

**A Kid Is
So Special
(KISS)**

BEING TOGETHER Handbook



When There Is Hurting At Home

An abusive partner impacts all parts of your life, including parenting. Can you relate to any of these things? Are they still happening, or did they happen in the past?

- ✿ I am worn out and drained; sometimes I don't have any energy for my kids.
- ✿ I'm afraid for our safety.
- ✿ I drink too much or take drugs to cope.
- ✿ I'm concerned that my kids don't respect me because I was insulted so much.
- ✿ I was discouraged when he called Children and Youth on me or took me to court for custody.
- ✿ I worry about the children's safety when they visit him.
- ✿ I am the "bad parent" because I make the kids listen and he spoils them.
- ✿ I feel like running away from my life and my responsibilities.
- ✿ I don't want to discipline my children; they have been through enough already.
- ✿ I'm frustrated that he keeps money that I need for the kids away from me; I can't provide for my children.
- ✿ I have lost confidence in my ability to be the good mother I want to be.
- ✿ I'm angry that my partner tells the kids it is my fault we are not together.

These are all common experiences for women who have been abused by their partner. You can use your time in this class to talk about these experiences and share ideas with other women about how to overcome the impact of the abuser on you and your parenting. Remember that your children love you, no matter how it may seem to you now.

Parents As Referees: When Siblings Fight

Siblings (brothers and sisters) give each other something that parents can not give – a chance to learn how to interact with others who are not adults, who have more (or less) power than you, and how to get along with people who can't "get away" from you when you have a conflict. Some siblings get along well and are close to each other, and some argue and compete for their parents' attention. Sometimes siblings fight with each other but defend each other to outsiders. Most parents expect their children to fight and argue sometimes, but don't always know how to handle the fighting. Here are some tips:

- ✿ **Don't treat your kids the same.** It seems to make sense – and you don't want to play favorites – but children are unique and have different needs. Treating kids the same can actually make fighting worse because children compete more to be "the favorite" or show they are individuals.
- ✿ **There is a difference between having a favorite child and playing favorites.** Favoring one child is normal and kids can easily identify who is the favorite of each parent. But giving one child special privileges at the expense of the other children is harmful and hurts all the children, even the favorite. Some children or one child may be the favorite of the abuser causing more problems with siblings.
- ✿ **Stay out of sibling arguments and don't take sides.** If fighting gets serious, separate the children until they can cool down. Help each child talk about what is bothering them, why they are angry, and how to solve the conflict.
- ✿ **Forbid hitting and physical fights.** Be clear to the children that even though the parents may have had physical conflicts, it is not acceptable. Teach your child that it takes two to argue but only one to stop an argument. Suggest solutions to the problem but let the children decide what they want to do.
- ✿ **You can't make your kids like each other** but by teaching them how to handle their differences you make your family life a lot happier for everyone.

Parenting Sons And Daughters

Being the mother of a son is different than being the mother of a daughter. Besides the obvious physical differences, boys and girls have some other differences; being aware of them can make your job as a mother a little easier.

Did you know:

- ✿ boys' and girls' brains develop differently?
- ✿ the right side of girls' brains develop faster so girls talk sooner, learn more words, read sooner, and have better memory?
- ✿ the left side of boys' brains develop faster so boys are good at math and problem solving earlier, have higher motor coordination and building skills?
- ✿ the part of the brain that is responsible for judgment and impulse control develops at an earlier age in girls than boys?
- ✿ hormone differences mean boys can be more physically aggressive?

Did you know that even with the brain developing differently, most differences between boys and girls come about because of how families, schools and society raise and treat boys and girls?

Boys are more physical in their play and are usually more aggressive than girls. Boys play games that are "win or lose" more often than girls and their games include danger and combat much more often than girls. If boys witness aggression and physical violence by their fathers, their level of aggression and being physical may get worse. Girls tend to be more focused on talking and getting along with people. The emotional development of girls' brains is further ahead than boys. Girls who witness domestic violence may become quieter and more isolated.

- ✿ **What you can do:** Help your son put his active energy into something constructive and make sure he has lots of chances to play outside with his friends. Set clear rules on how far rough housing can go. Watch for changes that may be harder to notice in girls' interactions with family members.

In some ways, boys and girls are the same with their friendships – both prefer friends of the same sex for much of the growing up years. But boys tend to choose friends based on shared interests (scout group or sports team, for example) and girls choose friends based on personality. Boys are less likely to have a "best friend."

- ✿ **What you can do:** Respect their choice of friends and give your child a chance to choose her friends from a wide range of children. Get to know friends and their parents.

Research shows that even in elementary schools, boys get more attention in school than girls. They tend to learn better by seeing something – that's why they enjoy video games so much. But boys are more likely to have learning difficulties and problems with language. Girls tend to be better at verbal and reading skills. Since boys get more attention, girls may feel they are not as smart in school and may even hide what they are good at.

- ✿ **What you can do:** Make sure your son is on track in school by keeping in contact with his teachers. Ask for an assessment if you think he has a learning difficulty and cooperate with any recommendations you receive. Pay attention to what your daughter and your son do well at school and encourage and praise them for their unique talents!

Girls are usually emotionally mature earlier than boys, who have trouble talking about their feelings. By the age of nine, most boys have learned to repress (or push down) all their feelings, except anger.

- ✿ **What you can do:** Teach your son to identify his feelings and talk about them, so he doesn't have to hide them. Make an effort to stay connected to your son with a sense of humor. Give him opportunities to be around older males (an uncle, neighbor, or friend of the family) so he can see that men can be gentle, too. Girls may seem to be handling their feelings better than boys, but may be having difficulty feeling overwhelmed with lots of feelings they can't name or understand.

Even with differences between boys and girls, both sons and daughters need to be taught to be respectful and to be respected for their uniqueness. They should be taught to be confident and strong and feel good about themselves. Both boys and girls should know clear rules and expectations. Aggressive behavior shouldn't be more acceptable in boys than girls – violent behavior is never a way to handle feelings or situations. Listen to them. Give them chances to talk about feelings or to express them in acceptable ways.

Co-parenting With Your Ex-partner

Getting along with the father of your children can feel like walking through a mine field, waiting for something to explode. It may be even more difficult when there has been domestic violence. If you share custody of your children and your children visit their father regularly, try to cooperate on parenting as much as possible. Here are a few ideas:

- ✿ Let the co-parent know about changes in your children's health, education, interests, or other areas of their life.
- ✿ Never use children as messengers; don't send money or lists of things the other parent should do or buy for the child. Don't ask your child to keep secrets from the other parent.
- ✿ Allow children to talk about their time with the other parent if they want, but don't push them. Just listen!
- ✿ Keep transition times pleasant. Don't "bad mouth" the other parent. Parents should make the arrangements for visits, unless the children are teenagers. Be flexible and realize that children's needs change as they grow.
- ✿ Recognize talents and qualities your child has received from the other parent. Mention positive things about the other family and how they have added to your child's life. Encourage your child to remember his "other" family on birthdays and holidays.
- ✿ It's not essential that the rules at both houses be the same, only that they be healthy and consistent for the children. Try to agree on important rules and let the small stuff go.
- ✿ Treat the other parent the way you want to be treated. This can be especially difficult if the other parent is an abuser.

"I Loved You Enough"

Some day when my children are old enough to understand the logic that motivates a mother, I will tell them:

- ✿ I loved you enough to ask about where you were going, with whom and at what time you would be home.
- ✿ I loved you enough to insist that you save your money to buy a bike, even though we might have been able to afford to give it you.
- ✿ I loved you enough to make you return a Milky Way – with a bite out of it – to the drug store to confess "I stole this."
- ✿ I loved you enough to be silent while you found out your new best friend was a creep.
- ✿ I loved you enough to stand over you for two hours while you cleaned your room, a job that would have taken me 15 minutes.
- ✿ I loved you enough to let you take responsibility for your actions even when the penalties almost broke my heart.
- ✿ I loved you enough to let you see anger, disappointment, disgust and tears in my eyes.
- ✿ I loved you enough to admit I was wrong and ask for your forgiveness.
- ✿ I loved you enough to let you stumble, fall and get hurt.
- ✿ But most of all, I loved you enough to say NO when you hated me for it. That was the hardest part of all.

– Erma Bombeck

Ten Rules For Dating

Sometime you are going to want to date again. Having a good understanding of domestic violence so you can spot “red flags” in the relationship will be good for you and your children.

- ✿ **Have your priorities straight.** Maybe it’s more important for you to be at your child’s school play than spending time with a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- ✿ **Nobody loves a parade.** Don’t introduce your kids to every date you meet. Wait until you’re secure in the relationship before you let your kids see them. Have a reliable sitter lined up.
- ✿ **Don’t ask too much too soon.** Don’t make the new person your parenting partner right away. For example, don’t ask that person to discipline your child or pick up your baby from day care just because it’s on the way.
- ✿ **Know the signs of trouble.** They say “love is blind” but blindness can be dangerous. Watch for signs that your new partner is trouble: could be abusive, involved with drugs or alcohol, have money problems, or be a sexual predator of children. Don’t kid yourself – you can’t change anyone and their trouble will become your trouble.
- ✿ **Nothing but the truth.** It’s good to be discreet and careful when you are dating a new person, but it’s not okay to do things you wouldn’t want your child to do as a young adult. If you can’t explain to your child (in an age-appropriate manner) why you are doing what you are doing, don’t do it. Behave as you want your kids to when they are your age.
- ✿ **When you’re out, be out.** Make sure you are confident in your child care arrangements so you don’t worry about your child when you are out. Check in with the sitter one time in an evening, for a few minutes, and then relax and enjoy yourself.
- ✿ **Don’t give in to pressure.** Decide what kind of relationship you want to have and don’t let that person, your kids, your family, your friends, or anyone else pressure you into doing something that’s not right for you.
- ✿ **Leave when it’s time.** One of the more stressful times in a single mother’s life is splitting up with someone her kids care about. Change and loss are part of life; things everyone has to deal with. Don’t stay in a bad relationship just because your kids like the person.
- ✿ **Expect your child to act out.** Sometimes kids act out because they are used to having Mommy to themselves. Acknowledge and accept kids’ feelings. Say, “I love you as much as ever, but sometimes I’m not here when you want me to be. I like to spend time with my friends, just like you do.” Don’t let your kids control you – or try to force them to like the person, either.

Who Is Part Of Your Web?

Think about the important people and relationships in your life. Put these people on the lines coming out from the center. On the threads going across the web, write the activities or behaviors that create a bond between you and that person.



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Mommy And Me

Free And Easy Ways To Have Fun (And Teach) Your Kids

- ✿ Go to a museum.
- ✿ Play Frisbee.
- ✿ Sing together.
- ✿ Write a story together.
- ✿ Make a tent with tables and blankets and pretend you are camping.
- ✿ Play sports.
- ✿ Go to the local playground.
- ✿ Do yard work together.
- ✿ Play cards or games.



Keeping Fit With Your Kids

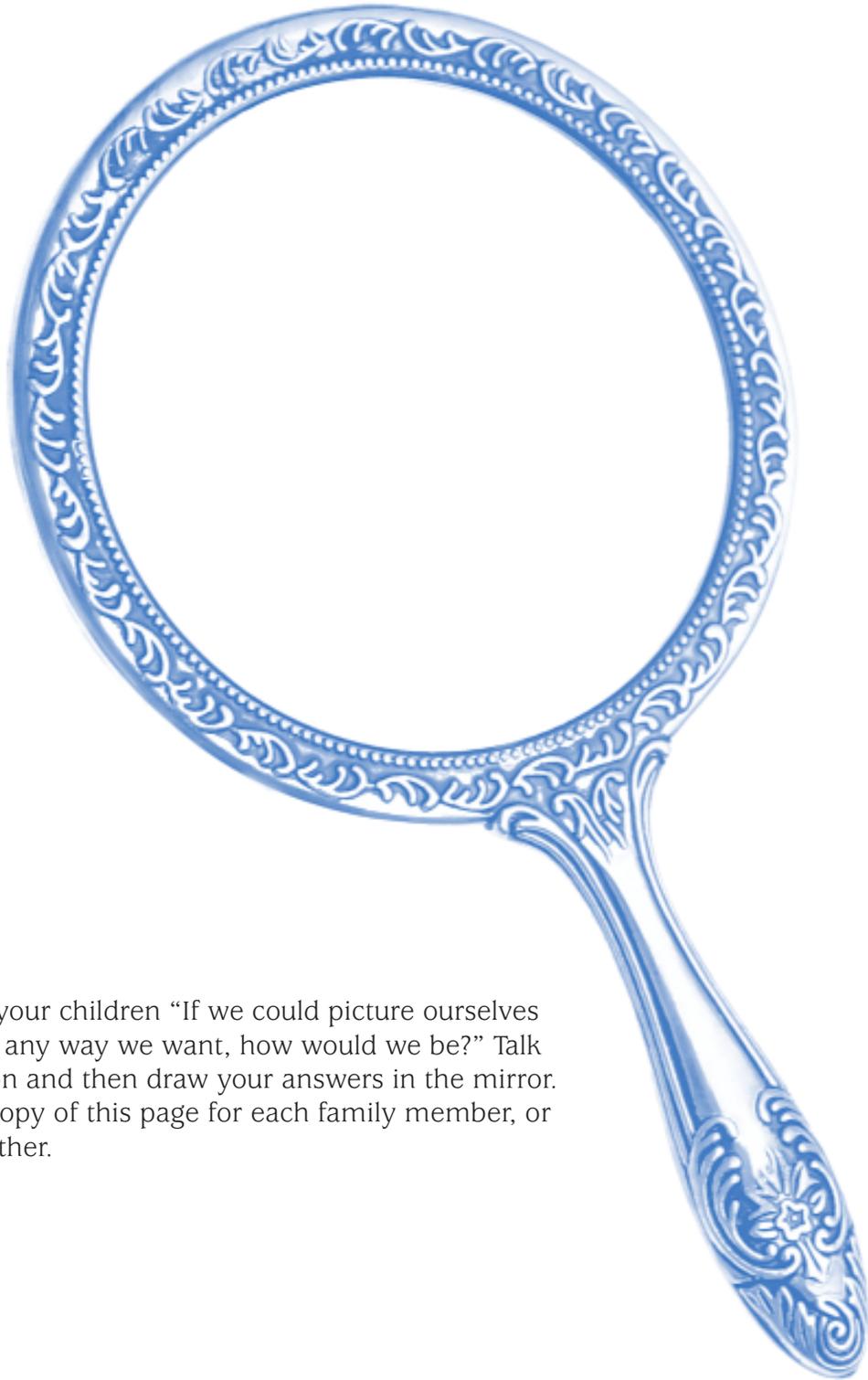
Being active and adding exercise to your every day life is a habit – your kids will learn it from you, and it’s not too late for you to learn it yourself! You teach your children how to be healthy by your example. Think about what activities your family likes. Do you like to hike in the woods? Go bowling? Play baseball or basketball? How about roller skating or swimming? The best exercise you can do with your children is walking. Parks and playgrounds are good places to start, but you can also walk indoors on rainy days at many malls (they have hours just for walking, before the mall opens). You can also “sneak” walking into your daily routine by parking farther away from places or walking short distances instead of driving. You can make a game of walking with your children by having a “parade” or playing active games instead of watching TV or playing video games.

It may be hard to fit exercise into your busy day, but it will be worth the effort for better health and the important lessons you teach your child.

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Mirror, Mirror...



Ask yourself and your children “If we could picture ourselves looking or feeling any way we want, how would we be?” Talk about this question and then draw your answers in the mirror. You can make a copy of this page for each family member, or work on one together.