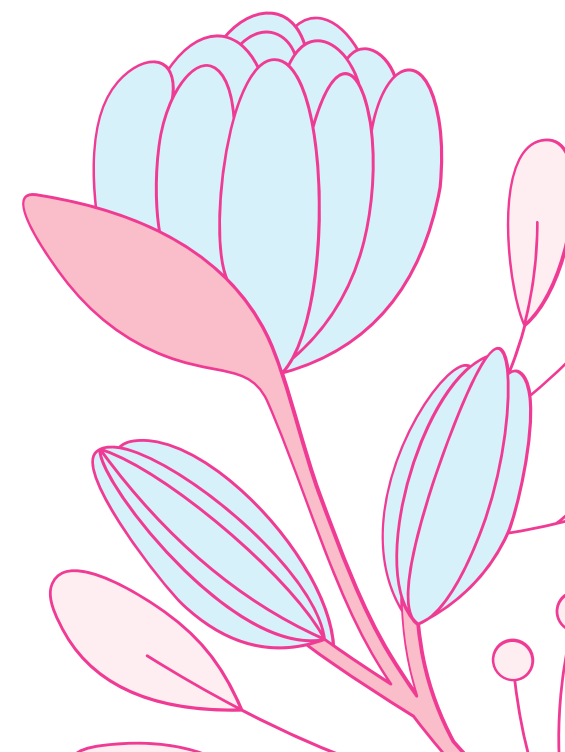
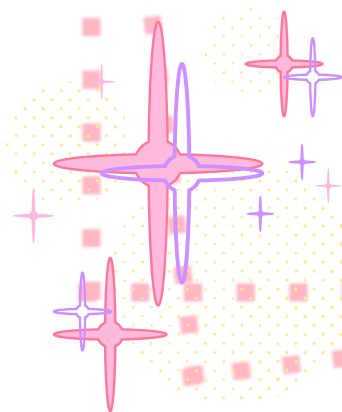




Safe Hearts, Strong Homes

By Deborah Sugirthakumar



Introduction



Welcome to Safe Hearts, Strong Homes. I'm Deborah Sugirthakumar. A wellbeing educator, broadcaster, writer, storyteller, and most importantly, a mum. I've walked through challenging experiences to create a better life for my child, and today, I want to share lessons about building emotionally safe homes.

This session explores:

- What emotionally safe homes really mean
- The hidden effects of domestic violence on children
- How emotional regulation in parents protects children
- Breaking intergenerational trauma
- Raising boys with compassion and girls with confidence

Whether you're a parent, carer, teacher, social worker, or friend, these insights are for you.

Part 1: What is an Emotionally Safe Home?



- Key aspects include:
- Children feel seen, heard, and accepted
- Emotions are acknowledged, not dismissed
- Boundaries are clear but kind
- Mistakes are learning opportunities
- Family members are free from harm, fear, or control

Insight: You don't need to be perfect. You need to be present and emotionally aware.

An emotionally safe home is not about material things. It's about how it feels to live there.

Harvard's Center on the Developing Child highlights:

"Emotionally responsive caregiving shapes a child's brain architecture, influencing emotional regulation, learning, and health."



Part 2: The Hidden Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

Children see, hear, and feel everything. Even if they don't witness violence directly:

- They sense tension in voices
- They notice fear in expressions
- They feel stress in the home environment

Statistics (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022):

- 1 in 4 children in Australia are exposed to family violence
- They are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem
- They may act out, struggle socially or academically, and risk repeating cycles

the silver lining:

Even one safe, emotionally regulated adult can significantly reduce trauma. This could be a parent, teacher, coach, or neighbour.

Part 3: Emotional Regulation – It Starts With Us



Before helping children manage emotions, we must regulate our own.
The 4 R's of Emotional Regulation:

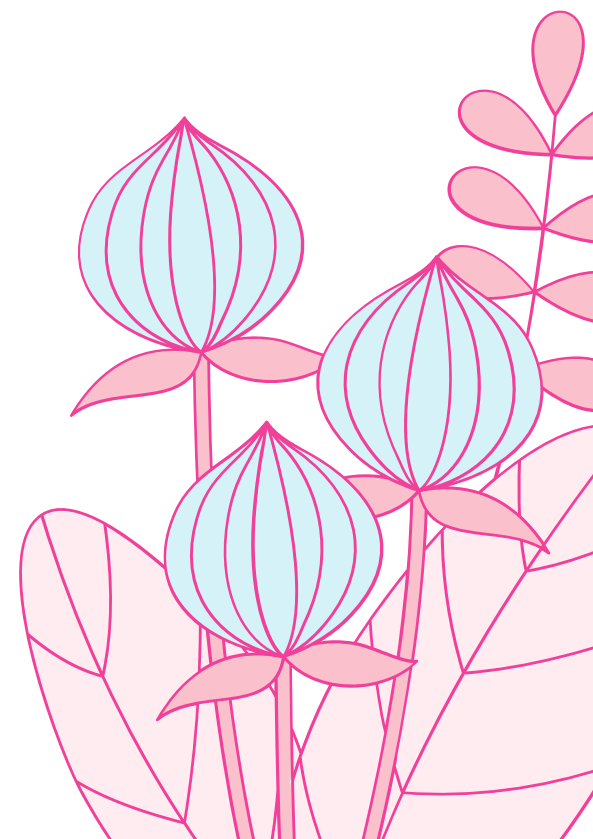
Regulate
Use breath, space, or
grounding techniques

Respond
Take action with
love, not
reactivity

**Recognise your
emotions**
"I feel overwhelmed."

Relate
Respond with
empathy, "I see this is
hard for you."

Dr. Dan Siegel: "Children don't need perfect parents. They need attuned,
regulated, responsive caregivers."
Your calm is their safety.





Part 4: Trauma Is Intergenerational – But So Is Healing



Ways to break the cycle:

- Therapy or counselling
- Support groups
- Mindfulness and self-reflection
- Setting new boundaries



Many of us grew up in homes with suppressed emotions, conditional love, or weak boundaries. Trauma often continues across generations. But healing can too.



National Child Traumatic Stress Network: "Parents who pursue healing are more likely to raise emotionally secure children."



Part 5: Raising Boys with Compassion and Girls with Confidence

Society often teaches:

- Boys: "Don't cry, be tough."
- Girls: "Be nice, don't be bossy."

This can suppress emotions in boys and voices in girls. Instead, aim to raise emotionally intelligent children

Dr. John Gottman:
"Children raised with emotional coaching are more confident, better problem-solvers, and have healthier relationships."

For Boys:

- Feelings are valid
- Kindness is strength
- Respect starts with self

For Girls:

- Use your voice confidently
- Be assertive and kind
- Set boundaries without guilt

Part 6: Practical Tools for Stronger Homes



Daily emotional check-ins:

"How is your heart today?"

Apologize when you slip up: Models accountability

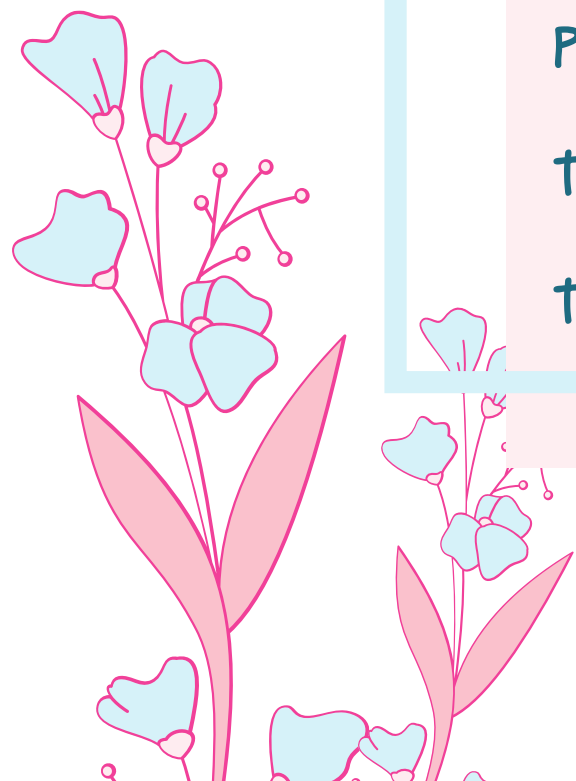
Use visual emotion charts: Helps young children express feelings

Set loving limits: Example: "You cannot throw objects, but you can stomp or talk about it."

Phone-free bonding time: 15 minutes of undivided attention

Teach calming tools: Breathing exercises, glitter jars, grounding techniques

Tip: If you suspect abuse, speak up and offer support.

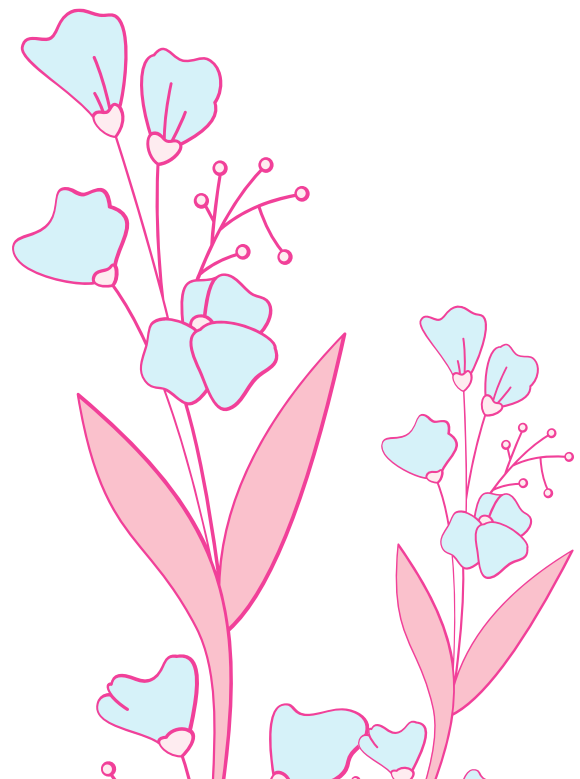


Part 7: Community Matters



“It takes a village to raise a child.”
But not all villages are safe. Surround children with
adults who are:

- Emotionally available
- Mental health aware
- Ready to challenge harmful norms
- Our Watch research: Shifting social norms can reduce domestic violence rates.



Conclusion

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- You don't need to come from a safe home to create one.
- You don't need to be fully healed to begin healing.
- Children need presence, connection, and love, not perfection.

Start small: a pause before reacting, a deep breath, a caring conversation. Every step rewrites a family story. Thank you for investing time in your child's emotional safety. Together, we can raise a generation that thrives.

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