



FACT SHEET: Domestic Abuse and Children

Home is where children and young people should feel safe but that safety may be compromised if they are living with domestic abuse. Research has found that it can take many incidents and years for women to report domestic abuse and the experiences of children may therefore be missed. Women are primarily the victims of domestic abuse but it can involve men being abused, same sex relationships, young people abusing other family members and abuse of older people by family members. It is important to remember that mothers (or fathers) who are victims will have developed coping strategies over time including ways of protecting themselves and their children. The impact on the children should always be considered and referrals made to Children's Social Care if there are concerns.

The impact on children

Children and young people are at risk of suffering long term psychological and emotional damage from domestic abuse as a result of:

- Witnessing the abuse perpetrated against a parent or carer, usually their mother
- Experiencing the fear and anxiety of living in an environment where abuse occurs
- Becoming actual victims of abuse and neglect
- Taking on the role of the abuser, against a parent or other sibling/s
- Witnessing physical abuse against their pets.

The Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Domestic Abuse guidance chapter 3.7 aims to promote a multi-agency approach to early, effective intervention and safeguarding of children and young people affected by domestic abuse. It emphasises risk assessment and safety planning, as a continuous, interlinked process.

Further information about safeguarding and risk assessment

For information about risk assessment processes such as MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) and details of forms of domestic abuse for example: Physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, forced marriage and honour based violence visit the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board website (http://sheffieldscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_dom_abuse.html) or the Sheffield Domestic Abuse Co-ordination Team website (<http://sheffielddact.org.uk/>).

Aspects to remember:

- Abuse, violence and controlling behaviour are unacceptable
- Domestic abuse is not just about physical assaults – coercive control and enforced isolation are key risk factors
- The child's safety is paramount
- Be alert to signs of domestic abuse and child abuse, and be aware of the connection between them
- Domestic abuse can be present in all forms of child abuse
- The most effective way to protect children may involve protecting the mother; which may mean leaving the family home, or the abuser being required to leave
- If a separation of the children and their mother is necessary, this must be assessed to be in their immediate interest
- Build trust and support the non-abusing parent to develop strategies and choices to stay safe
- Leaving an abusive partner is a drawn out process, not a single event
- Separation is also a risk factor – a couple splitting up doesn't mean the abuse will necessarily stop and can lead to conflict over child contact
- Continuous risk assessment and safety planning with all agencies must take place
- Consider overlaps with drug or alcohol misuse, learning difficulties, mental ill health, but not as an excuse for the abuse, or for minimising its seriousness
- Black and minority ethnic communities may be affected by aspects of forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called 'honour' crimes and killings, and also face other additional challenges including barriers to disclosure
- Responsibility for domestic abuse rests solely with the perpetrator/s, who should be held to account.
- Young people can also experience domestic abuse in their own relationships and peer groups. See FACT SHEET: Domestic Abuse and Young people.