

Handout - Domestic abuse – whole staff awareness

This factsheet is to be used as part of an annual update to whole school staff to raise awareness of:

- issues related to domestic abuse – avoid the term domestic violence
- the impact living in a household where domestic abuse is happening has on children and young people
- That domestic abuse can happen in children's own relationships
- what staff and the school can do to help.

Domestic abuse (including violence within a domestic relationship) is a growing problem. More than 2 women per week in the UK die at the hands of their partner. There is also a growing realisation that men can be the victims of domestic abuse too, but can find it more difficult to seek support.

Within any hundred-day period, an estimated 25,000 children will witness domestic violence. The Department of Health estimates that every year 750,000 children experience domestic violence. There are strong links between domestic abuse and child abuse. Children witnessing domestic abuse are viewed as being at risk of significant harm (section 47 of the Children Act 1989) and should be discussed with Children's Social Care.

Question for discussion: What are the indications that domestic abuse might be taking place in the home?

- the pupil makes a direct disclosure
- there is evidence of injuries to a parent
- the pupil runs away from home
- there is anxiety or fear-related behaviour
- there is an unexplained illness
- the pupil constantly worries about possible danger and/or safety of family members, for example phoning home
- the pupil exhibits more extreme worry as the day goes on and time to go home draws nearer
- the pupil shows a different reaction to the presence of each parent
- there are difficulties with sleeping or eating
- there are absences from school and the pupil has difficulty concentrating
- the pupil is withdrawn/withdraws from school activities
- there is evidence of substance misuse
- the pupil is depressed or exhibits distracted behaviour
- the pupil is withdrawn, aggressive or has behavioural difficulties including deliberate holding of breath
- there are missed health appointments.

Question for discussion: What are the indications that a child may be in a domestically abusive relationship themselves?

More children and young people are in domestically abusive relationships themselves than was first thought. Signs that this might be happening include:

- injuries to the child
- change of friends and peer group in school
- fall out with parents (in favour of new partner) – separation tactics by the partner
- a change in appearance e.g. not taking care of themselves, wearing different clothes (not being allowed to 'look nice' for anyone else)

- distraction, missing school and running away.

Question for discussion: “Why don’t they just leave?”

It can be hard to understand why a victim may continue to live with a violent or controlling partner or return to him/her. Some reasons include:

- not having anywhere else to go
- being terrified that they might lose their children
- thinking they can change the partner
- not wanting to leave what’s familiar
- not wanting to disrupt the lives of those around them, particularly the children who may be settled in schools and in friendships
- hoping that things will improve
- limited finance
- afraid of what the repercussions might be
- still being in love with the partner
- not seeing what is happening as abuse
- self-blame and feeling that the abuse is somehow deserved.

Children might also be reluctant to leave and the alternatives can seem as harsh as the treatment being received. It can be difficult for children and the victim to see what the immediate benefits will be in comparison to the immediate losses.

Question for discussion: “When are the riskiest times for the abuse partner and children?”

Separation risks

Anyone in a domestically abusive relationship or living in the household where domestic abuse occurs is at risk. Situations can escalate very quickly. However, the abused parent and child are not safe just because they have left the family home. The point of leaving and the period following separation remain particularly high-risk times and this is often not noticed until it is too late. Some 76% of separated women suffer post-separation violence.

Question for discussion: “Why don’t we call it Domestic Violence anymore?”

Changes to the definition of Domestic Abuse have happened over recent times. **Coercive Control** was made a crime and has been added under the heading of domestic abuse. **Stalking and Harassment** also comes under this heading.

Question for discussion: “What are the signs of coercive control and stalking and harassment?”

Coercive Control:

- A parent not having their own money.
- A parent not being able to come to parents evening because they are ‘not allowed’.
- A silent parent who makes no comment or is very much in the background.
- A parent who appears frightened of their partner.

Stalking and Harassment:

- A parent advises of a change of number because they do not wish to be contacted by an ex-partner and you are aware that the relationship was difficult.
- A pupil advises of possible deliberate damage to a parents’ car following a relationship breakup.

- A pupil appears protective of their parent and may not want to leave them to come to school following the breakup of a relationship.

Resilience

Some children are more resilient to conflict in the home than others. The quality of the parent-child relationship, the child's gender and temperament will all have an impact. The level of self-esteem of the child and his/her ability to deal with change will make a difference.

What we can do at our school

Schools are not expected to address domestic abuse on their own. However, it is important that we are aware of the issues and how we might help prevent it from happening through:

- Early Help – If you think domestic abuse is happening in a child's home, or they themselves might be in a domestically abusive relationship, discuss this with your Designated Safeguarding lead immediately.
- Take all disclosures and signs of domestic abuse seriously, even if you know the parents well.
- Put in place support for the pupil which is sensitive to their needs and age. See *Part 5 of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019* for more information on Peer on Peer abuse.
- The DSL can contact Children's Social Case or Early Help services within the Local Authority for advice or make an immediate referral if the concerns are serious.
- Work with you PSHE curriculum lead to ensure that, in line with *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019*, you take every opportunity to teach children and young people about the issue and equipping them with the skills to have relationships based on respect.