

Now you have heard us What will you do?

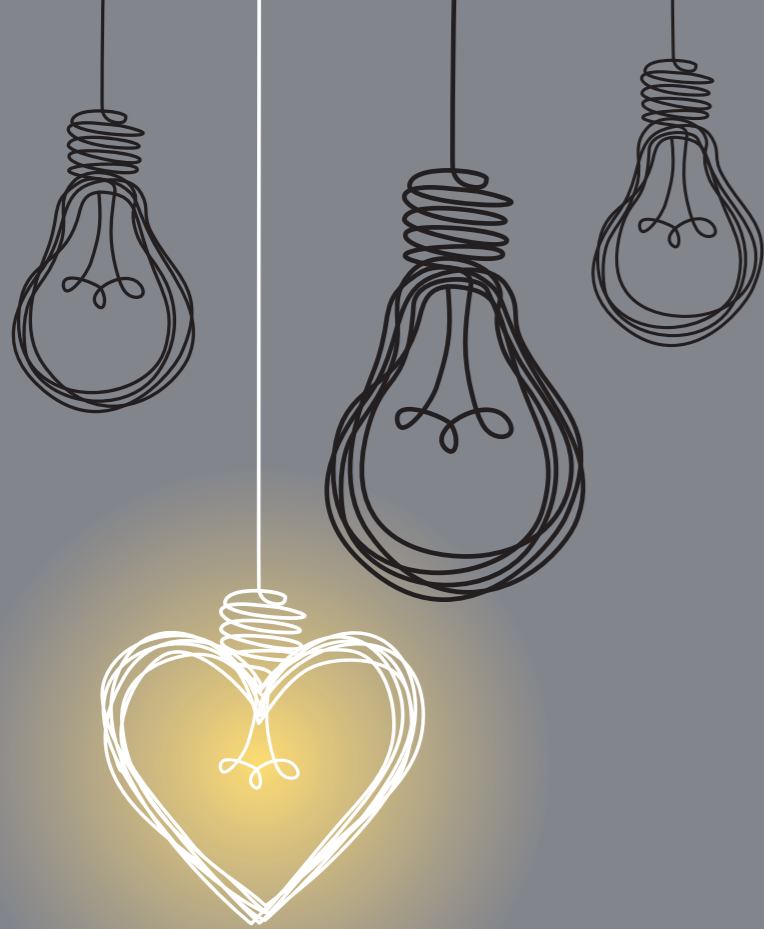
Young people's experiences
of domestic and family violence



FAMILY SAFETY HUB
AN INITIATIVE OF THE ACT GOVERNMENT



CHILDREN & YOUNG
PEOPLE COMMISSIONER
ACT Human Rights Commission



The voices of young people are often missing from conversations about them, and their views are often not considered when decisions are made that impact them.

Responses to domestic and family violence fail to meet the needs of young people, because young people have not been asked what they need.

Over six months the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner and the Family Safety Hub listened to 70 young Canberrans, 35 of whom have lived with family violence. They told us what it is like, what helped and what didn't, and what needs to change.

You will read stories in this booklet that bring together the experiences of these young people. These stories are not direct quotes or the story of any one young person. But they are true stories.

You will also hear from young people in their own words. Where we have quoted a young person we have not changed their words, including some coarse language, except to remove names or any other identifiable details.

The Family Safety Hub and the Children and Young People Commissioner thank and acknowledge the young people who gave their time and generously shared their experiences and views.

It was a privilege to listen.

You told us the project must lead to change. Sharing these insights is just the first step.



Young people and domestic and family violence

Children and young people experience family violence differently to adults. They also have different experiences of services that are meant to help. They are regularly overlooked or only considered as an add-on to their parent.

When you read family violence in this booklet, don't just think about physical violence.

Domestic and family violence refers to all the different forms of coercion or violent behaviour that a member or members of a family use to control or intimidate other family members. It can be emotional abuse, verbal abuse, financial control, psychological control and sexual abuse. Domestic and family violence is about power and control, not just conflict. Conflict is normal in relationships. Domestic and family violence is not a one off. It is a pattern of behaviour that controls and dominates other family members and makes them afraid for their own or another person's safety or wellbeing.

Domestic violence is about violence between people who are, or used to be, intimate partners. Family violence is broader and can include violence between intimate partners, as well as violence between extended family members, parents, children, siblings or other family members. They might live in the same household or they might not.

The young people who spoke with us had experienced all these different types of family violence. Some lived in families where there was violence between parents or other adults, some experienced violence from their parents, stepparents, siblings or other family members. Some were violent themselves. Because of the range of violent relationships that young people lived with, this booklet generally uses the term family violence.

"I reckon its emotional abuse on the kids to tell them that if they say anything they're going to be taken away."

"I think there was probably financial control."

"There's a lot of even adults who don't know the difference between punishment, discipline and abuse."

"My dad would spit in my lunch so I couldn't eat my food."

"Some people use physical violence, some people use verbal violence."

"When I was really little, my stepdad used to beat the shit out of my mum every night."

"My mum used to blame it on tough love."

"Some of the things that happened, and the wrong things that happened, shouldn't have happened but they were also very subtle."



As you read

Lots of us have lived with domestic and family violence and we all have our own stories. Maybe there was violence in your past, maybe you are in a hard situation right now.

Maybe you've done some things you feel bad about.

Or maybe this is new to you and you feel a bit overwhelmed.

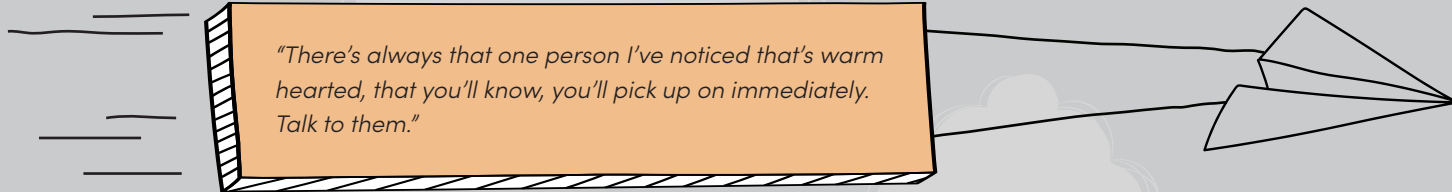
Domestic and family violence is hard. It is hard to live with.

It is hard to stop or prevent. And sometimes it is hard to hear and talk about.

Reading this booklet may also be hard. Take a break if you need to. There are some activities scattered throughout that might be useful if you need to change your headspace as you read.

Is there someone in your life you can talk to or spend time with if you feel upset? Do you have something fun or relaxing you enjoy doing?

At the back of this booklet are some ways to find people you can talk to if you need help.



"There's always that one person I've noticed that's warm hearted, that you'll know, you'll pick up on immediately. Talk to them."

If you are a young person reading this booklet and your experience is different, or you have a different view, that is okay.

Understanding that everyone experiences family violence differently shows how complicated this problem is. We hope that some of the things you read here will ring true for you. Because although your story may be different, you are not alone.

If you are an adult reading this booklet, we ask you to read and think about the included questions. Some of these are for adults who work with children or young people. Some are for adults who design policies and make decisions.

Some are for every adult.

What can you do differently to better support children and young people who live with family violence?



What we heard

Some of the young people who spoke with us had found a way to a safer space, while some were still living with controlling and violent relationships.

All of them had a lot to say.

Several young people spoke to us in depth by themselves, others joined group sessions, conversations and activities, and some left anonymous notes at the end of the sessions.

Several young people shared their story for the first time. Others said that they had not heard other young people talk about experiences that were like theirs. They had felt they were on their own.

We took in everything that young people said, wrote and displayed through their body language. We then distilled what we heard into the 13 insights you will find in this booklet.

One insight is not the specific story of one young person. Rather, these are the key messages that came from everything that was said.

If you are an adult who works with children and young people, works in a service for children and young people or makes policies that affect children and young people, then these insights provide a lens for looking at the work that you do.

Does that work meet the needs of children and young people and how they experience family violence?



Living with family violence

Steph's Story

Steph's parents separated when she was in primary school. The court didn't listen to Steph even though she tried to say what her Dad was like—manipulative and mean. No one thought that bad things happened in families like hers, and her Dad knew how to get people to like him. So Steph had to live with him alternate weeks.

Over the years things got worse. Steph's Dad would beat her up and emotionally abuse her, just like he used to do to Mum. Even though Mum tried to get the custody arrangement changed, legally Steph still had to stay with her Dad.

There was nothing she could do. Steph knew that if she ran to Mum's, Dad would have her back in court in an instant and Steph might end up with him full time.

One night Steph just couldn't take it anymore. She snapped and she hit him back, hard. He called the police. And they came for her! That's when Steph saw just how wrong it all was. She left and started sleeping rough.

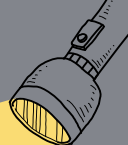
Steph is determined to go to university and is doing everything she can to stick with school. But it's hard trying to keep all her gear intact, let alone study, when she's living out of a backpack.

Steph can't wait until she's old enough to choose for herself and live with Mum full time. Being homeless to avoid Dad is really hard. Sometimes it gets too much and Steph has been in and out of hospital with self-harm and substance abuse. She knows the trauma is going to last for a long time.

Pause and draw

Take a look out the nearest window or around the place you are sitting. What can you see? Draw it!





I can't tell anyone, because it will break up my family or make things worse.

Young people do whatever it takes to keep family violence a secret. They know most people won't understand and mandatory reporting can do more harm. There is no pathway when young people seek help for themselves.

"They take you out of your home and put you in a place that's utterly more unsafe than your home before, which is what happened to me."

"She was, as she says, under the microscope of care and protection. And she didn't want to mess it up. So the things that I wanted to talk about that were upsetting me, I couldn't really talk about. So it kind of sucked."

"There's been times where I had to go to school with a black eye from Mum... then you get all the questions from the teachers, how'd it happen? I didn't tell them. I couldn't."

"I didn't want to get taken away from my brother and my mum."

"People say it's confidential, can't say nothing to nobody, then you go home and your parents get mad at you because of it. Because they've called home and said something to my parents. So it's like what's the point of even telling you if you can't keep it a secret or keep it confidential?"

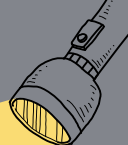
So adults, what will you do?

Can children or young people tell you things in strict confidence? Should they be able to?

If you make a child concern report, what other actions do you take? Do you talk with or involve the child or young person in making those reports? Do you engage with their families? Should you?

Who do you know with skills in responding to family violence? Do you need to develop relationships with people with these skills? How could they assist you, your service or organisation?





You have no idea how hard this is and what it takes.

Young people are working hard all the time to keep themselves and their siblings safe. Deciding who to trust, who not to trust, what to say, what not to say, where to be, where to hide, when to intervene. It takes a lot of time, energy and skill.

"...our whole lives we've been trying to protect my mum from my dad, and now we want to protect my mum from getting in trouble."

"My mum was always scared. I don't know, even though I'm there pretty much every night now she's still scared and that. I look after Mum, I feel like I have to, and I want to."

"My older sister and I shared a room so it was kind of hard for us. That's where we'd cop the most abuse so there was no real safe place in my house sort of thing. No real place away from the yelling or anything like that. It's just everywhere."

"As soon as I get home I go into my room and I come out for dinner and I go back to my room and that's it."

"I would hear abuse and I would have to choose whether, do I support Mum or do I illegally get in the car and drive the child away? There was that real 'what do I do?' Do I risk being hit in the face or do I take the child away? There was quite a lot of times I did just have to get in the car and drive."


So adults, what will you do?

If you were unsafe in your own home, how would you get a break from it? What could you do that would help a child or young person have a break from family violence, without making things worse?

Do you affirm the strengths, the skills and the abilities of children and young people that you know or work with? Do you see all the things they are doing, or do you mainly notice the things they aren't doing?

How could you create opportunities for children and young people to share what they know and what they have learned with other children and young people?





If you want to help me,
you need to start with
the people I trust.

Young people are wise and incredibly astute in choosing who they will talk with about what's happening at home. Supports need to build from the people they trust, or they may never reach out again. Being bounced around the system and having to tell their story over and over again is a form of abuse.

"It depends what you're talking about and if I can just trust the person or like you can actually tell them."

"I think it's just some are more understanding and actually listen and other ones it's just like, you know? It's just... it doesn't feel like they listen or they don't believe you or something. It's like, I don't know how to put it."

"Every time I got sent somewhere else, or someone left, I had to tell my story again, like I had to do that six times."

"I say if the young kids have to go into an interview or something about what happened in their family life, have someone there... who could support them through it. Instead of just chucking the kids straight in the deep end in front of two police officers."

"Yeah you've got to actually know them."

So adults, what will you do?

Has a child or young person ever confided anything difficult to you? Why do you think they chose to trust you? Or why not?

Do you work in a service or design policies that can help young people? How can you connect your work, service or organisation to the people that children and young people already trust?

Do you know who young clients trust, and why? How could you find out?



Living with family violence

Ashley's Story

Ashley and her family had been visited by care and protection workers quite a few times.

A teacher saw the bruises on her little sister's arms and reported it. Ashley had been interviewed several times. They always asked if Dad sexually abused her. That really freaked her out. He did lots of bad things, but he didn't do that.

Ashley was at school the day Dad got removed from their home. She got called over the intercom and care and protection workers told her that she was going to a refuge for a few days with Mum, leaving right then.

When she got back to school everyone knew her Dad had been kicked out. Everyone was talking about her.

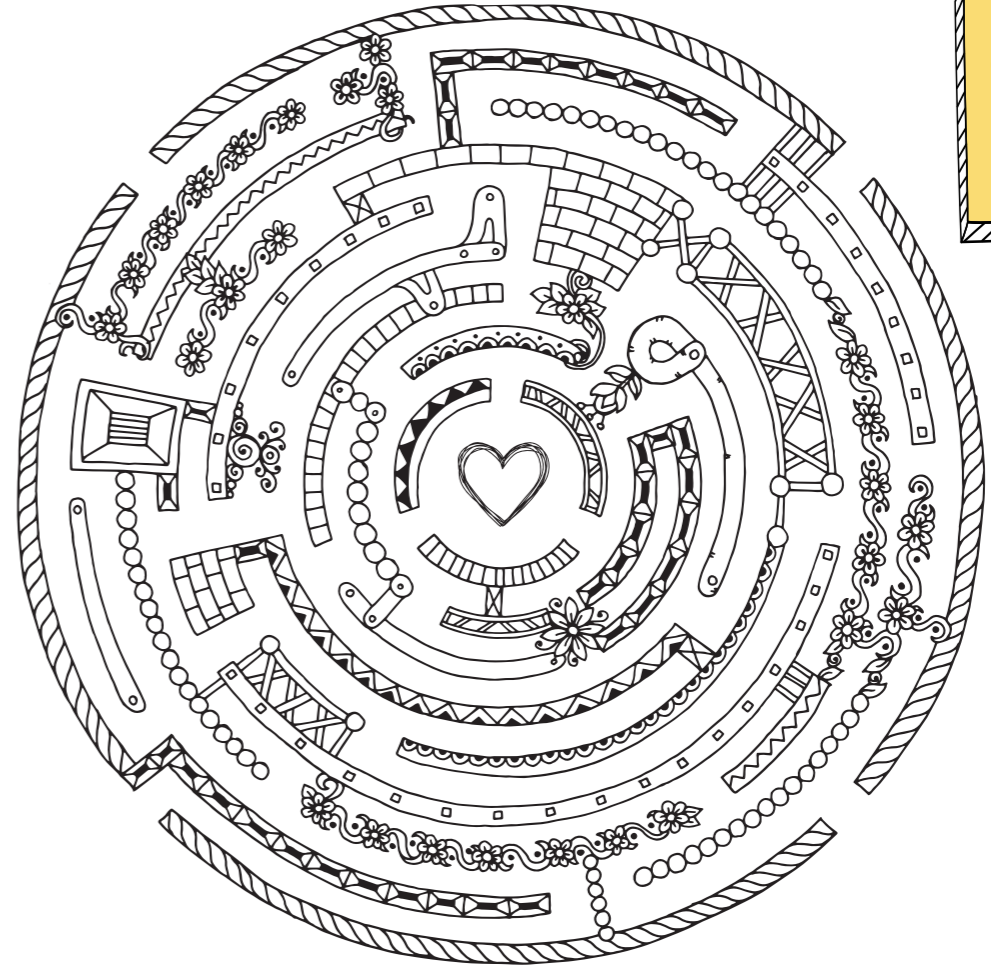
Ashley's Mum hates care and protection workers. She's scared of them. She didn't want Dad to leave, but she didn't want to lose her children.

Mum wouldn't see the counsellor. She said she was fine even though Ashley could see she obviously wasn't.

The workers stopped coming after Dad left. Then Ashley's older brother started bringing his friends home to drink and do drugs. He started taking Mum's money and pushing her about. Now he controls everything in the house.

There's no way Mum is going to try and get help because she's scared of everyone and everything.

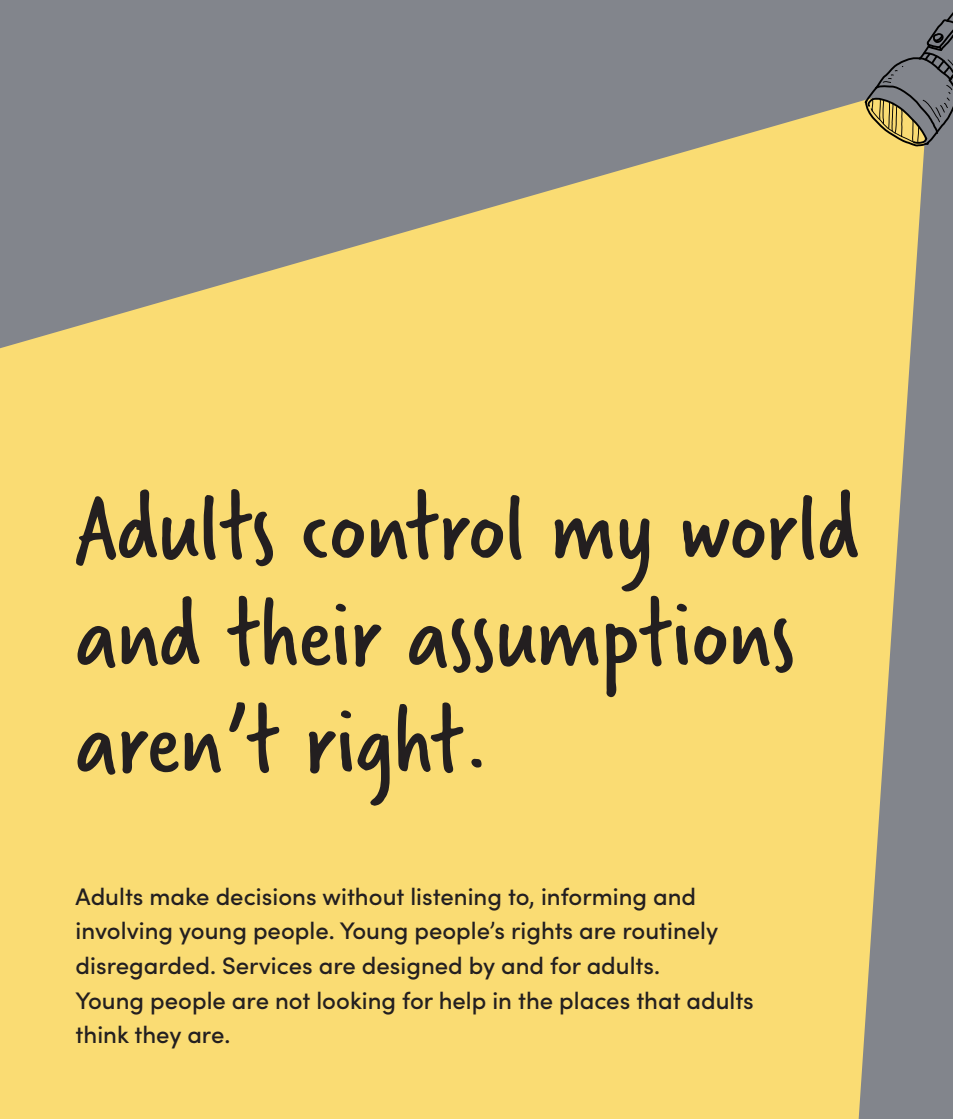
Ashley hates living there, but there's nowhere else to go. She's really scared for her younger sister. But after all the stuff that happened with Dad, there's no way she's telling anyone. Mum would hate her forever.



Pause and escape

Can you find a path for the heart to escape?





Adults control my world and their assumptions aren't right.

Adults make decisions without listening to, informing and involving young people. Young people's rights are routinely disregarded. Services are designed by and for adults. Young people are not looking for help in the places that adults think they are.

"What I found is the courts never really listen and are only concerned with the financial position of the parent."

"I guess the main thing is that people need to listen a lot more to children and to the actual children that are experiencing stuff."

"To think there are posters up in government buildings about kids' rights, the fact that some caseworkers don't listen to that."

"They're still going to want to talk to the parents instead of you because they don't see you as you, they see the parents. They look through you and then when they want to talk to you they just talk to the parents."

"We need a voice. I feel like a lot of us kids feel like we don't have a voice. We go to someone, we do talk to them and they're not going to listen. It's going to be like nothing."

So adults, what will you do?

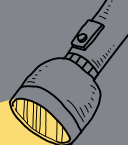
Do you create the space for young clients to engage with you without their parents being involved? Should you?

When you meet with children or young people, where do you meet? Does that suit them, or you?

When you meet with children or young people, is it always a conversation or do you have other ways for children and young people to express their views and communicate with you?

Have you asked children or young people to evaluate your service or organisation? How do you use their feedback to make changes? Have you involved children and young people in making your service better?





I feel what I feel.
This matters. It's okay
if I still love the person
despite what they do.

Young people are grappling with complex thoughts, feelings and emotions and need support, not judgement. Young people carry guilt, shame, defensiveness, anger, despair, love and hate, often all together. They need help with much more than the physical aspects of safety.

"...it's not like he was bad all the time. And he did things to help my family out and he is my dad."

"But I have had times where I sit there with absolute anger, resentment, frustration, and other times I'd be really sad and other times I'd try and go 'why can't I express love to my mum?', even though I do love her deep down."

"We're entitled to feel anything we want about these situations but we've got to realise that what we do with those feelings are the actions, choices, decisions and the aftermath, results, outcome, consequences, whatever you want to call them, it's all connected."

"I don't hate him. I mean we have the same DNA."

"He hated him but there was also, at night time, he wanted Dad to read him books again. There was still that element of love and longing as well. I don't think that was being recognised enough, and because there was a lack of recognition, then therefore there was a lack of support and knowledge going to him about 'you do have these options' because no one wanted to recognise he did actually feel that way."

So adults, what will you do?


How comfortable are you sitting with problems that you can't solve?

Do you think children should be allowed to have a relationship with parents who are 'bad' for them? Why or why not? What has shaped your views? How do your views influence your work?

How does what you hear from children about their parents influence the way you look the balance between safety and wellbeing? Has what you have read here supported or challenged your thinking?

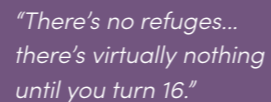
What do you think are some of the key differences between surviving and thriving? How do you, or your organisation, contribute to children and young people surviving? How do you contribute to children and young people thriving?



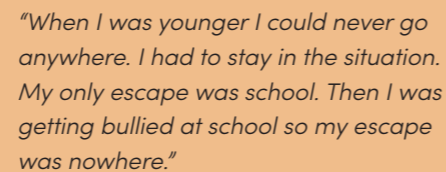


I just need to go to the park for a few hours while things cool off. or I might need to leave home altogether.

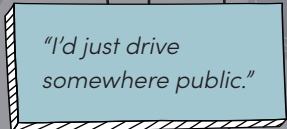
Violent homes are not the same every day, so flexible responses are needed. Young people may need help to be safer within their family. Or they may need help to leave safely.



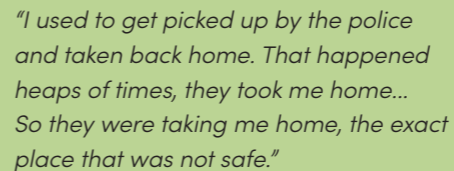
"There's no refuges... there's virtually nothing until you turn 16."



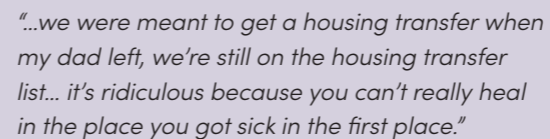
"When I was younger I could never go anywhere. I had to stay in the situation. My only escape was school. Then I was getting bullied at school so my escape was nowhere."



"I'd just drive somewhere public."



"I used to get picked up by the police and taken back home. That happened heaps of times, they took me home... So they were taking me home, the exact place that was not safe."



"...we were meant to get a housing transfer when my dad left, we're still on the housing transfer list... it's ridiculous because you can't really heal in the place you got sick in the first place."

So adults, what will you do?

What goes through your mind when you see young people hanging around public spaces, like shopping malls or parks? Have you ever thought that they might be getting away from unsafe homes?

If a young person talked with you about needing to leave home because of violence, what would you suggest they do? Would you refer them to a service? Which one?

Can your service or organisation assist children and young people to make safety plans for their home life? What happens if mum, or dad, doesn't want to take part in the planning?



Living with family violence

Jake's Story

Jake doesn't remember it being any different. There was always fighting and shouting and punches in his home. His Mum would tell people she fell down the stairs. Jake and his sisters knew the drill: 'she fell off her bike', 'she tripped while she was running'.

Mostly people stayed away from Jake. He got taken out of class a lot for being disruptive, for pushing other students and swearing at them. He sat in the front office until the bell went or he ran away.

The day he pulled a knife at school they called the police. The police didn't blink, they'd seen plenty of knives. Jake wondered why no-one asked what a 12 year old was doing wielding a knife at school?

Jake always made sure he was home when Dad got home. If it was clear, Jake would head into town with his mates. But if it was going to go off, he'd grab his sisters and get them out. Take them up to the park, or scam a ride on the bus down to Maccas. When they couldn't get out, he'd put his sisters in their room, stand in front of the door, and take it.

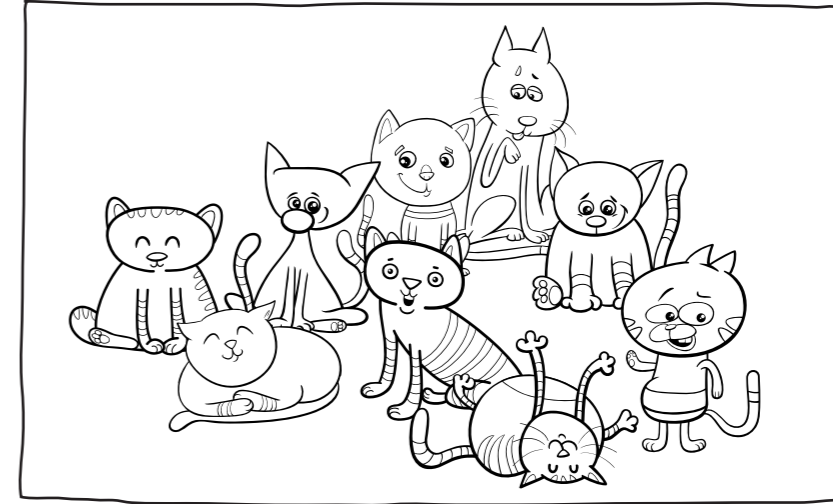
Eventually the police got Jake into a program that was nothing like school. He got to go rock-climbing, camping, kayaking and more. They learned stuff too, but it was much more chilled than regular classes. Everyone there had troubles, even the staff. He didn't have to explain, they just got it.

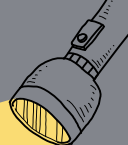
Jake reckons he might try going back to school for year 10, maybe for a couple of days a week. But what Jake wishes most, is that when he was little, like really little, he'd been as strong as he is now. Then he could have stood up for Mum. He could have let Dad have it.



Pause and spot

Spot the **6 differences** between these two images.





My siblings matter more than anything else.

Siblings are critical protectors, supporters and confidantes to young people experiencing family violence. Splitting them up may take away the only meaningful relationship they have and an essential part of their identity.

"My baby cousin was really scared and thought he was going to kill her. She wanted me to protect her. I was the one that had to try and explain what was going on."

"You're okay when it happens to you but when it happens to someone younger than you, someone you really care about, you just snap and just 'no, stop it, no more now!'"

"My little brother, who at the time was only like four or five, would actually stand in front of me and say, 'No, stop it.' As much as the big kid is the shield a lot of the time, when a little kid sees that so often, often they'll turn around and they'll be the shield for the big kid as well, which is beautiful in a really warped way..."

"Yeah, my entire life I stayed in the situation to protect my little sisters because I felt like I had to be there to protect them."

"We were living together up to a point where the government decided it would be best if they split us and put us all in different suburbs and different states."

So adults, what will you do?

Do you always see young clients individually?
Do you ask siblings if they would like to see you together? Could you?

Should we place greater priority on keeping siblings together if children need to leave their family home? What would we need, or need to let go of, to enable siblings to stay together?



I came out as transgender and that's when the violence started.

We are only just beginning to understand family violence for some groups of young people. Many trans young people are vilified in their own families. The existing gendered system does not meet their needs and perpetuates abuse.

"That parent could do whatever, seriously whatever. Say you are a kid and you're growing your hair out, that parent can just take you for a haircut and you can't say no. That parent can make sure you don't wear a specific 'terrible' clothing at that house."

"There's a lot of stuff that might not be thought of as abuse to people who have never been vulnerable to that. Misgendering, purposeful misgendering, and deadnaming [referring to a trans person by their birth name]. It's 100% abuse but it's not seen that way by cis people."

"...it's so horrifying to know as an LGBT person, if I come out, my loving parents, who I know are loving, who I know are good people - aren't going to be the same anymore. And if I don't come out, if I was different, and if I was better, then my parents would love me."

"Realising your gender in a cis-normative world is a terrifying, really hard experience. It's something that people go through years of repression. People pretend and ignore away and do everything they can to make pretend that they're not that. With all of those factors, of course someone wouldn't be able to admit to themselves, let alone admit to other people that they're trans in an environment where they don't feel safe."

"There's a reason why a bunch of us are homeless because that's the only way we can be trans or start transitioning."

So adults, what will you do?

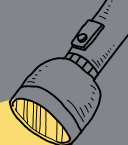
What do you know about the gender journeys that children and young people experience? Who would you contact for advice if you had a gender questioning, trans or non-binary young client?

Do you think it is violence for a parent to force their 6 year old child to have their hair cut, when they want to grow it long? What about a 12 year old? 17 year old? Why or why not?

Does your service or organisation require children and young people to disclose their gender? Are male/female the only options?

What about names and pronouns – does your service or organisation use the name a child was given at birth, or the name they prefer? Which name and pronoun would you use if the parents disagreed with the child or young person?





It doesn't end just because my parents split up.

Family violence does not end with separation, prison or court orders and young people need support to manage the ongoing impact. Some young people are forced to have contact with people who are not safe. Others are not supported to maintain relationships they need.

"When I saw him for the first time it was really weird. Like do I say anything? All this stuff happened but no one ever talked about it. Do I mention it or not? Like him being in prison, no one talks about that either."

"So people when they've gotten out of bad situations will go and try to get into bad situations again, because they don't feel alive without being hurt."

"They're not together anymore but my little sister goes back and forth and she's been through it already, but I don't want him to just have an outburst and go out on her because Mum's not around. You know what I mean?"

"...I was really afraid that he would come back. I remember having nightmares about him coming back."

"Where their mum and dad aren't together anymore, they should be fully aware that they can stop seeing him whenever but also they have a right to see him. No matter what anyone says, at the end it's up to them... because they have a right to see him."

So adults, what will you do?

How well do you think children and young people's experiences and views are understood in settings like the Family Court? What makes you think that?

How could you help a child or young person be heard and their views be given weight when decisions are made about them?

If you could change one thing in the justice system to better meet the needs of children and young people, what would you change?

Knowing that you probably can't change the legal arrangement, what would you say to a child or young person in a shared care arrangement if they do not want to stay with one of their parents? What would you ask?



Living with family violence

Zali and Dee's Story

When their mum got a new boyfriend, Zali and Dee thought it was okay at first, kind of, and they just wanted Mum to be happy. But a year after they got married it started to go bad. Zali and Dee could see what was going on, but Mum just couldn't see it.

He was like two different people, real nice in front of Mum but then different when she wasn't around. He started doing more weird things, deciding what Dee and Zali could wear, hiding Mum's stuff and pretending to be sick even when he wasn't.

He took all Mum's money and tracked her phone. He shouted a lot, he would hit Zali and pick fights with Mum. Then he would come back with presents and say sorry. Mum believed him.

Zali and Dee just tried to be nice about it because they didn't want to upset her.

He got to the rest of the family and made out like he was one they could trust. He set everyone against the kids.

It went on for ten years. After he left, Mum was a real mess and they all went through a really bad time. Zali and Dee have done everything they can, but Mum's never recovered.



Pause and find

Discover the hidden words in this word search! Can you find them all?

Y	B	A	L	L	A	W	L	K	O	A	L	A	U	O
Z	T	A	R	R	U	B	A	K	O	O	K	Z	M	O
K	I	N	G	P	A	R	R	O	T	O	I	C	E	R
L	I	V	E	D	N	A	I	N	A	M	S	A	T	A
E	S	Z	S	U	G	A	R	G	L	I	D	E	R	G
A	A	T	N	Y	R	A	W	O	S	S	A	C	P	N
P	L	A	T	Y	P	U	S	E	C	H	I	D	N	A
T	E	T	A	B	M	O	W	H	A	L	A	G	O	K

2	0	0	Y	1	Y	H	A	0	W	E	Y	1	3	1
Y	N	0	1	H	0	3	X	R	4	1	Y	1	4	
N	4	0	Y	5	0	K	Y	8	1	N	1	Y	Y	
0	4	3	0	1	0	2	Y	0	0	8	2	5	3	
Y	1	Y	5	H	Y	N	1	Y	N	0	3	1	1	
8	3	0	1	0	1	0	X	8	Y	4	0	N	1	Y
0	W	Z	X	0	0	Y	8	0	8	8	8	V	1	Z
0	0	Y	1	Y	0	X	1	A	V	1	1	Y	8	A

WORDS:

Cassowary
Echidna
Emu
Galah
Kangaroo

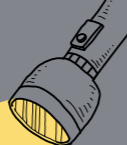
Kingparrot
Koala
Kookaburra
Platypus
Sugar Glider

Tasmanian Devil
Wallaby
Wombat



Adults need to step up.

Young people recognise that violence is the issue. Young people are not asking 'why didn't she just leave?' They are looking for complex behaviour change, accountability, and increased knowledge and action across the whole community. Adults need to work harder to stop family violence from happening.



"People are too scared to talk about it and it could be the difference between someone living...you could be saving a life."

"We're talking about the kid needing support but obviously the parents need supports too. Even if they abuse their kids, no matter how they do it, it's obviously because of something going on in their life. So they need support to get through whatever is going on in their life to try and be a healthier parent, whether or not kids are living with them."

"I think policymakers need to know that more laws and more policies isn't necessarily going to solve anything. You need programs and you need to teach people the right way to treat one another."

"I think there needed to be some actual restorative justice, actually understanding the impacts and taking responsibility, not just going off to prison. Working with the whole family."

"Not only do I think the man should be, I guess forcefully taken away but also I think the woman should have more support offered to her so she can identify those bad behaviours and habits that are going to make her want to go back. Because it's all well and good taking the man out but in the situation that I went through, he was taken out but my mum wanted to go back. There needs to be more support for her so she can pull herself away as well. It needs to be both ends."

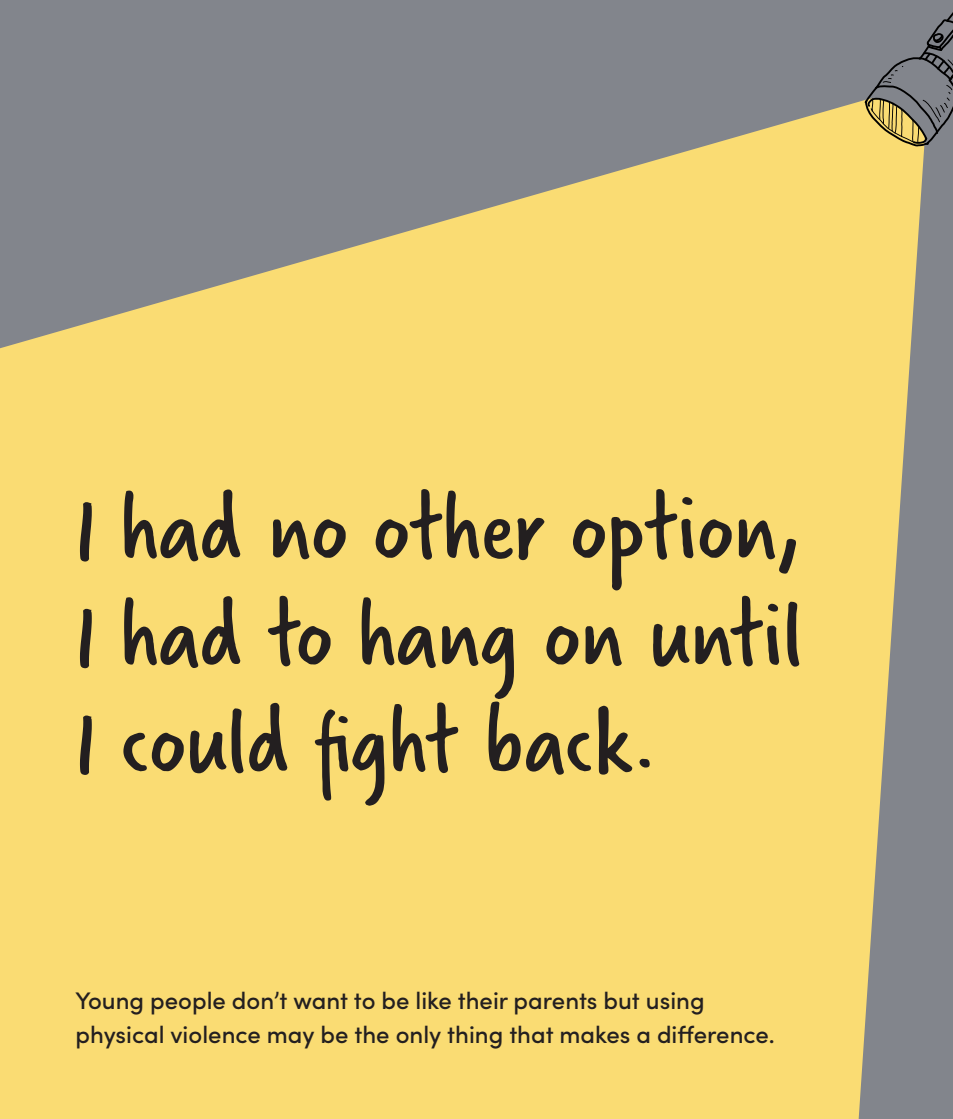
So adults, what will you do?

What do you know about family violence, the different forms of family violence, underlying causes, where and how family violence happens? Do you need to learn more?

What would you do if you were concerned that a child you know lives in a violent home? Who would you turn to for advice?

Is there anything you need to change in your own life? Can you get help with that?





I had no other option,
I had to hang on until
I could fight back.

Young people don't want to be like their parents but using physical violence may be the only thing that makes a difference.

"I was sick of him hurting Mum. I had a stick and I was beating him. I didn't want to let go of the stick. Not just for this day, for all the other times. I didn't want to let go of the stick."

"I absolutely lost my shit ... just to prove to him that I'm not taking his shit anymore. Then everyone came. Everyone. The whole police department and all that came out."

"I need to fucking put him in his place. I don't know."

"The look in her eyes because she was sad but very worried because she knows I would take Dad's punches and then just would fuck off and all that stuff. She was worried that I would grow up like him, being very violent and stuff. She wasn't far off. I still like hitting people and stuff."

"When you're hurt and when you're faced with violence, it feels you only have two options – you either are the one who is violent or you are the one that gets hurt. And then that leaves you to have a really bad view of the world where you're like, 'If I don't hurt others then they'll hurt me and I don't want to be hurt because being hurt was so awful. I just want to protect myself.'"

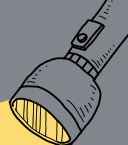
So adults, what will you do?

Do you know children or young people who are violent? Do you think you have the full context of their story? Is it hard to get all the details?

Has your service or organisation ever had to intervene because a child or young person used violence? Were there earlier points where more support or other options might have avoided the violence? In an ideal world, who would provide these supports?

What would you say to a young person who says, "The only thing that worked, the only reason Dad stopped hitting me, was because I beat him up and showed him I wouldn't take it anymore"?





It's my brother, or my sister, that is abusing me.

Different kinds of violence need different responses. So much needs to be done to understand and respond to adolescent violence, towards parents, siblings or in their own intimate partner relationships. Sibling violence is a little understood or talked about form of family violence.

"Even when people talk about domestic violence, they think about between grown-ups, the mum and the dad. I don't think people talk about family violence at all. I felt really alone. No one knew about this stuff."

"I suffered domestic abuse and felt like I couldn't tell anyone because it was my brother hurting me."

"With my brother we spent \$600 on a psychologist who then said they couldn't help him and so then we needed to fly a psychiatrist in."

"Knowing that this happens to other people, that I wasn't the only one. Someone who could explain that it does happen, and give me ideas about how to live in the house with him."


So adults, what will you do?

Why do you think adolescents use violence in their relationships or families? What has shaped your views? Do you need to learn more about the causes and forms of adolescent violence and the interventions that help?

Why do you think sibling abuse remains a taboo subject? What would be some of the opportunities and risks in being able to speak more openly about sibling abuse?

If you were concerned that a young person you know was abusing another young person, such as their girlfriend or boyfriend, brother or sister, what would you do? If you needed advice, who would you turn to?





I just want one worker
with a warm heart.

Young people are looking for workers who genuinely understand, who care about them and will stick with them.

"A good counsellor is someone who gets our culture, is outgoing and fun."

"Lots of teachers ask how you are, it's good that they care, but it's like they think it can just get better over night, they don't understand."

"Caseworkers who actually care about the kids they're working with, and aren't just in it for the money."

"I hate people who say they 'know what you're going through' because it's so clear they don't. If you haven't been through it you can't understand it at all."

"He's a mad lad. He was super nice. He was genuinely one of the best caseworkers I think I've ever had ever. He organised contact with my brother regularly, after me not seeing him because I was in care. That was probably the most important thing... he was really good."

So adults, what will you do?

Do you work at a service for children or young people – are children or young people involved in your recruitment process?

What is the rate of staff turnover in your organisation? How could you lower the rate of staff turnover and increase continuity for young people?

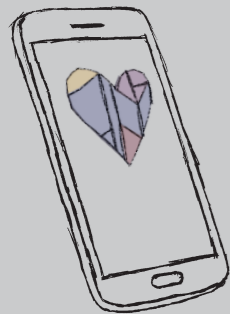
What transition arrangements do you have in place for young clients when staff leave?

How is staff performance measured and rewarded in your organisation? Are skills and abilities like empathy, fun and kindness encouraged and rewarded?



Messages from young people

If you are a child or a young person living with family violence, you are not alone. Others are going through it too. In every conversation young people were asked what messages they would share with other children or young people in Canberra who are living with family violence.



There were messages about standing up for yourself and getting help.

"If it's abusive, try to call someone to help."

"Try to avoid it, try to avoid the conflict, stay out of the way."

"Speak up."

"Just stand up for yourself. You don't need to take that much abuse."

"Invoke your rights, you're allowed to do that."

"Just finding someone that actually knows how you feel. So you can talk to them."

"Depends on what age they are. It does depend on the situation. I'd say if you're from 14 to 18, your parents are abusing you, tell them to shut the fuck up. Speaking about their rights by law, and just see how they react. If they do something, go straight to the cop shop. Don't listen to anyone else. If they're younger than 14, speak up to an advice counsellor, someone, aunt, uncle, anyone that's a circle that they can trust intuitively. There's always that one person I've noticed that's warm hearted, that you'll know, you'll pick up on immediately. Talk to them."

Some young people were able to share messages of hope that things get better.

"It actually does get better. A lot of kids think shit's not going to get better but it actually does."

"I wish I could say 'It'll get better' but I can't. I wish there was some easy nice thing to say like 'there are people to help you' but there aren't. I think maybe you just have to focus on what you can do for yourself and do that."

"...it doesn't last forever. It may seem like in the moment it lasts a long time. But people are looking out for you. And even strangers on the street will make a report to try and help you out."

Many messages were about resilience and how to cope.

"You can change the next generation."

"You have a choice in how you take things. You can't change what happens, but you can choose to stay positive."

"Don't give up, and don't give a fuck."

"Do what you've got to do."

"Stay strong."

"Forgiveness isn't always about them getting away with it because ...I've forgiven my parents but I still don't talk to them. But it's a let go for me, not for them. They don't even know I've forgiven them but in my heart, it's not my pain to bear anymore."

"Just hang in there. Try to at least, because hopefully one day it will be better."



Do you want to talk or are you worried about someone you know?

These are some of the places that you can try if you want to talk about your experiences, get help with a situation you are currently in, or find help for a friend:

For young people:

It can be hard to find the right person to talk to and many young people have not been able to get the support that they need and deserve.

We understand that things in your family may not change, or that it might take a long time until things are different.

We also know there are good people out there who are kind and get what you're going through. If you want to try talking to someone, or get some advice, these organisations may be able to help:

ACT Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner

02 6205 2222 | ACTkids@act.gov.au

If you are a child or a young person living in Canberra, and you have something you want to say or something you want to ask, or if you need help to get the support you need, you can call or send an email to Jodie Griffiths-Cook, the ACT Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner. Jodie is there to listen to and help children and young people in Canberra.

CREATE Foundation

6232 2409

CREATE represents the voices of children and young people who are in or who have lived in out-of-home care.

They also organise great ways for children and young people in care to have fun with each other and stay connected to their siblings.

Headspace

1800 650 890 | headspace.org.au

Headspace provides free and confidential telephone and online service for young people aged 12 to 25.

Junction Youth Health Service

02 6232 2423

Junction Youth Health Service provides free healthcare and support services to young people aged 12 to 25.

Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800 | kidshelpline.com.au

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

Youth Beyond Blue

1300 224 636 | youthbeyondblue.com

Beyond Blue provides information and confidential telephone and online counselling for young people aged 12 to 25 who may be experiencing anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts.

For everybody:

Domestic Violence Crisis Service

02 6280 0900 | dvcs.org.au

DVCS can provide support 24/7 to people impacted by domestic and family violence, including those who are at risk of using violence.

1800RESPECT

1800 737 732 | 1800respect.org.au

1800RESPECT provides support through phone or web chat for those experiencing sexual, domestic and family violence.

Mensline Australia

1300 78 99 78 | mensline.org.au

Mensline can provide online or video counselling for men affected by or considering using violence.

Parentline ACT

02 6287 3833

Parentline provides confidential counselling service for parents and carers as well as parenting courses and support.

Men's Referral Service

1300 766 491 | ntv.org.au

The Men's Referral Service is a men's family violence telephone counselling, information and referral service operating around the country and is the central point of contact for men taking responsibility for their violent behaviour.

Family Drug Support Australia

1300 368 186

Family Drug Support helps families affected by alcohol and other drugs with telephone support services for users, families and carers.

Family Relationship Advice Line

1800 050 321

The Family Relationship Advice Line is a national telephone service that helps families affected by relationship or separation issues, including information on parenting arrangements after separation.

It can be hard to know how to help, and to know whether you are going to make things better not worse. If you are concerned about the safety of a child or young person, the ACT Government's Keeping Children and Young People Safe guide is a good place to start.

A Gender Agenda

02 6162 1924

A Gender Agenda supports the goals and needs of intersex, transgender and gender diverse adults and young people in Canberra and the surrounding region.



What happens now?

We listened to young people because we want things to change.

We want the ACT to be safer for children and young people, and we want it to be easier for children and young people to get the support they need.

What we heard should challenge services and systems across both government and the community to make changes to what they do and how they do it. What we heard should make all adults step up.

Listening to young people and sharing what they told us is just the start.

The Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner will advocate for improvements that respond to what young people said is needed.

The Family Safety Hub will lead a co-design process to find ways to provide the supports and services that

young people need, not what adults think they need.

The result of co-design could be a new service, a change to an existing system, updated legislation or a completely new idea. Young people shared with us their own ideas for what would make things better, and those ideas will be where we start.

The Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner will monitor whether changes are being made and if organisations are being made safer for children and young people.

We hope all adults who read the insights will be inspired to consider how they can make things better for the young people they know.

Now that you have heard their voices, what will you do differently?





FOOTBALL

FUN

TREE

Pause and colour

Bring this page to life with colour!

COLOUR

WIN

LOVE

MUSIC

SOCCER PEACE

GO

SMARTPHONE

COFFEE

CANBERRA

SKILLS

Gold

DADDY

STOP

DINO

LIKE

MUSIC

Hi

ACT Children and Young People Commissioner

The independent position of Children and Young People Commissioner sits within the ACT Human Rights Commission. The Commissioner promotes the rights of children and young people. She talks with children and young people and listens to what they have to say, and provides advice to government and community agencies about how to improve services for children and young people.

ACTkids@act.gov.au

hrc.act.gov.au/childrenyoungpeople

Family Safety Hub

The Family Safety Hub is part of the ACT Office of the Coordinator-General for Family Safety. The hub is a new approach to tackling the critical issue of domestic and family violence. The Hub designs and tests tangible solutions, services and supports that can be introduced into the system to help those affected by violence.

saferfamilies@act.gov.au

communityservices.act.gov.au/saferfamilies

