

Domestic Abuse - Guidance for Parents

Domestic Abuse is a safeguarding issue.

Definition:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged over 16. The abuse can encompass but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional abuse.

Controlling and coercive behaviours - reference the Serious Crime Act 2015 Section 76.

Who is affected?

Men and women can be perpetrators and victims. The causes are 'POWER and CONTROL'. It is often thought that e.g. alcohol use/abuse is a cause, but it is an excuse. Anyone can be affected - it does not matter what your age, race, gender, sexuality (occurs in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities). Teenagers can suffer DA. DA occurs with partners living in the same home and ex-partners. Separation does not ensure safety; it often increases risk. 1 in 4 women experience DA.

DA can seriously harm children.

Witnessing DA is child abuse. It can be particularly linked to emotional abuse and neglect, also physical, as can be caught in the cross fire.

1 in 5 children are exposed to DA. 1/3 of children witnessing DA also experience other forms of abuse. DA is a factor in 60% of Serious Case Reviews. 130,000 children live in households where they are at high risk.

Risk factors:

- Disabled children - 3 times more likely to be abused. May not understand or may not be able to ask for help.
- Looked after children.
- Children who have experienced other forms of abuse.
- Children from black and mixed ethnic backgrounds. They are over-represented in the care system, language barriers, racial discrimination, cultural norms eg Female Genital Mutilation, harsh discipline.
- Mental health needs, drug and alcohol abuse, learning difficulties.
- Low income/poverty - a parent may feel unable to leave an abusive partner.
- Poor housing, multiple moves.
- Lack of family support.

Signs:

As for any signs of abuse, as 'Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility', becoming aggressive, displaying anti-social behaviours, suffering from anxiety and depression, not doing as well at school...

DA can have a serious impact on a child's behaviour and wellbeing.

How will they feel?

Some feelings may include:

Scared, powerless, confused, bad, helpless, angry, self-blame, anxious, guilt at loving the abusive parent, guilt at not being able to protect the victim, worried about the future, insecure, hopeless, split down the middle, numb...

If we do not address their experiences and feelings, they may develop belief systems about the world that are untrue.

They may learn:

- Other people are responsible for my behaviour (it is my sister's fault that I hit her because she would not do what I said).
- I am responsible for other people's behaviour (my mum and dad had a fight and she was cross. She would not have hit me if my room had been clean).
- Men have the right to control women (my mum never stops him).
- Violence is a way to solve problems (my dad hit my mum because tea was not ready on time).
- The abuse was my mum's/dad's fault.
- Women have no rights.
- My mum/dad cannot protect me.
- Nothing is safe.
- DA is normal.
- If I intimidate people I will get what I want.
- Other people have the right to abuse me.
- The abuse was my fault.
- Its OK to abuse my mum/dad.
- Its OK to abuse other people.
- You should not talk about abuse.
- You must deny your own feelings.

What can we do?

- Look out for signs and report concerns.
- Create a safe environment to share.
- Listen.
- Increase their knowledge via PSHE, circle time, NSPCC/ West Mercia Women's Aid workshops etc.
- Talk about healthy relationships/ feelings...
- Show understanding.
- Ensure that the child knows that it is not their fault and that it is never ok.
- Speak to parents about the impact of DA on their children.
- Suggest that victims seek support. West Mercia Women's Aid - 0800 733 1359
- Help parents understand the impact of DA on their child.