

SAFEGUARDING STAFF TRAINING CONVERSATIONS

DOMESTIC ABUSE

What is DOMESTIC ABUSE?

The UK government's definition of domestic violence is 'any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional.

Domestic abuse can take different forms, including:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- financial abuse
- coercive and controlling behaviour, and gaslighting/emotional abuse
- digital/online abuse
- 'honour'-based abuse
- forced marriage
- female genital mutilation (FGM)

What experiences might our students have of living in a home with domestic abuse?

- hearing the abuse from another room
- seeing someone they care about being injured and/or distressed
- finding damage to their home environment like broken furniture
- being hurt from being caught up in or trying to stop the abuse

TYPES OF ABUSE IN MORE DETAIL

Physical abuse

Physical abuse (violence) can include pushing, hitting, punching, kicking, choking and using weapons.

Verbal abuse

Verbal abuse is the use of harsh or insulting language directed at a person. You might be called names or constantly put down by your partner.

Coercive and controlling behaviour

Controlling and coercive behaviour are forms of emotional abuse. They often go together, but are slightly different.

- Coercion is a pattern of behaviour designed to make someone feel intimidated, scared, humiliated or threatened.
- Controlling behaviour happens when someone sets out to make the victim subordinate or dependent on them by cutting them off from their support networks, regulating their behaviour and reducing their independence.

This might include: withholding money, constantly criticising someone, watching monitoring someone in person or by interrogating their mobile communications, isolating from friends and family, and activities such as gas lighting.

These behaviours can make it even more difficult for the person to leave the relationship.

Controlling or coercive behaviour is now a criminal offence under the Serious Crime Act 2015.

Psychological abuse

Psychological or mental abuse is when someone is subjected or exposed to a situation that can result in psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is when you're forced or pressured to have sex without your consent (rape), unwanted sexual activity, touching, groping or being made to watch pornography.

RECOGNISING DOMESTIC ABUSE

- Domestic abuse can happen in any relationship. It can continue even after the relationship has ended, for example during contact visits, over the phone or on social media.
- People of all genders can be abused or be abusers.
- Teenagers can also experience abuse in their own relationships

Psychological effects of experiencing domestic abuse can include:

- aggression and challenging behaviour
- depression
- anxiety - including worrying about a parent's or carer's safety
- changes in mood
- difficulty interacting with others
- withdrawal
- fearfulness, including fear of conflict
- suicidal thoughts or feelings

Domestic abuse can cause confusing relationships with parents and carers. Children might experience conflicting feelings, including:

- not having a strong bond with their parents or carers
- hoping an abused parent will leave for safety reasons
- worrying about what might happen if their parents or carers separate
- being afraid of their parents or carers.

Some teenagers worry that being raised in abusive environment will affect their own future relationships.

Developmental effects of exposure to domestic abuse

Traumatic childhood experiences such as domestic abuse can affect a child's brain development. This may impact:

- executive functioning skills
- brain architecture
- and lead to overactive stress responses

HOW THIS CAN SHOW UP IN SCHOOL

- 1. Behavioural Changes:** Sudden shifts in behaviour, such as becoming aggressive, withdrawn, anxious, or showing signs of depression.
- 2. Performance at School:** A noticeable decline in academic performance or concentration, difficulty in completing homework or participating in class activities.
- 3. Physical Signs:** Unexplained injuries like bruises, cuts, or frequent complaints of pain without a clear cause.
- 4. Absenteeism:** Regular absences from school or a pattern of being late.
- 5. Fearful Behaviour:** Seeming overly anxious, especially about going home, or showing an excessive fear of upsetting parents.
- 6. Attention-Seeking:** Exhibiting behaviours that are designed to attract attention or care from teachers and other adults.
- 7. Social Withdrawal:** Difficulty in making friends, isolating from peers, or a sudden change in their social circle.
- 8. Emotional Outbursts:** Sudden crying, anger, or emotional responses that seem disproportionate to the situation.
- 9. Regressive Behaviours:** Displaying behaviours that are developmentally younger than their age, like bedwetting or thumb-sucking.
- 10. Overly Responsible Behaviour:** Taking on adult responsibilities, caring for younger siblings, or showing excessive concern for parents.
- 11. Changes in Appearance:** Neglect in personal hygiene, wearing inappropriate clothing for the weather, or signs of malnutrition.
- 12. Avoidance of Certain Topics:** Reluctance or discomfort when discussing family life or what happens at home.
- 13. Lack of Participation in School Activities:** Showing reluctance or inability to join after-school programs, sports, or social events.
- 14. Fear of Physical Contact:** Flinching or discomfort with physical contact, especially sudden movements.
- 15. Sleep Problems:** Showing signs of fatigue or sleepiness, possibly due to disrupted sleep at home.

WHAT TO DO IF A STUDENT TELLS YOU ABOUT DOMESTIC ABUSE

If a child shares details of domestic abuse with you, it's important to:

- Give them your full attention and keep your body language open and encouraging
- Be compassionate and understanding, and reassure them their feelings are important
- Let them go at their own pace - don't interrupt them
- Reflect back what they've said to check your understanding - and use their language to show it's their experience
- Remind them that abuse is never their fault.

Never promise to keep what a child has told you a secret. Explain that you need to tell someone else who can help.

ACTIONS THAT CAN BE TAKEN BY VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Police now have the authority to issue a **Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN)** to an abusive partner who poses a continued threat of violence. This notice, served in writing by an officer, initially lasts 48 hours, mandating the abuser to vacate the premises and cease contact with the victim. It can be extended to up to 28 days by a magistrate, who may issue a Domestic Violence Protection Order (**DVPO**).

In criminal law, domestic abuse encompasses crimes like assault, stalking, coercive behaviour, criminal damage, and sexual offences. Victims are entitled to protection under criminal law. Convicted individuals may receive restraining orders with varying restrictions based on the case's severity.

Civil law offers survivors the option to seek injunctions or court orders for protection. Common orders include non-molestation, occupation, and prohibited steps orders. Non-molestation orders prevent harassment or harm and can be issued urgently without notice for immediate protection, lasting up to 28 days. Violating these orders is a criminal offence.

Non-molestation orders This type of court order is used to stop someone from pestering, attacking, threatening or harassing you or your children. Each order is issued on the facts of the case and will take your individual circumstances into consideration. Courts will take into account health, safety and wellbeing, and consider any children involved. Courts will also assess how they think an order will help the situation

Occupation orders dictate residency rights, possibly requiring abusers to leave the shared property. Various individuals, including cohabitants, relatives, and those in intimate relationships, can apply for these orders.

Prohibited steps orders prevent a partner from taking children away, controlling how children's contact is maintained.

To apply for these orders, survivors often consult solicitors, though direct court applications are possible. Legal aid eligibility can be checked on the Gov.uk website, and domestic violence agencies can assist in application processes.

Enforcement requires serving the order to the abuser and notifying local police. Prohibited steps orders should also be shared with children's schools to prevent unauthorised removal

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Identification and Signs: Educate staff on the various signs and symptoms of domestic abuse that may be exhibited by children, including physical signs (unexplained injuries, frequent absences) and behavioural changes (anxiety, aggression, withdrawal, or fear of going home).

Discuss the importance of being vigilant and observant to subtle signs, as children may not always be forthcoming about their experiences.

2. Understanding the Impact: Discuss the short and long-term psychological, emotional, and physical impact of domestic abuse on children.

This can include issues with trust, difficulty in forming relationships, developmental delays, and educational impact. Understanding the profound effects can help staff appreciate the urgency and sensitivity required in handling such cases.

3. Legal Framework and Reporting Procedures: Cover the legal obligations and procedures that school staff must follow in the UK, including the duty to report suspicions of abuse and the process for doing so.

This includes familiarising staff with local and national safeguarding policies, as well as the school's own safeguarding procedures.

4. Supporting Affected Children: Explore strategies and best practices for supporting children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse.

This might include creating a safe and supportive school environment, providing access to counselling and mental health services, and working with external agencies for additional support.

5. Preventative Education and Awareness: Discuss the role of education in preventing domestic abuse and promoting healthy relationships.

This could involve incorporating age-appropriate discussions about respect, consent, and healthy relationships into the curriculum, as well as fostering a school culture that does not tolerate bullying or violence in any form.

Useful Links:

www.savelives.org.uk

www.mensadviceline.org.uk

www.galop.org.uk (LGBT+).

www.wearehourglass.org

www.refuge.or.uk

www.womansid.org