



The Domestic Violence Center of Chester County
www.dvccc.com

**Domestic Violence affects 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men in their lifetime –
and 1 in 3 teens, regardless of gender identity, experience abuse from a dating partner.**

*It's never too early to start talking with your children about healthy relationships, friendships,
and communication – and that's why we created this resource for you!*

Healthy Relationship Children's Book List

Books can be a wonderful tool to present big-world issues to children in a way that is easy for them to understand – and reading with them is a positive bonding experience. In creating this book list, the Domestic Violence Center of Chester County focused on a number of themes that relate to the work we do: witnessing or living with domestic or family violence, healthy communication with others, bullying and unhealthy behaviors in friendships, and working through difficult experiences. Encourage discussion while reading with your children – some of the reading choices on this list even include questions to spark conversations – and be warm and receptive to any questions that come up for them.

Words Are Not For Hurting by Elizabeth Verdick (one of many of Verdick's books from the Free Spirit award-winning "best behavior" series – other titles from this series can be found here: <https://www.freespirit.com/series/best-behavior> and are all recommended – *disponible en Español!*)

This book helps younger children understand the power of their words – outlining both helpful and hurtful examples of words we use – and what the consequences of using hurtful words can be. The book also discusses the importance of taking responsibility for our hurtful words, and apologizing – as well as other options, like talking to an adult about the words you said or heard.

Dealing With Hurt Feelings by Lisa K Adams (one of several good choices from The Conflict Resolution Library – other titles from this series can be found here: <https://www.librarything.com/series/The+Conflict+Resolution+Library> and are all recommended!)

This book – good for early readers! – defines several terms throughout (like arguing, lonely, solve, apologize, etc.) the discussion around "hurt feelings." Not only does this book help children identify and relate with the idea of hurt feelings but also helps them reflect on how hurting others in response does not solve the conflict. The book then presents several healthier ways for children to communicate with friends and family – even if their feelings have been hurt, or if they are feeling angry.

My Secret Bully by Trudy Ludwig

This book opens with a foreword about emotional abuse (or "relational aggression") and tells the story of young Monica, who experiences emotional harm from one of her oldest friends. Emotionally abusive behaviors can occur in all sorts of relationships – even those with our friends. This book provides examples of manipulation, isolation, gaslighting, etc. – all in ways that children can understand and relate with. The best part of this selection is that it has a comprehensive resource guide for parents and educators – with a book list of its own! – and has a great discussion guide to use with your kids!

Say Something by Peggy Moss

This short and simple yet meaningful book focuses on another side of bullying: the passive bystander. The narrator discusses how they witness bullying at school, and they assure us that they do not take part. However, they also do nothing to *stop* the bullying. After the narrator experiences bullying, she realizes how much it hurts to see others watching, but not helping. She ends the book by becoming an active bystander in a bullying situation – standing up for the student being bullied and setting a positive example for her classmates.



The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Teasing by Stan & Jan Berenstain

Stan & Jan Berenstain have several books that tackle wonderful issues: talking to strangers, accepting differences, bullying – even junk food! This particular choice made the list because of its’ depiction of one of the subtler forms of emotional abuse (often labeled “harmless”): teasing. In an understandable way, children can learn about the social acceptance of teasing – and the ways we can invalidate the hurt feelings of our friends by accepting teasing as “the norm.” The bears learn not only how harmful teasing can be – but how to be active bystanders when they see teasing occurring to end the social acceptance of this form of abuse.

A Terrible Thing Happened by Margaret M. Holmes

In this book, Sherman – a raccoon – has witnessed something upsetting/traumatizing. He is struggling with the feelings that this upsetting incident created. He begins behaving in ways he knows he should not and he does not know what to do. He decides to speak with a trusted adult to work through what happened. Some great aspects of this book include the unidentified “incident” – left open to interpretation for children to relate their own experiences – as well as the resources guide in the back (a list of ways adults can support children who have been through trauma, and a reading list for parents).

Whimsy’s Heavy Things by Julie Kraulis

Whimsy is carrying heavy things around with her – and they are weighing her down! She wants to get rid of them, but she does not know how. The literal rocks that Whimsy carries in this book are meant to represent issues that she has or is facing. She tries to hide them under the rug, up in a tree, in the ocean – but her heavy things keep coming back. Whimsy learns that “heavy things” become more manageable when we no longer try to hide them away.

I Do and I Don’t by Fred Rogers

The iconic Fred Rogers (Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood) brings us this story of domestic violence – told through the experience of a young boy discussing it with his aunt. This story teaches the concept of “ambivalence” and even defines the word for our young readers. Sometimes there are things – and people – in life that have aspects we love, and aspects we do not like so much. In this, the conflicting feelings children have and struggle to cope with when they witness domestic abuse (feeling fear and anger yet love and respect for a parent all at once) are normalized and named: ambivalence.

A Safe Place to Live: A Story for Children Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence by Michelle A. Harrison

This is a best choice for younger children – as the language is relatable for them, in that it is told from the child’s perspective. The plot is a very straightforward story of a child witnessing physical abuse, and the consequential events (police arriving and assisting, moving in with family members, attending counseling, etc.) of this incident. A great tool in this book is the 5-page art therapy guide in the back that helps children reflect on the story they just read/heard with their own experiences. Each drawing prompt includes questions for parents/adults to explore these drawings with their children.

Don’t forget – you can access some of these titles at your local library (and even reserve them online to be sent to your library for pickup)! Check out the online reservation tools and learn how to become a member of the Chester County Library System here: www.ccls.org