



CHILDREN EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A Guide for Primary School Teachers

Domestic Abuse
is **NOT** a private matter

Ascend Domestic Abuse Service for Women - North Tipperary



WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is the physical, emotional, sexual or mental abuse of one person by another within a close, intimate or family relationship. This includes violence perpetrated by a spouse, partner, son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim. The term 'domestic violence' goes beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional violence, the destruction of property; isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support; threats to others including children; stalking; and control over access to money, personal items, food, transport and the telephone.

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE STATISTICS REPORT 2014 (SAFE IRELAND)

- In 2014, 9,448 women and 3,068 children received direct specialist support from Domestic Violence support services.
- 3,068 individual children received direct support and or accommodation from a domestic violence service in Ireland in 2014. This figure includes 2,484 children who stayed in domestic violence accommodation services.
- Of the 2,484 children who stayed in DV specialist accommodation services, 2,349 were living in a refuge, 147 were living in DV specialist supported housing and 15 children were accommodated in a Safe House. 27 children who stayed in a refuge also stayed in DV specialist supported housing in 2014.
- Of the children who lived in a refuge for some period of time be it one night or many months, 899 children were aged below four, including 217 babies under the age of one. 422 children were aged between 10 and 14 and 123 teenagers aged between 15 -18 years.
- 1,168 children received non-accommodation direct support from services. These services include therapeutic and developmental play, counselling, accompaniment, referral, childcare services, support groups, school placement, after-school, homework supports and youth groups.
- In Making the Links, 64% of women who experienced violence reported that their children had witnessed the violence. (Making the Links, Women's Aid, 1995).
- An overview of research studies found that in between 30-66% of cases, the same perpetrator is abusing both the mother and the children. (Edleson, J., Children's witnessing of adult domestic violence, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, vol. 14. 839-870, 1999).

UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HELPS YOU SUPPORT AFFECTED STUDENTS

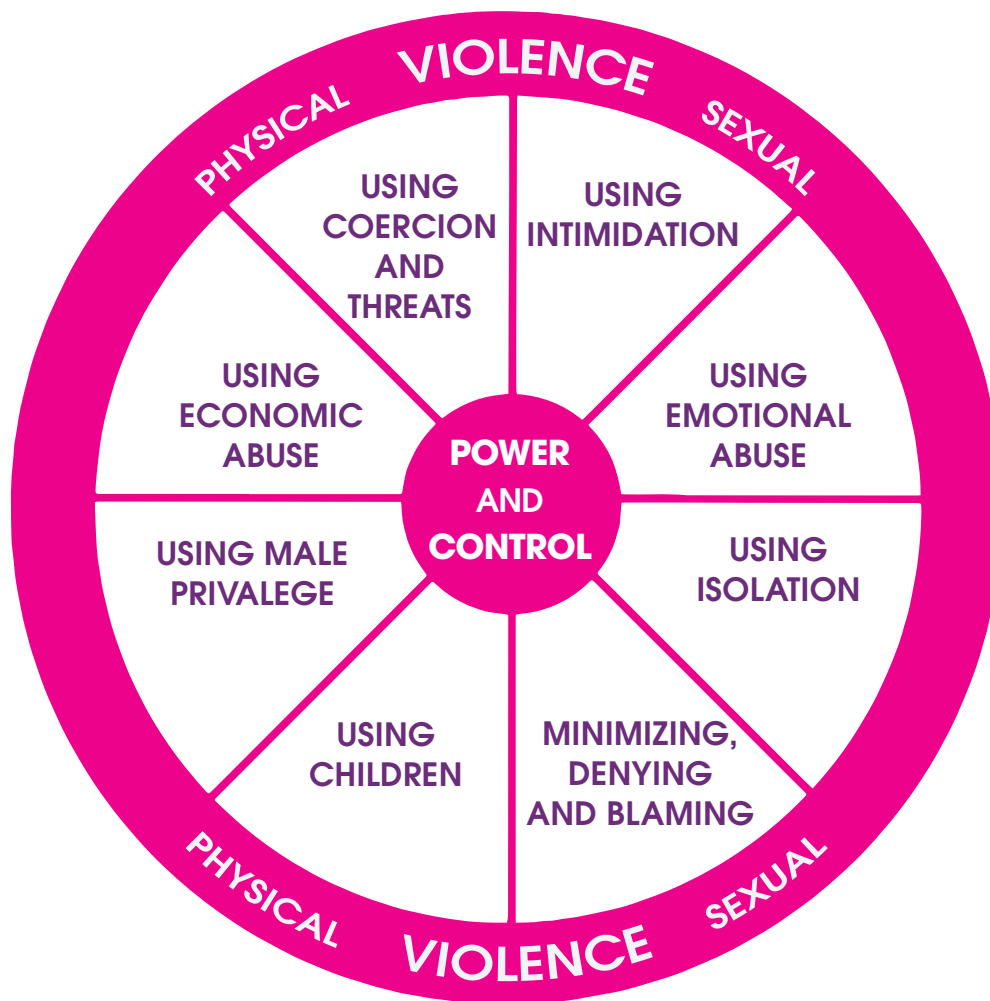
Domestic violence...

- is used to intimidate, humiliate or frighten victims as a systematic way of maintaining power and control over them.
- occurs in all age, racial, socioeconomic, educational, occupational and religious groups.
- occurs within an intimate relationship.
- typically involves repetitive behaviour including different types of violence. These behaviours can include physical assault, psychological, emotional and economic violence and use of children.
- is caused by the perpetrator and not by the victim or the relationship.
- is a criminal offense where actual or threatened physical or sexual force is used.
- is an increased risk to the victim during pregnancy and at the time of separation.
- results in victim behaviour that is focused on surviving and coping (e.g., minimizing or denying the violence, protecting the perpetrator, using alcohol or drugs, self-defence, seeking help, remaining in the abusive relationship).
- can result in victims experiencing depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. As such, early experiences are an important public health issue. Much of the foundational research in this area has been referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). For further information please visit: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about_ace.html





THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

Domestic violence is not an isolated event but occurs within a family system, and potentially disrupts the broader family functioning and home environment. Watching, hearing or later learning of a parent being harmed by a partner threatens children's sense of stability and security typically provided by their family. Children not only have to deal with the immediate impact of the violent episode but also the ensuing fallout of the violence such as parental stress and depression or changes in their home situation such as moving to emergency accommodation.

One review of studies in the U.S. indicated that child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in households with domestic violence than in households without (cited in Mills et al 2000), while another research piece indicated that child abuse and domestic violence cases overlap in 40% to 60% of cases (Garcia-Moreno 2002, cited in Women's Health Council 2007). Barnish (2004: 64), in reviewing U.K. and international studies, commented that there is convincing evidence to suggest that "the presence of domestic violence is a risk marker for, and significant predictor of child abuse, and vice-versa." This has been echoed by other researchers (Humphreys and Stanley 2006; Irwin and Waugh 2007).

Children who are or have experienced domestic violence may experience multiple stressors such as poverty, child violence, parental substance, unemployment, homelessness and involvement in crime.

- Children may experience increased emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Some young people who experience difficulties display traumatic stress reaction e.g. flashbacks, nightmares, intensified startle reactions, constant worry about possible danger.
- Children living with domestic violence are at increased risk of experiencing physical injury or childhood violence and neglect.
- Perpetrators may use children as a control tool against adults by:
 - claiming the children's bad behaviour is the reason for the assaults on the non-offending parent.
 - threatening violence against the children and their pets.
 - holding them hostage or abducting them to punish the adult victim or gain compliance.
 - talking to children negatively about the abused parent.
- Children may experience strong ambivalence toward their violent parent; affection coexists with feeling of resentment and disappointment.
- Exposure may desensitize children to aggressive behaviour. Aggression becomes the "norm" and is less likely to signal concern to them.
- It is a consistent finding that violence against women is highly correlated with other childhood adversities and family challenges such as poverty, parental alcoholism and parental mental illness. Every family is unique so these findings should never be automatically applied to specific cases.
- If parents are separated children may be affected by the withholding of maintenance to pay for basic living expenses.
- Children may be affected by prolonged court proceedings about custody and access, especially when the abuser has previously shown little interest in the children.
- Recurring court cases about maintenance and access can be very stressful for the abused parent and child especially when court is used by the abuser to further abuse and control the abused parent.
- Ongoing access with the abusive parent may also be difficult for children, causing them to become angry or upset in the lead up to the visit, or on their return home.





RECOGNISE

Students may display some of the following signs when they are living with domestic violence. However, it is important to remember that children may have some of these issues for many other reasons and may **not** have been exposed to domestic violence.

- Physical complaints e.g. headaches, stomach-aches.
- Tiredness, this can be as a result of late night incidents of domestic violence, worrying about the abused parent's safety, worrying about their own safety and the safety of siblings, worried that the abuser will "get into trouble".
- Sadness and or withdrawal from others and activities.
- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence, especially for trying new things including academic tasks.
- Difficulty paying attention in class, concentrating on work and learning new information.
- Outbursts of anger directed toward peers in and out of the classroom.
- Stereotyped beliefs about males as aggressors and females as victims.
- Homework may be to a poor standard and/or incomplete.
- Unkempt appearance.
- Coming to school without lunch or breakfast.
- Poor attendance.

RESPOND

There may be a variety of reasons for a student's behaviour. Problems may be explained by a number of factors in the student's life. Exposure to domestic violence is only one possibility.

Reassure students and increase their sense of security in school by:

- establishing simple rules and routines so they know what to expect;
- giving straightforward explanations for things that worry them (e.g. sirens, presence of police in school).
- allowing students to naturally express themselves through talk, play and written exercises.
- recognise a variety of talents, not just academic achievement.

Clarify your concern as it relates to the school and your responsibility to educate. Try not to interpret the behaviour, but rather describe it. It may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- What is the problem?
- When did it start?
- How often does it occur?
- Who is affected and in what ways (e.g. failing grades/performance, bullying peers)
- What has been tried and how did it work.

REFER

Consult with the principal and home school liaison staff, and **REFER** to local domestic abuse service or social services for opportunities to obtain support, information about resources and strategies for the classroom and school. Remember that it is often not easy to talk about family problems. Domestic violence and other family problems are often treated with great secrecy. **Sometimes secrecy is a way of maintaining safety.** By asking you will have to let the family know that you are concerned and willing to help. They may choose to talk to you in the future if they are experiencing violence or other problems that affect their child.

Barnardos is a children's charity who work with vulnerable children and their families in Ireland. Barnardos can be contacted at: Barnardos Centre Mall House, Slievenamon Rd, Thurles, Co Tipperary **0504-20018**

TLC Kidz is a group programme for children exposed to domestic abuse. TLC Kidz can be contacted at Barnardos Centre Mall House, Slievenamon Road, Thurles, Co Tipperary **0504-20018**.

Family Support Services are for families and individuals who need help. The main focus of these services is on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health, well-being and rights of all children, young people and their families **0505-23379**





Ascend Domestic Abuse Service provides support, information and court accompaniment to women who have or are experiencing domestic abuse in their intimate relationships **0505-23999 / 086-8283399**.

Social Work – Child Protection 067-46660

SUGGESTIONS

Students exposed to violence at may benefit from specific teaching approaches and strategies. Fortunately, these approaches benefit most students and are likely already being used to some degree in your classroom. Create a safe and low stress environment that promotes respect toward others.

- Consistently reinforce non-acceptance of violence.
- Teach and reward non-violent conflict resolution and cooperation.
- Model nurturing and respectful behaviour.
- Foster cooperation and reduce competition and situations where students may be humiliated (e.g., peers picking teams).
- Look for a match between the student's interests and or strengths and the course, school or extracurricular activity
- Strongly encourage participation.
- Enlist peer (e.g. cross age mentor, tutor) and adult (e.g. staff, volunteers) support to provide encouragement and support to foster connection.

Provide positive experiences and activities to promote security, self-esteem and learning.

- Verbally praise students for their efforts.
- Provide opportunities for fun.
- Assist students to recognise their strengths and to experience success.

Let students know what to expect.

- Plan and prepare the students for visitors.
 - Minimize last minute scheduling changes.
 - Give advance notice of upcoming events.
 - Give advance notice of upcoming lessons or activities that may touch on difficult experiences.
- Increase positive connections to school.

Be aware that some activities or situations may remind students of troubling events associated with the violence in their homes. Examples of events or themes that may be difficult for children living with violence include.

- Raised voices.
- Alcohol/drug prevention.
- Making something new to give to a parent.
- Violence prevention education.
- Peer fights.

"School served as my shelter from many storms... Teachers opened doors to worlds for me that the rest of my life had slammed shut"

For information or an appointment with Ascend contact:

Confidential Number: 0505-23379 / 086-8283399

W: www.ntlp.ie



www.facebook.com/AscendDomesticAbuse

