

Domestic Abuse & COVID-19

A briefing for schools #2



June 2020

Return of children & young people to school settings

Background

Statistically 1 in 5 children will live with domestic abuse occurring in their households. Whilst coronavirus does not cause domestic abuse, the recent restrictions on normal daily life, uncertainty around finances and isolation can lead to increasing pressures in household with the frequency and severity of domestic abuse increasing or in some cases domestic abuse occurring for the first time.

Domestic abuse includes psychological, physical, sexual, financial, controlling and coercive behaviour as well as 'honour' based violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.



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Facilitating a safe environment to enable disclosures of domestic abuse

Many children may not recognise that they have been living in an abusive environment or may have been told not to tell anyone about the family 'secret', so ideas to help children feel safe to talk about what they have been experiencing include:

- 1) An assembly and / or tutor group discussion to talk about domestic abuse within a context of difficult experiences and times which the children have been going through over the past few weeks – this can include struggles with mental wellbeing, feelings of isolation, alongside pressures within household. The aim is to reassure the children that you are open to discussions about any of these issues and to reduce their feelings of anxiety and that they are the only one who has been facing these difficulties
- 2) Following a whole group discussion, try to arrange one to one time to check in with each student on an individual basis, and build on the discussions and enable them to feel safe talking to you about any concerns they may have. This should be in a setting where the child cannot be overheard by other students and ask sensitive questions to explore their feelings of safety and wellbeing.
- 3) Try and provide children with different routes to accessing help and disclosing what has been happening at home, so that they can decide which route is right for them. As some children may find it difficult to directly approach a teacher or member of staff, you could consider having a 'box' where children could put a piece of paper with their name on, to indicate they would like someone to speak to them; you could consider putting information in a school email or perhaps put up some posters in suitable locations, with contact numbers and website addresses on as well as information about which members of staff are available and what support they can offer.



- 4) Whilst some children may show physical signs of abuse, for many the signs will be difficult to detect as they may go to great lengths to cover up the abuse or be used to hiding how they are feeling inside and the emotional impact the abuse is having on them. Every child and young person is unique and will react differently to their experiences, so be alert to changes in their normal behaviour as these may be natural reactions to being back at school after this long break, or could be a sign of other concerns.

Responding to a disclosure of domestic abuse

Many young people will be worried about sharing what has taken place or is happening to them and it is important to reassure and support them. Try not to register shock at any information which is disclosed to you as this could hinder the child or young person from talking to you further.

- **Listen** and believe what the child or young person says to you
- **Thank them for trusting you** enough to tell you this information- it takes a lot of courage to talk about abuse
- Be **supportive and non- judgemental**, reassuring them that they are not alone and there are people who can help them who understand what they have and are experiencing
- Be aware that a child or young person living with domestic abuse is **likely to blame themselves** for the abuse and feel that they are responsible for what has happened. Whilst this is not true, just saying “It’s not your fault” may lead them to think that you don’t understand, so alternatively, listen to them, be patient with them and support them in seeking help. It can also be helpful to explain to them that we can only be responsible for our own actions and no-one deserves to be abused or hurt.
- Reassure them that **they are not alone** and that this is happening to a lot of other children and young people and there are people who understand and can help them
- **Be honest** with them and don’t be afraid to tell them that you’re worried about them and that you think they need help.
- Explore with the young person **what they would like to happen** and what additional support they would like to access (e.g. children and young person’s domestic abuse advocate), together with talking through safety planning options
- Talk to the child or young person about what they are worried may happen and support them to create a ‘safety plan’ to minimise potential risks they may be currently experiencing. The aim of this initial safety plan is to address the immediate risks which the child or young person might be facing, which can then be built upon by a Children & Young Person’s Domestic Abuse Advocate (see contact details below). The initial safety plan should cover as a minimum ensuring that the child or young person knows how to call the police in an emergency and thinking of safe places where the child could go if they needed to get out of a room or the house in order to call for help.
- A **safety plan** includes ensuring the child or young person knows what to do if there is an emergency or they are worried that another incident may take place, including how to call the police
- If it safe for them to do so, encourage the child or young people to speak to the non-abusive parent about how they are feeling and their concerns as well as providing them with the contact details for **support services** and information websites (details below)
- Try to gather information to form a clear picture of the circumstances in order that you can **assess safeguarding needs and risk factors** for the young person and any additional children in the household. Make notes of the discussion and what actions have been agreed. Where possible use the young person’s own words rather than your interpretation of what they are saying.
- If you identify safeguarding concerns, refer **to the schools safeguarding policies** and procedures. It is best to explain to the young person that you will need to share information with the school safeguarding team and other agencies in order to keep them safe and try to let them know who you will tell, why and what is likely to happen next.
- **Be aware of other children in the household** who may also need protection (especially if the young person who you are talking to has been providing some protection for a sibling who has not been able to return to school).



Specialist Domestic Abuse Support Services – Children and Young People

Hampshire Domestic Abuse Service Children and Young People's Domestic Abuse Advocates (delivered by Stop Domestic Abuse) are in place across Hampshire to support young people who are, or have experienced domestic abuse, as well as young people experiencing dating abuse. The advocates support young people 1:1 as well as group support (pre-Covid) and contact can be within schools.

The CYP team can also provide age-appropriate assemblies, virtually or in person, to schools.

Telephone **0330 0165112** or email advice@stopdomesticabuse.uk

Victim Support have children and young people's workers to support victims of all crime types, including domestic abuse.

Telephone **0808 1781641**

Childline provide telephone support on **0800 1111**

www.thehideout.org.uk is a website with specially written information for children and young people affected by domestic abuse. Information includes other children's stories as well as information about what it's like to live in a refuge and sources of support.

Operation Encompass

[Operation Encompass](#) is still active in Hampshire and schools will continue to be notified of domestic abuse incidents in the previous 24 hours by the police.

Operation Encompass – teacher's helpline is in place to provide guidance, information and support when dealing with vulnerable children, after receiving an Op Encompass call or notification, including consultation with psychologists and therapists that is confidential and accessible. Telephone **0845 646 0890** (Monday – Friday 08.30 – 10.30am).

Links to helpful resources

- [Hampshire Domestic Abuse Service Website](#) (for local service provision, professionals' advice & referral pathways) <https://www.hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/domesticabuse>
- [Hampshire Domestic Abuse Partnership COVID-19 update web page](#) (including local service provision updates)
- [Hampshire's domestic abuse referral pathway](#)
- [Safety planning for where the child is the aggressor](#) (COVID version)
- NICE guidance: [Recognising and responding to domestic violence and abuse](#)
- National gov.uk press release - [Social workers to work with teachers in schools](#)
- A series of short podcasts is currently being created to reach out to children and young people who have not yet returned to school – please contact karen.evans@communitysafetynh.org to register your interest in receiving these when they are available.

Local support services

Hampshire Domestic Abuse Service (delivered by **Stop Domestic Abuse**):
0330 0165112 Monday - Friday
9.30am – 8pm
(24 hr service to enable access to refuge accommodation)

Aurora New Dawn 24 hour domestic abuse COVID helpline: 02394 216816

Victim Care Service: 0808 1781641
Mon-Fri 9am-5pm
(0808 1689111 outside these hours)

Nepali Domestic and Sexual Abuse Service: 07741 261387

YOU Trust (support with target hardening) 0800 9169878

Hampton Trust (perpetrator interventions): 02380 009898
Mon-Fri 9am-5pm with service available until 8pm on Tues & Thurs.

Support and Information for Children

Childline: 0800 1111;
<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/home-families/family-relationships/domestic-abuse/>

National Contacts

24 hour Domestic Abuse helpline (female victims): 0808 2000247;
www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk
Men's Advice Line: 0808 8010327;
www.mensadvice.org.uk
Mankind Initiative: 01823 334244;
www.mankind.org.uk
National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse helpline: 0800 9995428;
www.galop.org.uk
Respect National helpline (perpetrator help): 0808 8024040;
www.respect.uk.net



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