

Boundaries Violation & Control.

As a society professionals and non-professionals alike are used to hearing terms like child abuse and domestic abuse. Some will understand terminology such as corporate abuse and abuse of position. However, there is a form of abuse which is not currently categorised even though it destroys hundreds of lives each year.

Non-relationship adult to adult abuse comes under the broad heading of bullying and harassment even though it is far worse than either.

Examples of bullying or harassing behaviour include:

spreading malicious rumours

unfair treatment

picking on or regularly undermining someone

denying someone's training or promotion opportunities

[Workplace bullying and harassment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

So, what is Boundaries violation & control if it's not already defined by the government as bullying and harassing behaviour?

In simple terms it is everything identified under the heading of grooming and domestic abuse minus the personal relationship element.

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

(2) Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if—

(a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and

(b) the behaviour is abusive.

(3) Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following—

(a) physical or sexual abuse;

(b) violent or threatening behaviour;

(c) controlling or coercive behaviour;

(d) economic abuse (see subsection (4));

(e) psychological, emotional or other abuse; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

(4) "Economic abuse" means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to—

(a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or

(b) obtain goods or services.

Definition of “personally connected”

(1) For the purposes of this Act, two people are “personally connected” to each other if any of the following applies—

- (a) they are, or have been, married to each other;
- (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2));
- (g) they are relatives.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1)(f) a person has a parental relationship in relation to a child if—

- (a) the person is a parent of the child, or
- (b) the person has parental responsibility for the child.

“relative” has the meaning given by section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996.

[Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

Grooming can be defined as the process that an abuser uses to desensitise you – to make you less likely to reject or report abusive behaviour.

Grooming can happen when there is a power differential within a relationship, which the abuser exploits for their own gratification.

[SurvivorsUK | Grooming](#)

Boundaries violation & control can be defined by the following:

Where adult (A) uses coercive control, emotional abuse, stalking, harassment, grooming, threats, financial abuse, verbal abuse etc to control adult (B) within the workplace, online, over the phone or in real life. This includes where adult (A) and (B) live in the same house as part of a house share.

This also includes using a 3rd party to cause suffering, control or abuse (B). For example: lying about (B) to other people in order to isolate that person from colleges, support, friends, family etc. Most common lies are calling (B) a paedophile, rapist, home-wrecker, thief, child abuser, mentally unstable, mentally ill, substance misusers, alcoholic, untrustworthy, where (A) accuses (B) of an act towards (A) or where (A) calls in to question (B) professionalism or qualifications.

Case studies: The following case studies from 2018-2019 explain the key points to each case. These situations took time to establish, progress, escalate and devolve.

Case study 1.

(B) lived in a rural area, no public transport. (A) moved into the area and befriended (B) to find out about the local area and amenities. (B) was a single mum. (vulnerability) The two became friends, speaking when they saw each other outside.

Key points: First incident that could be recalled by (B) is where (A) walked into her home uninvited, walked up the stairs to where (B) was getting her child dressed to go out and started shouting and screaming about another neighbour. (B) requested that (A) leave her house. (B) then started to recall other incidents where (A) had spoken about neighbours in the area stating that (A) was trying to protect (B) from these people. As (B) had requested (A) leave her house things escalated to (A) throwing stones at (B's) windows late at night. (A) going into (B's) garden moving things around at night. (B) at this time did not know who was doing this as (A) was still being friendly and giving her advice regarding other people in the area. (A) then walked into (B) kitchen late at night as (B) had not locked the door and tried setting fire to (B) kitchen. Again, pretending that it wasn't her. (B) started to suffer from anxiety as a result and turned to (A) for help and advice. (B) started to have child services involvement as there were multiple anonymous calls to child services regarding (B) and her child. Neighbours in the area stopped talking to (B) or when they did talk, they were not as friendly and chatty. (B) had a small business but after (A) moved into the area her sales started to drop till she closed the business.

It took time for (B) to realise that all these events were being perpetrated by (A). (B) finally realised this when some items from her garden that disappeared were openly visible in (A) car. This situation escalated to (A) trying to run (B) over. (A) was moved out of the area but still continued to stalk and harass (B) and her child. (B) ended up moving to stop the abuse.

In case study 1. (A) violated boundaries on (B) by entering her house and garden without permission. Used coercive control to isolate (B) from other neighbours. Caused (B) to be anxious and feel unsafe in her own home. Groomed (B) into trusting her and turning to her for help and advice. Gaslighting also forms part of this case study as items were moved, went missing or suddenly appeared again in (B) garden. (A) had also told (B) that she had given permission for (A) to use items she saw in (A) car when (B) has no recollection of lending these items.

There is no equivocal evidence to prove that everything that started going wrong in (B) life was down to (A) either directly or indirectly. Hearsay is also part of this case study as (B) only found out from others what they had heard or seen after (A) moved out of the area.

Case Study 2.

The two parties met via a mutual acquaintance. (A) explained that she was a single mum, issues with the father and her family. Needing support and friendship. (B) had seen (A) at the local church hall on a number of occasions prior to them becoming friends. People spoke about (A) as being through a very difficult time and how nice it would be if (B) would help her as they were about the same age. (B) struck up a conversation with (A) as (A) appeared withdrawn. It seemed that they had the same kind of interests and within a short time (A) invited (B) over to her house. They'd swapped numbers so (A) could call when she needed someone to talk to.

Key points: First incident (B) can recall was being asked to look after the child as (A) had a doctor/nurse appointment and didn't want to take little one with her. (B) told (A) to drop the child off at hers as it was on the way. (B) was not given any nappies for the child but didn't ask as it was a quick appointment. Hours later (B) took the child to the shop across the road and bought nappies as the child needed changing. (A) finally returned but said nothing about the lack of provisions for the child. Instead, she explained that she's been harassed after she left her appointment and had taken a much longer route back so she could ensure she wasn't being followed. Another incident involved (B) being called and asked for help with electric money as (A) needed to top up the electric but wasn't paid for a few more days. There were other incidents of (B) looking after the child or lending money to (A) to help with food, electric etc. The money was never paid back and when (B) asked she was either ignored or talked about a new incident where (A) was being abused, attacked, stalked or harassed. (A) met a new guy (X) and (B) did not hear from (A) as much.

The next key incident was when (X) called (B) saying he wasn't sure what to do as he had to get back to work (A) had left to go to the local shop, leaving the child on the potty, been gone over an hour and (X) couldn't stay any longer. (A) wasn't answering her phone. (B) went to look after the child and started making calls to people who might be able to help find (A) and she knew (A) trusted. (B) was told to contact the police or child services by (Z) as (A) had been out of contact for around 3 hours. (B) did not contact child services as (A) had already told her that she was scared of them due to the father. Around 6 hours after (A) went to the local shop she returned crying and saying she had almost taken her own life because of the abuse from the father and others. (A) made (B) and (X) promise they wouldn't tell anyone what had happened because (A) was scared the father and others would use this incident to take her child from her. (B) called (Z) who told her she should report the incident to child services so (A) could get the help she needed and that (B) needed to stop giving (A) money, food, nappies etc as (B) was going without herself to help (A)

Third key incident was (A) calling (B) asking her for help as the child was in hospital. (B) called (Z) who told her categorically to stay out of it. (B) had previously told (Z) that she had followed (Z) advice and wasn't doing as much for (A) However, (Z) discovered that (B) had again started doing everything (A) asked of her. (B) ignored the advice from (Z) and went up to the hospital to help (A). Child services at this point got involved. The child was placed away from (A) whilst they investigated.

This is where the situation became confusing for (B) and (X). (A) stated to both that she needed to do some improvements on the house for the child to return. (B) lent (A) her entire savings to cover rent arrears, decorate, install carpets etc. (A) stayed in communication with both (B) and (X) stating she knew neither of them had hurt the child and that she was doing everything she could to protect both from child services. However, both (B) and (X) were being openly accused of child abuse within the local community. (B) again, reached out to (Z) who told her to contact child services to find out exactly what if anything she was being accused of and provide the text messages from (A) stating she was telling child services (B) hadn't done anything. (B) listened to (Z) and discovered that (A) was telling child services either (B) or (X) had hurt the child.

This situation escalated in the local community and both (B) and (X) were banned from the local church till the incident was resolved. This case did go to court and (B) was proven innocent of the allegations, as (B) was no longer party to the case (B) does not know the outcome of the case.

However, since this incident (B) is still suffering in the local community as a result of allegations made by (A) to other people and is slowly rebuilding her reputation.

In case study 2 we see multiple forms of abuse towards (B) by (A) with the addition of including multiple 3rd parties within this abuse. (X) may have been party to the abuse or also a victim of (A). This is difficult to establish without knowing the dynamics of the (A), (X) relationship and the case outcome. However, it is easy to see that (B) was being controlled by (A) to the point that she lied to (Z) regarding the friendship. This case also includes a substantial financial abuse element.

Case study 3.

(B) met (A) whilst he was working on her house renovations. It was winter and (A) told (B) he was sleeping in a caravan and was worried about the cold weather as he had no heating. (B) agreed to allow (A) to stay at her home for a short time due to the weather as (A) said it would be easier for him to do the work needed on her house. Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months. Hardly any work was carried out on the house during this time. (B) was left feeling as if her house wasn't her own and justified (A) behaviour by saying he was a nice person who was trying to help her improve her self-esteem. However, at the same time (B) was left feeling isolated, drained and emotional. (A) was cooking ingredients derived from pigs when he knew it was against (B) religion and knew that anything that comes from a pig was not allowed in the house. (B) was telling (A) that she needed to improve her wardrobe because she looked shoddy and that she needed to keep the house tidier. (A) left (B) feeling as if she couldn't even answer the phone in her own home. (B) started confining herself to her bedroom when she got home from work. When (B) first asked (A) to leave he said she was making him homeless because he'd sold the caravan and had nowhere to go. He started refusing to wash his clothes if any of hers were in the washing machine. He started questioning her in regards to what she bought shopping and what she ate. (A) also told (B) that no man would want her. This situation started to affect (B) at work and her health. (B) eventually kicked (A) out of the house. (A) often stated that he was helping (B) save money on repairs as he was living in the house.

In case study 3 it is clear that this was an abusive situation and that (B) felt she had no choice but allow (A) to stay. There was no physical relationship between the two parties, although (A) did have a professional working relationship with (B) this is not classed as domestic abuse. (A) did however, abuse his position of power being a contactor. He also used coercive control, mental, emotional and verbal abuse. Luckily this did not escalate into physical abuse but there was a financial abuse aspect. As the house was (A) workplace this case study also covers boundaries violation and control at work.

Online bullying (often referred to as cyberbullying) is any form of bullying that is carried out through the use of electronic media devices, such as computers, laptops, smartphones, tablets, or gaming consoles. <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/online-bullying/what-online-bullying>

Cyberbullying as per the above definition from the anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk covers many devices however, when reading the information on this and other cyberbullying websites, it is easy to see that this information is primarily directed towards children and young people. Cybersmile.org tackles the effects this has on adults and discusses the wider aspects of adult-to-adult cyberbullying.

However, just as The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 also covers children within the domestic abuse household Boundaries violation & control covers the cyber bullying aspect of adult-to-adult abuse.

Since the start of the Covid epidemic and especially during the lock-downs more and more people have been working from home and using technology to replace face to face meetings, socialisation and communication. This has also led to more people looking online for social platforms, websites and chat-rooms to gain self-help, advice and support.

According to mind.org.uk around a third of adults and young people said their mental health has got much worse since March 2020.

Mind welcomes Online Safety Bill measures, but warns protection must be given to legitimate support groups

Thursday, 17 March 2022 Mind

Mind welcomes details shared on the Online Safety Bill, which confirms the UK Government's intentions to tackle harmful content, which encourages suicide or self-harm on social media, but Mind also warns that tech companies must make sure any actions to remove this content do not infringe on legitimate and valuable peer support, which is an important source of support for many people experiencing a mental health problem. <https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/>

Mind.org.uk is one of if not the leading charity when it comes to helping people suffering from mental illness and raising awareness of mental health issues.

As you can see from the above quote Mind.org.uk understand that many people reach out to online peer support for mental health issues. Many people also reach out to online peer support for other issues such as relationship problems, child related issues, police related issues, education, general health and therapies.

There are untold numbers of online support groups within the UK via websites, chat rooms and social media. Only a small number of these are regulated because anyone can set up a social media group, website or chatroom that offers peer-to-peer support. As there are no statistics available to quote it becomes difficult to ascertain exact numbers and percentages of these that may be problematic.

However, if we look at the statistics from Prevent, domestic abuse and Cyberbullying we can begin to gain some insight into the online world of abuse.

Prevent referrals saw an overall increase of 10% in the year to March 2020, up to 6,287 from 5,737 in the previous financial year, with just 2% (139) coming from friends and family seeking support for a loved one.

Much of that 10% increase was seen in the 'mixed, unstable or unclear' ideology category, which represented 51% (3203) of referrals in 2019/20, up from just 11% (696 of 6093) in 2016/17.

<https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/new-prevent-statistics-warn-of-increase-in-young-men-becoming-fixated-on-violent-extremism/>

The research showed that almost 15 percent of the participants had ever been a target of cyberbullying. Young adults (18-25 years) experienced the highest levels of cyberbullying (during both the lifetime and past month time frames), but substantial lifetime cyberbullying was reported by older age groups as well, including those 26-35 years (24 percent) and 46-55 years (13 percent), up to the 66+ age group (6.5 percent).

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/shame-nation/201911/adult-cyberbullying-is-more-common-you-think>

In the year ending March 2021, the number of domestic abuse-related incidents recorded by the police in England and Wales (613,929 incidents) increased by 6% compared with the year ending March 2020 where there were 581,649 incidents. This ended the trend of consecutive annual decreases seen in recent years

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2021#:~:text=In%20the%20year%20ending%20March%202021%2C%20the%20number%20of%20domestic,decreases%20seen%20in%20recent%20years.>

Even if a study was undertaken in respect to boundaries violation & control, the statistics could only cover incidents that have been reported, with many others going undetected.

When we look at the above reported statistics we need to remember that not every incident of radicalisation, domestic abuse or cyberbullying is reported and as such we only get a snap-shot of the possible cases per year.

As non-relationship adult-to-adult abuse has not been studied it is impossible to predict how many cases of boundaries violation & control happen each year.

