

Child to parent violence and abuse at a glance

What is child to parent violence and abuse (CPVA)?

CPVA encompasses a broad range of violence and abuse that children under the age of 18 display towards their parents / caregiver and siblings.

Types of violence can include (but is not limited to):

- Physical harm – hitting, strangling, biting, using weapons, hurting /killing pets
- Verbal harm – threatening, intimidation, shouting, insulting
- Coercion – controlling, manipulating, gaslighting, threats to harm self
- Property damage – holes in walls & doors, smashed windows & furniture, personal items destroyed
- Financial – stealing money, demanding money, stealing personal items
- Sexual harm – unwanted sexual acts, posting sexualised images of others without consent
- Digital harm – online bullying, posting content about others without consent.

CPVA is complex and there could be many reasons why this is occurring. CPVA can start at any age during childhood or adolescence including early childhood. If families are left unsupported, the violence can escalate and continue in adulthood, towards the parents and in intimate partner relationships.

Why does CPVA Occur?

CPVA can occur in any family. Not all children using violence towards their parents have experienced or observed violence at home. It is a complex issue and there are a broad range of contributing factors. When families with disabled children do not have the support they need CPVA is more likely to occur.

Impacts on the Family

Living with CPVA means that all family members must adapt their own behaviour and responses to cope with and respond to the violence. Many people don't believe or understand how a child can be in control of the parent. This adds to the invisibility of CPVA, and families feel ashamed and are socially isolated, unable to share what is happening to them with friends or professionals. Most parents will only reach out for help when the violence has become extreme and there are safety concerns.

There are many similarities between CPVA and other forms of violence such as the abusive, controlling and violent behaviour that can occur within a family unit. The main difference between CPVA and other forms of violence is the parent's inability to leave the situation to protect themselves as they are still legally responsible for the child's safety. This means that they are an Adult at Risk.

An Adult at Risk is:

- Someone who has needs for care and/or support, and
- Is experiencing violence and abuse (or risk of), and
- Because of their needs for care and/or support are unable to remove or protect themselves from the abuse (or risk of)

A Safeguarding Adults Response

Each family is unique and requires a tailored and culturally safe response. VisAble recommends a Safeguarding Adults from Abuse (SAFA) multi agency response. We recognise that there are limited supports in Aotearoa New Zealand for families living with CPVA. We are working on an action plan to build capability within services to equip and enable them to respond safely and appropriately.

You can contact VisAble for advice and support by emailing
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