

Age-Appropriate Conversations about Domestic Violence

0 - 6 years

Provide comfort with a security blanket, pacifier, or special toy.

Soothe them by rocking, holding, or singing.

Allow them to show fear and provide support by staying close and remaining calm.

Ask questions that will help them tell you their feelings (e.g., —You look scared, or, —You look sad. What would help you feel better?)

Use storybooks to help you talk to them about how they're feeling.

Let them draw pictures. Ask questions about what's in the pictures.

Allow them to show fear and provide support by staying close and remaining calm.

Tell them what happened is not their fault.

Answer questions without giving them more information than what is needed.

7 – 11 years

Listen without judging.

Respond calmly to what they say, without becoming anxious or angry.

Help them label feelings.

If you don't know the answer to a tough question, admit it. Then help your kids find the correct information and talk about it.

Write down your children's specific worries and talk about each one.

Encourage them, when they're ready, to write or draw their thoughts and feelings in a journal.

Help them find a safe place to go when they feel overwhelmed (a cozy reading corner, a quiet place to listen to music, etc.).

Make a plan for how they can respond to scary things that remind them of times they witnessed your violent behavior.

Model conflict resolution skills, such as listening to the other person's side, coming to an agreement, and expressing feelings, rather than hitting.

Don't make promises you can't (or might not be able to) keep.

12 – 18 years

Ask, in private, what's wrong. Try opening conversations by saying things like, —You haven't seemed like yourself lately.

Encourage teens to talk about feelings and tell their side of the story.

Respond calmly to what they say.

Keep anniversary reactions in mind. A teen may feel upset around the date that the violence occurred, even years after the event.

Repeat in your own words what they say or feel. Let them know their feelings are normal.

Help them identify and label their feelings.

Praise their efforts to communicate their thoughts and feelings. (e.g., —I'm glad you are talking with me about this.)

Respond supportively when they talk about what has happened. Don't disagree or try to lessen the intensity of their feelings.

Encourage them to talk to other people they feel comfortable with.