

Domestic Abuse: Why it's a Child Protection Issue

"The interest of the child is paramount in all considerations of welfare and safeguarding. Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility."

Contents taken from:

The Welsh Assembly Government Strategy for Tackling Domestic Abuse



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"Domestic Abuse is best described as the use of physical and/or emotional abuse or violence, including undermining of self confidence, sexual violence or the threat of violence, by a person who is or has been in a close relationship. Domestic abuse can go beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse, the destruction of a spouse's or partner's property, their isolation from friends, family or other potential sources of support, threats to others including children, control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone, and stalking."

It can also include violence perpetrated by a son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim/survivor. It can also include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by, children. **The wide adverse effects of living with domestic abuse for children must be recognised as a child protection issue.** The effects can be linked to poor educational achievement, social exclusion and to juvenile crime, substance abuse, mental health problems and homelessness from running away. Domestic abuse is not a "one-off" occurrence; it is frequent

The growth in public and professional understanding, and acknowledgement of domestic violence has been one of the most important developments of the last 30 years. It is now far more widely recognised that domestic abuse affects people from all walks of life, and from all cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds, the well off as well as the poor. It affects those in work and those out of work, the young and the old, in all parts of Wales.

Domestic abuse can include all kinds of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and can occur within all kinds of intimate relationships, including same sex relationships. Women and children suffer in particular but men can also be victims.

There is a significant overlap between the abuse of women and the abuse of children. Where children live in a home where domestic abuse takes place there is a risk of harm. To witness or to be aware of abuse and threats or violence is obviously highly detrimental to children of any age, including the very young. They could also be at risk of, or subjected to, serious systematic abuse themselves.

- One in five child abuse cases dealt with by the NSPCC involves domestic abuse;

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Abuse and neglect

6.6 Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting; by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger.

Physical abuse

6.7 Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates or induces illness in a child whom they are looking after.

6.8 Physical abuse can lead directly to neurological damage, physical injuries, disability or – at the extreme – death. Harm may be caused to children both by the abuse itself and by the abuse taking place in a wider family or institutional context of conflict and aggression. Physical abuse has been linked to aggressive behaviour in children, emotional and behavioural problems, and educational difficulties. Violence is

pervasive and the physical abuse of children frequently coexists with domestic abuse.

Emotional abuse

6.9 Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It may involve causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

6.10 There is increasing evidence of the adverse long-term consequences for children's development where they have been subject to sustained emotional abuse. Emotional abuse has an important impact on a developing child's mental health, behaviour and self-esteem. It can be especially damaging in infancy. Underlying emotional abuse may be as important, if not more so, than other more visible forms of abuse in terms of its impact on the child. Domestic abuse, adult mental health problems and parental substance misuse may be features in families where children are exposed to such abuse.

Domestic abuse

6.16 The Welsh Assembly Government's national strategy on tackling domestic abuse (<http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/strategy/strategypublications/strategypubs/935798/?lang=en>) was launched on 30 March 2005. It has been jointly developed with experts from all the agencies who deal with the victims of abuse across Wales.

6.17 Domestic abuse and wider abuse is an issue that affects all parts of society and it can have devastating consequences for its victims, both male and female and, of course, children. It can take a number of forms and does not only involve violence against the victim, but can

also include isolation, intimidation, control and humiliation. Whilst men are sometimes the victims of domestic abuse, it is more frequently women who suffer.

6.18 The effects of domestic abuse on children can be great. As well as sometimes being the direct victims of domestic abuse they are also frequently witnesses to abuse against a parent/carer. Domestic abuse also frequently leads to family breakdowns with the associated emotional trauma that children then have to face.

6.19 When a child witnesses domestic abuse, this can have a substantial damaging effect upon the development of a child. Even if the child does not itself suffer from the abuse directly, the long term effects of witnessing physical and/or emotional abuse can be significant. In addition the parent or carer who is subject to domestic abuse might have reduced parenting ability and this will have an effect upon the child.

6.20 Prolonged and/or regular exposure to domestic abuse can have a serious impact on a child's development, psychological and emotional well-being, despite the best efforts of the victim parent to protect the child. Domestic abuse has an impact in a number of ways:

- _ It can pose a threat to an unborn child, because assaults on pregnant women frequently involve punches or kicks directed at the abdomen, risking injury to both mother and foetus.
- _ Children may also suffer blows during episodes of violence.
- _ Children may be greatly distressed by witnessing the physical and emotional suffering of a parent'.
- _ Domestic abuse (both physical and psychological) can have a negative impact upon the victim's ability to look after their children.

6.21 Children's exposure to parental conflict, even when violence is not present, is upsetting and can lead to serious anxiety and longer-term psychological distress. Children may witness or be drawn into the abuse, or pressurised into concealing it, which further exacerbates the damaging effect. Substance misuse can also be a contributing factor adding to the serious impact of domestic abuse.

This text has been taken directly from the welsh assembly government document:
Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under The Children Act 2004 a full copy of
which can be accessed on
<http://wales.gov.uk/publications/circular/2007/1637402/?lang=en>