

## Big Situations – Stories for Reflection

### Family Violence



This story refers to a family violence situation and may raise big feelings. Before you read this, make sure this is the right time for you, and that you can access support for yourself if you need it. Should any of the information in this document cause distress for you, it may be helpful to contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 or the Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800.

*Read this story to help you be better prepared to respond to a family violence situation, or if you have already encountered a situation like this and you want to hear about other educators' experiences. This is a fictional story informed by real experiences. If you are facing a situation like this now, you can find [Tips for responding now](#) and resources to support children, parents and educators in the [Big Situations](#) section of the NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency website.*

### Keeping the focus on children

We have recently experienced a family violence situation at our service involving Elly and her child Chris. Elly's partner Lee was charming, but we realised after a while that he was always putting Elly down in subtle ways. If Lee brought Chris and something was forgotten he'd always put the responsibility on Elly in a joking kind of way. So, we were a bit uncomfortable about their relationship, but nothing specific. Then one weekend there was an incident that sounded like it was pretty frightening. Lee had threatened Elly, and she'd called the police. She brought Chris to the service on Monday and told us about the Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) the police had organised. As the AVO didn't cover Chris we had to explain to Elly that because there were no parenting orders, if Lee came to the service and wanted to pick up Chris we'd need to cooperate.

We encouraged Elly to get advice and she contacted the Family Relationship Centre and started the process of getting court orders. As part of shared parenting arrangements, Lee continued to pick up Chris from the service. Elly did not want Lee to know where she had moved to, but Lee started stalking Elly, and breached the AVO. She reported this to the police, and things went back to court. Elly was very stressed, and we could see that Chris was being affected by what was happening. Chris seemed watchful and on edge needing increased reassurance and encouragement from us to play.

It was stressful for our whole team and in particular for a team member who had recently left a violent relationship. This team member became very anxious for both Elly and Chris. We had a team meeting to discuss our legal and mandatory reporting responsibilities, service policies and procedures, and the need for confidentiality. We also supported educators to work through their concerns and feelings. It was hard for some team members to maintain their professional partnerships with both Lee and Elly. Some educators found contacting our Employee Assistance Program helpful. Everyone was encouraged to focus on the things we could do to support Chris such as keeping our routines predictable, planning for consistency in staffing where possible and ensuring there were always experiences of interest available.

This big situation has highlighted the importance of our role in connecting families to other agencies when help is needed.

### Some things to think about:

- ▶ Have you had a previous experience of family or domestic violence at your service? How have your experiences been similar or different to those in the story?

- › Are you aware of some local services that could be helpful to families who are under pressure?
- › How might a child react to a family violence situation? What support could you put in place to enable the child to continue participating in experiences at your service?
- › How can you be supportive of your team members if their personal experiences are impacting on their work?
- › How can policies and procedures support your responses and planning? Do you need to develop or review any policies or procedures?
- › As a mandatory reporter, what resources could you use to support your response to a situation like this?

**The following resources can help you be better prepared for big situations:**

- › [National Mental Health Education Initiative](#) (Be You)

Access professional learning modules for educators or to get the most benefit from Be You, sign up your service to create a learning community and access a Be You consultant from Early Childhood Australia.

- › [Community Trauma Toolkit](#) (Emerging Minds)

Access short courses and resources to help educators support children following a disaster or community trauma.

**Note:** See additional resources on the [Family Violence](#) and [Child Safety and Wellbeing](#) pages of the Big Situations online resource.

**Please remember:**

An Inclusion Professional can support educators to proactively prepare to have the skills and confidence to respond to big situations that may occur. This preparation could include support to use the [Big Situations](#) resource and may involve strategic inclusion planning. It should be noted that big situations often require support from experts that sit outside the role and expertise of the Inclusion Professional. Inclusion Professionals can help you connect with external organisations and agencies as needed.

**Disclaimer:**

This is a fictional story informed by real experiences to support you to reflect and plan for the future. If you would like support or have any feedback on this resource please [contact us](#).