



Safe Start for All: The Tasmanian Aboriginal Safe from the Start Project Final Report

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The Salvation Army
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A Safe Start for All: The Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* Project Final Report

**Dr Angela Spinney
Swinburne Institute for Social Research
Swinburne University of Technology
for The Salvation Army Tasmania**

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Glossary

An Aboriginal Australian person is someone who:

- a) is of Aboriginal descent; who
- b) identifies as an Aboriginal person or/and
- c) is accepted as such by the Aboriginal community in which they live.

‘Community’ refers to the Aboriginal people living within a particular geographical location, while remaining mindful of the diversity of the people within that community.

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Executive Summary

The Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* Project was funded by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation and builds on the work of the original *Safe from the Start* project, which was funded through the Commonwealth Office for Women – Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Initiative 2007/8. *Safe from the Start* is a Salvation Army Tasmania initiative born out of recommendations from the Salvation Army Tasmania research study ‘States of mind’ (Bell, 2006), which considered the specific needs of children, aged up to six, affected by family violence.

The main aims of the original *Safe from the Start* project were to:

- identify key elements of best practice for working with children, aged up to six, affected by family violence
- identify effective assessment tools
- identify and form a register of intervention activities and therapeutic play which can be used by children’s workers and parents
- train children’s service workers to work with the developed resources.

Both the original *Safe from the Start* and the Tasmanian Aboriginal project were community-based action research studies which involved input from stakeholders to both form a research reference committee and assist with the trialling of resources. The expected outcomes of the *Safe from the Start* resource kit and training module, set by the research reference committee at the beginning of the project, included:

- identification of the needs of children, aged up to six, who have experienced domestic and family violence, and integration into programs and case management
- education of parents and the community about the impact of violence on young children
- dissemination of children’s activities and information for use by services and parents
- development of a training module focusing on children aged up to six
- information for Tasmanian services about best practice, latest research and the impact of violence on young children
- production of a final research report for application nationally.

Safe from the Start has grown and flourished far beyond the expectations of those involved with the original development of the program, as it has met a real need in the community by providing practical assistance on how to engage in effective activity based play with children who have experienced domestic and family violence (Spinney, 2013).

The Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* project discussed in this report came about as a result of a recommendation from the evaluation of the original *Safe from the Start* project by the University of Tasmania (Guenther and Bell, 2008) and from feedback received by some of the 750 plus participants in the training programs developed as part of the original project. Because the original *Safe from the Start* and the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* projects are closely related there is some direct repeating of information in this Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* report for the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation from the original *Safe from the Start* (Spinney, 2008) report for the Commonwealth Office for Women. This is particularly the case for the sections about how domestic and family violence affects children and activity-based play. Although each report can be read alone, careful consideration of both will provide a complete picture of the research findings for the two companion projects.

This report charts the history of the *Safe from the Start* project, the need for a Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* project, and the context in which it was initiated. This includes the history of Tasmanian Aboriginal people since colonisation and explanation of why domestic and family violence occurs in particularly high rates in communities that have been traumatised. Discussion of the impact of domestic and family violence on children, and the rationale for using activity-based play to help ameliorate the harm experienced are followed by explanation of the methodology to develop toys and storybooks of relevance to Tasmanian Aboriginal children for the 2013 amended version of the *Safe from the Start* kit.

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* Project was funded by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation and builds on the work of the original *Safe from the Start* project, which was funded through the Commonwealth Office for Women – Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Initiative in 2007/8.

Safe from the Start is a Salvation Army Tasmania action research initiative and came about as a result of recommendations from a Salvation Army Tasmania study which considered the specific needs of young children affected by domestic and family violence (Guenther and Bell, 2008). Between September 2007 and August 2008 the first *Safe from the Start* project investigated and researched the effectiveness of selected toys and books to assist young children in exploring their experiences of domestic and family violence in a safe and supportive environment with their carers and front-line domestic and family violence workers.

The main aims of the original *Safe from the Start* project were to:

- identify key elements of best practice for working with children, aged up to six, affected by family violence
- identify effective assessment tools
- identify and form a register of intervention activities and therapeutic play which can be used by children’s workers and parents
- train children’s service workers to work with the developed resources.

Both the original 2008 *Safe from the Start* and the new Tasmanian Aboriginal project were community-based action research studies which involved input from stakeholders to both form a research reference committee and assist with the trialling of resources within their relevant workplaces and community. The expected outcomes of the *Safe from the Start* resource kit and training module, set by the research reference committee at the start of the original project, included:

- identification of the needs of children, aged up to six, who have experienced domestic and family violence, and integration into programs and case management
- education of parents and the community about the impact of violence on young children
- dissemination of children’s activities and information for use by services and parents
- development of a training module focusing on children aged up to six
- information for Tasmanian services about best practice, latest research and the impact of violence on young children
- production of a final research report for application nationally.

The *Safe from the Start* project has grown and flourished far beyond the expectations of those involved with the original development of the program. This is because *Safe from the Start* is recognised as filling an important gap in knowledge about how non-specialist workers and carers can conduct early intervention work with children affected by domestic and family violence and its associated homelessness. Across Australia (and more recently, internationally in New Zealand and the United Kingdom) *Safe from the Start* has great potential to play an important part in lessening the damage caused to these children, and to improving their long-term prospects. The development of effective and simple interventions such as *Safe from the Start*, aimed at tackling the complex disadvantages faced by a specific

group, are important not only for the children concerned, but also for the wider society; they work to break the cycle of intergenerational homelessness, social exclusion and disadvantage (Spinney, 2011).

The Tasmanian Aboriginal research project discussed in this report came about because both the evaluation of the original project (Guenther and Bell, 2008) and feedback from participants in the original *Safe from the Start* training program recommended that the project kit include books and toys with special relevance for Tasmanian Aboriginal children. The books, cards, puppets and music in the original kit come from several English-speaking countries and are intended to help children talk about and come to terms with their experiences of living with domestic and family violence. The stories include badgers, cows, rabbits, bears, frogs and children, but until now have not included animals and scenes native to Tasmania or illustrated in Indigenous colours. The new, improved 2013 kit offers an eclectic range of resources which can be used in therapeutic or activity-based play to encourage both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children to express their feelings. It includes books written and illustrated particularly for this project.

Because the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* Project comes out of the original *Safe from the Start* research there is, where appropriate, some information in this report taken directly from the 2008 final report of the original project. This is particularly the case for the sections on contextual matters surrounding the harm done to children who experience domestic and family violence and its associated homelessness.

1.2 The development of *Safe from the Start*

Safe from the Start was initiated by Nell Kuilenburg, Development and Research Manager of The Salvation Army Tasmania. The project emerged from a previous study: 'States of mind' (Bell, 2006). Bell's research findings proposed a set of principles to guide the work of Tasmanian Immediate Emergency Accommodation services addressing the needs of young children exposed to family violence, and suggested assessment tools useful to Supported Accommodation and Assistance Providers (SAAP) and relevant information links for practitioners.

Although each individual's experience is different (Danby et al, 2006), growing international knowledge of the significant damage experienced by young children exposed to domestic and family violence further highlighted the seriousness of the problem, and the short-term and long-term implications for children's wellbeing. As a result, funding was successfully sought from the Commonwealth's Office for Women – Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Initiative 2007/08 to develop an action research project looking at ways to ameliorate some of this damage. The rationale for this was the knowledge that children use play for very specific purposes when under extreme stress, as they have a need to play out crisis or trauma and use their play 'to master their fear-provoking pasts and anticipated futures' (Boyd Webb, 2007). The author, Dr Angela Spinney, now an academic in the Swinburne Institute for Social Research, was employed to conduct the original research project, and also conducted the research for the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* project as part of a contractual arrangement with Swinburne University of Technology.

The original objective of *Safe from the Start* was to identify and form a register of intervention activities and toys which workers and parents could use for working with children aged up to six who had been exposed to domestic and family violence. This resulted in the production of the *Safe from the Start* kit, a box of 24 books and toys which have been trialled and found to help these children come to terms with their experiences. The kit also contains the final report of the original project (Spinney, 2008), reading materials on the

consequences for children of experiencing domestic and family violence, and information about how products in the kit can be used. This was originally envisaged as a time-limited project involving the production of about 50 kits for distribution in Tasmania and the presentation of six half-day training courses for workers on using the kits. However, due to the success of the project and its eager take-up by the community, funding for additional training was provided in 2009 by the Early Years Foundation Tasmania. This allowed 300 additional participants to be trained in the theoretical framework of domestic and family violence and its impact on children, and how to use the kit, in 22 additional Tasmanian locations. The 2008 evaluation of the original project (Guenther and Bell, 2008) found that the kits can be used far beyond the refuges, shelters and crisis recovery scenarios first envisaged, and as a result participants for the 2009 training came from a range of related occupations including child protection workers, teachers, psychologists, counsellors and police officers. This is especially important because much domestic and family violence and homelessness is not openly disclosed, and most of those affected by homelessness in Australia are unable, or do not choose, to access services (Spinney, 2011).

Interest in the project soon began to come from other areas of Australia, and as a result a full-day *Safe from the Start* 'Train the trainer' course (funded by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation) was developed to facilitate the training of individuals who can then pass on the training in use of the kit. In the six years since the original research findings were published (Spinney, 2008), over 1000 of the kits have been sold across Australia and over 700 workers, from every state and territory, have participated in the training. In October 2011, the project was awarded the national Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Award. *Safe from the Start* was also awarded a Tasmanian Child Protection Award in 2010 and a NAPCAN Play Your Part Award in 2013. Kits have been exported to several countries, including New Zealand and the United Kingdom, where the author ran *Safe from the Start* training sessions in 2013. Later, Chapter Three of this report explains how play can be used as a means of communicating with children. Through using toys, young children can often demonstrate more adequately how they feel than they can through using words. This makes it possible for front-line workers and carers to play a 'first aid' role in allowing young children to explore their experiences (Spinney, 2013). Before this the following section explains the research process of the original *Safe from the Start* project, and Chapter Two examines the context, and need for, a Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* project.

1.3 The research process of the original *Safe from the Start* project

The original research reference group was made up of representatives from five of the refuges in Tasmania, transitional accommodation agencies and support providers. In order to establish which toys and books would be most useful for promoting activity-based play, materials and resources for the original *Safe from the Start* kit were sourced from around the English-speaking world. The methodology of the project, developed in conjunction with the research reference group, centred on the ethical principle of respect and justice. It was aimed at conducting 'good' research (Fraser et al, 2004, p. 98); that is, research that was the right and correct thing to do and would respect children as human beings (Spinney, 2013). As detailed later in this report, the research methodology for the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* Project was adapted from that used for the original project.

The role of the reference group was to assist with the collection of books and toys to trial, to suggest other suitable members for the reference group and to facilitate trials of the collected materials. We wanted to establish which toys and books would be most effective for ameliorating the harm done to children who had experienced family violence and homelessness within a Tasmanian setting.

Sixty-one books, toys, puppets and music CDs were sourced from Canada, the United States, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, as well as Australia. All of these items were available for purchase by the general public. The reference group selected 41 of these to trial, based on the group's combined expertise in the field and on the cultural appropriateness of the resources for a Tasmanian setting. The selected books were on a mixture of themes, including recognising what feelings 'feel like', issues of self-esteem, moving house and the rights and wrongs of fighting. These 41 books and toys were trialled with children who were clients of the nine reference group agencies by their mothers and children's support workers. The adult participants completed a questionnaire about how well they felt the trialled toy or book assisted with achieving the intended purpose. In total, 120 questionnaires were completed: 52 by mothers living in refuge accommodation and 68 by staff. In addition, 17 qualitative interviews were conducted with children's workers. The data collected was used in creating the original *Safe from the Start* toolkit and the training course content. Of the 41 products trialled, 24 were included in the kit: 16 story and picture books, an action songs book, four sticker and card sets and three puppets and toys. The University of Tasmania evaluation of the project identified three main ways in which the kit can be effectively used: as a tool to help identify signs of abuse, in one-to-one work with children and as a tool to use with parents (Guenther and Bell, 2008). A more recent evaluation of the *Safe from the Start* training and kit (Bell, 2013) found that practitioners' comments about the usefulness of the *Safe from the Start* kit across cultures were positive, but recommended development of the generic cultural translatability of the kit through direct engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders (Bell, 2013, p. 11).

An integral part of the *Safe from the Start* project is raising awareness of the damage done to children by domestic and family violence. Although the project has grown larger than anyone originally expected, the Tasmanian roots of the project have never been forgotten. We are delighted that an important gap in the original project – the inclusion of books, toys, posters and leaflets which have special relevance for Tasmanian Aboriginal children – has now been filled.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the development of the original and *Safe from the Start* project and explained why it was decided to develop a new *Safe from the Start* research project seeking to ensure that the *Safe from the Start* kit of books and toys, and the associated training program, are culturally appropriate for use in activity-based play to encourage both Tasmanian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children to express their feelings. Chapter Two goes on to look more specifically at the context of, and need for, the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* Project.

Chapter Two – The context of, and need for, the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* Project

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines what domestic or family violence is, how frequently it occurs, the context in which it occurs in the Australian Aboriginal community and the impact it has on young children. First, the history of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, especially since colonisation, is briefly examined to begin to set the context in which Tasmanian Aboriginal people live and in which the research took place.

2.2 The Tasmanian Aboriginal community

Aboriginal communities are thought to have lived in Tasmania for 40 000 years, having originally emigrated from Africa through Asia. At the time of British colonial invasion of the island of Tasmania in 1803 it is estimated that between 6000 and 8000 Aboriginal people were living there, comprising nine separate Nations and four major languages (Ryann,2012).

The British deemed the land *terra nullis* – ‘unoccupied land’– and Court decisions quickly established that Aboriginal people were not British subjects and would not be granted the rights and protections this would have provided. Between 1808 and 1820 a creole society emerged through interactions between Tasmanian Aboriginal people and white sealers, who often abducted Aboriginal women and children. During this time there were trade arrangements between Tasmanian Aboriginal people and the white colonisers, but there was also Aboriginal resistance to the British presence (Ryan, 2012).

By 1819 the Aboriginal and white communities of Tasmania had almost equal populations, made up of approximately 5000 Aboriginal people and 4250 white people. However, the end of the European Napoleonic wars saw a massive influx of white settlers and convicts. As a result, between 1817 and 1826 there was a mass extension of white pastoral land grab. This led to severe conflict with the Aboriginal Tasmanian communities as their kangaroo-hunting grounds and other important sites were taken over. The conflict over resources led to increased tensions between Aboriginal Tasmanians and the white population, with Aboriginal people often murdered to clear them from sites wanted by the white population. This in turn led to Aboriginal Tasmanians carrying out food raids. As a result, on 29 November 1826 the British declared war on the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, with the goal to force their surrender. By 1828 the British had divided Tasmania into two parts, with the aim of having the settler districts Aborigine free. To achieve this, martial law was declared in 1828, meaning that Aboriginal Tasmanians could be legally shot on sight within the settler districts (Ryan, 2012).

The 1830 infamous ‘Black Line Offensive’ chain of white settlers pushed through the settler districts in an attempt to push the Aboriginal Tasmanians out and force their surrender. While many Aboriginal groups managed to slip through the line, within a few years almost all Aboriginal people in the settler districts had surrendered and moved to ‘protected’ and controlled communities. The first of these controlled communities was on Gun Carriage Island. By now the Aboriginal population originating from the settler districts had been vastly reduced. It was further decimated by the unsuitability of Gun Carriage Island for habitation, and poor sanitation, which led to many deaths from disease. Gun Carriage Island was abandoned by the British as a ‘protected’ area, and the controlled Aboriginal Tasmanian people left alive there were moved to Wybalenna on Flinders Island. Conditions here were little better (Ryan, 2012).

Throughout this time there was also forced removal of the Western Nations people living outside of the settler districts, and they were moved to Flinders Island. The children were schooled for domestic service and Christianised, while the women were forced to keep European-style homes and the men were allowed only limited hunting. There were terrible conditions, with almost half the population dying from disease. Eventually the community had to be moved again to Oyster Cove. By the 1830s the prevalent discourse of the white colonists held that the remaining Aboriginal Tasmanians were seen as an expensive problem of a dying race (Ryan, 2012).

However, and contrary to many white Tasmanians' beliefs, the Tasmanian Aboriginal population did not die out in 1876. Numerous families continued to live in the Furneaux range of islands, on Preservation Island and on Kangaroo Island, where for a time they were left alone, and were able to establish successful communities. In 1912, however, they were brought under the Barron Island Reserve Act, which imposed control over what they could and could not do (Ryan, 2012).

During the 1950s the forced removal of Aboriginal children – the 'stolen generation' – was in full swing, By the 1970s this led to increased Aboriginal activism, and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Council (TAC) and other peak bodies were established to fight for land rights, recognition of identity and other issues. On 3 May 1991 the High Court handed down its seminal judgment in the Mabo case, which in time led to the *Aboriginal Land Act 1995* finally recognising Aboriginal peoples' ownership of their lands (Ryan, 2012). Aboriginal Tasmanians have experienced 200 years of dreadful trauma, and the community has fought long and hard for recognition. Now the community is vibrant and politically active (Ryan, 2012), and in the 2006 census 16 900 Tasmanian citizens identified themselves by their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and heritage. This is approximately 3.5% of the Tasmanian population. However, trauma such as that experienced by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community cannot be addressed without investing significant time and effort. The next section looks at some of the long-term and intergenerational consequences of such trauma.

2.3 The links between domestic and family violence and the experience of complex trauma

As discussed in the previous section, Tasmanian Aboriginal people (and indeed all Aboriginal Australians) have had a very traumatic time in the 200 years since white colonisation. Trauma can be defined as an event that is psychologically overwhelming for an individual, and complex trauma results from multiple or prolonged traumatic events. Intergenerational trauma can be transferred from the first generation of survivors to the second or further generations of their descendants (Atkinson, 2013), and it is only in the last 20 years or so that new ways of understanding the consequences of this trauma have emerged. This includes understanding why rates of domestic and family violence are disproportionately higher in Aboriginal communities than in the general population of Australia (Memmott et al, 2001). As Atkinson (2013) notes, citing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation Development Team (2004):

Many of the problems prevalent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities today – including family violence – have their roots in the failure of Australian governments and society to acknowledge and address the legacy of unresolved trauma still inherent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Factors which are considered contributors to family violence in Aboriginal communities include colonisation, dispossession and cultural dislocation; dislocation of families through

removal; marginalisation as a minority; unemployment; welfare dependency; past history of abuse; destructive coping behaviours; and health and mental health issues, low self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness (Cripps, 2007).

All sections of the Tasmanian community experience domestic and family violence. However, the original *Safe from the Start* project did not take enough account of the traumatic experiences that Tasmanian Aboriginal communities have been through, or of the need to adapt programs to take account of clients' traumatic experiences (Atkinson, 2013). Trauma research specific to Indigenous Australian children and their families is in its infancy (Atkinson, 2013), and we have more knowledge now than we did in 2007 when the first *Safe from the Start* research was designed. In order to create an appropriate environment where Tasmanian Aboriginal children will feel culturally and emotionally safe (Cripps, 2007; Atkinson, 2013) we came to realise that the design and evaluation of *Safe from the Start* kit resources needs to specifically involve Tasmanian Aboriginal community members. The Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* Project aims to put this omission right. The author particularly acknowledges the strength and resilience of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities and culture. As described in the previous section, the past 200 years have been racked with trauma and dislocation. It is the protective attributes of the Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, including strong kinship systems and connection to spiritual traditions, ancestry, Country and community (Atkinson, 2013) that have enabled Tasmanian Aboriginal people to thrive and rise above their recent history. These attributes will also assist the women and children who experience domestic and family violence and associated homelessness. Research has demonstrated that approaches informed by Aboriginal culture can assist with healing and recovery from domestic and family violence (Cripps, 2007) and that is where the new *Safe from the Start* kit seeks to play a part.

The next section looks further at domestic and family violence and its consequences.

2.4 Domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence occurs in all cultures, races and religions. It is found in all communities and across all demographics including age, gender, socio-economic status, race, religion, culture and educational attainment. It is made up of many controlling and intimidating behaviours, often much wider in range than physical violence alone.

The following offers a useful definition for the term 'domestic and family violence':

A pattern of coercive behaviour used to maintain control over a partner, through a combination of physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse, enforced social isolation and intimidation.

(Cunningham and Baker, 2004)

Domestic or family violence occurs, then, when a family member, member of the community, partner or ex-partner attempts to physically or psychologically control or dominate another. Those who suffer such violence can experience abuse in many forms: being killed, seriously hurt, raped, isolated, frightened, depressed and kept in poverty. Most domestic and family violence is perpetrated by males against females, but this is not always the case (Cunningham and Baker, 2007). Living with domestic and family violence, in whatever form it takes, has an extremely negative impact on women and their children. Being in a situation of fear, intimidation, isolation and subjugation, of constant worry about 'keeping a lid on things' and of having to fight to keep themselves and their children safe can mean that women and children lose a sense of having a home (in the sense of a safe place to

be, where they can relax and be themselves) even before they may be forced to leave their physical dwelling (Tomas and Dittmar, 2007).

The effects of colonisation and its consequences for the amount of domestic and family violence in Aboriginal communities could be seen to be at odds with more conventional feminist explanations of the causes. From the 1970s there was a growing feminist discourse (Spinney, 2007) on the causes of domestic violence. This perhaps became most overt in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which was instigated by Australia and Canada and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993). The declaration reads:

Recognising that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.

(Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993)

Both explanations have validity, especially when considering how the societies from which the explanations have evolved are very different and have very different histories. The term 'family violence' is preferred by some Aboriginal communities because it includes all forms of violence in intimate relationships, covering a broad range of family relationships. Perpetrators and victims can include extended family such as aunts, uncles, cousins and children of previous relationships, as the term 'family' covers a diverse range of reciprocal ties of obligation and mutual support (Victorian Government, 2004). Furthermore, the ways Aboriginal Australians describe domestic and family violence may be different from other communities' descriptions. Research has identified that Aboriginal people may use language that minimises the violence, such as describing it as a frequent innocuous event, in order to protect their family from the intrusion of agencies; to protect people from looking bad and from the impact that full disclosure could have on their small community (Cripps, 2010). What we do know is that nearly one in four of all Australian women who have been married or in a de facto relationship have experienced domestic violence at some time (ABS 1996, p. 50), and that Aboriginal Australian women are up to 35 times more likely to experience domestic and family violence than non-Indigenous Australian women (COAG, 2010). It is important to note that these figures are for the whole of Australia and not just for Tasmania.

Another reason that Indigenous Australian women are less likely to make complaints to the police is the still-existent differences in the ways that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women are treated if they do make complaints:

While the quality of intervention and support for non-Aboriginal victims of domestic violence has generally improved over recent years, derogatory and racist stereotypes of Aboriginal women still continue to normalise abusive behaviour towards them ...

(Blagg, 2002, p. 6)

Aboriginal women are also typically more reluctant to engage a police or justice response to their abuse, fearing consequent alienation within their community and/or the further disintegration of their community resulting from the abuser's possible incarceration or death in custody (Blagg, 2002). The implied expectation of mainstream justice that the victim and offender will separate and have no ongoing relationship is also problematic. Blagg points out that:

[f]or many Indigenous women, choosing to leave 'family' – with all its complexly embedded ties of responsibility and obligation, connection with country and culture – is not an option. The capacity to exit family relationships (indeed, the very concept of 'choice' in such matters) – to repackage and reconstitute one's identity as an autonomous individual in some new location – is a profoundly Eurocentric construction ...

(Blagg, 2002, p. 198)

In the Northern Territory, Faye Parriman has created a 'cycle of violence' diagram to explain some of the symptoms and attributes of domestic and family violence in the local community. Although the Northern Territory and Tasmanian Aboriginal communities have many differences, the diagram is included here because it is one of the rare examples of an attempt to explain figuratively what domestic and family violence can look like, and be triggered by, in an Aboriginal community. At the centre of the diagram are possible immediate triggers of an attack: alcohol, jealousy, drugs and payback. Circling around this are explanations of the cycle of domestic and family violence, including ways the violent person may deal with the regret and remorse that can result from an attack before the violence starts again. As the diagram makes clear, not all domestic and family violence involves physical violence; increased tension and control, blaming, arguing, staying out without explanation, swearing and cursing can be included along with the bashing, booting, hair pulling, hitting and slapping that victims may have to endure.

Cycle of Violence

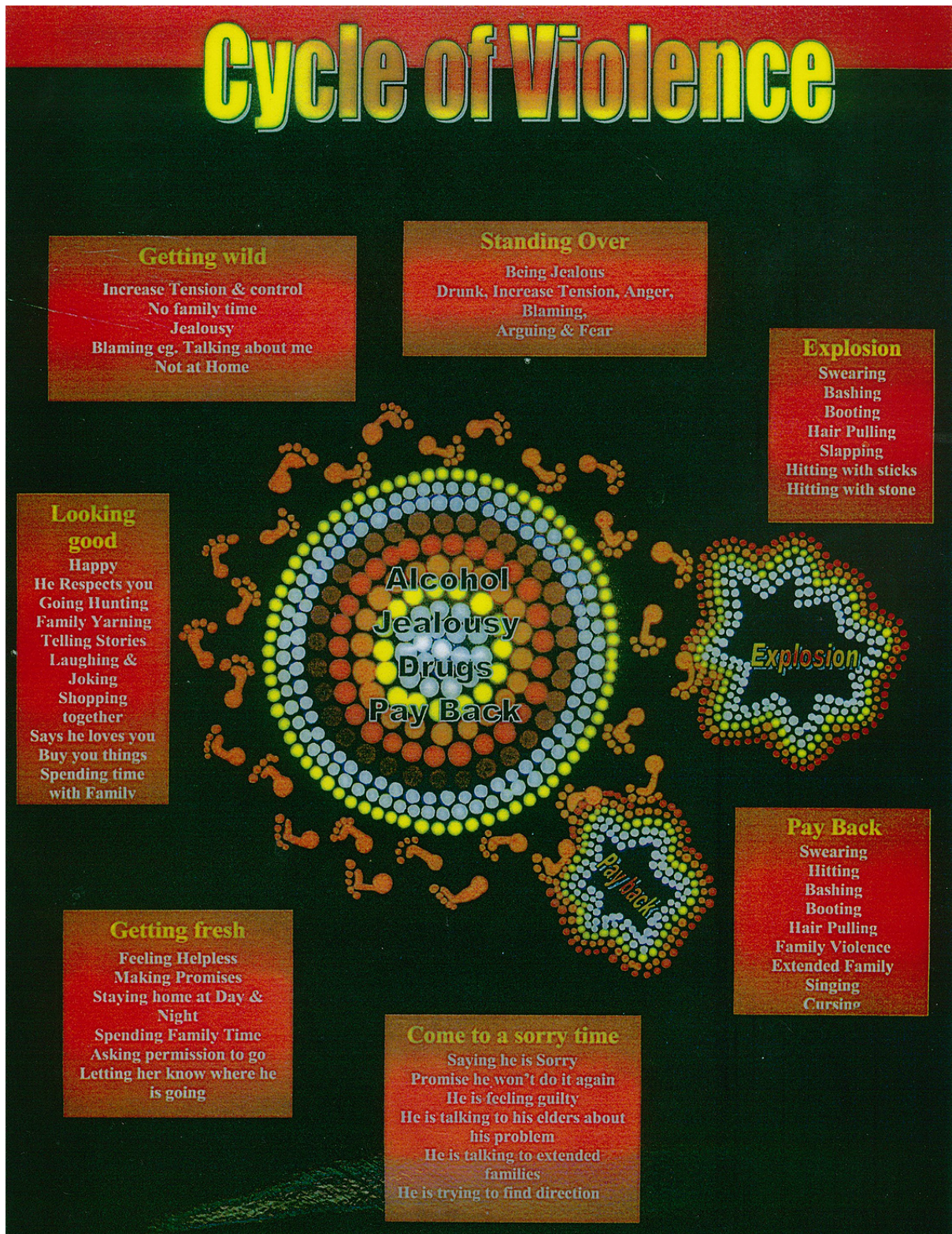


Diagram One – The Cycle of Violence, Faye Parriman

2.4.1 *The impact of domestic and family violence on mothers*

Whatever the cultural and racial background, the effect of domestic and family violence on mothers can be devastating. They are often isolated from family and friends, and live in fear, not knowing when the next attack will come (Calder, 2004).

Bagshaw and Chung (2000) found that the experiences of mothers included:

- Abuse of mother in front of children – ranging from verbal put-downs through to serious physical violence
- Torture or killing of children's pets
- Obsessive control over what and when the children eat
- Unreasonable control over children's outings and friendships

In 2004, Calder identified the following ways in which domestic and family violence can impact on a mother's parenting:

- It is difficult to give children a sense of stability and well-being if the mother is trying to keep the peace, to keep the children out of the way and to conceal her emotions from the children.
- Some mothers are constantly criticised or assaulted for not doing everything perfectly and get so run down they can't cope with cleaning and washing.
- Some cannot cope with finances because they have never been allowed any control over money.
- Injured women may not be able to get up and take their child to school in the morning.
- Some mothers have never been allowed a close relationship with their children, and as a result cannot talk or play with them.

Domestic and family violence can also have a detrimental effect on the mother-child relationship:

- *Children's need for reassurance, attention and support are accentuated in situations of domestic and family violence, at the same time as the resources of the mother are taxed to the limit. Mothers constantly on their guard are exhausted and have limited energy left to devote to the children.*
- *Children can be deliberately used by abusive men to hurt and control women, and can be forced to witness abuse or compelled to listen to accusations about their mothers.*

(Calder, 2004)

2.4.2 *The impact on children of experiencing domestic and family violence*

We know that although many Indigenous children grow up in safe environments, others experience trauma, and some are not safe (Atkinson, 2013). The trauma of historical events associated with colonisation of Indigenous land can pass to children through a process of intergenerational trauma. Some Indigenous children, just like non-Indigenous children, directly experience trauma through exposure to family violence. Aboriginal children across Australia are more likely to have witnessed physical violence against their mother or stepmother (42%) than children are generally (23%) (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care study, cited in Flood and Fergus, 2008 and Richards, 2011) Although the effects of childhood trauma can be severe and long-lasting (van der Kolk, 2007), we also know that recovery can be mediated by appropriate interventions. (Atkinson, 2013).

Recent studies indicate that domestic or family violence can affect children's emotional and cognitive development, social functioning, ability to learn, moral development and ability to negotiate intimate relationships later in life (Weinreb and McAlister Groves, 2007). This is partly because such experiences can prevent children from being adequately parented and nurtured, when one parent can be aggressive and the other frightened and controlled (Weinreb and McAlister Groves, 2007). As a result, some children suffer from separation anxiety, sleep dysregulation, temper tantrums and aggression. Around one in four children who have witnessed domestic or family violence has serious social and behavioural problems. They are two and a half times more likely to have these problems than children from non-violent backgrounds (Wolfe et al, 1986)

Experiencing domestic and family violence can seriously affect children's brain development. The brain is constructed through a process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. If the traumatic experience occurs during a critical period of development (that is, when the brain is on an accelerated growth curve and neural networks are being built), the effect can be significant. Because of this, trauma affects brain development in children and adults differently and the effects can be more profound on a child's developing brain. Their development can be impaired or slowed down (van der Kolk, 2005).

2.4.3 How children experience domestic and family violence

Children can experience domestic or family violence in several ways (Cunningham and Baker, 2007). Their experiences can include being hit or threatened while in their mother's arms, hearing violence occurring after they have gone to bed, and seeing the effects of violence – blood, bruising and damage to the home – the following morning. Children are exposed to domestic and family violence by seeing their mother demeaned, hearing loud conflict and violence, seeing the aftermath, learning what happens to their mother or being used by the perpetrator as part of the abuse. Children are not just passive witnesses to events in their home, and those living with conflict and abuse will actively interpret, predict and assess their roles in causing a fight. They will also worry about the consequences and engage in measures to protect themselves and their siblings (Cunningham and Baker, 2007).

Children can also experience domestic or family violence in the following ways (Calder, 2004):

- The perpetrator may take the child hostage to force the mother's return to the home.
- The perpetrator may force the child to watch assaults against the abused
- The perpetrator may force the child to participate in the abuse
- The child may be injured when trying to intervene to protect the abused
- The child may be physically caught up in violence between adults
- The child may be killed in the process of an attack.

Further information about how children feel about experiencing domestic and family violence can be found in *Through their eyes: domestic violence and its impact on children*, published by YWCA Seattle, King, Snohomish in the United States in 2010. The book, which includes drawings by children who have experienced domestic and family violence, can be obtained from <http://www.ywcaworks.org/>. Another good resource is Cunningham and Baker (2004), *What about me! Seeking to understand the child's view of violence in the family*, published by the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System. This document can be downloaded from http://www.lfcc.on.ca/what_about_me.html. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) *Through Young Black Eyes* kit is also highly recommended. It is available from the SNAICC website.

2.4.4 What domestic and family violence does to children

Experiencing domestic and family violence can psychologically rob children of both their father and their mother. One parent is the frightening aggressor, whilst the other is the terrified victim. Young children who depend exclusively on their parents to protect them are very psychologically vulnerable in such circumstances because they cannot trust their caretaking environment. When children are aged under four, their perception of the danger towards their caregiver is a strong risk factor, because their perception of their own safety is closely linked to the perceived safety of their caregiver. If a caregiver is not safe, the effects on the child can be overwhelming (Weinreb and McAlister Groves, 2007). If an adult and child are exposed to the same traumatic event, a child aged under 11 is three times more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder than the adult. As a result, they can suffer from separation anxiety, sleep dysregulation, temper tantrums, aggression and impulsivity. Children's physical health can also be affected by their experiences of domestic and family violence. Asthma, eczema, eating disorders, headaches, stomach pains, disturbed sleep, feeding problems and general developmental delays have been reported as a result of exposure to domestic and family violence (McGee, 2000).

When a baby or toddler sees violence at home they may feel distressed or scared. Babies cannot understand what is happening between adults, but they hear the noise and feel the tension. The most stressful things for children in this age group might be loud noise such as banging and yelling; a distracted, tense, unhappy socially isolated mother; and an angry, self-centred, inconsistent father or father figure. These children may also be at risk of physical injury as the result of an accident or physical maltreatment, such as compromised nutrition and health (Cunningham and Baker, 2007). Dissociation and hyper-vigilance are the two overarching defences babies use in the first year of life, and both are likely in response to trauma. Babies may become hyper-alert to the sounds and sight of violence and need to disconnect from relationships to protect themselves. Infants who experience domestic or family violence can suffer fear without ending (Thomson-Salo and Paul, 2007).

Children are 'good observers but poor interpreters', and as a result they may feel fear, confusion, guilt, anger, frustration, tummy aches and worry. For preschoolers aged three to five, experiences are more real than anything they are told. When a preschooler experiences violence, they may worry about their own safety and about being hurt, or feel responsible – because at this young age they think everything in the world is related to them. They may hope that a TV character or superhero will come to save them, or they may tune out the noise by concentrating hard on something else. At this age they can also worry about being arrested or taken away if the father figure is arrested or leaves, or worry that their mother will be taken away by the police. They may have nightmares about being harmed, or may try to make an attack stop by yelling at the abuser (Baker and Cunningham, 2007). Preschoolers may feel confused about why people are saying bad things about their father, or about why he cannot live with them anymore, which often makes them feel distressed and guilty (Baker and Cunningham, 2007).

Other ways that exposure to violence can affect children include:

- *Anxious, whining or nervous behaviour*
- *Depression*
- *Nightmares and difficulty sleeping*
- *Bedwetting*
- *Withdrawn behaviour*
- *Behavioural problems like truancy or running away from home*

- *Frequent illnesses like headaches and stomach aches*
- *Poor concentration*
- *Low self-esteem*
- *Insecurity*

(Darwin YMCA, 2007)

2.4.5 How domestic and family violence changes children

Children are not just passive witnesses to noise, tension or violence at home, and growing up with violence and abuse at home can change them.

The following are ways in which children can be changed by experiencing domestic and family violence:

- *Children are denied a good father and positive male role model*
- *Abuse can harm bond between mother and child*
- *Children can develop negative beliefs about themselves*
- *Children can be isolated from sources of support*
- *Unhealthy family roles can evolve in homes*
- *Abuse destroys a child's view of the world as a safe and predictable place*
- *A child's style of coping and survival may become problematic*
- *Children can believe that domestic or family violence is inevitable or normal*

(Cunningham and Baker, 2007)

2.4.6 How children's brains are affected by living with domestic or family violence

A series of studies over two decades reveals that childhood experiences of domestic and family violence can damage key areas of higher functioning in the brain, which can negatively affect the quality of future social interactions. An infant who receives very little positive, sensory input from a primary caregiver will initially attempt to induce positive facial expressions withdrawing. A non-expressive maternal face triggers a negative response in the infant. Similarly, a non-responsive infant, or an infant who displays negative facial expressions, can provoke a profound negative effect in the mother. Infants raised with an abusive, addicted or a severely depressed caregiver not only experience considerable anxiety when interacting with that caregiver, but come to associate anxiety with other social interactions. Infants also become highly attuned to the environment into which they are born. An infant reared in perilous surroundings will develop brain connections and chemical responses that are highly sensitive to signs of danger (McCain et al, 2007).

A child's early experiences have far-reaching effects on the development of their brain and behaviours. A child's experiences in the early years of life are crucial in establishing how the genes that govern various aspects of neurological development are expressed. Furthermore, these experiences are essential for vital connections that are formed in the brain right from birth. Parents are crucial in providing the early stimulation that drives the function of the neural pathways. The relationship between caregiver and infant therefore plays an important role in the child's capacity to interact with others and influences neural pathways for language and higher cognitive functions (McCain et al, 2007).

Children who grow up with domestic and family violence learn to use intimidation and force in relationships. In violent homes children learn that aggression is a part of relationships, and that it is acceptable to relieve stress by yelling or threatening another family member (Weinreb and McAlister Groves, 2007). These are the reasons why childhood experiences of

domestic and family violence are associated with greater rates of juvenile delinquency, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse and mental illness.

Older children exposed to domestic and family violence are more likely to:

- *Exhibit violence and aggressive behaviour and language*
- *Attempt suicide*
- *Use and abuse drugs*
- *Engage in risk taking behaviour*
- *Commit crimes when they are teenagers*
- *Repeat behaviour*
- *Have difficulty making and keeping friends*

(Darwin YMCA, 2007)

The United Kingdom's Social Exclusion Task Force has stated that families facing multiple problems such as domestic or family violence and homelessness do not just have a negative impact upon themselves, but also exert a high cost on society through the cost of support services, lost productivity and the costs of policing antisocial behaviour (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2007). Failure to address the exclusion faced by such families can 'levy high costs on children, parents, families, the community and wider society in terms of poor life experiences and future prospects' (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2007).

As part of the original *Safe from the Safe* research the author visited New Zealand. The Brainwave Trust (<http://www.brainwave.org.nz/>) envisages a day when every child in New Zealand will get the best start in life because the whole community understands the impact that early experiences (including experiencing domestic and family violence) have on the developing brain and thus on the success of society. The Brainwave Trust produces a range of leaflets and publications about these issues, and was very generous in allowing The Salvation Army Tasmania to amend these and use them as part of the *Safe from the Start* Project. At first the Salvation Army *Safe from the Start* versions of the leaflets 'Your child does not have to be hit to be hurt' and 'Family Violence can harm your child for life' did not include photographs of Aboriginal children, and therefore might not be picked up and read by Aboriginal mothers. As part of the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* project this has been put right and the two amended leaflets are included in the appendices of this report. They very clearly explain why living with domestic and family violence can be very damaging for children, and what can be done to ameliorate this damage. Thousands of copies of the original Salvation Army leaflets have been distributed around Tasmania and Australia through participants from the *Safe from the Start* training sessions. The leaflets are also included in the amended 2013 *Safe from the Start* kit. New versions of the *Safe from the Start* posters 'Children growing up in a non-violent home are more likely to ...' and 'Everything babies and toddlers experience affects their brains forever' are also being developed, as part of this Tasmanian Early Years Foundation funded project, to be relevant for Aboriginal families.

2.4.7 The link between domestic and family violence and homelessness

In 2006, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that there were 517 200 Indigenous people in Australia, making up 2.5% of the population. In Australia, most of the women who enter homeless accommodation because of domestic or family violence have accompanying children, and a disproportionate amount of these are Aboriginal Australian women. As women frequently bring more than one child with them, the majority of those accommodated in domestic or family violence refuges are children. Almost one in ten of all homeless

Australians is aged under 12, and three in four are aged under 10 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007). 54,700 children accompanied their parents in SAAP services in 2005/2006, most of whom had previously either witnessed or experienced family violence and sexual abuse (SAAP, 2006). Nearly 2% of Australian children under the age of five sleep in crisis accommodation at some stage during the year.

Whatever the causes, for children, homelessness brings trauma and affects routines and friendships. Children who have been homeless are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems such as distress, depression, anger and aggression. Experiencing homelessness as a child makes adult homelessness more likely (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007).

The impact on children of living in violent households has been neglected in research more often than the impact this situation has on the women involved (Mullender and Morley, 1994). In some cases children's work in refuges has consisted mostly of providing the children with entertainment and providing mothers with babysitting facilities whilst they look for move-on accommodation. Children are infrequently given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. However, our research has shown that a 'front-line' activity-based play response in a non-therapeutic environment can have a beneficial impact on the long-term mental health prognosis of children.

2.5 The aims and anticipated outcomes of the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* project

We know that the *Safe from the Start* project is viewed as a positive intervention by practitioners and mothers, and we wanted to ensure that Tasmanian Aboriginal people could gain maximum benefit from the *Safe from the Start* kit and training packages. Accordingly, the aims and desired outcomes of the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* research were:

- to develop a comprehensive 'Train the trainer' package – including a manual and PowerPoint presentations – to be provided free of charge to participants, for use in Aboriginal and mainstream services working with Aboriginal families
- to redesign, reprint and distribute *Safe from the Start* brochures and posters suitable for use in Aboriginal communities (1000 of each brochure and poster)
- to create an Indigenous *Safe from the Start* training resource kit
- to produce a final report on the project.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explained what happens to children who are exposed to domestic and family violence, and why we particularly wanted to improve the cultural applicability of *Safe from the Start* for Tasmanian Aboriginal children. The *Safe from the Start* project was instigated in the context of a growing use of intervention programs designed for babies and young children who have been exposed to domestic and family violence in Australia (Bunston and Heyanatz, 2006). One rationale behind the project was that very young children do not always need to be in a formalised, designated program run by mental health professionals to have a therapeutic experience, but that a positive relationship with a well-meaning adult can also assist them:

The more good experiences a baby has in a relationship the more chance there is for more connections to be made, not just emotionally but also neurologically. I think it is possible to offer something even if it is only a single encounter with an infant.

(Thomson-Salo and Paul, 2007, p. 3)

Chapter Three looks at the rationale behind activity-based play such as that promoted by the *Safe from the Start* kit and training.

Chapter Three – Activity-based play

3.1 Introduction

Because play is one of the main ways in which children make sense of their world (Boyd Webb, 2007), the original *Safe from the Start* project centred on finding a collection of effective books and toys for adults to use in play with children. It is known that children use play for very specific purposes when under extreme stress. They have an overwhelming need to play out crisis or trauma, and to use their play ‘to master their fear-provoking pasts and anticipated futures’ (Boyd Webb, 2007, Introduction). Play can be used as a means of communicating with children, because a child can show how he or she feels using toys. This can act as a prompt for a conversation that might not otherwise arise about feelings. ‘Playing with a purpose’ in this way can make it possible for well-meaning adults to provide a ‘first aid’ early intervention role, allowing young children to explore their experiences in a safe and supportive environment. As discussed in Chapter One, feedback on the original kit was that it would be improved by making it more appropriate for Tasmanian Aboriginal children, such as through including books and toys that contain Aboriginal colours and animals known to Tasmanian Aboriginal children. This chapter explains why activity-based play can help to ameliorate some of the damage done to children who experience domestic and family violence.

3.2 Best practice when working with children who have experienced domestic and family violence

When you become aware that a child might be experiencing violence in their home, it is important to connect with the child. It is imperative to talk to, rather than talk about, the infant and not to use toys just as a distraction (Thomson-Salo and Paul, 2006). Encourage children to accept that it is not their responsibility to keep their mother safe when adults fight, and that domestic or family violence is an adult problem that adults need to fix.

When a child discloses information regarding abuse, adults have an enormous responsibility to appreciate how difficult it was to reveal a family secret, and understand the risk to the child if you do not respond appropriately. Cunningham and Baker (2007) advise that you should assume the child has decided that help is needed and allow the child to tell his or her story. Reassure the child by validating his or her feelings, and do not criticise or speak negatively about what they tell you. Few children admit they have problems however, (Boyd Webb, 2007), and you may pick up other behavioural signs indicating significant problems at home.

Darwin YMCA, in their Children and Violence information resource kit, give the following helpful list of “DO’S and “DON”TS” about what to do if a child tells you abuse is happening:

DO

Listen carefully to what the child is saying

Acknowledge how hard it is to talk about these things

Tell the child you believe them and take them seriously

Make it clear that whatever happened is not the child's fault and the child is not bad

Tell the child that grown-ups sometimes do the wrong thing and that this has also happened to others

DON'T

Avoid or reject them – you might be the only significant adult in their lives

Investigate further yourself, unless it is within your professional duties

Press for details or inquire further into the details of the abuse, unless it is part of your job

Make promises you can't keep, for example not to tell anyone

Seek medical attention or treatment unless it's an emergency or there are serious health risks to the child

3.2.1 *Why activity-based play?*

Children think and behave differently from adults, so the approach we take with them must be different. We can use the medium of play to communicate with children. Play encourages their creativity, imagination, and general intelligence, and enables them to discharge their emotions (Boyd Webb, 2007). Under extreme stress children turn their play to very specific purposes and use play to try to master their fear-provoking pasts and anticipated futures; "Children's overwhelming need to play out crisis or trauma suits our purposes" (P47, Boyd Webb, 2007).

3.2.2 *How nonexperts can use activity-based play*

Play is the main way that children make sense of the world, and how they learn (Boyd Webb, 2007). It is possible for caring adults who do not have a therapy background to engage in useful play with children, through combining interventions that involve playing with the child, and talking about what is going on in the game. The role of the adult in activity-based play is to participate and to play with the child, being careful to follow the child's lead, without jumping ahead. The adult can ask the child to describe the play activity, and suggest motives or feelings in the context of the play (Boyd Webb, 2007). Carefully making connections between the child's symbolic play and their own life can be helpful, but it is not essential to think too far beyond the metaphor of the game. It is not necessary to make a verbal connection between the play and the child's life if the adult does not feel comfortable doing so, or they feel they do not know the child well enough. Activity-based play can still be useful for the child and assist in relieving their symptoms. Just listening actively and talking to children can help them.

Activity-based play can involve a wide range of materials. Art techniques involve drawing a person, family, house and tree, or whatever the child wishes. Modelling clay can be used for pounding and squishing as well as making models. Crayons, paper, scissors, glue, finger-paints and magazines can be used (Boyd Webb, 2007). These materials are really useful for engaging in activity-based play, but they are also readily available, and for this reason are not included in the *Safe from the Start* kit, which aims to make available toys and books that might not otherwise be readily to hand, in order to promote conversation.

Dolls and puppets allow the child to identify with them, and to project his or her own feelings onto the play figure. Children can name dolls the same names as members of their own family. Hand and finger puppets allow children and adults to talk about feelings without acknowledgement that the child has similar feelings, thereby not pushing the child to overtly reveal something they are not comfortable with. The original *Safe from the Start* kit includes finger and glove puppets of human faces and animals. The amended kit still has these, but it also includes a wallaby puppet that is more likely to be familiar to Tasmanian Aboriginal children.

Storytelling is also a form of activity-based play, and books and stories can help children to learn new skills and to understand their own feelings and behaviours. Storytelling can be combined with puppet play to take the story forward (Boyd Webb, 2007). The original *Safe from the Start* kit contained 16 story and picture books from Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. Like the puppets, all were chosen after trialling them with children in Tasmania who had experienced domestic and family violence, and often homelessness, and all were found to be effective in helping young children come to terms with their experiences. The first trial of books and toys took place through domestic and family violence refuge and outreach organisations. Some of the children who trialled the products may well have been Aboriginal Australian, but this status was not recorded and no specific attempt was made to find books and toys which might have special relevance to Tasmanian Aboriginal children.

3.2.3 Movement as therapy

Traumatised people need to have physical and sensory experiences in order to be able to tolerate their sensations, unlock their bodies and activate effective fight or flight responses (van der Kolk, 2007). Humans need to play, talk and move regularly in order to maintain a healthy mind. Activity-based play for children that includes movement, such as dance, action songs and rope-jumping, allows intervention to be made at a sub-language level, and for this reason the original *Safe from the Start* kit included a book of action songs with a CD of accompanying music, which proved very popular with babies, children and their mothers. This remains in the amended kit.

3.3 Conclusion

Activity-based play with an interested and involved adult is known to help children. Over the last five years the *Safe from the Start* kit has been found to be an effective way to promote such play between children who have experienced domestic and family violence and adults. The following chapter explains the methodology used for choosing the products of both the original and amended *Safe from the Start* kits.

Chapter Four – Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the resource selection of the original and the new, amended *Safe from the Start* kits, and the measures taken to make the new kit more inclusive of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

4.2 Resource selection

The Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* research has approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Swinburne University, where the author is based.

In September 2007, the author was employed by the Salvation Army Tasmania to conduct the original *Safe from the Start* research. The 24 original resources selected in 2007 were chosen for their use in promoting effective activity-based play between children aged up to six who had experienced domestic and family violence and their workers and parents. They consisted of 16 books, one action song book and CD, four sticker and card sets and three tactile puppets and toys.

None of the books and toys in the original *Safe from the Start* kit were explicitly Aboriginal in their design. It is known that a disproportionate percentage of Aboriginal Australian women and their children become homeless due to domestic and family violence (Cripps, 2010), and also that cultural appropriateness is becoming increasingly recognised as a factor in whether schemes designed to help affected women and children are successful (Habibis, 2013). There is also growing awareness that initiatives guided and supported by the Indigenous community are more likely to be successful (Cripps, 2007). We were aware that there was a lack of knowledge about how the *Safe from the Start* kit could be made culturally 'safe' (Cripps, 2007) for Tasmanian Aboriginal children, and that Tasmanian Aboriginal women and children would need to be very much involved in finding new books and toys if they were to be effective.

A research reference group was brought together, made up of Tasmanian Aboriginal women, and professionals working with Tasmanian Aboriginal children. From 2011 onwards they met in Launceston and Hobart to discuss what was missing in the existing kit and whether any of the existing resources were inappropriate for Tasmanian Aboriginal children. The consensus was that nothing in the kit would be detrimental for Tasmanian Aboriginal children (and therefore nothing needed to be taken out), but that there was nothing in the kit that would particularly make Tasmanian Aboriginal children or their mothers feel specifically included or that the kit had a special relevance to them. As a result, the leaflets were amended to be more culturally inclusive (see appendices). At the same time, the research reference group members searched for books and toys that they felt would be culturally appropriate and would contain appropriate messages for Tasmanian Aboriginal children who had been exposed to domestic and family violence and may have become homeless as a result.

Although some Aboriginal books and toys were available for purchase, most of them came from the different Aboriginal culture of the Northern Territory and so were not specifically relevant to Tasmanian Aboriginal children. In most cases the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* research reference group chose not to trial these products as they were found to be culturally inappropriate for Tasmania. The exception to this was *How do I feel?*, published by the Bachelor Press in the Northern Territory. This book for young children was successfully trialled, and has now been included in the amended *Safe from the Start* kit. Indeed, the research reference group came to realise that there was no book specifically about domestic and family violence and homelessness that had been written and illustrated with

young Tasmanian Aboriginal children in mind. As a result, it was decided to run a competition in Tasmania to write and illustrate a suitable book.

Funding was successfully gained by the Salvation Army from the Tasmanian Community Fund in order to develop a book specifically for the Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* project. Writers and illustrators were invited to submit a developed concept for a children's storybook to be professionally written, illustrated, produced and published. The storyline was to be suitable for children aged 0–6 years who had experienced or been exposed to family violence. The story could include topics such as parents experiencing family violence, or separation due to parents not being able to live together, in order to enable children to engage with the story and express feelings. This could include feelings of fear, sadness, anger, grief and loss, and experiences such as moving house or parents not living together.

Entries were received towards the end of September 2012. The research reference group assessed submissions and story ideas and worked with the successful authors and illustrators to finalise the Salvation Army copyrighted project books. Such was the high standard of entries that three books were selected, and at the time of writing (September 2013) one has been printed, with the other two to follow in October 2013. The first, *Little Jack the Wallaby*, was written by Fiona Calvert and illustrated by Judith Rose Thomas, both of whom are Tasmanian Aboriginal women. The book takes the reader on an illustrated journey of bright Indigenous colours and a story of Jack's friend Jimmy, who is feeling frightened when he hears his father shouting at his mum. The book was written specifically for the *Safe from the Start* project to provide both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children with a story book about feeling safe and having friends to talk to and stay with. The illustrations use the Aboriginal colours for the moon, rock carvings, pyjama jackets and blankets which enable children to ask questions about the Aboriginal meaning of the illustrations. The story provides opportunities for children to express their feelings about any shouting in their home, and suggests that friends and family can listen and help them to be safe.

When Daddy hits the table and *When Mummy shouts*, the other two books, are written by Mary Koolhof and Aunty Eva Richardson and illustrated by Janet Fenton. They are to be launched on Wednesday 23 October 2013 in Hobart. The three books specifically written for the project are to be given to all Tasmanian services that have purchased the original *Safe from the Start* resource kit, Aboriginal services, child and family centres, women's refuges and counselling services. It is expected that the books will also attract national interest and be distributed to services in other states. The books will be sold to interstate agencies but distributed at no cost to Tasmanian services.

4.3 Trialling of existing books and toys

In all, seven additional books and toys were trialled for the *Safe from the Start* Tasmanian Aboriginal Project. Some of these were about being scared, some about being homeless or experiencing domestic and family violence, and some were stories of animals that live in Australia. After discussion with the research reference group it was decided that a similar research methodology would be used to that for the original *Safe from the Start* project. Participating organisations would seek the agreement of mothers to allow their children to take part in the research by either using the toys and books with the children themselves, or allowing their children's workers to do so. A questionnaire would be then be completed by the adult who played with the child, asking if they considered the product to be suitable for a Tasmanian Aboriginal child who had experienced domestic and family violence. Research participants remained anonymous and were not asked to declare whether they were Aboriginal, although the participating organisations tried to ensure that as many of the

participants as possible were Tasmanian Aboriginal mothers and their children. Perhaps because of this, the number of participants taking part in the research was low, with only a dozen or so questionnaires completed. Organisations reported that during the research period (January to July 2013) they had few child clients in the right age group who they knew to be Aboriginal. In spite of these restrictions, there was clear indication that the books and toys trialled (except *How do I feel?* from the Bachelor Press) were not suitable for the new *Safe from the Start* kit, either because they were not of a subject relevant to the project or because they did not have any factors that would make them especially relevant to Tasmanian Aboriginal children.

It was originally envisaged that a separate Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* kit would be developed for Tasmanian Aboriginal children. However, it was the view of the research reference group members that this would differentiate Tasmanian Aboriginal children, and that it would be preferable to include some Aboriginal Tasmanian related products into the original kit. This would prevent a situation where a separate kit would be brought out for Tasmanian Aboriginal children where children of different races and cultures were present, such as in kindergartens, schools and libraries. It would also mean that non-Aboriginal children would be able to benefit from the five new products – the three commissioned books, the Bachelor Press book *How do I feel?* and a wallaby puppet to accompany the wallaby book – now included in the kit.

Final conclusion

This report has explained the ways in which the *Safe from the Start* kit has been made more appropriate for Tasmanian Aboriginal children, through the research process.

The *Safe from the Start* kit will continue to develop and evolve as new products and new needs emerge. Training in use of the new kit and about the needs of traumatised Tasmanian Aboriginal children will take place in Hobart and Launceston in November 2013.

After that, the next stage is to produce a kit which is more appropriate for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, so that as many children who have experienced domestic and family violence as possible can benefit from activity-based play.

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Appendices

Appendix One – Brochures, posters and leaflets

Appendix Two – The Tasmanian Aboriginal *Safe from the Start* Toolkit

Everything babies & toddlers
experience
affects their
brains forever



Babies & toddlers are precious

"My brain is still growing.
Please cuddle me
protect me
praise me
read to me
sing to me
make me safe
LOVE ME
and I'll grow up to
be a happy person."



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and Indigenous Affairs

Family violence
can harm your child for life

Children growing up in a loving, non-violent home are more likely to:



- do well at school
- be confident and resilient
- have good relationships
- make the right choices
- do well in their efforts to lead a happy & satisfying life

Things that can harm your baby's brain:

If a child is repeatedly smacked, abused or exposed to family violence, that child's brain will be hardwired for bad feelings.

Experiencing violence makes a child feel:

- scared
- anxious
- worried
- confused
- insecure



Seeing violence will change the way your baby's brain grows

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Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs

Your child
does not
have to be
hit to be
hurt



Children have
the right to live
free of violence.

There are people who can help – speak to a trusted friend, family member, doctor, community nurse, community agency, Family Violence Worker or contact a Women’s Shelter.

If you are concerned that a friend or neighbour is experiencing family violence, offer support and encourage them to seek assistance.

It is never too late to change
the life of a child.

CONTACT

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1800 200 526

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Seeing,
hearing
and feeling
violence
changes the
way your
child’s brain
grows



Children are never too young to be affected

At birth your baby's brain is not completely connected up.

Most brain development happens in the first three years of life.

This early development affects the way that your children think, act and feel for the rest of their lives.

Exposure to violence and abuse in these early years can have a severe effect on brain development.



Children who grow up in a violent environment can develop:

- Learning difficulties
- Problems with controlling anger
- A tendency towards criminal activities
- Mental health issues
- Abusive relationships
- Addiction to drugs and alcohol
- Suicidal thoughts

If you are the victim of violence or abuse during pregnancy, your brain releases high levels of stress hormones. These hormones cross the placenta into your baby.

What your baby sees, hears, feels, touches and smells shapes the way your baby's brain grows. All experiences – good and bad – will have an impact. Neurons, or brain cells, connect up with each other during your child's first three years. The brain can become 'hard-wired' for life.

Children who repeatedly witness or experience yelling, fighting, pushing, hitting and the smashing of objects around them form unhealthy brain connections. This type of stress releases hormones which are toxic to brain growth, no matter how young your baby is.

Children are most vulnerable to damage before the age of three. Having caring and supportive family and friends who provide consistency, stability and positive non-violent role models can make a difference.

Help them to explore their world
& always keep them safe

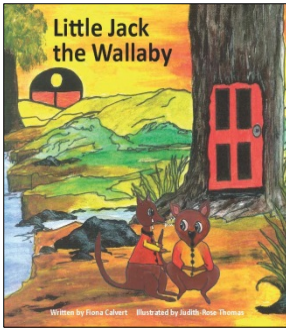


Children need lots of love and attention from good, strong, non-violent people to grow into healthy adults.

The choices you make now will affect your child forever.

Babies' brains grow in a healthy way when they have:

- someone to trust
- safety and security
- lots of love, cuddles and hugs
- comfort when hurt, sad or scared
- talking, reading and singing
- interesting things to do
- smiles, fun and play

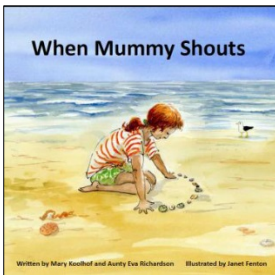


Little Jack the Wallaby takes the reader on an illustrated journey of bright indigenous colours and a story of Jack the wallaby who is feeling frightened and scared when he hears his father shouting at his mum.

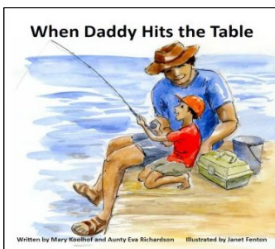
This book was written specifically for the Safe from the Start project to provide both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children a story book about feeling safe and having friends to talk to and family to stay with.



The wallaby puppet is a great toy to use together with the *Little Jack the Wallaby* book. Children enjoy choosing a puppet to play with after a bad time and tell what they were feeling. The puppet is often good to use when children don't relate to stories or books. It is soft with a friendly face and can be put to bed, pretend to cry and can be hugged. This can teach a child about comfort, having a friend and that we all have feelings.



When Mummy Shouts and *When Daddy Hits the Table* are two Aboriginal stories written for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children to assist them to understand different behaviours by their parents.



Written specifically to be included in the Safe from the Start resource kit, the books aim to address violent behaviour by either parent and to encourage children to discuss their feelings with other family members or their teacher. Both books can be used to engage children who have witnessed or been exposed to violence, have been abused or live with parents displaying violent behaviour.



A brightly coloured children's book illustrating various feelings and the words used to describe them. The book is designed to help children identify, understand and express their emotions.

