A child who has lived with domestic violence is likely to have confusing thoughts and feelings about the parent who has harmed the other parent. Whether the abusive parent still lives at home, sees the child sometimes, or has no contact, the child and parent have a relationship. Maintaining contact with both parents can be of benefit for some children, as long as everyone is safe. One of the biggest and most challenging jobs for you, the caring parent, is to help your child navigate his or her relationship with the abusive parent.

SAFETY FIRST

The first thing to think about is your own safety and your children's safety with the abusive partner. If you have concerns, contact a domestic violence advocate, a lawyer, or another trusted individual who is knowledgeable about domestic violence and can help you make plans for safety. If you believe your child has been injured or abused by the other parent, get medical help if needed and contact your local police or child protective services. Try to find time alone with your children to discuss plans for safety and respond to any worries they may have.

YOUR CHILD’S MIXED EMOTIONS

Most children have complicated feelings about the abusive parent. They may feel afraid, angry, or sad about what's happened in the home. They may also feel confused because the person who was hurtful was also loving and fun at other times. Many children feel that the abuse was their fault, not the parent's. They may think they have to choose between loving one parent or the other. Don't expect your kids to have the same feelings that you do about your partner. Instead, listen to and accept their feelings. Let them know that it's OK to talk to you, and that you won't be angry to hear that they love and miss their other parent. If your children trust you with their thoughts, over time you can help them to understand and accept the realities about the person who hurt you.
Managing Pick-ups and Drop-offs

If your child visits a parent who has been abusive to you, try not to fight or argue in front of the child even if the other parent starts it. If arguments keep happening, consider these steps:

- Contact your lawyer if you have one. If you are in need of one, please contact your local Legal Aid Office.
- Contact your local domestic violence agency to find out about visitation resources.
- Have another person present with you for your child’s pick-ups and drop-offs.
- Arrange the exchange at a neutral place.
- Ask a family member trusted by both parents to handle the pick-ups and drop-offs.

Joey, age 9, returned from a visit with his father and said, “I miss Dad. I want us to all live together.” His mother responded, “I know you miss him. But we can’t live together. He can’t control his temper, and we left because it wasn’t safe.”

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