

## Triggers and Causes of Family Violence

What are triggers and causes of family violence and are they the same?

**Triggers** are circumstances, situations, or events that precede an incident of abuse or are associated with a pattern of incidents or escalation of abuse.

Not all incidents of abuse are able to be traced back to an identifiable trigger. But when triggers are identified and removed these are generally replaced by others and the pattern of abuse continues because triggers do not cause abusive behaviours.

Triggers may be internal or external to family relationships and most are commonly experienced in New Zealand society, they may include:

*Traumatic or stressful life events e.g.*  
*Redundancy, under- or un-employment*  
*Death or injury of a loved one*  
*Migration*  
*Relationship separation*  
*Stresses of parenting/new pregnancy*  
*Stressful living conditions e.g. overcrowding*  
*Financial problems*  
*Relationship problems*  
*Difficulties at work or in other relationships*  
*Alcohol or substance use or overuse*  
*Perceived challenges to family norms*

**Causes** of family violence are underlying social factors that increase the likelihood that a person will abuse family members.

We usually talk about risk factors for abuse rather than causes of family violence, recognising that not everyone who has these risk factors will abuse their families and that those who do abuse can get help to change their behaviour.

There are a number of known risk factors for both victims and perpetrators of family violence, these include:

### *Factors in childhood*

*Witnessing family violence as a child*  
*Experiencing abuse during childhood*

### *Current personal factors*

*Being a youth or young adult*  
*Low educational attainment*  
*Patriarchal attitudes about gender roles*  
*Anti-social behaviours*  
*Strong sense of entitlement*

### *Current intimate relationship factors*

*In a relationship for less than five years*  
*Becoming a parent very young*  
*Large age gap between partners*  
*Blended family with children from previous relationships*

Triggers of FV are not the underlying causes of abuse.  
 Help is available for those who want to change their behaviour.

*Are you concerned about your own or someone else's behaviour?*

*Find out about the services available in your area by contacting:*

**Family Violence Helpline: 0800 456 450 (9am–11pm)**

**Women's Refuge Helpline: 0800 REFUGE (733 843) website: [www.womensrefuge.org.nz](http://www.womensrefuge.org.nz)**

**National Network of Stopping Violence Services website: [www.nnsvs.org.nz](http://www.nnsvs.org.nz)**