

Family and Community Factors

Domestic Abuse and the Impact on Children and Young People

Overview Description

Domestic Abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or 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. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim

Domestic abuse is an issue that impacts on many.

- Around one in five children in the UK have been exposed to domestic abuse
- 62% of children in households where domestic violence is taking place are harmed directly
- One in five teenagers has been physically abused by their boyfriends or girlfriends

NSPCC and Department for Education, 2019.

It is also a problem which appears to be on the increase. For the 12-month period leading to March 2020 the police recorded number of domestic abuse incidents rose by 9% on the previous 12 months.

Domestic Abuse in England and Wales Overview, Office of National Statistics, 25th Nov 2020.

The impact of domestic abuse and coercive control on children and their education can be devastating. It can prevent a child achieving their full potential in terms of growth and development and lead to long term emotional and social difficulties. It causes distress, anxiety and can result in children experiencing poor mental and physical health, being isolated from family and friends and misusing substances (often as an attempt to cope with their circumstances).

‘Exposure to domestic abuse and/or violence can have a serious, long lasting emotional and psychological impact on children. In some cases, a child may blame themselves for the abuse ...’

Department for Education 2019: 20

Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control can be considered as Emotional Abuse of children **It is always a safeguarding issue.**

Impact of domestic abuse on children and young people

Many studies indicate that children living with severe or prolonged abuse are more likely to develop challenging behaviour and have significant social, emotional and mental health needs. Domestic abuse and coercive control can impact negatively on:

- early play and learning; ability to engage with play and learning activities
- early language development
- social interactions and social development
- behaviour
- feelings of wellbeing and good health
- attendance and punctuality

Home can be a stressful, unpredictable and sometimes, dangerous place; the family a source of conflict. Some children can feel they always have to be 'on guard', living in a state of almost constant fear and high arousal; they are often preoccupied with their mother's or their own safety.

Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control is understood to be a form of Emotional Abuse of children. In *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (HM Government, 2018), the definition of emotional abuse is 'The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development.' In studies:

- 41% of children were fearful of harm to themselves
- 59% were fearful of harm to their parent
- 23% of children feel or have felt they were to blame for domestic abuse
- 18% were subject to neglect as a result of domestic abuse

Safelives, 2017

Domestic Violence as Emotional Abuse

For children living with domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour, emotional abuse includes:

- causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger
- not giving children opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them
- placing limitations on their exploration and learning,
- preventing children participating in normal social interactions
- hearing the ill-treatment of another
- serious bullying

What Children and Young People May Experience

- Witnessing / overhearing violent incidents
- A parent being degraded and belittled by the perpetrator
- The destruction of property or belongings
- Other family members being hurt or intimidated; abuse of siblings
- Forced participation in the abuse and degradation of their parent
- Overseeing or being made to watch their parent being physically assaulted, raped or sexually assaulted
- The aftermath: their parent's injuries and distress
- Arrests; neighbours observing incidents
- Being deprived of family and social contacts which reduces the likelihood of disclosure
- Threatened or actual abuse of family pets
- Attempted suicide by their parent
- The death of their parent

'Children and young people [describe] a catalogue of fathers' cruel and emotionally abusive behaviour towards them, such as destroying school work, school reports and toys, harming pets, not allowing children out of the house, not allowing them to speak to their mothers and not allowing friends to phone or come to the house. Some fathers are shown to deliberately emotionally abuse children and young people, insulting them and humiliating them in a similar way to their mothers.'

Harne (2011), citing research by McGee (2000) and Mullender et al (2002)

Teenage Relationship Abuse

- One in three adolescents in the UK is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner including control of social media
- One in ten teenagers report being purposely hit, slapped or hurt physically by a current boyfriend or girlfriend
- Violent behaviour typically begins between the ages of 12 and 18
- High correlation between Child Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Abuse (*Women's Aid Federation 2010*)

Domestic Abuse in Pregnancy and the Impact on Babies and Young Children

33% of domestic abuse starts in pregnancy and then often escalates. It can result death of the baby: premature labour, miscarriage, forced termination

Before birth, emotional trauma directly affects brain development. Stress releases the hormone cortisol and this can have a toxic effect on newly formed brain cells and on brain development

During the first three years particularly, exposure to extreme trauma from domestic abuse also affects brain development. It can create 'toxic stress' - with strong, frequent, chronic and prolonged activation of body's stress response system. Young children may react by:

- showing very little control; hyperactive, impulsive, anxious ('flight or fight'). Or
- becoming dissociated; impassive, switched off, helpless ('freeze and surrender')

They may also exhibit:

- Eating difficulties and 'failure to thrive' in extreme cases
- Developmental regression (especially in toileting and language)
- Difficulties in developing secure attachments
- Emotional difficulties - distressed, confused, sad / fearful of new people and situations / frightened of perpetrator

The Impact of Domestic Abuse on Educational Performance

- High states of arousal may lead to attention and concentration difficulties and low attainments and underachievement
- Behavioural, social, emotional and mental health and behavioural difficulties
 - Aggressive, violent behaviours
 - Passive, withdrawn behaviours
 - Relationship problems
 - Depression, anxiety, PTSD
- Psychosomatic/eating/sleeping problems
- Role reversal (children are "parentified")
- Fear and mistrust of adults and authority figures
- Changes of school and information gaps in education history
- Attendance and punctuality issues

How schools can support children and parents affected by domestic abuse

Certain key conditions which help children to recover from trauma include:

- The need to feel safe
- Opportunities to be listened to and to express their feelings about what has happened
- Secure relationships and access to supportive social networks

A key adult in school needs to be knowledgeable about domestic abuse and safeguarding. They can:

- develop a trusting relationship with the child and the parent. Acknowledge what they've been through or what they are going through
- monitor the child's feelings of safety and security
- monitor children and provide support at the start of the day; monitor attendance and punctuality
- go at the child's pace; follow their lead
- help them make sense of what has happened / is happening
- help the child make sense of the way they are feeling and behaving
- act as an advocate for the child within and beyond school; work closely with teachers and other staff
- co-ordinate a support package around the child and family, including facilitating access to specialist services
- provide support with transition planning

Other practical support might include:

- With organisation at the start of the day (usually more complicated in secondary school)
- Provision of uniform if required
- Access to a quiet time-out area
- Exit passes
- Support with personal care
- Extra-curricular activities: Homework Clubs
- Focusing on a child's successes
- Flexibility, e.g. around punctuality
- Peer support systems

Parents affected by Domestic Abuse reported that they appreciated:

- being contacted regularly by school about concerns
- schools that had a good understanding of the security issues
- schools that made every child feel welcome, safe and relaxed and that would make allowances
- schools that had accessed / had helped them access additional support
- schools that taught about Domestic Abuse.

The Needs of Young People in Refuges and Temporary Accommodation

'Children in refuge and other temporary accommodation, and those who have moved home repeatedly to flee domestic abuse, are particularly vulnerable and risk becoming invisible to professionals in the education, health and social care sectors.'

House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. (2018) paras 84 and 85.

A study of the needs of young people in refuges and temporary accommodation highlighted the following:

- Disruption of education; disruption to courses and exams pupils having to leave their school;
- Poor concentration; worry;
- Limited or no choice of school
- Changes of home meaning long bus journeys to school
- A lack of involvement in decision-making contributing to friction with their mothers
- Barriers to study such practical difficulties in completing homework, including a lack of appropriate space and equipment in refuges such as computers, books or internet access. No separate spaces to complete homework
- Refuge staff have reported it to be difficult to establish positive partnership working with some staff in schools
- Teenagers' lack of trust in school staff; fear and embarrassment at people knowing they were in refuges. They were worried their confidentiality would be breached, resulting in embarrassment and stigma.
- Teenagers who were not attending mainstream education expressed feelings of loss, of being left behind and excluded. Those attending PRUs communicated a sense of stigma which affected their sense of identity.

Bracewell et al (2020)

A study of 10-16-year-old girls highlighted:

- Severed friendships. (Bowyer et al 2015). Adolescence is a time when children move away from relying on their primary caregivers, increasingly turning to friends for support and spending more time with their friends. Children without a support network of friends are more likely to develop depression and this is especially true for adolescent girls
- Loss of personal space
- Ongoing and relentless feelings of being trapped in an unsafe world; uncertainty, confusion and unanswered questions;

Bowyer et al (2015)

For further reading documenting the journey of children and young people in refuges:

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NWTA-2017.pdf>

Prevention Education and Talking to Children about Domestic Abuse

'Positive and sustainable outcomes can only be achieved by taking a holistic and preventative approach to the needs of individuals and their families'

Working Together ... Manchester Safeguarding Children/Adult Board (2018)

'Prevention programmes in school are more effective when promoted through whole-school policies and practices than through single component programmes or individual teachers'

Harne and Radford (2008)

Statutory curriculum content on sex and relationships education in schools will promote healthy relationships, raise awareness of unhealthy relationships and the unacceptability of violence in relationships.

Teaching and Talking to Children About Domestic Abuse

Work needs to start primary school for it to have the most impact. This is an effective time to influence children's attitudes. Children and young people like:

- Lessons on relationships and abuse, undertaken in interactive ways
- Lessons with visual input such as drama and YouTube clips
- Discussion based classes and opportunities to ask questions
- Lessons that address sexuality, gender, consent, emotional aspects of healthy relationships

Talking to primary aged children about domestic abuse and coercive control: the following resource can be used with individual children and groups. There is a professionals' guide and accompanying picture book for children to read with an adult that helps young children understand about domestic abuse and coercive control.



Helping Children Learn About Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control: A Professional Guide (Floss and the Boss) by Catherine Lawler and Abigail Sterne (2021)

Provide Information to the Community

- Display posters advertising helplines and make leaflets available. Available from: www.womensaid.org.uk.
- Leave cards with local and national helplines and key safety information around school

- Display details of The Hideout, a website for children and young people from Women's Aid: www.thehideout.org.uk



- Display details of the Refuge website: www.refuge.org.uk
- Place stickers on the insides of toilet doors
- Make *the Survivors' Handbook* available to the community. Downloadable from www.womensaid.org.uk
- Address the issue in assemblies and on themed days, to which parents, governors and members of the community are invited
- Ensure all staff have received training on domestic abuse

Top
Tips!

For Early
Years

- Remember the importance of the child's key person in the setting. Children may require additional 1:1 play/care with their trusted adult during this time.
- Some children will require more physical contact than before, they may seek out their trusted adults for hugs or want to sit on your knee to share stories and enjoy the closeness from a trusted adult.
- Ensure that the early years environment is safe and secure with practitioners who can provide love, care and support.
- Model appropriate conflict resolution and share social stories that reflect this. Support children in naming and understanding their emotions.
- Allow children to choose a transitional object in the setting to help them feel safe and secure.
- Partake in lots of nurturing play experiences with the child, model safe and caring play in the role play and home areas.

Useful Links:

<https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/features/article/working-with-families-in-the-shadows>

<https://www.teachearlyyears.com/a-unique-child/view/responding-to-domestic-violence>

Useful Resources

Operation Encompass is a Police and Education early intervention safeguarding partnership which supports children and young people exposed to domestic abuse. <https://www.operationencompass.org/> Free information, resources and training on domestic abuse for schools. Operation Encompass is the reporting to schools, before the start of the next school day, that a child or young person has been involved or exposed to a domestic abuse incident the previous evening. The information is given in strict confidence to a school's Key Adult to enable support to be given dependent on the needs and wishes of the child or young person.

Phonelines

- Operation Encompass Teachers' National Helpline 0204 513 9990 Mon – Fri 8am – 1pm. For free advice from an Operation Encompass Educational Psychologist about how best to support a child
- Greater Manchester Domestic Abuse Helpline
Tele: 0161 636 7525 (Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm excluding Bank Holidays) or visit their website at www.endthefear.co.uk
- 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline
Tele: 0808 2000 247 or visit their website at www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/
- Respect – Men's Advice Line 0808 801 0327
- National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 999 5428
- Sahara (BAME Women). 0161 660 7999
- Childline 0800 1111

Useful links

The MCC Multi agency Domestic Abuse toolkit can be found on the HSM website at hsm.manchester.gov.uk

https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/manchester/fsd/files/multi_agency_domestic_abuse_toolkit.pdf

<http://www.safelives.org.uk>

<http://www.refuge.org.uk>

<http://www.thehideout.org.uk>

<http://www.womensaid.org.uk>

<https://mensadviceline.org.uk/>

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk>

<http://www.endthefear.co.uk>

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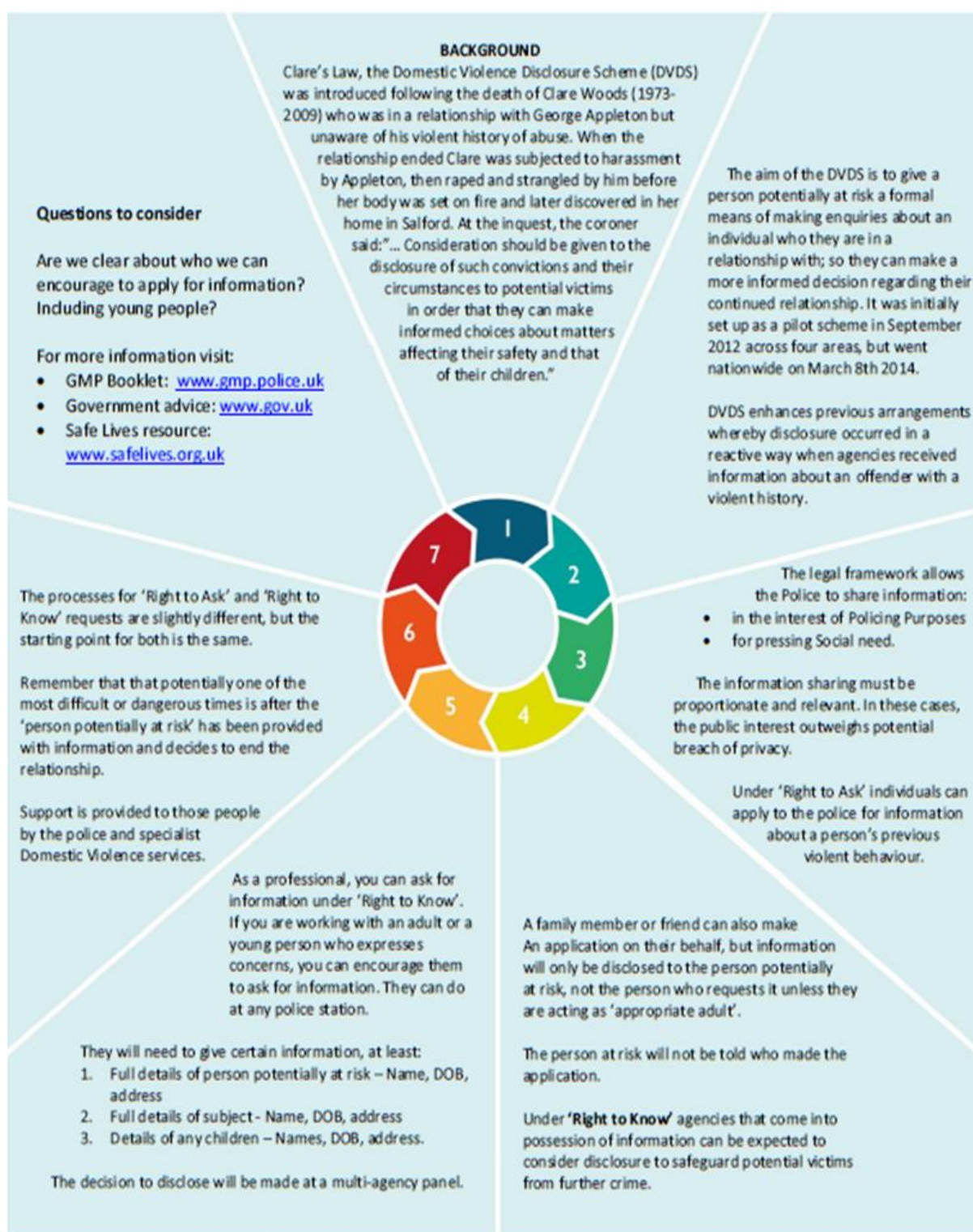
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Clare's Law – Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme



More information can be found on our website manchestersafeguardingboards.co.uk
 Contact us at manchestersafeguardingboards@manchester.gov.uk

The 'Toxic Trio'

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER & DISCUSS

- Is a parent's drug or alcohol use significantly affecting their parenting capacity?
- Do we take into account all members of the household e.g. fathers, new or ex-partners who are still in the picture?
- Is there evidence of non-engagement/disguised compliance by parents we work with?
- Are there children or families in our care who could be in this situation?
- Can our team recognise the warning signs? Do we know who to consult if unsure?

BACKGROUND

The 'toxic trio' is the combination of **domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse** within a family. The term is used to identify the common features of families where significant harm to children has occurred.

Each of these issues is hard to manage on its own and can have a severe impact on family life, particularly for children & other adults.

However these problems rarely exist in isolation; there is often a complex interaction between them.

WHY IT MATTERS

The toxic trio are indicators of increased risk of harm to children & families and are significant factors in IPV (Interpersonal Violence) & AFV (Adult Family Violence).

The toxic trio features in findings from serious case reviews - analysis showed that in 86% of cases where children were seriously harmed or died one or more 'toxic trio' issue had played a significant part.

The toxic trio represent a significant risk to the safety & wellbeing of children & families. These parental risk factors impact on outcomes for children into adulthood.

WHAT TO DO

- know how to identify common signs of abuse and neglect; who to consult with and how to refer – find resources on www.manchestersafeguardingboards.co.uk
- focus on the needs of the child or vulnerable adult and act in their best interest at all times
- learning cites lack of information sharing as a key factor:

ASK - LISTEN - SHARE

Complete a team action plan

- Parental mental health:**
- Mental health conditions, such as depression, can inhibit a parent's ability to respond to their child's emotional cues and offer consistent care
 - they can cause a parent to be either 'intrusive & hostile' or 'withdrawn & disengaged'
 - adults with mental health problems are statistically more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol
 - people who abuse drugs have a markedly increased lifetime occurrence of diagnosable mental health issues.

INFORMATION

Domestic abuse:

- creates an inconsistent & unpredictable environment for children
- carers may demonstrate a lack of emotional connection and /or higher levels of aggression
- those living where there is domestic abuse suffer emotional abuse
- there are established links between domestic abuse, neglect & the physical abuse of children.

Substance misuse:

- it is not inevitable that substance misuse will affect parenting capacity
- however, it is a significant feature in cases where children have been seriously harmed or killed
- alcohol dependence linked with depression is particularly associated with poorer, less consistent parenting
- the impact of alcohol/ substance addiction on the child is often underestimated by professionals.
- always review the impact of work in terms of the outcomes for the child.