



# Supporting Children and Young People Living with Domestic Abuse:

A practical guidance document for  
professionals in  
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

## Acknowledgements

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## About AVA

AVA is a feminist organisation committed to creating a world without gender-based violence and abuse. Our mission is to work with survivors to end gender-based violence by championing evidence-based change. We are a national charity, independent and particularly recognized for our specialist expertise in multiple disadvantage and children and young people's work. Our core work includes training, policy, research, and consultancy.

AVA run the CODA programme (Children Overcoming Domestic Abuse) Programme, a national concurrent group work programme for mothers and children adaptable locally to flex with your capacity and demand. If you would like to talk with us about running the programme in your area or would like information to pass to commissioning colleges please email [info@avaproject.org.uk](mailto:info@avaproject.org.uk)

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# 1. About this guidance

This guidance was commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council to help shape local guidelines and best practice in providing support for children/young people who are living with conflict, abuse, and violence at home. Focus on the needs of children has grown as a result of the changed status of child survivors arising from the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.<sup>1</sup>

This guidance draws on four key sources:

1. Three (3) face-to-face focus groups with young people; focus groups took place in: Cambridge, March and Wisbech; total number of participants 35, average age 16.
2. Four (4) online focus groups with professionals and practitioners based in Cambridgeshire, representing the education, social work, domestic abuse and ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) sectors; total number of participants 54.
3. Best practice identified across AVA's in-house resources and work; e.g. Ask AVA<sup>2</sup> and General Guidelines for Responding to Child Survivors (in-house document, unpublished).
4. Rapid literature review on needs of children/young people experiencing domestic abuse at home.

The guidance follows headline themes from both sets of focus groups. It focuses on providing information on how to support/meet the needs of children/young people living with domestic abuse perpetrated by a parent or a sibling in the home, as opposed to other forms of domestic abuse children/young people may face or perpetrate.

We would like to acknowledge there are a wide range of services and agencies supporting children/young people in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. These services and agencies will be working within different external and internal policies, legal obligations and with families at different stages of intervention either inside or outside of the home. To acknowledge the differences in aspired outcomes and legal/policy frameworks agencies and services need to follow, this guidance is not prescriptive. While we aimed to cover different aspects of support that children/young people may need, recommendations in this guidance should be considered in line with your organisational policies and mandate.

This guidance focuses on highlighting approaches on how to practically work with children and young people who are still living with the domestic abuse perpetrator. We also include a guide on working with the non-abusive parent on how to discuss children's safety and pass on tools and techniques to their child. While we do include limited information on signposting and referral process, this is not the main focus of this guidance.

This guidance consists of eight key sections.

- Section 1: Outlines information on aims and structure and provides information on data collection
- Section 2: Provides information on policy context and outlines relevant statistics
- Section 3: Provides information on how children/young people experiencing abuse at home might present
- Section 4: Provides guidance on how to communicate with the child/young person to encourage disclosure
- Section 5: Provides guidance on appropriate responses once disclosure has been made
- Section 6: Provides guidance on risk assessment and safety planning
- Section 7: Provides guidance on how to support the non-abusive parent
- Section 8: Provides information on multi-agency work, signposting and referrals.

Keeping children/young people safe is everyone's responsibility. All organisations and professionals working with children/young people are in a vital position when it comes to identifying those who may be experiencing domestic violence/abuse and providing support, whether immediate or long term.

1. Domestic Abuse Act 2021: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents> [last access 16.11.2021]

2. Main ASK AVA website: <https://ask-ava.org.uk/> [last access 16.11.2021]

## 2. Context

### Domestic abuse and children/young people

The new Domestic Abuse Act (2021) defines domestic abuse as any of the following: “physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; psychological, emotional or other abuse.” For the definition to apply, both parties must be aged 16 or over and ‘personally connected’. People who are ‘personally connected’ are defined as: intimate partners, ex-partners, family members or individuals who share parental responsibility for a child.

Part 1 of The Act provides that a child who sees, hears, or experiences the effects of domestic abuse and is related to the person being abused or the perpetrator is also to be regarded as a victim of domestic abuse in their own right, and, as such, services need to ensure that they are responding to their needs.

Although this guidance specifically focuses on children/young people living at home and experiencing violence and abuse by their parents and/or sibling, it is important to acknowledge the other forms of domestic abuse children/young people may be victim to, or abusive behaviours they may adopt.

Children/young people may also face or perpetrate the following forms of domestic abuse: teenage relationship abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual exploitation, sexual harassment and bullying, and child to parent violence.<sup>3</sup>

### Rates of domestic abuse in Cambridgeshire:

**Domestic abuse is hard to quantify, reliance on police data hides help seeking from schools, family and friends, health and other professionals. With this caveat we note that;**

- The rate of domestic abuse related crime in Cambridgeshire has increased in the last 5 years, from 4.2 to 7.6.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2020-21, a total of 1,176 domestic abuse cases were heard at MARAC.<sup>5</sup>
- In 2020-21, there were 2,324 referrals to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor Service for domestic abuse, an increase of 18% on 2019-20, over half of those open to the IDVA service have dependent children in 2020-21, refuges across the county housed 93 women and 112 children.<sup>6</sup>

### National rates of children/ young people experiencing domestic abuse:

Not all children/young people face the same risk of abuse; those who identify as LGBT+, those with mixed or multiple ethnic background, and disabled children, all face higher rates of abuse in childhood.

- One in seven (14.2%) children/young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic abuse at some point in their childhood.<sup>7</sup>
- 692 children daily are assessed as being at risk of domestic abuse in England.<sup>8</sup>
- Two in five children (41%) living in families where there is domestic abuse have been living with that abuse since they were born.<sup>9</sup>

3. See ASK AVA's 'Understand' section for an explanation of each form of domestic abuse and the 'Resources' section for tools to support children and young people [last access 16.11.2021]

4. Cambridgeshire Research Group, 2019. Domestic Abuse-Related Crimes and Incidents Cambridgeshire: 2014/15 - 2018/19: <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Domestic-Abuse-Infographic.pdf> [last access 16.11.2021]

5. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership, 2021. Annual Report 2020-21 [last access 16.11.2021]

6. Ibid. p.3

7. Women's Aid (2019): Impact Of Domestic Abuse On Children And Young People. [last access 16.11.2021]

8. Action for Children (2019): Patchy, Piecemeal and Precarious: support for children affected by domestic abuse. [last access 16.11.2021]

9. SafeLives (2017): SafeLives Insights National Briefing 2017 Children, young people, and the involvement of Children's Services. [last access 16.11.2021]

## The impact of domestic abuse for children/young people

At their core children are resilient and creative problem solvers, with the right support children and young people can overcome the choices of perpetrators and the impact of their behaviour on them. Within this understanding research shows that without the right support;

- Living in a home where domestic abuse happens can have a serious impact on a child or young person's mental and physical welfare, as well as their behaviour, this can last into adulthood.<sup>10</sup>
- Children/young people who experience domestic abuse face higher risk of experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse, of developing emotional and behavioral difficulties in their lives.<sup>11</sup>
- Domestic abuse in childhood may lead to depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts and feelings, as well as physical health problems such as higher rates of physical illness.<sup>12</sup>
- Evidence suggests that children over ten are much more likely to try to intervene to stop physical abuse, and almost a third of children feel like the abuse is their fault.<sup>13</sup>

Children will often ask whether domestic abuse happens in other families. Understanding the scale and the impact of domestic abuse can help you as a practitioner to manage questions that young people and children have about whether 'they aren't the only one'.

10. Refuge, NSPCC (2011): Meeting the Needs of Children Living With Domestic Violence In London. [last access 16.11.2021]

11. Holt, S., Buckley, H. and Whelan, S. (2008): The impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people: A review of the literature, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 32(8), pp. 797-810. [last access 16.11.2021]

12. NSPCC (2021): Protecting children from domestic abuse. [last access 16.11.2021]

13. SafeLives (2017): SafeLives Insights National Briefing 2017. [last access 16.11.2021]

### 3. How do children/young people who experience domestic abuse at home present?

#### Top 5 hints and tips:

1. Think about how trauma manifests in abusive behaviours and relationships.
2. Consider different types of domestic abuse as defined by the Domestic Abuse Act.
3. Consider different signs of domestic abuse; keep in mind children/young people might react differently to abuse.
4. Consider the child/young person's behaviour in response to their siblings, parents and peers.
5. Trust your professional instincts, if you suspect there is abuse in the home, ask questions.

Any child or young person can experience domestic abuse, but not all children/young people react the same way, and siblings in one household may have different reactions to abuse and relationships with the perpetrator.

It's important to be aware of how domestic abuse victim-survivors might present in your service. Remember, there is no universal way or one thing to watch for, and, in some cases, there may be no obvious 'indicators'. Most important is your relationship with that child or young person and your professional curiosity about changes in behavioural patterns as a potential indicator of domestic abuse.

Indicators		
Ages 1-6	Ages 6-11	Ages 11-18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bedwetting</li> <li>● Excessive crying</li> <li>● Immobility</li> <li>● Excessive clinging</li> <li>● Thumb sucking</li> <li>● enuresis/encopresis (bed/clothes soiling)</li> <li>● Fear of being left alone</li> <li>● Asking to be dressed or fed</li> <li>● Fretful sleep pattern</li> <li>● Irritability</li> <li>● Confusion</li> <li>● Speech problems</li> <li>● Frequent illness</li> <li>● Physical neglect (diaper rash, sores)</li> <li>● Reluctance to be touched</li> <li>● Aggressiveness, biting, hitting, difficulty sharing</li> <li>● Excessive fantasy in play</li> <li>● Rescue fantasies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bedwetting</li> <li>● Night terrors/nightmares</li> <li>● Sleep problems</li> <li>● Irrational fears</li> <li>● Irritability</li> <li>● Excessive clinging</li> <li>● Disobedience</li> <li>● Injury to the body</li> <li>● Refusal to go to school</li> <li>● Visual or hearing problems</li> <li>● Withdrawal of interest</li> <li>● Loss of ability to concentrate</li> <li>● Frequent illness</li> <li>● Eating disorders</li> <li>● Nervous disorder (stuttering, tics, etc.)</li> <li>● Sophisticated knowledge of sex</li> <li>● Protective of mother</li> <li>● Self-harming</li> <li>● Inappropriate care-taking behaviours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Withdrawal and isolation</li> <li>● headaches/stomach pain</li> <li>● Depression and sadness</li> <li>● Suicidal ideation</li> <li>● Aggressiveness</li> <li>● Increased sleep</li> <li>● Night terrors</li> <li>● School problems</li> <li>● Loss of childhood</li> <li>● 'Perfect child' or 'caretaker'</li> <li>● Anger at abused parent</li> <li>● Identification with the aggressor</li> <li>● Fear of bringing friends home</li> <li>● drug/alcohol abuse</li> <li>● Sexual acting out</li> </ul>

Source: Ask AVA

When looking for potential indicators, it is important to consider the family as a whole. This may include looking at the child/young person's behaviour in response to their siblings, parents and peers. Evidence suggests children/young people may take on different roles in the household where abuse is present. This may include: caretaker, mother's confidant and abuser's confidant.<sup>14</sup>

Most important when working with children/young people is to trust your professional instincts. If you suspect the child or young person is experiencing abuse, make sure to ask questions about domestic abuse in the home (see next session).

14. Baker, L. & Cunningham, A., 2004. 'What about me?': Seeking to Understand a Child's View of Violence in the Family.



Children/young people may feel afraid of disclosing for the following reasons:	Children/young people may be thinking or feeling any of the following about domestic abuse in the home:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not recognising abusive behaviours in the home. If a child/young person has grown up around abuse, these behaviours may have become normalised.</li> <li>● Wanting to protect other members of their family or the perpetrator.</li> <li>● Not wanting to share private details of family life with outsiders</li> <li>● Receiving threats from the abuser</li> <li>● Fears around consequences: moving area, losing their home, losing friends or family, being taken into care.</li> <li>● Fear of exposing the family to shame or dishonour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Angry at the perpetrator for his choices and behaviour</li> <li>● Angry at their mum for staying with the abuser and letting them treat her badly</li> <li>● Sadness about lost opportunities and grief for a 'normal' life</li> <li>● Afraid that she will go back if they have left, that he will kill her/them if leaving isn't an option</li> <li>● Guilty that they haven't been able to stop the 'bad thing' from happening</li> <li>● Embarrassment and shame</li> <li>● Isolated as they can't talk to anyone about this</li> <li>● Worried about what will happen if they leave</li> <li>● Helplessness as they feel there is nothing they can do to stop bad things happening</li> <li>● Responsibility for causing the bad things, or for making sure their brothers and sisters are ok</li> <li>● May not trust their mum to keep them safe</li> <li>● Doubt that their parents love them</li> </ul>

Source: Perthshire Women's Aid

## Building rapport

It is important that professionals working with children/young people invest time in building rapport and restoring trust. Clarity on what will happen as a result of conversations with you is key to ensuring trust is protected.

Children/young people may have lost trust in professionals from previous encounters, may struggle feeling comfortable around adults due to the abuse faced and the direct messages of perpetrators, or may be afraid of the consequences of building relationships with professionals.

Often disclosure or recognition of domestic abuse may come as an end result of a child/young person building a trusting relationship. Key considerations include:

- **Get to know the child/young person**, for example, their likes and dislikes, wishes and hopes.
- **Be clear about your role** and what you can/cannot do for the child/young person.
- **Remain consistent** in your approach and availability to the child/young person.
- **Be clear about the limits of your confidentiality from the get-go.** You may wish to discuss: the circumstances that will necessitate you telling someone else, who you may tell, and why you need to do this. Providing examples can be a useful way to help children/young people understand what 'immediate risk of harm' looks like in practice.
- **Offer options for communication** including digital technology (e.g. webchat, phone calls, online forums, chatbot).
- **Take a trauma-informed approach.** Do not assume that resistant behaviour is a result of disinterest or the child/young person being 'difficult', it is likely a protective strategy.
- **Work closely with the non-abusive parent** to support the child/young person (where appropriate). (See pg xxx of this guidance).

## 4. How should I communicate with a child/young person about domestic abuse in a safe and age appropriate manner?

### Top 5 hints and tips:

1. Children/young people are unlikely to recognise and articulate their experience as domestic abuse.
2. Build rapport, use non-blaming, sensitive, and age appropriate language when discussing domestic abuse with children and young people.
3. Make sure children/young people are aware of the limits of your confidentiality and fully understand your role, before asking them any questions or offering support.
4. Create a safe and supportive environment encouraging disclosure.
5. Tailor your communication to every child/young person as an individual.

We know children/young people most often come to the attention of services through their behaviour and demeanour, rather than through explicitly disclosing abuse. This is why it's important that professionals are able to recognise signs of abuse and are aware of the need to ask questions rather than assuming that a child or a young person will disclose if something is happening in the home.

When attempting to explore experiences of abuse with children/young people, do not assume:

- A child/young person is too young to comprehend or internalise what is happening around them.
- All children/young people in the household have experienced or perceived the abuse in the same way.
- The non-abusive parent will be able to accurately determine the child/young person's experiences of abuse.

A note on identity, perpetrators are skilled at using identity and protected characteristics to create barriers to help seeking. Take care to disrupt the perpetrators narratives and control by offering choice around how children and young people present themselves to you and avoid assumptions on sexuality, gender-identity, race and disabilities.

### Barriers to communication and disclosure

Professionals must recognise that children/young people may think differently about the risks of disclosing abuse. The table below outlines just some of the barriers and fears they may have around sharing their experience with you.

## Language

**Use non-blaming, sensitive, and age appropriate language** when discussing domestic abuse with children/young people:

- **Listen, believe and affirm** what a child or young person shares with you. It's important for them that they feel their experience is validated and that you genuinely care.
- **Give the child/young person space and time** to share. Suggested phrases include: 'Take as much time as you need...'; 'Please don't feel forced to talk...share as much or as little as you like'.
- **Avoid using the term 'domestic abuse'** which children/young people may not understand or relate to. Instead, you may wish to use terms like: 'fighting', 'bullying', 'arguments' and 'hurting' - especially when working with younger children.
- **Consider disabilities and additional vulnerabilities:** for example, if working with a deaf/hard of hearing child/young person, a child/young person with special educational needs (SEN), make sure you have a support from a communication support worker (CSW) or a learning support assistant
- **Consider language difficulties:** for example, needs of a child/young person where English is not their first language, make sure you do not use parents or siblings as interpreters for any child/young person.
- **Use different methods to communicate:** If a child/young person is unable or struggles to verbally communicate, make every attempt to communicate through using toys, arts and crafts, activity booklets to support the child/young person to communicate and express their feelings and emotions. This is especially useful when discussing domestic abuse where younger children may not know how to verbalise what they have seen/heard.
- **Using Scaling Questions:** rather than ask children and young people how things are at home, ask them to let you know on a scale of 0 - 10 - orient towards positive.

### Useful resources:

- For more on supporting Disabled children, see NSPCC's 'We have a right to be safe' and 'Safeguarding d/Deaf and disabled children'.
- For more on discussing domestic abuse with children/young people of different ages (in a school setting), see ASK AVA 'how to work with different ages'.
- For children aged 5-15 it may be useful to use a genogram to support them in exploring their home life context. See: Leeds SCP Children's Genogram Resource.
- It may also be useful to use an ecomap to identify dynamics within the family. An example version is available here: Ecomap Activity.
- Practitioners may wish to use activities with children/young people to facilitate ease in identifying their emotions, wishes, wants and feelings. For example, Derby City Council: Three Islands activity pack.
- See Barnardos' 'Say it your own way': Children's participation in assessments: resources for a number of activities and resources to support communication with younger children around themselves and their home life.
- See 'The Solution Focused Approach with Children and Young People: Current Thinking and Practice', for solution focused questions and scales to help build an accurate picture of home life.

### Create a safe and supporting environment to encourage disclosure:

- Raise questions regarding domestic abuse with a child/young person when they are in a **private place**. If suitable, offer the child/young person the opportunity to be seen alone, or with their preferred trusted adult.
- (If possible) **Ask the child/young person what type of environment they would like to meet in**. For example, this may be school, at home, or on a walk.

- **Create an inviting, friendly environment.** For example, by offering a snack or drink or inviting them to bring anything that makes them feel safe into the space (e.g. a toy, blanket, phone etc.). Invite the child/young person to occupy the space in a way they feel most comfortable (e.g. standing vs. sitting down).
- **Non-verbal communication** is key to creating a safe environment, and professionals should consider their body language, for example, sitting next to rather than opposite the child/young person.
- **Dress code** is important. Think about how clothing (depending on the age of a child/young person), can be a barrier or can help build relationship and trust, to encourage disclosure.

### Useful resources:

- Sterne, A. and Poole, L. (2010). Domestic Violence and Children: A handbook for schools and early years settings.

## Asking questions about domestic abuse

It is important to ask children/young people questions to gain insight into their experiences, their level of safety and what types of support they would like to receive.

- **Do not ask leading questions.** If you suspect something has happened, use open-ended questions e.g. rather than 'did dad hit mum?' use 'you said mum got hurt, how did she get hurt?'
- **Never force a child or young person to answer questions when they appear uncomfortable** to do so, especially if a particular adult is making the child/young person visibly uncomfortable.
- **Be prepared to spend time exploring what abuse is.** The young people you work with may not identify their own experiences as abuse.
- If you suspect something is going on, but the child/young person does not disclose, **continue sensitively opening up the conversation around safety in the home at future meetings.**

### Example questions for encouraging disclosure and exploring experiences of domestic abuse:

- 'Who is in your family?' 'Who lives in the house with you?'; 'Who comes and visits you?'
- 'What's your relationship like with mum/dad/parents?'; 'What do you like to do with mum/dad/parents?'
- 'Who are you the most/least close to in the family?'; 'Who makes you feel safe in the family?'
- 'How are things at home? Is everything alright at home? Do you feel safe (at home)?'
- 'Are there some things that happen in your family that are scary? Do you ever feel threatened (by your parents or siblings)? /Do your parents (or other family members) put you down, threaten or hurt you?'; 'Does 'parent 1' ever hurt/scare/put down/insult 'parent 2'?'
- 'What do you do when scary things happen?'; 'When do scary things tend to happen?'; 'What do you think needs to happen to make things better at home?'; 'What can you/others do to change things?'

### Useful resources:

- See London Safeguarding Children's Partnerships': Safeguarding Children Affected by Domestic Abuse - 'Appendix Four: Communicating with Children' for more ideas on the types of questions you may want to ask children/young people living with domestic abuse.

## 5. How should I respond to a disclosure of domestic abuse from a child/young person?

### Top 5 hints and tips:

1. Believe the child/young person and take their concerns seriously.
2. Make sure that any steps you take are in line with the child's wishes and aligns with your safeguarding principles and practices
3. Be transparent about what will happen next especially if you need to involve other services/agencies.
4. Present the child/young person with options and give them choice over how they are supported.
5. Make sure you have access to regular and scheduled support and feedback, to support your own mental health and wellbeing.

Any disclosure of abuse should be treated seriously, with appropriate steps taken in line with your organisation's safeguarding procedures. Remember that best practice in safeguarding is person centred and led by child focused outcomes.

### 1. Receive

- **Listen**, but do not look shocked or disbelieving. Mirroring their language and reflecting back what they have shared will help the young person feel listened to. Try not to show any anger or shock you may be feeling at that moment. It can be difficult when hearing distressing or upsetting details, but try as hard as possible to retain neutral and supportive language.
- **Take what they are saying seriously and believe them.** Thank the child/young person and affirm their disclosure. Suggested phrases include 'I believe you', 'Thank you for telling me', 'You've done the right thing by telling me'.
- **Do not ask probing questions or suggest answers** as this may undermine any investigation by the police or enquiry by Children's Social Care Services.
- **Do not make the child or young person feel bad.** For example, resist saying things like 'You should have told me earlier', 'Why didn't you mention this when I asked before?'

### 2. Reassure

- **Stay calm**, tell them that they have done the right thing by telling you, and not to feel worried that they have done the wrong thing by telling you.
- **Acknowledge** how hard it must have been to tell you. Suggested phrases include: 'You are very brave to have shared this with me', 'You have done the right thing by telling me'.
- Tell them that they are not to blame. Reassure the young person that the abuse is not their fault and it's not their responsibility to stop it from happening. Suggested phrases: 'This is not your fault', 'You have done the right thing by telling me'.
- **Empathise**, but do not tell them how they should be feeling.

- **Do not promise confidentiality.** You may want to explain that only those that need to know will be told (i.e. the designated staff member for child protection). Never promise to keep a secret.
- **Be honest** about what you can and cannot do.

### 3. Respond

- **Do not interrogate**, instead let them tell you as far as possible.
- **Do not ask probing questions.** Remember, it's not your job to find out 'who, where, when?' at this stage.
- **Refer your concern on to the appropriate party/parties** in accordance with your child protection procedures. This must be done in a timely fashion.
- **Record the date, time and any information given to you.** Always use the words they said to you; never interpret what was said or put it in your own words.
- **Record what you did next** and with whom you shared the information.
- **Do not criticise or judge the abuser** – the child or young person may have feelings for him/her – you risk alienating the child/young person by passing judgement on the perpetrator.
- **Try to follow things through yourself** so they do not need to repeat their story to other professionals (only if this is in line with procedure).
- **Explain what will happen next**, for example, who you may tell, that they may wish to speak to the child/young person, if it is safe the non-abusing parent may be informed, you may need to involve other services / organisations.
- **Make sure you are supported.** It can be distressing dealing with this type of information. Remember to maintain boundaries with your work and to reach out to your team when you need support.

Adapted from Ask AVA

After these first steps, ensure the child/young person and (where appropriate) the non-abusive parent are involved in the follow-up processes as much as possible.

Consider:

- **Inviting them to follow up meetings.** If it is not appropriate for them to attend the meeting or they are unable to, you may want to inform them about the meeting, what will be discussed, who will be there, and ask if there is anything they would like for you to share at the meeting.
- **Asking who they would like to attend meetings.** For example, the child/young person may want the non-abusive parent present, or they may prefer a different trusted adult.
- **Presenting them with options and giving them choice over how they are supported.** When sharing signposting information about what support is available, be led by and allow the child/young person to have a choice in this process.
- If relevant, **keep them up to date** about any referrals made, who might contact them and when.

#### Useful resources:

- The governments 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'.
- AVA's online resource hub 'looking after yourself' including resources to support managing secondary trauma.

## 6. How do I ensure the safety and welfare of children/young people still living with domestic abuse?

### Top 5 hints and tips:

1. Ensuring safety and welfare is about ensuring open communication and engagement, children and young people are at most risk when professionals are unaware of their situation.
2. Safety plan and risk assess in a collaborative and open way; involve the child/young person you are supporting in safety planning and risk management. Remember safety is built over time and not 'done to' children and young people.
3. If appropriate, work with and consider involving non-abusive adults in the family system in safety planning.
4. Empower young people and help them build their support networks, resources and safety strategies.
5. Support the child/young person to identify existing strengths and protective factors and come up with goals for developing additional coping strategies.

### Understanding Risk, Safety and Protective Factors

Creating a safety plan is a useful way to help children/young people reflect on their own perception of safety and the options available to them for support. It can be useful to talk with them about their own existing strategies and how national tools might help them evaluate their situation.

You may wish to consider **conducting a young person's risk identification checklist** using tools such as: SafeLives' young people's DASH risk checklist with guidance (for children/young people aged 13-18) or Barnardos' DV-RIM.

Safety planning must be a collaborative process and focused on helping children/young people identify who they can talk to, how and where to ask for help as opposed to telling them what to do.

#### Developing a Safety Plan

1. Before starting a safety plan with a child/young person, **explain that intervening in abusive situations is dangerous and should be avoided and that they are not to blame for the abuse.** If a child/young person has been intervening previously, validate the bravery and care they have shown, and discuss how they can protect themselves/others in alternative ways.
2. **Ask the child what they think about their own safety and what they currently do when an abusive situation occurs.** Start with open ended questions and validate their responses. For example:
  - 'When do / don't you feel safe at home?' This can include a discussion around what signs they notice to help them identify a dangerous situation.
  - 'Who do you talk to when you're upset, scared or angry?'
  - 'How do you manage when you feel upset or scared?'
  - 'Who else knows what it can be like at home?'

**3. Help the child/young person to identify a safe place, either inside or outside the home (or both).** This may be as simple as helping them identify their bedroom as a safe place, or, for older children, helping them to think of a friend/relative's home they can go to. You may also discuss what might help them feel safe in these spaces, for example, listening to music or bringing a favourite toy with them. If there are multiple children/young people in the home, you may wish to discuss if they identify a shared safe place, can support one another accessing this space when at risk, and ideas for keeping safe and distracted in this space.

**4. Identify a trusted adult with the child/young person.** Encourage the child/young person to notify the trusted adult/s of this role and identify solutions they can take together. They may wish to make up a code word/phrase so that if they use the word/phrase the trusted adult will know what action the child/young person needs them to take.

**5. Discuss how the child/young person feels about calling emergency services.** Go through what the process of calling 999 might look like and what they can say if they need to call the emergency services.

**6. Discuss distraction and coping strategies.** Discuss hobbies or activities the child/young person finds useful when domestic abuse is occurring in the house, and/or strategies they already have to help cope. If there are multiple children/young people in the home, you may wish to encourage them to think of support strategies they can take together e.g. older children supporting younger children.

**7. Provide telephone numbers and/or signposts** for the child/young person to reach out for immediate support if needed. This might include the police, local domestic abuse services, the Childline number (0800 1111) and services to support the child or young person emotionally (e.g. The Mix). You may wish to teach older children/teens how to find resources and numbers online, as well as how to quickly exit online pages or delete internet history.

Consider:

- Do not use safety planning as a tick box exercise. Keep the process open and interactive. Identify strengths, resources and protective factors as well as goals to build additional strategies
- Refresh the child/young person on the safety plan at regular intervals.
- Provide the child/young person with a written copy of the plan, identify a safe place for them to keep the plan.
- Discuss with the child/young person if they would like to share their safety plan with a trusted adult.
- If appropriate, as led by the child, involve the non-abusive parent in the safety planning process as they will most likely be best informed of the child/young person's home environment.

### Useful resources:

- Cedar Network's 'mikey and jools keep safe' (for discussing safety with 8-11 year olds)
- Social Work Tool's 'Safety Planning with Children and Young People: Domestic Abuse'. This resource contains age appropriate safety plans and sample scripts.
- SafeLives' Safety Plan for Young People.

## Empowering children/young people living with domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is about power and control, and it is important when working with children/young people to make the space for them to feel listened to and in control of the support available to them.

Professionals should take **a strengths-based and person-centred approach** to working with children/young



Key elements of this include:

### 1. Educate around domestic abuse and its impact

- Ensure children/young people are appropriately informed about causes, roots and forms of domestic abuse so that they're able to recognise and respond to abuse at home.
- Educate the child/young person around the impact of abuse to support them in understanding their own responses. This can help to normalise behaviours or feelings children/young people may not understand themselves.
- Safely challenge self-perceptions and perceptions about the world that child/young person may hold as a result of abuse. See: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership: What children learn when they experience domestic abuse.

### 2. Identify and establish coping strategies

- Support the child/young person to identify existing strengths and protective factors and come up with goals for developing additional coping strategies. Examples include: going for a walk, listening to music, taking deep breaths, doing some exercise, doing something you enjoy – skateboarding, painting, swimming, talking to someone about how you are feeling, playing computer games to take your mind off it, reading a book, having a hot bath (YoungMinds, 2021).
- Encourage the child/young person to talk about their feelings and explore why talking about feelings is important.

### 3. Encourage the young person's strengths and hobbies

- Identify the child/young person's strengths. Ask them about their likes and dislikes, what makes them feel good about themselves or happy.
- Identify when the child/young person does something positive or is resourceful and validate this behaviour.

### 4. Identify further support

- Link the child/young person into further support, for example: organisations, clubs or groups that may help to boost their self-esteem and physical/mental health, e.g. local sports teams and arts clubs.
- Explore the child/young person's support networks, both in relation to professional support, and family and friends.

### 5. Model a positive relationship

- Model positive relationships for the child/young person through being respectful, honest and non-aggressive when interacting with them and others. You may wish to explain what is acceptable or not acceptable behaviour in a safe and non-judgemental environment.
- Consider the child/young person's identity, for example, their sexuality, ethnicity, race, migration status, cultural and religious background, disability, gender identity and how you can support them in accordance with their particular needs. Where possible link them into specialist support services.

### Useful resources:

- HelpforHurtingKids provides a number of resources and activities designed to support children and young people in identifying and managing difficult emotions.
- For age appropriate ideas to support children who have experienced trauma, see: Multiplying Connections: Practical interventions to help children affected by trauma.
- For session ideas to help (younger) children understand their feelings, see Cheshire East's 'Six Sessions Feeling Programme' Resource.
- For information and ideas to support children (ages 6-12) understanding domestic abuse, see Tulsa and Barnardos' 'Coping with Domestic Abuse'.
- Womens Aid's Expect Respect Toolkit.
- YoungMind's Addressing Trauma and Adversity.

- Women's Aid have created The Hideout to help children/young people to understand domestic abuse, and how to take positive action if it's happening to you. Website: [thehideout.org.uk/](http://thehideout.org.uk/)
- YoungMinds aims to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children/young people and to empower their parents and carers. Website: [www.youngminds.org.uk/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/)
- Disrespect NoBody is a website full of information on sexting, relationship abuse, consent, rape, porn and harassment. Website: [www.disrespectnobody.co.uk](http://www.disrespectnobody.co.uk)

## 7. How can I support the non-abusive parent?

### Top 5 hints and tips:

1. Children and mothers often recover from domestic abuse in parallel. Ensure support is in place for a non-abusive parent too.
2. Validate the support the non-abusive parent has already provided.
3. Discuss safety-planning with the non-abusive parent.
4. Encourage healthy communication between the non-abusive parent and the child/young person.
5. Encourage the non-abusive parent and child/young person to do things they enjoy together.

Children and mothers often recover from domestic abuse in parallel. The biggest impact on sustained outcomes is restoring appropriate parenting power and therapeutically informed parenting. It is important for all professionals to take an approach that supports this bond and empowers the non-abusive parent in their role as caretaker. The Safe and Together Model talks about 'partnering with the survivor', resisting deficit or mother blaming language. Remember that only the perpetrator is responsible for the abuse and that language that hides their choices should be avoided.

Professionals should support non-abusive parents from a strengths-based approach, highlighting the strategies the parent is currently using to keep their children safe, and working with them to add additional strategies and ideas for them to use in the future. In order to do so, you may consider the following:

**1. Ensure parallel domestic abuse support is in place for parents**, e.g. outreach, counselling, domestic abuse groups and/or refuge support (if required), local interventions to address perpetrator behaviour, support with mental ill-health and substance misuse etc.

**2. Validate the support the non-abusive parent has already provided.** Reaffirm the non-abusive parent's strengths and ability. Example phrases include: 'remember, you are enough', 'you are not to blame for the abuse you have faced', 'look at all the ways you have managed to support your children so far (list examples)'.

**3. Talk about safety-planning with the non-abusive parent. You may wish to discuss the following:**

- The strength the non-abusive parent has shown in keeping her child/ren safe thus far.
- The strategies the non-abusive parent uses to keep her children safe, what she feels works and doesn't work, and the types of things that might support her.
- Ask for her input in what her children need at this point, validate her expertise and approach.
- You may wish to facilitate a conversation where the child/young person and non-abusive parent safety plan together. This might include discussions around: how they can help each other to feel safe, a code word for when the child/young person needs to leave the house or call the police, a discussion around how they read the perpetrator and how to manage them.
- Encourage the non-abusive parent to establish safe people who can look after the child/ren if there is an incident at home. They may also put together an emergency pack in case they need to leave the home, and may consider items to comfort their child/ren.

**4. Encourage healthy communication between the non-abusive parent and child/young person.** For example, supporting the non-abusive parent to discuss and explore the child/young person's experience and feelings with them.

**5. Encourage the non-abusive parent and child/young person to do things they enjoy together.** Support in organising enjoyable activities that the non-abusive parent and child/young person can take part in together.

### **Useful resources:**

- Talking to My Mum' workbook (for children aged between 5-8).
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership: Communicating with your children about domestic abuse and age appropriate Parenting Leaflets.
- NCTSN: Listening and Talking to Your Child About Domestic Violence.

## 8. How can I work with other agencies to ensure children/young people living with domestic abuse are appropriately supported?

### Top 5 hints and tips:

1. Before you liaise with external agencies, ensure you are fully familiar with your agencies' GDPR-compliant data sharing policies.
2. Coordinate your response: work to ensure consistent approaches and messages between agencies working with the family.
3. Build your knowledge and signpost to specialist support, in particular, support for LGBTQ+, Black and minoritised and disabled children/young people.
4. Build your knowledge of local agencies and services working with children/young people.
5. Facilitate opportunities to share learning and expertise between agencies.

When working with families experiencing domestic abuse it is likely that you will be working alongside a number of other professionals. It is important that families experiencing domestic abuse receive consistent approaches, and that organisations communicate to ensure an appropriate wrap-around response.

Consider the following:

- Ensure you are fully familiar with your agencies' GDPR-compliant data sharing policies
- Coordinate response: to ensure that neither adult or child victim/survivor is having to retell their story unnecessarily or receiving conflicting advice or information. If multiple agencies are involved with one family, it can be useful to identify a key individual to liaise with each individual/s.
- Clear signposting to onwards support and referrals to specialist services. Agencies must have adequate knowledge of specialist organisations in the local area, in particular, those for Black and minoritised survivors, LGBTQ+ survivors and disabled survivors.
- Opportunities to share learning and training opportunities between agencies. For example, keep up to date with local learning through SCR, SHRs and SARs. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence •
- Partnership also run a DASV Champions Network, and a Newsletter.

### Useful resources:

- NSPCC: Multi-Agency working.

# Appendix 1

## Local services list

(See Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership: Survivor Support Services)

- Cambridge Women's Aid (City/South/East) 01223 361214 [www.cambridgewa.org.uk](http://www.cambridgewa.org.uk)
- Refuge (Fenland/Hunts/Peterborough) 07787 255821 [www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)
- Peterborough Women's Aid 08454 103123 [www.peterboroughwomensaid.co.uk](http://www.peterboroughwomensaid.co.uk)
- Cambridge Rape Crisis 01223 245888 [www.caprccp.org.uk](http://www.caprccp.org.uk)
- Peterborough Rape Crisis 01733 852578 [www.caprccp.org.uk](http://www.caprccp.org.uk)
- The Elms Sexual Assault Referral Centre 0800 193 5434 [www.theelmssarc.org](http://www.theelmssarc.org)
- Victim & Witness Hub 0800 781 6818  
[www.cambsvictimservices.co.uk/support-for-victims/victims-and-witness-hub](http://www.cambsvictimservices.co.uk/support-for-victims/victims-and-witness-hub)
- Embrace Child Victims of Crime have a Cambridgeshire based service offering free trauma-focused CBT and therapeutic counselling for young people. The counselling is available to young people aged 13-19 (or up to age 24 with special needs) who have been victims of, or witnessed domestic abuse or sexual violence. For referral information click this download link:  
[www.cambridgeshireandpeterboroughccg.nhs.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=15426](http://www.cambridgeshireandpeterboroughccg.nhs.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=15426)
- The Young People's IDVA (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough only) works with young people aged 13 and over who are experiencing abuse in an intimate relationship. The YP IDVA works with all risk levels. The YP IDVA Referral form/Risk Assessment Checklist can be found at [www.cambsdasv.org.uk/website/referral\\_forms/296136](http://www.cambsdasv.org.uk/website/referral_forms/296136)
- Family Action offers support to children, young people and families affected by domestic abuse. They also offer support to families and children affected by domestic homicide. Family Action also have a free Parent Helpline for confidential support and information Parent Helpline: 0808 802 0222. Cambridgeshire specific referral information is available to download at the bottom of this webpage:  
<https://www.cambsdasv.org.uk/website/parenting/185992>

## 9. Checklist

Below is a checklist of key considerations professionals should make at different points of supporting children and young people living with domestic abuse in the home.

<b>1) Identifying</b>	
<b>How do children/young people who experience domestic abuse at home present?</b>	
Think about how trauma manifests in abusive behaviours and relationships.	
Consider different types of domestic abuse as defined by the Domestic Abuse Act.	
Consider different signs of domestic abuse; keep in mind children/young people might react differently to abuse.	
Consider the child/young person's behaviour in response to their siblings, parents and peers.	
Trust your professional instincts, if you suspect there is abuse in the home, ask questions.	

<b>2) Communicating</b>	
<b>How should I communicate with a child/young person about domestic abuse in a safe and age appropriate manner?</b>	
Children/young people are unlikely to recognise and articulate their experience as domestic abuse.	
Build rapport, use non-blaming, sensitive, and age appropriate language when discussing domestic abuse with children and young people.	
Make sure children/young people are aware of the limits of your confidentiality and fully understand your role, before asking them any questions or offering support.	
Create a safe and supportive environment encouraging disclosure.	
Tailor your communication to every child/young person as an individual.	

### 3) Responding

#### How should I respond to a disclosure of domestic abuse from a child/ young person?

Believe the child/young person and take their concerns seriously.	
Make sure that any steps you take are in line with the child's wishes and aligns with your safeguarding principles and practices.	
Be transparent about what will happen next especially if you need to involve other services/agencies.	
Present the child/young person with options and give them choice over how they are supported.	
Make sure you have access to regular and scheduled support and feedback, to support your own mental health and wellbeing.	

### 4) Ensuring safety and wellbeing

#### How do I ensure the safety and welfare of children/young people still living with domestic abuse?

Ensuring safety and welfare is about ensuring open communication and engagement, children and young people are at most risk when professionals are unaware of their situation.	
Safety plan and risk assess in a collaborative and open way; involve the child/young person you are supporting in safety planning and risk management. Remember safety is built over time and not 'done to' children and young people.	
If appropriate, work with and consider involving non-abusive adults in the family system in safety planning.	
Empower young people and help them build their support networks, resources and safety strategies.	
Support the child/young person to identify existing strengths and protective factors and come up with goals for developing additional coping strategies.	



<b>5) Supporting the non-abusive parent</b>	
<b>How can I support the non-abusive parent?</b>	
Children and mothers often recover from domestic abuse in parallel. Ensure parallel domestic abuse support is in place for parents.	
Validate the support the non-abusive parent has already provided. It is important for all professionals to take an approach that empowers the non-abusive parent in their role as caretaker.	
Discuss safety planning with the non-abusive parent.	
Encourage healthy communication between the non-abusive parent and child/young person.	
Encourage the non-abusive parent and child/young person to do things they enjoy together.	

<b>6) Working with other agencies</b>	
<b>How can I work with other agencies to ensure children/young people living with domestic abuse are appropriately supported?</b>	
Before you liaise with external agencies, ensure you are fully familiar with your agencies' GDPR-compliant data sharing policies.	
Coordinate your response: work to ensure consistent approaches and messages between agencies working with the family.	
Build your knowledge and signpost to specialist support, in particular, support for LGBTQ+, Black and minoritised and disabled children/young people.	
Build your knowledge of local agencies and services working with children and young people.	
Facilitate opportunities to share learning and expertise between agencies.	