



# The NVR Ireland Parent Handbook-Extracts



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Suggested citation: Butler, D, Connolly, M, Coogan, D, Dahms, I, Fox, R, Kelly, T, Lauster, E, Magee, M and Perry, G (2021) The NVR Ireland Parent Handbook Dublin, Parentline.

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# What is Non-Violent Resistance?

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## It may seem surprising at first but Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) is not new.

*Please note, these extracts provide readers with an introduction to and an overview of the handbook which NVR Ireland trained practitioners use in our work with families.*

Many people will think of Gandhi or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when they hear this term. In the context of social and political change, NVR is concerned with bringing about change through peaceful protest and resistance.

Here in Ireland, we too have a strong history of Non Violent Resistance with Daniel O'Connell and Michael Davitt – both of whom advocated a non-violent approach in their pursuit of political goals. Eva Gore-Booth, political activist and poet, sister of Constance Gore-Booth (Markievicz) was also committed to political and social reform through peaceful means.

In family work, Non-Violent Resistance begins with the parent(s)/carer(s)<sup>1</sup> acknowledging that the *child* is not the problem - the *behaviour* is the problem.

This shift in perspective is crucial. When the problem is no longer located in the child, the parent is empowered to begin a change - rather than simply waiting for the child to be assessed or treated by a mental health professional. In this section of the handbook, we provide an overview of the NVR approach and we provide much greater detailed in different later sections.

We provide this handbook as a type of reference guide and memory aid as you work through Non Violent Resistance with a trained NVR practitioner. Over the course of NVR sessions, the NVR practitioner (later joined by the NVR Support Network) supports parents in a similar position to yours to take

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a different position in relation to the child. We identify different skills to de-escalate difficult situations. Many parents tell us that most of the arguments centre on technology – such as video games and phone use. Working through NVR with the trained practitioner, parents begin to identify how these situations can quickly get out of hand and to learn new ways to address what can be very difficult discussions with their children.

Although parents who are experiencing this difficulty will often avoid their child when they are quiet for fear of triggering another aggressive episode, ‘with NVR, we encourage and support you as parents to become more present in your child’s life. This is where the process of building the relationship begins. In some cases, relationships are badly damaged and parents may need support to find ways to restore and strengthen their relationship with their child.

We often hear parents talking about the shame they feel about their child’s behaviour. They may keep this a secret from friends and family - feeling that they have failed as parents. Through the NVR programme, parents are encouraged to build a support network and to allow other people to support them and their child. This is not about shaming the child - the child is no longer presented as the problem. Rather, parents ask supporters to help them with a family difficulty - having acknowledged that the violence or aggression is a habit that has developed and escalated over time.

NVR encourages parents to look at how they have given away their authority over time. Giving in to demands or orders to prevent an escalation of aggression, has often encouraged an increase in demands - for money, clothes, lifts etc. Fear of violence or abuse has resulted in parents handing over money, meeting unreasonable demands and becoming increasingly powerless. This is often done to keep the young person quiet. Through NVR, the parent is supported to refuse orders and to move to a position where they become “as strong as an anchor - not as a fist”.

It is likely that parents will have made many efforts to bring to an end the violence and aggression in their home. Their methods may have varied from

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pleading, cajoling and imploring to threatening, shouting and demanding. They become like a pendulum - swinging from one approach to another in an attempt to deal with their aggressive or violent child. The NVR programme supports the parents to make an announcement that clearly states their position - "I am no longer going to tolerate your violent and aggressive behaviour, and I will do everything in my power to resist it - without hurting or threatening you. I have invited our supporters - x and y - to help us to bring this to an end". This statement is delivered with authority and is supported and strengthened by the presence - or availability - of the supporters. It conveys to the child that the parent is strong and steady and that his/her power has been restored. It is presented in a way that is not threatening or accusatory - but loving and supportive.

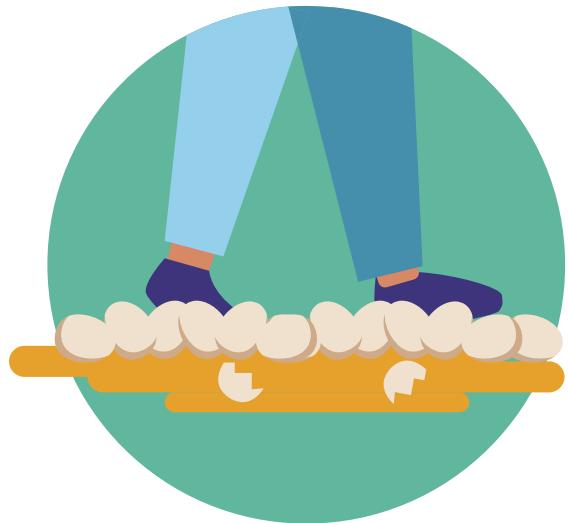
Should the child continue to behave violently, the parent is supported to hold a 'sit-in'. This is where the parent conveys to the child that the announcement remains in place, the parent remains resolute and the violence will be peacefully but strongly resisted. Where necessary, the sit-in can be repeated.

NVR supports parents to make fundamental shifts in how they deal with violence, aggression and hostility. The NVR position is a position that is steady, grounded and consistent. Many parents have told us that it has been effective for their families.

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## Treading on Egg-shells

Are you finding that your child has become increasingly angry? Perhaps you are caught in a cycle of arguing, punishing, pleading or fighting with your child/teenager. For many, this may be a pattern that has become well established in your relationship with your child - with every day a new round of shouting and door slamming. For some of you, this fighting may have become physical - with you or other people in your family being injured or property in your home being damaged. You may be stressed and upset to find that your child no longer seems to respect you or work within your rules or expectations and sad that your relationship has come this. Perhaps you are feeling completely powerless. You may even be fearful about how far this fighting will go



Parents often say that they are “treading on egg-shells” with their child or refer to their son or daughter as “ruling the roost”. They may talk about being afraid to challenge their child and report giving in to demands for more money, different meals than those that have been prepared, access to WiFi late in the evening and perhaps lifts at unreasonable times and with little notice. Parents tell us that when they attempt to refuse the demands of their child, then “all hell breaks loose”. In response, parents often submit to demands and in doing so, over a period of time, they undermine their own authority in the family and the child becomes more powerful. It is not unusual in these situations for a child to demand a particular chair, control over the remote control in the TV room and other privileges that would not generally be granted so readily. Brothers and sisters are often put in to second place by the aggressive child – with the parent also demanding that the sibling gives in

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to the demands – just to keep the peace and to prevent him or her from “kicking off”.

More and more parents are reporting that they are struggling to manage conflict with their child or adolescent. The ‘old ways’ of managing difficult behaviour with punishments and consequences no longer seem to work. It’s hard to take a phone from a teenager who may be very angry and aggressive. Turning off the internet at a certain time at night might result in an escalating argument. How can parents manage these situations in ways that are strong but do not shame the child or cause more fighting? NVR is increasingly being used across Ireland and beyond to help parents to reduce the conflict in their homes and repair or strengthen their relationships with their children.

**Some parents have told us:**

**“It’s a relief to hear that other parents are experiencing this and finding a way to stop the fighting.”**

**“I’m getting much better at staying calm and avoiding escalating the situation.”**

**“Instead of avoiding her, I’m finding ways to reach out to her — she’s starting to respond.”**

**“I have made it clear that I will do everything I can to help our family. I no longer feel powerless and I think that shows.”**

**“My friend and my sister are helping our family to end this — we all need to make some changes. I realise that my child is not the problem and there is lots that I can do to improve things.”**

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**“It has been months since he hit me or damaged anything in the house. We watch a movie together every weekend.”**

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