

## Domestic Abuse, Violence & Child Abuse.

What is domestic abuse. Types and definition.

Domestic violence is defined as violence or abuse perpetrated on a person above 16 years of age by either a family member, an intimate partner or ex-partner you were intimate with. There are different types of domestic abuse. However, most will fall into the following categories: sexual, physical, economic, emotional, verbal, control, using male privilege and isolation. To elaborate even if the abuse only happens once or twice it is still abuse. Sexual abuse also covers sharing of photos of a sexual nature, withdrawing sexual favours, forcing sex as well as exposure to sexual related content. It does not have to be rape. Coercion, threats, blame, intimidation, refusing access to food, drink, money, friends and family, plus telling someone what they can or can't wear is also abuse.

Who is at risk?

Anyone, male or female who is over 16 years of age is at risk of domestic abuse. Although females are more likely to become victims, abuse can be perpetrated by an adult child towards an elderly relative or parent. However, where children form part of the relationship under three years old are also most at risk of domestic abuse. The abuser does not have to be biologically related to the child if they are in an intimate relationship with the parent of the child. Abusers often use children as a weapon against the victim.

Common safeguarding children myths.

There are some common myths around safeguarding children which include the following: that children lie about abuse, that the child will be immediately removed from the home, that only a professional can report abuse, that females do not abuse children, that strangers are more likely to abuse children, that family and parents do not abuse children and that there is generally only one abuser, that abusers can't show kindness, that abuse doesn't happen in hospitals, doctors or care homes, that child abuse has been decreased sufficiently to say it hardly happens and finally that it doesn't happen in this country, culture, neighbourhood etc.

Why do victims stay?

Victims of domestic abuse stay in these types of relationships for a number of reasons, they may blame themselves for the abuse and believe if they change it will stop, they may feel that they can not leave as they owe it to the abuser, children or some social conditioning belief system to stay. They may not have the finance to get away or they may have been forced to believe that they are incapable of surviving without the abuser telling them what to do. There are times when it is physically impossible for them to leave the abuse as they may be locked in the house or be without clothes. Furthermore, they may think that no one will believe them if they report the abuse and try to flee, they may not know where to turn to get help to leave or be unable to speak English so can't ask for help. There is also the fear that even if they physically escape from the abuse that the abuse will not stop

and when looking at statistics it is well reported that once a victim tries to leave there is generally an escalation in the abuse, which means the victim could end up fearing for their lives and as such stays to avoid further physical abuse or death.

Cycle of abuse,

The cycle of abuse can be difficult to discern at times because abusers like to vary their tactics however, it generally involves wearing the victim down before inventing an issue or setting a trap for the victim so they can justify their behaviour at a later stage, the abuse, followed by false remorse, justifying their behaviour and starting all over again. This can include periods of down time, where they build the victim up just to break them down again. However, we can not forget that the abuser will generally appear to be a good, kind, considerate person to the outside world. They are often very charismatic and can easily convince people that the victim is mentally unwell, which makes it more difficult for the victim to ask for help. This is part of the cycle of abuse because the way they talk to others about the victim also changes during the cycle.

When the victim leaves, the abuser will make up stories to tell people. They will contact the police, local authorities etc with very convincing stories about the victim to harass the victim. They will convince family and friends that they have video, audio, written evidence of what they are saying about the victim to make the victim appear to be the guilty party or reason the relationship has broken down. Yet, whilst they are saying this to others, they will be trying to convince the victim that they have changed and that only they can protect them from what others are saying about them. This is called the Hoovering stage of abuse where the abuser sucks the victim back into the relationship and this happens much more than reported in statistics.

It should be noted here that there is an increase in the number of abusers who use friends and family to help perpetrate their abuse towards the victim. This is not a new element of domestic abuse but it is an area that needs to be addressed by professionals and anyone who comes into contact with a domestic abuse victim. The abuser convinces other people of their narrative, that they themselves are the victim and these people often turn on the real victim believing they are helping to protect an innocent who is actually the abuser. This increases the risks to the real victim and they are further harassed, belittled and abused by people who do not fully understand the situation. The more the real victim tries to tell these outside people the truth, the more they fall into the narrative the abuser has spun and as such they appear to be the actual abuser instead of the victim that they are.

Signs of DV, components of power and control.

Signs of domestic abuse can be very subtle but include the following: lack of eye contact, fear of the abuser, anxiety when talking about the abuser, pretending that everything is fine, physical marks such as bruises, cuts, frequent hospital trips with excuses like they're clumsy, the abuser uses power and control to ensure the victim doesn't say anything about the abuse and can appear very sociable and kind to the outside world. They control where the victim goes and uses threats or gaslighting to stop

the victim from speaking out. The victim may have been convinced that they are mentally unwell, or the abuser may tell people that the victim is mentally unwell or forgetful in order to keep their secret.

Characteristics of victims.

Victims of domestic abuse may have been victims of child abuse, they may have been bullied at school, be socially awkward, from a low-income background, have a low IQ or be estranged from family. However, social standing, background, race, religion or economics are not a shield against domestic abuse anymore than making a person more vulnerable because abuse is about controlling a person, not the person's history or personality. It is wrong to think that if a person has been subjected to a broken home, child abuse, poor economic upbringing or have a disability that they will be more likely subjected to domestic abuse. What professionals and academics should be looking at is the characteristics of abusers. If we could define the personality traits of abusers and work out what caused them to become abusers, we could work on reducing the next generation of abusers.

Impact and effects of abuse.

The impact of abuse on the victim is life-changing, where emotional abuse is concerned the victim is more likely to withdraw into themselves, be more compliant and have a low self-esteem. All types of abuse will include a level of emotional abuse which is why it can be difficult to distinguish between types of abuse when it comes to the impact they have. All forms of abuse can also lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and PTSD but some can also lead to body dysmorphia, lack of trust, self-harm, suicide attempts etc. The physical results of abuse can include: undiagnosed ailments, badly healed broken bones, diabetes, eating disorders, worsening of existing ailments as well as infections etc. Victims will be scared to reach out for medical aid or any form of support because they do not trust people and have been conditioned by the abuser to distrust services that could potentially help them. Many of these victims will have spoken to someone in passing at the early stage of abuse only for that person to tell the abuser what has been said, as such the victim starts to believe that the abuser knows everything they're saying to others and will avoid speaking out.

What is child abuse? neglect and signs of physical abuse.

Child abuse is the harm perpetrated to a child as a result of cruel and, or violent treatment. There are many forms of child abuse including mental, emotional, sexual, physical and neglect. The categories of child abuse that come under the wider heading of neglect are: mental, spiritual, emotional, developmental harm and physical. Neglect is one of the harder categories of abuse for parents to understand as they may not realise that neglect can also mean not having the correct fitting shoes or clothes, not supplying the correct foods or spiritual education and that physical neglect can include not giving your time to the child. Victims of domestic abuse would not necessarily realise that trying to appease the abuser can be seen as neglect towards the child or children. Where neglect can be difficult to ascertain, signs of physical abuse towards a child are more identifiable. Bruises, cuts, marks to the top of arms and legs, marks on the child's back or around the hairline are common indicators to look out for.

Risk factors that can increase abuse and neglect.

Adult risk factors to watch out for where child abuse and neglect is concerned are: domestic abuse, mental health issues, substance misuse, previous police involvement, low income, living in a high crime area and lack of support network.

Assessing a child at risk.

Where no disclosure is made assessing a child at risk means using professional curiosity. Watch out for children who look unkept, smaller in stature, thinner or fatter than they should be, black bags under their eyes, unclean hair, skin etc, history of missing school, frequent hospital or doctors' appointment without a long-term medical diagnosis. Clothes that are dirty or do not fit correctly, developmental delays, withdrawn, anger, outbursts of violence, physical marks, bruises or burns, eating issues, emotional outbursts and constantly being late for drop off or collection from school.

What is disclosure and what to do.

Disclosure is when a child or adult tells you what is happening to them. This may not be clear and concise as it may be told in parts or by way of asking questions. If you are uncertain raise this with your line manager or safeguarding lead. It is better to raise a possibility than to leave a victim to abuse. Write down clearly exactly what was disclosed to you as soon as you can after the disclosure is made. You should listen to the person disclosing to you, stay calm and not interrupt them. Don't make jokes as this may cause them to stop telling you information. Be careful not to promise anything or be patronising. You should never express your opinion whilst being disclosed to or rush the victim. Never judge them or contact the abuser. If you think the victim is at immediate risk of harm you should inform the police, if they've been physically injured and need urgent medical assistance, call an ambulance. If you do not have a line manager or safeguarding lead you should call the NSPCC, police, social services or other professional organisation such as Age concern

Why children do not disclose abuse, recognising warning signs and what to do.

Children do not disclose abuse for a number of reasons. They may feel scared that they will be removed from their parents and placed into care. They may feel that no one will believe them or that the abuse will get worse. They may have been threatened that someone else will be hurt if they tell. They may be ashamed of the abuse or not know it is abuse. As previously stated, there are a number of warning signs to look out for which can help you determine if a child is at risk.

If you are in doubt about your concerns talk to your line manager, safeguarding lead, NSPCC or social services. It is better to be wrong than to be right and do nothing. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Record keeping and what can happen if you do not keep effective records.

Records should be clear, concise and accurate. They should be written as soon as possible in a legible manner stating facts. If you add any opinions from your observations or communications you should clearly indicate that these are opinions not facts. Records should clearly state the date of

disclosure, date the record was written and what was said or observed. They should also contain the following: basic details, contact details, case notes, reports, plans, body maps if needed, minutes from meetings, index chronology and other correspondence. Basically, everything should be kept on record as long as it is factual. These will be needed if other agencies become involved and lack of effective record keeping could cause delays in any assessments or help being offered, work needing to be done again and mistakes being made. Remember where possible do not include opinions as this can create misinformation or opinions being classed as facts.

#### The domestic Abuse Act 2021 DAPN and DAPO

The domestic abuse Act 2021 has been formulated to help reduce domestic abuse. It sets out what domestic abuse is, who is at risk and types of abuse and children within domestic abuse situations. It has also introduced the domestic abuse commissioner as well as a government advisory board and local boards of domestic abuse advisors.

These domestic abuse advisors include police, health professionals, academics, social workers, charities and someone to represent the interests of the victims.

It also sets out the duties of the police, housing, health professionals and social care for victims of abuse and their children.

The DAPN, domestic abuse prevention notice is a new power given to the police to put an abuser on notice of a DAPO, domestic abuse protection order. These are designed to help victims of abuse stay safe from the abuser. They include restricting the distance an abuser can be around the victim, stop threats of abuse or further abuse, help keep the victim in their home etc. It also gives the police extra powers to arrest and detain the abuser if they break the notice and or order.

Unfortunately, the domestic abuse Act does not go anywhere near far enough to protect victims or stop abuse but it is in its current form a major step forward from anything that came before it.