

QUIERO VIVIR SIN VIOLENCIA



I want to live without violence

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Ensuring egalitarian spaces which are free from violence against women is both fundamental and necessary for children's development. The provision of a protective environment and proper care are essential rights for a healthy childhood.

Violence against women is a violation of their human rights and constitutes an attack on their lives and freedoms. Often, aggressive fathers use their children as a tool to continue inflicting harm on the mother - a situation which, in extreme cases, may end in murder. Since the time that we began to count children as direct victims of gender-based violence, 29 have been killed by their fathers as an act not only of revenge but of continued violence against the mother.

Many international agencies such as UNICEF, as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, advocate the need for institutions to ensure that children have the right to live in safe and violence-free environments, as well as guaranteed access to equal education and the enjoyment of the rights to which they are entitled.

Ensuring that children can enjoy a happy and violence-free childhood is also necessary in shaping a society that respects and guarantees rights and freedoms, and that fights against gender-based violence as a democratic necessity, not only for women but for the whole of the community.

The story of **'I want to live without violence'** is based on the accounts and experiences told by the children of women who are victims of gender-based violence.

It was designed to shine a light on the sometimes overlooked children who live in homes overshadowed by this type of violence. It seeks to convey the importance of their emotional experiences not only during the separation of their parents but also after the aggressor leaves the family unit. In many cases, the violence does not end here but instead changes form, with the children being used to continue inflicting harm on the mother.

The story explores the different emotional and situational stages that children go through in these cases.

Among the wide range of situations that arise, we wanted to draw special attention to the children who leave their whole world behind - their neighbourhood, home, friends,

school, family and more - in order to take refuge in a shelter. These children are some of the worst affected because they suffer the most abrupt changes.

'I want to live without violence' is intended to be used as a tool by professionals working in the field of gender-based violence and with children in general. Many girls and boys who have experienced these kinds of situations in their homes find it hard to share their experiences and express their emotions, often feeling blocked or afraid to tell their story in fear of possible reprisals.

This story can be used as a method to help enable them to express their feelings and emotions, so that they can begin to manage them in a more effective way and incorporate them into their own story.

For them, for a violence-free childhood.

Vanesa Bielsa Soro

Psychologist, child welfare service at the IAM

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Hi!

I'm Ana and I'm 9 years old.

This is my brother Martin and he's 5.

This is our story about when my parents separated and how our life changed.

I knew some parents separated because it happened to friends.

But I didn't think it would happen to me.

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I felt strange when Mum told us, a bit sad and a bit relieved. I remember Martin crying.

Dad didn't treat Mum very well. He said bad things that made me hurt when I heard them.

But I got used to it.

Sometimes, I wished I was the Hulk so they'd see me get big and stop arguing.

Página 3

When my brother and I got in the middle, Dad shouted at us and scared us.

Mum told us to go to our room and play.... but I couldn't stop thinking about her.

Martin and I would sing or cover our ears so that we couldn't hear them and we'd feel less scared.

We learned to live like this. We got used to it. We learned to think that it was normal. But now I know that it's **not** - it's called **VIOLENCE** and it's not good for anyone.

I tried to behave well, doing what I was told to stop dad from getting angry, but it was never enough.

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Everything changed the day Mum decided to **report** Dad for treating her badly.

That day we left home and Mum took us to a big house with other mothers and children who'd been through the same thing as us. At first I was sad and afraid.

We'd left our house, friends and school. Mum told us that we'd only be there for a while.

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When there's violence at home you have to leave, even if the changes make it hard.

Some children had stayed at home and it was their father who'd left. Some had gone with their mum to stay with their grandparents and others had gone with their mum to a rented house.

The psychologist told us that our home was wherever our loved ones were, and that together we'd be fine.

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We had our own room and things to play with and paints. We were treated very well. But I saw Mum crying a lot.

My brother wanted to go home and I felt sad because I didn't know how to help them.

Mum told us that we were going to start seeing Dad and we'd be spending the weekend with him.

I got a knot in my stomach and I felt like crying.

What if Dad was angry with us? What if he didn't love us any more? What if he found Mum and hurt her?

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At night in bed, these thoughts would come into my head and I didn't know how to stop them. I'd get into Mum's bed so she could tell me a story to make my fear go away.

Página 8

The first day we had a visit with Dad my brother cried because he didn't want to leave Mum. I made myself be brave for him, telling him that we'd be fine. But my head and my tummy hurt. Dad picked us up and I didn't understand why he couldn't pick us up from home. I was very happy. He gave us lots of kisses, bought us things and we had a good time... but I didn't like him asking me so many questions about Mum and I didn't know how to answer.

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Back with Mum, I didn't want to tell her about it so I just said it was okay.

Martin was naughty for a few days. I think he wanted to tell us something and didn't know how.

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It happens to me sometimes too. I feel like screaming and breaking things, or I get angry and I don't know why.

If I say something bad to my brother or Mum, I feel bad afterward, but I don't know how to stop when it happens.

Does that ever happen to you?

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Sometimes at my new school I can't concentrate. It's hard to make friends and I don't feel like talking to anyone.

I want to go home... but at the same time I don't and I want to cry.

But when Mum comes to pick us up I try hard because I don't want her to see that I'm sad and because I want her to be happy.

Página 12

One day Mum took me to talk to a very nice girl in a place called a court.

She asked me a lot of questions about Mum and Dad, but I didn't dare say anything bad about Dad... What if she told him? Would he be angry with Martin and me?

I thought it was best to say only nice things.

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Visits with Dad began to get better. Martin and I could play and watch TV until late. We didn't have to do much schoolwork, and he bought us whatever we wanted...

The bad bit was that Dad kept saying horrible things about Mum. But she wasn't even there!

I didn't understand it, but I felt bad.

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Sometimes Martin asked to see more of Dad. He said it was a drag going to bed early, and not being able to play if he hadn't done his homework.

Or not being able to eat sweets, and he'd scream that it was more fun with Dad.

I thought the same sometimes but then I'd remember everything that Mum did for us and it made me forget.

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One day Mum told us that she was taking us to talk to someone who'd help us feel better and who we could tell about what was bothering us.

I thought I didn't want to tell my secrets to a stranger.

When we went I realised that there were other children in the same situation and that they felt the same as us.

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They said things like sometimes they loved their dad and sometimes they hated him.

They were afraid to tell their dad about their mum and they felt bad when one of them said bad things about the other.

They felt sorry for their dad when he said he didn't have any money left for his own things.

Sometimes they didn't complain in case it made their dad angry with their mum.

I said that when I went with Dad I felt sad or afraid to leave Mum alone because I didn't know if she was going to be okay.

It was so good to be able to say what I felt!

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Every time we went to talk to the psychologist it felt a bit easier. Finally somebody understood what was happening to me.

She kept the secrets that I didn't want to tell Mum or my friends and helped me solve my problems.

She told us that after we stopped seeing her if something made us feel bad or upset us or if we thought something wasn't right, we should tell our mum, teacher, doctor, relative or someone like that.

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I learned that it's not me who has to take care of Mum or my brother when we're visiting Dad. I only have to worry about school, homework, friends and play. I can help out at home, but first of all I'm a child!

We found out that keeping secrets can give you stomach ache and headaches and can sometimes make you sick.

I remembered when Martin threw up even though he wasn't ill. Now I know it's because of bottling

up what you don't like inside your head for too long.

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We learned that we're not to blame for the fights at home, that when Dad got mad and acted like a monster it wasn't because we behaved badly or didn't do what we were told or wouldn't eat...

Then I thought that Mum wasn't to blame either and that Dad should go somewhere like we did where they could teach him to stay calm and not get so angry.

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And now... here we are, in a new house, with new friends, a new school and a new pet! I've learned that when time passes and we get help, the things that make us sad and angry get better and the changes that scare us so much get less frightening and can give us a chance at a happier life.



Ensuring that children can enjoy a happy and violence-free childhood is also necessary in shaping a society that respects and guarantees rights and freedoms, and that fights against gender-based violence as a democratic necessity, not only for women but for the whole of the community.
