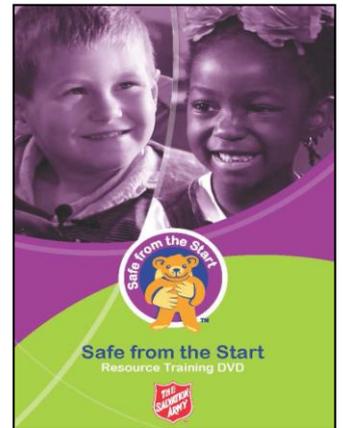


Safe from the Start DVD

A child who lives with violence is forever 'changed', but not forever 'damaged' and there is a lot that we can do to change their future prospects. (Baker/Cunningham 2007)



The **Safe from the Start** DVD was created to assist workers to engage with young children demonstrating how some of the Kits resources could be used to engage with and listen to children who have been exposed to family or domestic violence.

The DVD shows how counsellors could read a story in therapeutic or activity based play. It shows how to **engage with a child** - by reading a story or using a puppet. The child can be encouraged to express their feelings of being sad, scared or angry and share their experiences.

The DVD is not intended to be a play therapy or counselling training tool. Instead it gives examples of how **activity based play** using the Safe from the Start books or puppets may be used to identify if further support may be needed, such as play therapy with a trained therapist or professional counsellor or psychologist.

Play enables symbolic communication with the child as it is the way in which a child can express their feelings and connect with and seek to understand their world.

You will observe that while some children **engage** easily with the counsellor and are interested in the story or puppet and express their thoughts and feelings openly, others do not. The children who do not engage at first, may still benefit from the play session and talk about it later at home, to someone else they trust or in another session. While some counsellors in the DVD ask the child a number of questions; in a real activity based session the emphasis could be on more time listening or play as opposed to asking direct questions.

Each situation would be different according to the child's circumstances, previous sessions held getting to know the child before using activity based play or discussions with the mother or caregiver regarding the child's experience.

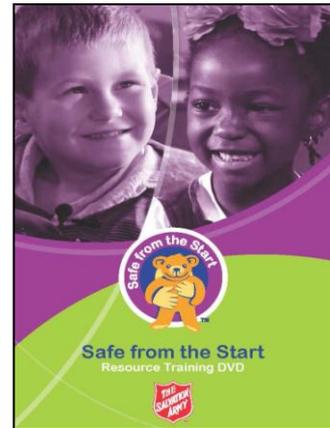
The children in the DVD are aged between 4 and 6 years and do not live in violent homes, but share their feelings naturally about different life situations. The children's responses are not scripted and their replies are spontaneous as they engage with various books and puppets in the kit.

The Counsellors in the DVD range from qualified professionals such as a psychologist, social worker, family violence counsellor, youth worker and family support worker.

The DVD also includes a number of discussion questions which can be used in staff training and development sessions.

When Do Children Need Professional Help?

Many children who have witnessed or been exposed to family violence can resolve their feelings and concerns with the help of their mum, a trusted family member such as a grandparent or their teacher. However, there are situations when professional help is needed. Consider seeking professional help in the following situations:



- The child is particularly vulnerable because of other stressful events or losses they have experienced.
- The violence within the family has occurred several times.
- The child is avoiding going to school or is being bullied.
- The child's mother is highly upset and unable to respond to the child's needs.
- A child is physically hurting him/herself or others.
- A child's problems have gone on for 3-4 months with no improvement.

If you are a parent worried about your child, remember that you know your child best. Don't hesitate to contact and consult with a professional.

If you are worried about a child you know well, remember that you play a very important role!

Where Can You Seek Professional Help?

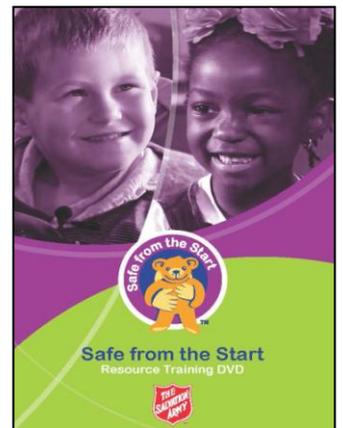
There are a number of services (both government and non-government) that provide help.

Talk to someone who knows your child well as they may be able to provide counselling or a referral. Consider contacting the following professionals:

- Domestic or Family Violence Services (1800 200 526)
- Domestic or Family Violence Refuges
- Child Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Family counselling services specialising in counselling children
- Therapeutic Play Therapists
- Schools (the child's teacher or social worker)
- Psychologists
- Child Psychotherapy
- General Practitioner

General Guidelines

- When working with young children who have been exposed to violence, the parent or care caregiver should be informed about any therapeutic or activity based play that occurs with a child.
- The Kits Resources used in **activity based play** can also be given to the parent or caregiver to take home or suggestions given how to use similar resources at home to encourage the child to discuss their feelings and emotions.
- A mother can be part of the **activity based play** session with the child which can often also be useful for the mum (eg: the book, Ruby & the Rubbish Bin is about self esteem, and A Huge Bag of Worries - sorting out large and small worries). This enables the mother and child to continue the discussion at home using the same language through using the resource.
- The Safe from the Start brochures can be given to the parent or caregiver which provides information re the impact of exposure of family violence on young children.



Supporting Children who are living with violence or been exposed to violence

- Healing begins by engaging with and listening to children
- A helpful and supportive adult is the most powerful tool we have to help children feel safe. This can be a parent, grandparent, neighbour, teacher, child carer or community person.
- Engage with the child through activity based play and listening to them.
- Give the child permission to tell their stories and share their feelings about their experience which can include feelings of being sad, angry, scared or of loss, grief or low self esteem.
- Give clear, simple explanations about scary events or situations of violence. They do not really understand the causes of violence and often blame themselves.