

Using *Where's My Daddy?* with families

Notes for counsellors, refuge and family violence workers, and school wellbeing staff. Based on published guidance from the Australian Psychological Society, Emerging Minds and the US National Child Traumatic Stress Network (sources at the end).

About the book

Where's My Daddy? by Zoe Jones, illustrated by Jacinta Kay (2020), is a picture book for young children whose mum has left an abusive relationship and who no longer see their dad. It answers the question many children ask, and repeats three messages: it isn't your fault, you are loved, and you are safe. A poem for the parent is included at the end. Paperback ISBN 978-0-6489440-0-3.

Why parent-led reading

The NCTSN identifies a strong relationship with a caring, non-violent parent as one of the most important factors in children's recovery from domestic violence. The APS encourages parents to rebuild that bond after separation, through warmth, attention and comforting touch.

Where it suits the family, the book can be offered as something for the parent to read *with* their child, so the reassurance comes from the parent.

Before suggesting the book

- **Safety first.** If the family is still living with violence, private conversations may be difficult or unsafe. Safety planning comes first (NCTSN).
- **The parent's readiness.** The NCTSN recommends that parents reflect on their own feelings and decide what messages they want to give before talking with their children. Some parents may want to read the book alone first.
- **Fit.** The book is written for a child who no longer sees their dad. Families with ongoing contact may need different messages. See the APS guidance on contact and changeovers.

Messages to reinforce

Quoted from the NCTSN's "Helpful Messages for Kids About Domestic Violence" (fact sheet 4). They match the book's themes:

- "It isn't your fault."
- "Violence isn't OK."
- "I will do everything I can to help you be safe."
- "It's not your job to fix what is wrong in the family."

- "It's OK to have mixed feelings about either or both of your parents."

Child-focused conversations with parents

Emerging Minds' PERCS-FDV conversation guides prompt practitioners to ask parents, with curiosity and without judgement, about five areas of the child's life:

1. Parent-child relationship
2. Emotions and behaviours
3. Routines
4. Communication and meaning-making
5. Support networks

Emerging Minds notes that these conversations can help parents connect their concerns about a child's behaviour to the child's experience of violence, and recognise the protective steps they're already taking.

Helping parents answer "Where's Daddy?"

The APS advises parents to:

- be matter-of-fact, and give simple messages about safety
- stay non-judgemental about the other parent, while being clear his behaviour was unacceptable
- avoid talking negatively about him, or about the violence's impact on themselves, in the child's hearing
- explain that violence is always a choice
- not question children about time with the other parent

Reactions to expect, and when to refer

Clinginess, sleep problems, tantrums, aggression and blaming are common, and usually ease once the child feels safe (APS, NCTSN). The NCTSN suggests seeking further help if:

- changes persist or get worse
- the child seems unusually sad, angry or withdrawn
- there's concern the child may harm themselves or others
- the parent is overwhelmed
- the violence was extreme

Follow your organisation's child safety procedures and reporting obligations if you have concerns about a child's safety.

For families: support in Australia

000 in an emergency · 1800RESPECT 1800 737 732 · Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 (ages 5–25) · Lifeline 13 11 14. A free parent guide, and a feelings page for children, are at whereismydaddybook.com.au/resources/.

Where this information comes from. The book's author, Zoe Jones, is a mum with lived experience of leaving family violence, not a qualified practitioner. These notes summarise published guidance, which draws on both professional expertise and survivors' lived experience, and add no clinical advice of her own:

- Australian Psychological Society (2018). *Separating parents, family violence: Promoting children's wellbeing when one parent is leaving a violent partner*. psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics/parenting/parenting-after-separation-family-violence
- Emerging Minds (National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health). *Talking to parents about family and domestic violence* (PERCS-FDV conversation guides). emergingminds.com.au/resources/talking-to-parents-about-family-and-domestic-violence/
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2014). *Children and Domestic Violence* fact sheet series, sheets 1, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9, developed from survivors' experiences, research, and advocates' and clinicians' reports. nctsn.org/resources/children-and-domestic-violence-parents-fact-sheet-series

Not clinical guidance. Please read the original sources, and use your own professional judgement and your organisation's procedures.

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