

Domestic Abuse Guidance for Schools, Pre-Schools and Colleges

Purpose of Guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to increase awareness among those working with children and young people¹ about domestic violence and abuse issues and provide support to staff in an education setting to have conversations with young people and their carers about domestic abuse. This guidance will cover:

1. Identifying when someone may be experiencing domestic abuse
2. Talking to parents and responding to disclosures
3. Support with safety planning and accessing support

Please note that any safeguarding procedures remain the same. If you have concerns for a child's welfare, these should be shared with [Hampshire County Council Children's Services](#) through the usual process.

Stop Domestic Abuse is the commissioned provider of domestic abuse support services in Hampshire and provides an Advice Line for anyone seeking advice, help, support, or access to services (details on page 4 of this guidance).

Definition of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by someone [personally connected](#). It is very common. In the vast majority of cases, it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men. It is however important to be aware that men can and will experience domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence, this includes gaslighting)
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse

It is important to remember that, as stipulated in the [Domestic Abuse Act \(2021\)](#), children witnessing domestic abuse are now classified as victims in their own right. Being exposed to domestic abuse has serious consequences for children and young people and it can affect how they feel, think and behave in harmful ways.

Identifying When Someone May be Experiencing Domestic Abuse

Signs that a child or young person may be experiencing domestic abuse at home:

¹ For the purposes of this guidance 'children and young people' refers to all those between the ages of 0-18.

- Presenting as sleep deprived
- Unsettled/withdrawn
- Anxious
- Aggressive or bullying behaviours
- Focus on pleasing others
- Hypervigilance

For further information about signs that a child or young person may be affected by domestic abuse issues, please see *Appendix A*.

Signs that a young person may be experiencing intimate partner abuse:

- Sudden change to personality
- Decrease in confidence
- Falling out with friends and family resulting in isolation
- Fearful/anxious
- Unexplained bruising or other injuries

Operation Encompass

Schools participating in [Operation Encompass](#) receive advance notice that a pupil in their care has been exposed to a domestic abuse incident at some point the day before. This process gives schools an opportunity to support the young person with any additional support deemed appropriate.

Talking to Parents and Responding to Disclosures

A parent may disclose experiencing domestic abuse independently or as a result of an [Operation Encompass](#) notification to the education setting. It is important to recognise that the parent/carer is likely to have overcome many barriers (for example: shame, guilt, fear) to make a disclosure, so it is vital that this conversation is managed as sensitively as possible. In the event of a disclosure about domestic abuse from a parent or carer, the member of staff should:

- Listen, without making or showing any judgment
- Not promise confidentiality
- Not advise the parent/carer to leave the relationship, people are most at risk of serious incident at the point of, or just after separation
- Ask about the parent's immediate safety and consider the safety tips on page 3 of this guidance
- Accurately record the conversation
- Report the disclosure to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) who may refer onwards to relevant support services
- The DSL may need to inform [Children's](#) or [Adult Services](#) or the police.

Initiating the conversation:

Below are some questions that can be used to instigate the conversation when approaching a parent about a concern you have around domestic abuse:

- Is everything ok?

- I am worried about how you are; would you like to come and have a chat?
- How are things at home?
- How are things with your partner?
- Does your partner ever stop you from doing things?
- Are you ever afraid at home?
- Is someone hurting you?
- Have you ever been forced to do anything you do not want to?
- I see you have a bruise on your face, what happened/ tell me about that?

Responding to a Child or Young Person’s Disclosure

The most important thing that you can do when a child is disclosing is ensure they know that it is not their fault, that they are believed and that there is help available. It is important to remember that this may be the first time that the child has spoken about their experience, so they need to be given the time to be heard supportively. The tips below will support in responding in a safe way:

| Do: | Do not: |
|---|---|
| Create a school environment where children and young people feel comfortable and know that abuse of any kind is not tolerated | Pressurise the child or young person into a plan of what to do next |
| Explain confidentiality and safeguarding duties in an age-appropriate way | Promise confidentiality |
| Praise the child or young person for talking about what is happening | Send anything home regarding the disclosure |
| Keep detailed records of conversations had with the child or young person. | Attempt to mediate between partners |
| | Show any judgement of the non-abusing parent’s choices or actions |

Support With Safety Planning and Accessing Support

Safety planning with children and young people:

- Have they had to call 999 before? When do they think they would need to do this? How do they feel about doing this? Discuss with them what a 999 call would involve- asking for the right service, giving their name and address, describing what is happening.
- Have they ever tried to stop something happening or tried to get involved? What happened? The best way to make sure they do not get hurt is either to go to the place in the house where they feel safe or to leave the house and go somewhere else they feel safe.
- You should only give written material or resources if it is safe. Seek guidance from your Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Information About Harmful Cultural Practices:

Forced Marriage:

A forced marriage is a marriage conducted without the full consent of both parties and where duress (emotional pressure in addition to physical abuse) is a factor. If there are concerns that a child is in danger of a Forced Marriage, the [Forced Marriage Unit](#) should be contacted on:

Telephone: 020 7008 0151

Email: fmufcdo.gov.uk

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):

FGM is an illegal practice and is a form of child abuse. Female Genital Mutilation is any procedure which involves the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Professionals from all agencies have a statutory obligation to safeguard children from FGM and are required to report concerns under the [Mandatory Reporting Duty 2015](#).

Other Harmful Practices:

Further information on Harmful Practices is available on the [HIPS Procedures website](#). Training around other Harmful Practices including breast ironing, honour-based abuse and child abuse linked to faith and belief can be found at [HSCP Training Page](#)

Support Services:

[Stop Domestic Abuse](#) is the commissioned provider of domestic abuse support services in Hampshire and provides an Advice Line for anyone seeking advice, help, support, or access to services. This includes victims and survivors, family and friends of someone experiencing abuse, perpetrators and professionals.

Advice Line for all parts of Hampshire: 0330 016 5112

Email: advice@stopdomesticabuse.uk

[Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) provide a wide range of free domestic abuse themed training for all professionals working with children and families living in the Hampshire local authority area. This training supports professionals in developing their understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and knowing how to respond well to disclosures of domestic abuse. Training also covers important themes such as coercive control, stalking and cyber stalking, post separation abuse and economic abuse.

In line with your school's safeguarding procedures, please ensure all concerns are reported to Hampshire County Councils Children's Services by completing an [Inter-Agency Referral Form](#).

Appendix A - Signs That a Child or Young Person May be Affected by Domestic Abuse Issues

Each child or young person who experiences domestic violence will respond differently. Some children may not exhibit any negative effects, and others will display many signs of distress both internally and externally through their behaviour. The effects may be short and/or long term.

The following indicate some of the signs to be aware of:

| | Pre-School | Primary | Secondary |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| Behavioural | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor attendance • Aggressive • Irritable • Regressive • Issues with sleep | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor attendance • Disobedience • Constantly looks to please • Withdrawn • Discusses issues that are not age-appropriate • Evasive when asked about home life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor attendance • Truancy • Early sexual activity • Running away |
| Social | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues interacting with peers • Stranger anxiety • Acts out unhealthy situations when role-playing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to maintain friendships • Uses inappropriate insults/words when navigating difficult social situations with peers. • Unhealthy perception of gender roles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks to control situations • Unhealthy romantic relationships • Overly compliant • Pulls back from previous friendship groups |
| Emotional/ Psychological | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear if 'get something wrong' • Separation anxiety | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somatic complaints • Fear and anxiety • Bed wetting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance misuse • Unresponsiveness • Eating Disorder |

It is important to remember that domestic violence may be one of many other issues that are happening within the family home and the abuse itself can create other issues for a family.