



Non-violent parenting



A guide for refugees and newly arrived parents and caregivers

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Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung
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**Ethno-
Medizinisches
Zentrum** e.V.



Impressum

Gewaltfrei erziehen – wie geht das?

Ein Familienratgeber für Geflüchtete und neu zugewanderte Erziehungspersonen

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Introduction

We want children and adolescents to grow up happy. We want them to become strong, confident, and able to develop their full potential. Children are our hope for a positive future. This guide aims to protect children by promoting non-violent parenting within the family. Protection from violence is an important task for all of us, including parents and other caregivers.

Ideas about how children should be brought up differ from society to society – as do ideas about how parents, other people who children relate to, and the children themselves should behave. For family life to go well in a foreign country, it is extremely helpful for newly arrived families to know and understand the systems of bringing up and educating young people in that country, including the associated laws.

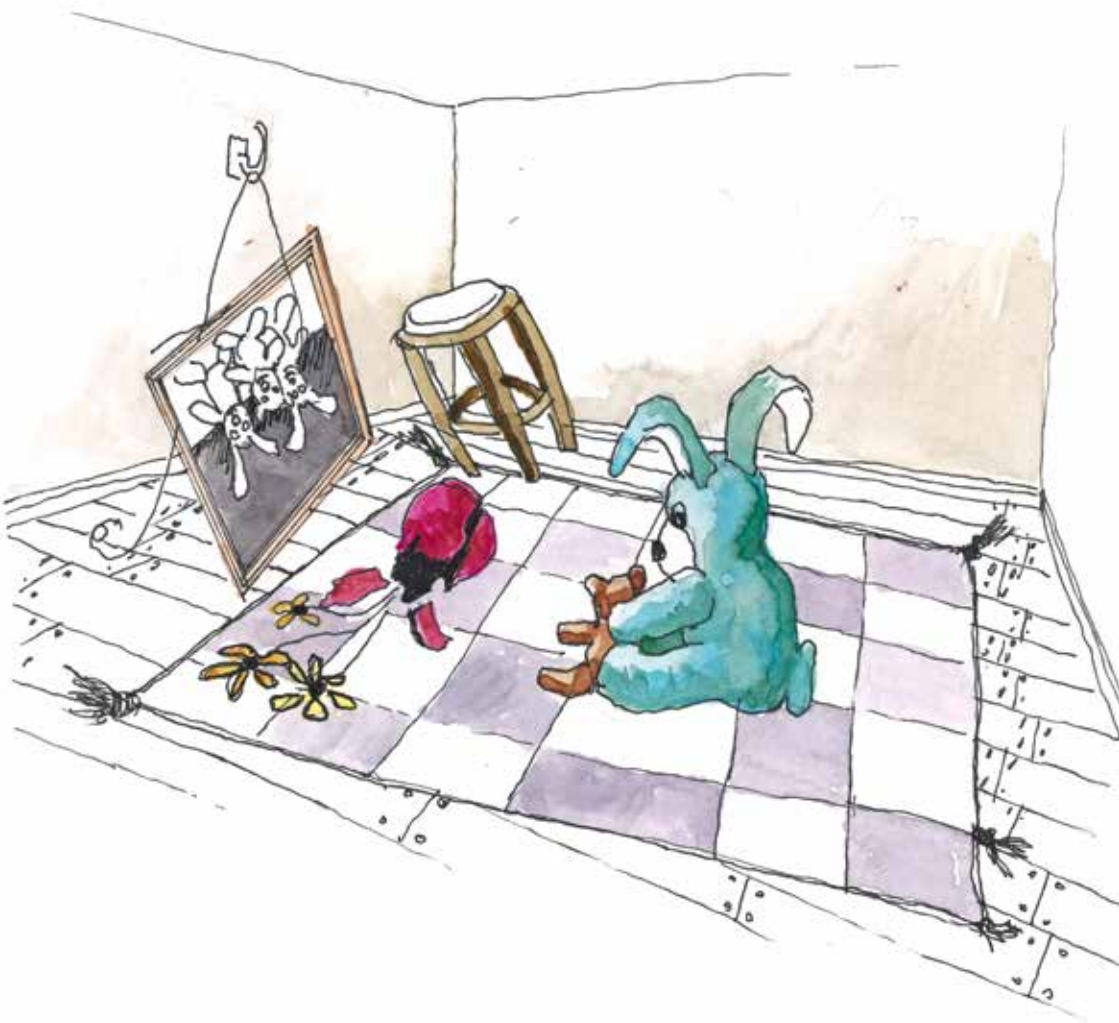
Chapter 1 of this guide describes the perspectives on parenting prevailing in Germany, as well as important rights and legal provisions.

Chapter 2 describes the various forms of violence children may be exposed to, and their potential consequences. Violence within the family in particular – as well as war, refugee and migration experiences – put children's mental health at risk.

Chapter 3 describes how important it is to avoid violence in parenting, and to empower children with an upbringing marked by love and attention instead. It is often the parents or caregivers themselves who use violence as a parenting tool. But, in Germany, this has been prohibited by law since the year 2000.

Chapter 4 provides information about who parents and caregivers can turn to if they have questions or concerns about parenting.

Non-violent parenting is a prerequisite for our children to grow up healthy, protected and loved.



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1. Parenting and the family in Germany

Many immigrant families come from countries where ideas about how to bring up children differ greatly from those in Germany. Especially when neither the parents nor the children know the rules that apply in Germany, this can lead to being overwhelmed, to confusion and to conflict.

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF PARENTING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN GERMANY?

When it comes to parenting, western societies like Germany focus on promoting the individual skills and unique personality of each child. Beginning at birth, children have a right to physical integrity and to freely develop their personality.

It is the task of parents and the education system (including kindergarten and school) to promote children's physical, mental and emotional development.

Children should be able to form their own opinions and contribute them to society. Children should learn to take responsibility for themselves and, at the same time, for the community as a whole.

In order to understand the tasks involved in bringing up children in Germany, it is important to understand the process of child development. It can be divided into two stages.

CHILDHOOD

Childhood is the life stage between birth and the beginning of puberty. In German law, every person who has not yet reached the age of 14 years is considered a child.

Events during childhood determine a person's pathways into the future. Childhood is the foundation for all that is to follow. It is therefore especially important for children to develop healthily and well. Skills and attitudes acquired in childhood retain their influence throughout the life course.

From age 6, all children in Germany – girls and boys, rich or poor, whether they are native Germans or not – have the right and the obligation to attend school. Parents are legally obliged to ensure that children attend school for at least nine years.

For refugee families, compulsory schooling applies from a particular deadline that is calculated from the date of arrival in Germany. This deadline varies from state to state within the Federal Republic of Germany.

With increasing age, children can take on household tasks. However, family duties must not impinge on the time required for attending school, doing homework or any additional support programmes, but also for leisure activities and recreation.

According to the Youth Labour Protection Act (Jugendarbeitsschutzgesetz), children are generally not allowed to work. Exceptions may apply from age 13 only. Parents are responsible for their children's livelihood, but they can receive state benefits if necessary.

Apart from learning and developing their personality, protection and security are also very important for children. Children often find it difficult to accurately assess risks and dangers, which is why they more easily become victims of violence than adults.

ADOLESCENCE

According to German law, a person who has reached the age of 14 but is not yet 18 years old, is considered an adolescent. Adolescence is the stage of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is characterised by becoming physically and emotionally mature.

At school, adolescents deepen the basic set of skills and knowledge they will need for everyday life and future employment. Decisions about a future occupation or about starting their vocational training are usually taken during this stage.

In many federal German states, adolescents have the right and the obligation to continue attending a secondary school or vocational education institution until they have reached the age of 18. When it

comes to choosing an occupation, parents may advise adolescents, but must not decide for them. Girls have the same rights to freely choose an occupation as boys do.

Contact with peers becomes more important during adolescence. Many young people fall in love for the first time, which can be considered preparation for a partnership and future family life.

Intimacy and sexual intercourse between people of the same age is permitted by law. The legal age of majority in Germany is 18 years. Sexual acts between adults and persons under the age of 14 are prohibited and punishable by law. This applies even if the child appears to have given consent. Such acts are defined as sexual abuse (*Sexueller Missbrauch*) of children by the *German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch**, Article 176 Section 1).

According to the German Civil Code, marriage is only permitted from the age of 18 (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*, Article 1303). The Criminal Code stipulates that no person, regardless of their age, must be forced to enter into a marriage through violence or the threat of violence. Such an act represents the criminal offence of aggravated coercion (*Schwere Nötigung*) and is punishable by law (Article 237).

It is normal and natural for young people to distance themselves from the family during adolescence. This can go hand in hand with conflict and differences

* Terms in italics are explained in the glossary.

of opinion between parents and adolescents. Such conflict is an indication that children are developing their own personality, and are increasingly taking responsibility for themselves. In order for adolescents to develop well, it is up to the parents to support them, and to allow them freedom and participation in decision making, in accordance with their age.

'When children are small, we must help them take root. But once they've grown up, we must give them wings.' (Indian saying)

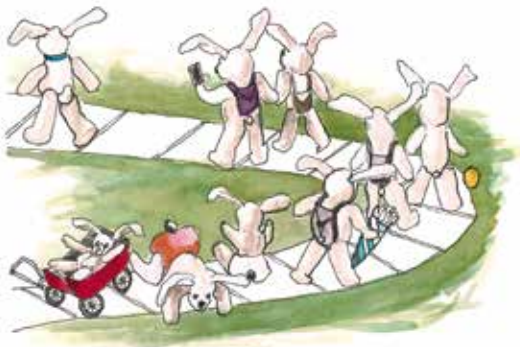
Many questions and concerns about parenting, about how to deal with conflict, and about setting limits arise for parents during this stage. These questions and concerns can be discussed free of charge, and anonymously if desired, with professionals at counselling centres or helplines for parents.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities are entitled to the best possible level of physical, mental and emotional development during childhood and adolescence, the same as those without a disability. As far as possible, they should be allowed to make their own decisions. They should be able to participate in society – for example with regard to school and further education – without limits. However, this often places particular demands on parenting and education, as well as on the relationship between parents and child.

A disability

- May result from physical limitations that affect body movement or sensory perception (vision or hearing). This can restrict mobility and communication.
- May permanently affect a child's emotional health, e.g. through mental illness. Children may be overly aggressive and impulsive, or sad and reclusive over an extended period. This can mean that children with disabilities have difficulties in their interactions with other people, or in kindergarten or at school.
- May result from limited intellectual capacity, which can mean that perception, learning, comprehension or communication may be restricted.



Parents of children with disabilities often have questions or feel insecure. These may concern their interactions with the child, parenting and also the support available within the family. Finding a suitable kindergarten, school or vocational training option are often difficult. If the child is being excluded by family members or the community, this can also be stressful for the parents.

Germany has a range of statutory assistance and support services intended to prevent children with disabilities being disadvantaged. These include, for example, special kindergartens and schools, as well as other forms of assistance that make it possible to attend school or vocational training. These services are based on the individual needs of each child and its family.

Families can access additional assistance with everyday life through the family support service (Familienunterstützender Dienst) and the family relief service (Familienentlastender Dienst). As well as supporting the child who has a disability, these services also assist parents and siblings. Parents themselves decide how much support they want to access. The responsibility for the care and upbringing of the child remains with the parents.

One important initial port of call for the parents of a child with a disability are paediatricians. They can write a referral to one of the socio-paediatric centres (Sozialpädiatrische Stellen, SPZ), which offer comprehensive services (interdisciplinary examinations and diagnostics, as well as advice and information for parents on all assistance and support options). Child-care workers in kindergartens, teachers in schools, and the social services at group accommodation facilities for asylum seekers are also able to answer questions.

Where language difficulties exist, an interpreter should be involved. Information brochures regarding support services for children with disabilities are available in some additional languages. In some cities, immigrant families that include relatives with disabilities have founded support groups to provide each other with mutual assistance.

According to the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz), accessing any of the support services described here does not negatively affect a current claim for asylum. Children with disabilities are considered to be in need of special protection. Even if their residency status is based on a temporary protection permit (Aufenthalts-erlaubnis zum vorübergehenden Schutz, Article 24 Section 1), they are fully entitled to all necessary medical and other assistance as stipulated in the Asylum Seeker Benefits Act (Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz Article 6 Section 2).

WHAT ARE THE LEGAL RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS IN GERMANY?

In Germany, parenting and the relationship between parents and children are governed by several laws:

THE BASIC LAW

From birth, children living in Germany have the same basic rights as adults. These rights are enshrined in the *Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (Grundgesetz, GG)*.

Important fundamental rights contained in the Basic Law include:

- 'Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.' (Article 1 Section 1)
- 'Every person shall have the right to free development of his personality insofar as he does not violate the rights of others or offend against the constitutional order or the moral law.' (Article 2 Section 1)
- 'Every person shall have the right to life and physical integrity. Freedom of the person shall be inviolable. These rights may be interfered with only pursuant to a law.' (Article 2 Section 2)

From birth, children are complete human beings with their own rights and responsibilities. Parents have a duty of care towards their children and help them to become independent. Parents have the right and the obligation to care for and bring up their children until they are 18 years old, i.e. until they have reached the age of legal majority (Article 6 Section 2 of the Basic Law). Care and upbringing must serve the child's positive development.

THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

International rights of children up to their 18th birthday are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights have applied in Germany since 1992, and comprise three areas:

- Rights to necessities and services: these include, for example, the right to health care, education and adequate living conditions.
- Rights to culture, information and participation: these include, for example, the right to freedom of expression, the right to privacy and the right to leisure time.
- Rights to protection: these include, for example, the right to be protected from physical or emotional violence, the right to be protected from sexual abuse and from economic or sexual exploitation.

FAMILY LAW PROVISIONS IN THE GERMAN CIVIL CODE

National laws regarding the rights and obligations of parents towards their children are contained in the articles pertaining to family law that form part of the *German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch, BGB)*. According to these provisions, the livelihood of a person is no longer solely dependent on the family, but is safeguarded by state benefits. Parents are regarded as the most significant persons that children relate to. At law, they carry sole responsibility for the welfare of the child.

Important laws contained in the German Civil Code include:

- ‘The parents have the duty and the right to care for the minor child’ (Article 1626 Section 1). In particular, this includes ‘the duty and the right to care for, bring up and supervise the child and to specify its abode’ (Article 1631 Section 1).
- Parental custody must be exercised by mutual agreement and in the best interests of the child (Article 1627). Mothers and fathers carry the same responsibility, and have the same right to contribute to decisions.
- ‘The growing ability and the growing need of the child for independent responsible action’ must be taken into account by the parents. Questions of parental custody are to be discussed with the child in an age-appropriate fashion, and decided jointly with the child as much as possible (Article 1626 Section 2).



Important: ‘Children have a right to a non-violent upbringing. Physical punishments, psychological injuries and other degrading measures are not permitted’ (Article 1631 Section 2). Parents are, however, permitted to act physically upon a child, for example to restrain it in order to avert danger. However, any form of violence, especially corporal punishment as a parenting tool, is prohibited and can be reported as a crime.

THE GERMAN CRIMINAL CODE

According to The German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch, StGB), all acts or omissions by parents or other caregivers that torture or cruelly mistreat a child are considered ‘ill-treatment of a person in one’s charge’ and represent a punishable offence (Article 225). This also includes maliciously neglecting the care of a child, and accepting or causing damage to health.

2. Violence against children

Worldwide, all children have the right to be protected from violence. Nevertheless, violence against children is still widespread. It is often perpetrated by the same persons to whom the children are entrusted, and whom they spend time with every day: by parents and other relatives. Children with disabilities are especially at risk because they are even less able to defend themselves.

WHICH FORMS OF VIOLENCE MAKE SUCCESSFUL PARENTING DIFFICULT?

Forms of violence can vary a lot.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Physical violence includes all assaults on the physical integrity of the child, independent of their severity, and whether or not they result in visible or permanent injuries.

Examples:

- Hitting, pinching, kicking or choking
- Blows or injuries inflicted with objects, for example brooms, belts or shards of glass
- Shaking small children
- Scalding with hot water or burning with hot objects
- Poisoning

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

Psychological violence means that it is not the body that is assaulted or injured directly, but the mind, or the child's personal integrity or sense of self-worth. This can occur through words, gestures or actions. In cases of psychological violence, the child suffers through experiencing negative feelings. Even though the effects of psychological violence are not visible, children may suffer very severe damage to their further development.

Psychological violence is the most common form of violence against children. It is often used in parenting, and mostly happens when adults feel overwhelmed.

Examples:

- Shouting
- Ignoring the child's questions, giving disparaging looks, demonstratively looking away
- Locking the child up, e.g. in a room
- Threats like 'If you're not quiet right now, you've really got it coming.', 'If you do that again, I'll get rid of you.' or 'I will kill you.'
- Derogatory remarks or humiliations like 'I don't love you anymore, get out of my sight.', 'You are totally useless!' or 'What did I do wrong to be lumped with a child like you?'
- Apportioning blame like 'It's all your fault that I'm having such a bad time.', 'If you don't behave properly, I'll end up getting sick because of you.' or 'I'd have a much better life if it wasn't for you.'

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence includes all acts that violate a person's right to sexual self-determination, meaning that these acts are occurring against the person's free will. Sexual acts by parents or other adults on, with or in front of a child are generally prohibited and punishable as a crime. This applies even if the child appears to be consenting or does not resist. Sexual violence often has very severe effects, including permanent physical and mental illness.

Examples of sexual violence:

- Touching the genital area, breasts or buttocks for the purpose of the perpetrator's sexual arousal
- Taking photographic or video images of the naked body of a child
- Forcing the child to look at or touch the genitals of an adult
- Penetrating the child's body with the penis, fingers, tongue or objects (rape)
- Forcing the child to engage in sexual acts with other people.

NEGLECT

Neglect is a passive form of hurting a child. For example, when parents don't sufficiently or adequately care for the child. As a result, the basic needs of the child remain repeatedly or continuously unmet over a longer period, which leads to the child being harmed. In the worst case, neglect leads to the death of the child, for example because it starves or dies of dehydration.

Examples:

- Lack of sufficient and nutritious food, insufficient personal hygiene, danger through lack of supervision.
- Lack of love and attention. Failure to set adequate limits. For example, when a child is allowed to watch TV or play on a computer for several hours every day. Risks are not pointed out, or drug abuse or criminal offences by the child are tolerated.
- Scheduled preventive medical checks and necessary treatment are withheld from the child.
- Lack of support with schooling and homework. Truancy is tolerated or supported.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

Immediate reactions of children to violence include:

- Shock, frozenness, unresponsiveness
- Fear, panic, screaming
- Prolonged crying
- Clinging
- Fighting off, hitting out, hiding
- Confusion.

Medium-term and long-term effects include:

- Retreat, isolation
- Loss of basic trust and optimism
- Listlessness, lack of interest in play
- Depressive mood
- Strong fear
- Clinging to the mother or caregiver
- Rejecting affection
- Disruptions in development, growth disorders
- Regressive behaviours, e.g. bedwetting or reverting to baby talk
- Sleep disorders, school failure, lack of concentration
- Low self-esteem, low self-confidence
- Violent behaviours, increased aggression
- Health-damaging behaviours, e.g. eating disorders, drug abuse, smoking
- Self-harm, risk of suicide.

Possible long-term effects and permanent damage:

- Severe physical complaints, e.g. headache, stomach ache or backache
- Lack of positive attitude towards life
- Disdain for one's own gender, often as a result of experiencing sexual violence
- Self-contempt
- Rejecting social relationships, fear of intimate relationships
- Repeating previously experienced negative relationship patterns
- Justifying or denying what happened
- Thinking about suicide, actual suicide risk

Gender-specific effects

Inwardly directed effects are more often observed among girls, including:

- Insecurity
- Withdrawal
- Health-damaging behaviours, including self-harm
- Fear
- Avoiding social contact.

Outwardly directed effects are more commonly observed among boys, including:

- Accepting violence
- Domineering behaviour
- Invalidation and disdain towards girls and women
- Sexual assault through words or actions
- Increased aggression
- Violent and threatening behaviour.

In contrast to adults, children are still in their developmental phase. If a child experiences violence, this can have lasting effects on body, mind and personality for the rest of the person's life.

WHY DOES FAMILY VIOLENCE HAVE PARTICULAR EFFECTS?

For a child, family is the place where it is supposed to feel safe. If a child experiences violence inside the family, this feeling of security is lost. Instead, the child learns that rejection and violence are normal in families and among loved ones. Parents and caregivers are children's models for how the world responds to them. The child takes rejection and violence to mean that it is not wanted in this world. This can result in these children no longer expecting love and affection from other people. Correspondingly, they in turn respond to others with rejection or suspicion.

Family violence causes children great emotional distress. They cannot simply distance themselves from their most important caregivers, on whom they depend. Sometimes, caregivers behave lovingly and caringly towards the child immediately after having been violent. This leads to confusion and emotional chaos for the child. Children look to themselves to find fault, which can go so far that they begin to hate themselves.

Many children tacitly endure violence because they do not want the family to be broken up. Or their parents may pressure them not to tell anyone.

CHILDREN AS VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Children experience a particular form of psychological abuse when parents are violent to each other. Children are affected by beatings, insults or rapes, even if they are not the ones being targeted and only witness them indirectly – for example when they are in their room and overhear the use of violence through voices or noises. Or if, due to the tense atmosphere in the family, they notice that something has happened between the parents.

Violence creates an atmosphere of fear in children. It may be fear of becoming a victim of violence themselves, or the fear of losing their parents because of the violence. Children may feel guilty or powerless because they can't prevent the violence. Because of the violence in their parents' relationship, they may not

receive the attention, affection and care that they long for. Instead they experience emotional chaos because their parents love and hate each other at the same time. They may be ashamed or confused because they can't understand why violence is occurring between their parents.

Children who witness partnership violence are at increased risk of experiencing violence themselves as adults, either as perpetrator or as victim.

Family violence during childhood affects the adult life of the affected children. They may repeat these learned behaviour patterns in their own partnerships and families.

We must protect children and provide them with a positive and healthy upbringing to avoid passing on the violence!

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF WAR, REFUGEE EXPERIENCES AND TRAUMA ON PARENTING?

All forms of violence mentioned so far can also occur outside of the family, through war or the experience of being a refugee. These experiences of violence have similar effects on the affected children, and deeply influence their behaviour. Here too, the risk increases that those affected will later perpetrate violence themselves, or become its victims. Parenting and educational settings must take such past experiences and trauma into account.



3. Violence in parenting

Using violence as a parenting tool always causes harm. Not least for this reason it is prohibited by law in Germany. Experiences of violence increase the risk of physical and mental illness, difficulties at school, using violence yourself and becoming a victim of violence.

Despite its serious consequences, parents and caregivers sometimes defend violence as a parenting tool.

CAN VIOLENCE BE A PARENTING TOOL?

Children are not born with a bad character that adults have to shape through violence.

Science has proven that children are strongly influenced by the people around them. Children learn most things through observation and imitation. When children are shown respect and affection in their upbringing, they learn to show others respect and affection, too. If children are brought up with coercion and violence, they also learn to live with coercion and violence, and may use them on others.

Nevertheless, even when treated with loving care, some children can be challenging in their behaviour, for example babies who cry a lot or children who hit out a lot. There is often a reason for this, even if it is not obvious at first. The cause may, for example, be a mental disability. In

these cases, it is important for parents to seek support.

The right to receive care and education does not mean that children must be obedient and serve their parents.

Children are independent, worthy human beings, not the property of their parents. Obedience is not always a sign of respect – it can also be based on fear. If the relationship between parents and children is marked by the parents' use of power and authority, it often leaves children unable to develop a sense of self-worth. This sense of being valued as a human being, however, is important for their healthy development.

If they experience violence during childhood, children may end up rejecting their parents or even begin to hate them. Frustrations and aggression may develop, which they may then act out on those who are weaker. When children are older and physically strong enough, there is an increased risk they may become violent towards their parents or turn away from them.

Some parents have experienced violence in their own childhoods, and may have opinions like 'It didn't do me any harm, either'. This does not give anyone the right to use violence with their own children.

Violence against children always leaves its mark, no matter what form it takes, or how frequent or severe it is. Violence is not necessary to resolve conflict with children, or to set them limits.

If parents settle conflict or disputes by using violence, children will often perpetuate this behaviour. Guide books and courses are available to learn how to set limits for children, and how to empower them without resorting to violence.

WHAT TO DO WHEN I FEEL OVERWHELMED AND HELPLESS?

Stressful situations can contribute to the use of violence against children and adolescents. If parents are, for example, stressed by unemployment, insecure immigration status, cramped housing, unprocessed trauma from the country of origin or the journey as refugees, or by illness or conflict in their partnership, they often feel overwhelmed. Feeling helpless, they can sense that they are about to lose control. It often happens without wanting to, and without being aware of the reasons. The feeling of being overwhelmed or helpless can also arise when parents are, for example, looking after a child with a disability and extensive care needs, and are reaching their limits and running out of options.

It can generally be helpful to think about how to respond without violence before the next conflict arises. One way that has

proven successful in stressful situations is to leave the room and take ten to twenty deep breaths. When stress levels and family tensions are running high, it is advisable to seek help from a counselling centre, from statutory assistance and advisory services, or from friends and family.

HOW CAN I USE PARENTING TO EMPOWER MY CHILD?

To strengthen children's healthy development, it is important for parents to maintain a relationship of love and attention with them. This includes praising and affirming the child, listening attentively, comforting the child, taking it into your arms, and not to use put-downs during disputes and conflict.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PARENTING AFTER MIGRATION OR A REFUGEE EXPERIENCE?

Migrating to another country can be particularly stressful for a family, which may also affect parenting. Often, family members end up in different places because some have stayed behind in the country of origin, or because they got separated on the journey. Reuniting the family after a time of separation can be marked by conflict. Family members have to renegotiate parenting tasks and roles, and relearn to carry them out. This includes, for example, the age-appropriate supervision of children.

People's personal views about family, children and parenting are influenced by societal values, culture and religion, as well as by their own childhood experiences. People carry these views with them when they emigrate to another country, but they don't always fit in with the ideas, rules and laws of the new society. Tensions arise between the values and rules that people have brought with them – and which they often continue to live by inside the family – and those outside the family. Children are then faced with having to adjust to new ideas and demands, for example at kindergarten, at school or in their vocational training. Young people, however, find it easier to adapt to a new environment. In most cases, they not only learn the new language faster than their parents do, but also the values and rules of the new society.

If the parents then uncompromisingly stick to the values and rules they brought with them, and without knowing and learning about the demands of the new country, it can lead to conflict and become a permanent source of stress in the family. This especially affects children who find themselves having to choose between these partly contradictory demands inside and outside the family. Children and adolescents who live in different cultural worlds therefore seek compromise in order to get along both within and outside the family.

For this reason, parents should find out as much as possible about the settings their children live in outside the family, and use their parenting to support them in their search for compromise. Usually, not everything learned in and brought along from the homeland is either good or bad. And the same is true for the new country. Talking to caregivers, teachers and other contact persons in kindergartens, schools and vocational training can help with the search for a reasonable compromise.

This kind of conversation also shows appreciation for the personnel in kindergartens, schools and training institutions, and motivates everyone to collaborate in bringing up children and adolescents. Where people talk with each other a lot, negotiate and work on common goals, aggression, lack of respect and failure have no chance to thrive. On the contrary – such situations produce healthy, happy, strong and successful children and young people who are the pride and joy of their parents. Parents will be stronger because they understand their children, and children will be stronger because they feel understood and supported.

4. Child protection in Germany

In everyday life, living together as a family is not always without its problems. If conflict and violence occur frequently, or if the family is under severe stress because of its circumstances, it can be helpful to seek assistance from counselling and support services. A large and diverse range of such services exists in Germany. Using these services does not adversely affect asylum claims or residency status.

WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

COUNSELLING SERVICES

Counselling means talking to a professional about your personal or family situation. Together you will then look for options to improve the situation. This can be done face to face, on the telephone, by email or online chat.

There are more than 1000 family and parenting counselling services in Germany. Some have a specific focus on counselling families with refugee or migration experiences. Counselling is free of charge. Specialised counselling services also exist for conflict in relationships and other forms of family stress.

Counselling staff members are subject to professional confidentiality. Nothing that is said in a counselling conversation – or written in emails or online chat – is allowed to be passed on to others. An exception to professional confidentiality exists when, in the assessment of the counsellor, the life of the person seeking assistance is in acute danger, or if the welfare of a child is severely at risk. If you are unsure, please ask at the beginning of the counselling session about the circumstances in which the counsellor is obliged to pass information from the conversation on to others. You also have the option of anonymous counselling, in which case you don't need to give your name.

PAEDIATRICIANS

If you notice something unusual, or are unsure about something regarding the development or behaviour of a child, you can ask a medical specialist for child and adolescent health (paediatrician) for advice.

Examples include a baby who is screaming all the time, a child who doesn't speak, or is very aggressive and angry, or a child who has a disability.

COURSES ON NON-VIOLENT PARENTING

In many places, courses are available where parents can learn how children can be brought up without the use of violence. These courses offer information about the development and the needs of children. They also introduce adequate responses to difficult situations and show pathways to non-violent conflict resolution. At the same time, they provide opportunities for exchanging experiences with other parents. Such courses are sometimes also offered especially for parents with refugee or migration experiences.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

When parents are under a high level of emotional stress, psychotherapeutic treatment may be required. Reasons for the distress may include bad experiences in their own childhood, experiences of violence and war, strong grief and despair, or the abuse of alcohol, medications or illegal drugs. Psychotherapeutic treatment is prescribed by a medical practitioner and covered by statutory health insurance. During psychotherapy, people learn to deal with stressful experiences, feelings and thoughts in a way that makes functioning in everyday life – including parenting – possible again.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

In acute cases of violence, anyone – including children – can call the police free of charge by dialling 110. The police are obliged to attend immediately in order to protect the affected person.

In cases of domestic violence, the police can issue an order (*Wegweisung*), banning the violent person from entering the shared home for up to 14 days. The police can also temporarily detain the violent person in order to enforce this ban on entering the home (*Wohnungsverweisung*).

If, according to the German Criminal Code (*Strafgesetzbuch*), a crime has been committed, the police must report the violent person.

WHAT KINDS OF SUPPORT ARE AVAILABLE FROM CHILD AND ADOLESCENT SERVICES?

Statutory assistance services for children and adolescents (*Kinder- und Jugendhilfe*) exist to support parents in caring for and bringing up their children in stressful situations, and to ensure the children's healthy development. Such parenting assistance measures (*Hilfen zur Erziehung*) are described in the *German Social Code on Assistance for Children and Adolescents* (*Sozialgesetzbuch, SGB VIII*). If parents feel that they need assistance in dealing with their child, they can lodge an application for parenting assistance (*Hilfen zur Erziehung*) with the office for youth affairs (*Jugendamt*).

The assistance provided differs in form and scope in each case, and is intended to match the needs of the family and the child concerned. It may, for example, take the form of participation in a group activity for children, led by a social worker. But it can also mean assistance for the entire family through a social work professional who visits the family at home several times per week. The professional can assist with parenting, problems of everyday life, resolving conflict, and dealing with public authorities and institutions.

To ascertain if and what kinds of assistance may be suitable, a counselling session is required. The counsellor will lead a detailed discussion about the situation of the child and the family, about possible solutions and the range of available services. You can arrange an appointment with the office for youth affairs (Jugendamt) responsible for your area, which is also where the counselling session will take place. The government departments responsible for these matters are often called 'Allgemeiner Sozialer Dienst' (general social services) or 'Kommunaler Sozialer Dienst' (municipal social services). The staff at the office for youth affairs (Jugendamt) are not entitled to remove children from the family on the basis of a counselling session alone – unless the welfare of a child is severely at risk.

WHEN CAN THE OFFICE FOR YOUTH AFFAIRS BECOME INVOLVED IN PARENTING?

According to the Basic Law (Grundgesetz Article 6 Section 1) and the German Civil Code (Article 1666), the state may, through staff at the office for youth affairs (Jugendamt) or the family court (Familiengericht), issue binding instructions to the parents if the welfare of the child is at immediate risk and the parents are unable or unwilling to avert the danger.

According to the German Civil Code (Article 1666), such instructions may include:

- An order to access state support, such as child and youth assistance services (Kinder- und Jugendhilfe) or health care services (e.g. preventive health checks).
- Ordering parents to ensure that the child attends school on every school day (except in case of illness), thus complying with compulsory school attendance (Schulpflicht).

Only in very rare cases is a child removed from the family and 'taken into care and protection' (Inobhutnahme). Contact with its parents is very important for the development of a child, which is why the professional staff at the office for youth affairs, by providing other forms of support and assistance to parents, aim to avoid taking a child into care and protection.

The involvement of the office for youth affairs (Jugendamt) has nothing to do with criminal law. The office for youth affairs is not generally obliged to report a criminal offence. The welfare of the child is its first priority.

Glossary

**Basic Law
(Grundgesetz, GG)**

This is the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, comprising the substantive determinations on its system of government and societal values. It ranks above all other German legislation. The complete Basic Law is available online at www.bundestag.de/grundgesetz (in German). Translations of the Basic Law into Arabic, Mandarin, English, Farsi, French, Italian, Polish, Russian, Serbian, Spanish and Turkish are available e.g. at www.spd.de/standpunkte/alte-unterseiten/fuer-unser-land-menschlich-und-weltoffen/grundgesetz-in-elf-sprachen

**Criminal Code
(Strafgesetzbuch, StGB)**

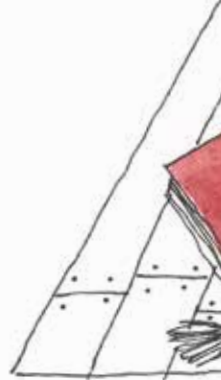
Comprises the criminal offences applicable in Germany and their legal consequences. The entire Criminal Code is available online at www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stgb/index.html (in German), and at www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_stgb/index.html (in English).

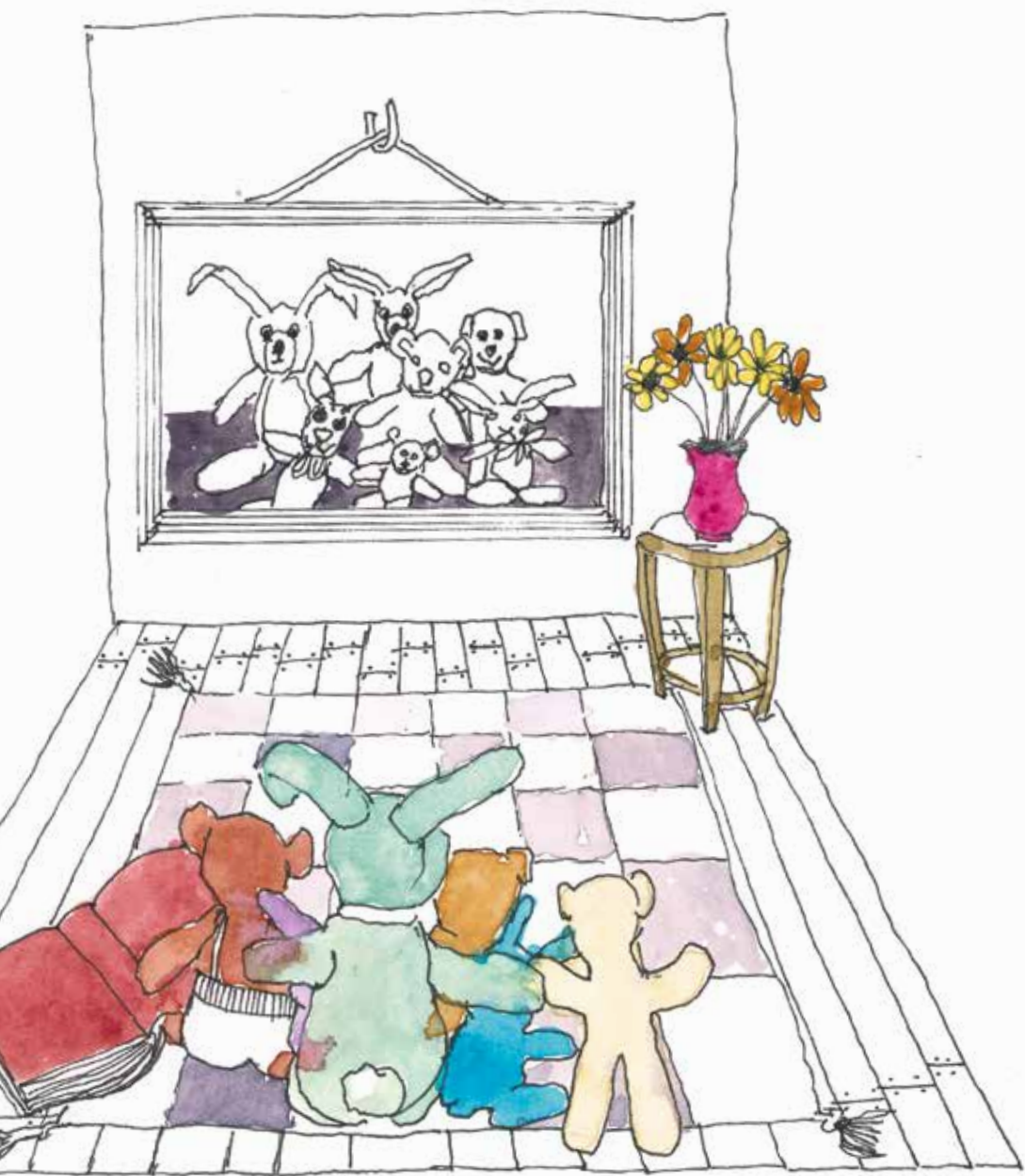
**German Civil Code
(Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch,
BGB)**

Codifies general civil law, i.e. the legal relationships between private individuals in Germany. It also includes family law, including the legal provisions regarding marriage, divorce and parental custody. The complete Civil Code is available online at www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bgb (in German), and at www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_bgb/index.html (in English).

**Social Law Code
(Sozialgesetzbuch, SGB)**

Comprises the social laws applicable in Germany, and regulates state benefits and support provided in order to preserve human dignity when a person is not able to take care of themselves, e.g. in the areas of child and youth assistance, promoting employment, or social security benefits.





Services directory

COUNSELLING CENTRES

Bundeskonferenz für Erziehungsberatung e.V. (Family Counselling Federation Inc.)

www.bke.de

Offers a search option for local counselling centres that focus on parenting and family issues. Includes a search option for immigrant families to find services provided in their native language.

Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Jugend- und Eheberatung e.V. (German Working Alliance for Youth and Marriage Counselling Inc.)

www.dajeb.de/beratungsfuehrer-online/beratung-in-ihrer-naehe/

Offers a search option for local counselling centres, as well as for telephone and online counselling services. Includes, for example, counselling in case of separation and divorce, and for victims of any kind of violence.

Elterntelefon (parent helpline)

www.nummergegenkummer.de/elterntelefon.html

Ph.: 0800 1110550

Mon – Fri 9 am to 5 pm,

Tue, Thu until 7 pm

Anonymous telephone counselling for parents in German, covering all kinds of questions and concerns about parenting and family matters. Referral to local counselling centres available.

Kinder und- Jugendtelefon (child and adolescent helpline)

www.nummergegenkummer.de/kinder-und-jugendtelefon.html

Ph.: 116111

Mon – Sat, 2 pm – 8 pm

Telephone counselling for children and adolescents in German, covering all kinds of personal matters and concerns. Referral to local counselling centres available.

Elternsein Info (parenting information)

www.elternsein.info

Assistance and counselling for pregnant women and parents of children up to 3 years old

Online counselling for parents through the Bundeskonferenz für Erziehungsberatung (Family Counselling Federation)

<https://eltern.bke-beratung.de/views/home/index.html>

Anonymous online counselling on parenting, family life, kindergarten, school and puberty (in German)

Online counselling service by Caritas for parents and families

www.caritas.de/hilfeundberatung/onlineberatung/eltern-familie/start

Anonymous and free online counselling on parenting, family life, kindergarten, school and puberty (in German)

Parenting information letters

www.ane.de/download

The open letters published by the Arbeitskreis für neue Erziehung (working group for reformed parenting) offer tips on parenting according to the age of the child. Free orders and downloads in Turkish and other languages available.

Parent information videos about the German education system

www.ane.de/elternfilme

These short videos by the Arbeitskreis für Neue Erziehung provide parents of children up to the age of around 10 years with information about the German education system. Languages: Arabic, English, French, German, Spanish and Turkish.

Parent information videos on parenting situations

vimeo.com/channels/fmdvids/222248624

These short videos by the International Rescue Committee provide information on typically difficult parenting situations and offer tips on how to respond. Language: English

PARENTING CLASSES

Information and videos about parenting classes in Germany are available at <https://elternkurse.com>

Starke Eltern – Starke Kinder (Strong Parents – Strong Children) course

A service of the Deutscher Kinderschutzbund e.V. (German Child Protection Alliance Inc.), available at www.sesk.de/CONTENT/vorort.aspx

Kess Erziehen ('Peppy Parenting') course for immigrant parents

A service provided by the Kess-erziehen-Institut für Personale Pädagogik (Peppy Parenting Institute for Personal Education, AKF), available at www.kess-erziehen.de/elternkurse-kess/migration

ASSISTANCE FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The 'Mein Kind ist behindert – diese Hilfen gibt es' (my child has a disability – these services are available) brochure

This brochure, published by the Bundesverband für körper- und mehrfachbehinderte Menschen e.V. (Federal Association of People with Physical and Multiple Disabilities Inc.), provides information about the services that people with disabilities are entitled to in Germany. It is available for download in Arabic, German, Russian, Turkish and Vietnamese at <https://bvkm.de/ratgeber/mein-kind-ist-behindert-diese-hilfen-gibt-es-in-mehreren-sprachen>

'Das deutsche Betreuungsrecht' (German Guardianship Law) brochure

The Institut für transkulturelle Betreuung e.V. (Institute for Transcultural Guardianship Inc.) provides this comprehensive information brochure in Arabic, English, French, Greek, Italian, Polish, Russian, Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian, Spanish and Turkish.

Mail order and download available at <https://itb-ev.de/broschueren>

Protecting children through non-violent parenting

A guide for refugee families

This guide contains information on the topic of non-violent parenting and the rights of children in Germany. The brochure is intended to reach parents and other caregivers who are refugees or have newly migrated to Germany.

We provide you with the following information on this topic:

- Forms of violence against children and their effects
- The stages of child development until adolescence
- Pathways to parenting that promotes healthy development
- Contact information and services for parents and other caregivers.

This guide was developed as part of the Germany-wide 'MiMi Violence Prevention with Migrants for Migrants' project. It is available in the following language versions: Arabic, Bulgarian, Dari, English, Farsi, French, German, Kurdish, Pashto, Polish, Russian, Serbian/Bosnian/Croatian, Spanish and Turkish. Order online at www.mimi-gegen-gewalt.de or www.mimi-bestellportal.de.

With support from:



Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung
für Migration, Flüchtlinge und
Integration

**Ethno-
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Sächsische
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Gesundheitsförderung

LANDKREIS



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