **1800 622 258** for district office contacts.

KEY AGENCIES + CONTACTS *(continued)*

TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING SERVICES 131 450

Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For the cost of a local call, TIS helps people who do not speak English.

To order publications, or for more information, visit the Department for Child Protection's website at: **www.childprotection.wa.gov.au**

Some of the ideas for this booklet have been adapted from *Mirrors, Windows and Doors*, a self-help booklet produced by No to Violence, PO Box 3022, Victoria Gardens VIC 3121. Telephone (03) 9428 3536.



Government of **Western Australia**
Department for **Child Protection**

FREEDOM FROM FEAR
CAMPAIGN AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE