

A Guide to working with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence

Quick Check

Ensure that you are sufficiently trained and knowledgeable to undertake this work - consult your line manager who will be happy to discuss any concerns.

Understand the definitions of safeguarding and domestic abuse, and its relevance to the person you are working with.

Be alert to patterns of coercive or controlling behaviour, as well as incidents of abuse.

Take account of gender, sexuality and cultural issues including honour based violence.

Always act to safeguard children who are living with or witnessing domestic abuse.

Victim Safety

If you are in contact with both partners, always see them separately when discussing violence and abuse

If your information about the violence comes only from the victim, do not use that to challenge the perpetrator. The victim's safety is paramount

Ensure there is a robust safety plan in place for the victim and children first and foremost

Voice of the child

Hear and respect children's voices as they have valuable ideas and opinions to contribute.

Consider the child's day to day experience of living with domestic violence.

Consider the child's views regarding contact and ensure it is safe.

Beginning Direct Work With Perpetrators

Ask: The information you gather will be the basis for your decision about how best to engage the person and what kind of specialist help is required to manage risk.

Assess risk: Risk awareness should be a continuous process and risk assessments should be regularly reviewed.

Respond: Your response to any disclosure made by the abuser could be significant for accepting responsibility and motivating change.

Refer/Signpost: Consider if it is appropriate to refer to alcohol/drug services and or mental health services as this may reduce the risk of violence

Record: Keep good records of any discussions and interventions that are recorded in a timely manner as they may need to be accessed by out of hours services.

Multi Agency Working as an Intervention

Ensure professionals working with the perpetrator and those working with the victim and children are actively sharing information relevant to delivering the safeguarding plan.

Questions to consider

Who if anyone is working the perpetrator?

What will be the objective and desired outcome of this work?

What information do other agencies need to work with the perpetrator?

Who is monitoring and following up with the perpetrator?

Look after yourself

Don't work on your own – maintain links with partner **agencies**.

Refer to your 'Lone Working Policy'

Make plans that ensure your safety – e.g. don't visit someone suspected of serious domestic violence to talk about the behaviour on your own. Invite them into the office or a community based building that is safe

Do not work with perpetrators when they are under the influence of alcohol or other substances.

Use supervision for support and planning.

Risk Assessment Check List

Use your professional judgement in risk assessment as everybody's circumstances are different:

- Recent or imminent separation
- Past assault of family members
- Past assault of strangers or acquaintances
- Past breach or ignoring of injunctions, court orders or conditions
- Victim and/or witness of "family" violence as child or adolescent
- Substance misuse
- Recent mental ill-health relating to violence
- Past physical assault of partner
- Partner pregnant or recently given birth
- Sexual assault or sexual jealousy
- Past use of weapons or threats of death
- Recent escalation in frequency or severity of assaults
- Extreme minimisation or denial of domestic violence history
- Attitudes/beliefs that support or condone domestic abuse

Good Practice in Dealing with Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

If it is within your role to have direct contact with a perpetrator and to speak about domestic abuse:

- Do not expect an early full and honest disclosure about the extent of the abuse
- Be clear that abuse is always unacceptable
- Be clear that abusive behaviour is a choice
- Be aware of and vigilant against the potential of 'the rule of optimism', do not place undue confidence in the self reporting of individuals
- Do acknowledge any accountability shown by the abuser
- Be aware that perpetrators can present as rational and cooperative with professionals, or may use their professional status, vulnerability, or 'charm' to avoid detection
- Be respectful and empathic but do not collude
- Be straight-forward and avoid jargon
- Be aware, explain that children are always affected by living with domestic abuse, whether or not they witness it directly
- Be aware, domestic abuse is about a range of behaviours, not just physical violence (see definition)
- Be aware of the barriers to acknowledging the abuse and seeking help (such as shame, fear of child protection process, self-justifying anger)
- Be clear that you might have to speak to other agencies and that there is no entitlement to confidentiality if children are at physical or emotional risk

Definition

The Home Office (March 2013) defines domestic abuse as: '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

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

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.

N.B. There is a strong, evidence-based link between domestic abuse and child abuse. Exposure to domestic abuse is **always** abusive to children, although the impact on them may vary.