

White Ribbon Campaign- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Staff Handbook: Guidance notes on Domestic Abuse

Given the levels of Domestic Abuse in society, and in particular the levels currently being experienced by children and young people, we can be sure that there are a significant number of children and young people in your school who are experiencing some form of abuse. This may be as a result of living with an abusive parent or Teen Partner Violence. Teaching about Domestic Abuse and Healthy Relationships is increasingly acknowledged to be of the utmost importance in violence prevention, but is widely believed to be a difficult subject to approach on a number of levels. This should not stop us from broaching this vitally important issue as children and young people need information about all forms of Domestic Abuse, in order to deal with their experiences and the devastating effect these experiences have on their lives, as well as to achieve success in their personal relationships both now and in the future. Children and young people living with Domestic Abuse at home often blame themselves or cannot understand why the abuse is happening. Without education they will not be able to make any sense of what is happening around them or find the support they desperately need. Teenagers may feel confused when they find themselves the victim of abuse in their personal relationships, be unable to recognise such abuse is happening to them or even think that such abuse is normal. We must also remember that Domestic Abuse can often lead to depression, self harm and even suicide amongst young people. It is therefore vital to enable teachers to feel confident in their understanding of this subject, know how to deal with disclosures from pupils experiencing DA at home and from older pupils experiencing DA in their own personal relationships, as well as looking at DA as a workplace issue.

What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic Abuse is a form of gender based violence. The government defines domestic violence as 'Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.'

We need to remember that Domestic Abuse is often a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviours, which may or may not include actual violence, but are no less harmful if they don't. This also includes forced marriage, FGM and 'honour crimes'. It can also severely affect children and young people in their own personal relationships. We are now seeing a huge number of cases of Teen Partner Violence; 40% of teenagers are in abusive dating relationships. Teenagers experience just as much abuse in relationships as adults but have a worryingly high level of acceptance of abusive behaviour as well as justifications as to why it is ok. The overwhelming majority of victims of Domestic Abuse are women, girls and children, and the majority of abusers

are men of all ages. Domestic Abuse can happen to anyone from any background, race, religion or class equally, there is no one group within our society where abuse happens more or less frequently.

Why is prevention through education important?

- 1 in 4 women will experience physical abuse in their lifetime.
- 16 – 24 year olds are the highest risk age group for domestic abuse
- Almost half of women will experience domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking.
- In 90% of family households where domestic violence is occurring, children are in the same or the next room 90% of the time
- 2 women a week in the UK are killed because of domestic violence
- 25% of girls and 18% of boys have experienced physical abuse
- 75% of girls and 50% of boys have experienced emotional abuse
- A third of teenage girls (13-17 years) have suffered unwanted sexual acts
- Almost 1,000,000 children witness domestic violence every year, an average of 3 in every class of 30 pupils.
- In between 30% and 60% of domestic violence cases, the abusive partner is also directly abusing the children.
- Children who have witnessed domestic violence are 2.5 times more likely to have serious social and behavioural problems.
- 70% of teenage mothers have experienced domestic violence, abused girls are 4-6 times more likely to become pregnant than their peers.
- 39% of overseas assistance cases dealt with by the Forced Marriage Unit in 2008 involved children under the age of 18, 14% of these were under 16.
- Approximately half of women in contact with mental health services have experienced childhood sexual abuse and/or domestic abuse.
- 77% of children and young people say they don't receive enough information about domestic abuse
- The majority of young people experiencing domestic abuse don't tell anyone
- It has been shown that children as young as 5 years have benefited from having this issue discussed in school
- 25% of all reported crime is Domestic Violence, and it is that; A CRIME.

A recent Home Office report found that one in five people believe it is justifiable to hit a woman if she is provocatively dressed and one in three hold a woman partly or fully to blame if she was drunk when assaulted or raped. A Sugar magazine survey quoted in the same report found that a third of teenage girls believe cheating justifies violence. In our experience we have found that many teenagers believe that certain controlling and emotionally abusive behaviours are a normal part of a relationship. Schools are ideally placed to challenge these beliefs.

It is important to teach children and young adults from a young age an understanding of what domestic violence and controlling behaviours are, how to recognise such behaviours and that violence and abusive behaviour has no place in a loving and mutually respectful relationship. We can promote gender equality, challenge gender stereotypes and teach them how they can help friends and others experiencing violence and abuse.

Our children receive messages about appropriate behaviour, gender stereotypes and relationships from the wider society. Children and young people are more concerned than adults with 'fitting in' and can therefore take some of the stereotypical gender roles they see around them on board wholeheartedly without fully questioning the consequences of doing so. Through education we can develop children and young people's ability to recognize and change behaviour and attitudes which support violence against women, this is vital to preventing violence and abuse from happening in the first place.

It is now increasingly recognised that our society is becoming more and more sexualised, through the dissemination of sexualised visual imagery, the 'normalisation' of pornography and the sex industry and the imposition of an adult sexuality on young girls too immature to deal with it. Children and young people are surrounded by sexualised representations in music videos, in advertising, on the internet, in magazines, and computer games. The messages that children and young people seem to be internalising is that masculinity is about being hyper-masculine and aggressive, whereas femininity is about sexual desirability. In a study of the content of computer games, 83% of the male characters were aggressive and 60% of the female characters were sexualised. Up to 81% (depending on genre) of music videos depict sexualised imagery where women are predominantly decorative objects who pose and dance. Over half of music videos depict violence and over 80% of these also show sexual imagery. 90% of 8-16 year olds have viewed pornography online and over half of boys say it has 'inspired' them in their own sexual behaviour. This is worrying as pornography is increasingly 'hardcore' with themes of power, aggression and control. Boys are increasingly learning to be consumers of the female body and that sex is about domination rather than a form of intimacy. Girls are learning that their worth is measured in terms of their sexual desirability to men; in a recent Scottish study, 63% of teenage girls want to be a glamour model, only 4% said teacher. There is a clear link between sexualisation and violence and abuse. Children and young people should be given the chance to develop a healthy and respectful sexuality through receiving age appropriate information as well as the opportunity to question and discuss the messages they are receiving about gender identity and develop a more informed media literacy.

Schools can also create a culture where gender based violence and abuse is unacceptable by tackling issues such as sexual bullying. Sexual bullying is any form of bullying, physical or non-physical, that is based upon a person's sexuality or gender. It is most commonly experienced by girls, though some boys do report such bullying too. It includes teasing or putting someone down because of their sex life, their sexuality or their body, using words like 'gay' as

a derogatory term, using sexual words as a put down, making threats of rape or sexual assault, spreading rumours about someone's sex life or sexuality, touching when someone doesn't want to be touched or putting pressure on someone to act in a sexual way. Increasingly technology is being employed by young people to carry out this form of bullying. Sexual bullying is on the rise in both primary and secondary schools and supports a culture where domestic abuse is considered acceptable.

Why schools?

- Domestic violence can affect children and young people's cognitive and emotional ability
- Domestic abuse can interrupt, or damage completely, children and young people's education through lateness, truancy, lack of concentration and lack of sleep caused by the abuser's behaviour.
- Schools can be a safe haven for children and young people experiencing violence at home
- Schools may be a place of safety for mothers to seek support
- Schools have a safeguarding duty to protect the welfare of children
- Schools are legally obliged to promote pupil's moral, spiritual and social development
- Domestic violence is a cross-curricular issue which can be integrated into a range of other issues and subjects such as bullying, emotional literacy, circle time, PSHE, SRE, forced marriage etc

Teacher's role:

It is clear that this subject is complex and involves many aspects which have a direct bearing on people's lives, emotional and mental well being and their relationships. It is not only important that children and young people are given clear and accurate information about domestic violence but that teachers leading the sessions feel confident in promoting attitudes which do not condone or unintentionally collude with domestic violence and abuse.

Teachers will require an understanding of:

- The nature, scale and extent of domestic violence and of the effects on victims, children and others;
- The ways in which perpetrators deny, minimise and excuse their behaviour and of the ways in which other people can intentionally or unintentionally collude with this;
- The legal context to domestic violence and the range of responses to help to support and protect victims and their children and to hold perpetrators to account;

- The historical context of domestic violence and of the relationship between assumptions about gender roles in relationships and domestic violence;
- The ways in which children and young people can be affected by domestic violence;
- The child protection implications of domestic violence and of carrying out domestic violence prevention work;
- Relevant techniques and approaches to domestic violence prevention work, specific to the age, ability and developmental stages of the children and young people they are working with and skills in using these;
- The role of schools in domestic violence prevention work, of the ways schools work and of the links between domestic violence prevention work and the National Curriculum.

As well as considering the well being of pupils, it is of vital importance that the well being of teachers is also considered. For those teachers who have experienced, or are in, an abusive relationship, raising this issue will be extremely difficult. These teachers need to feel supported within the school and know where they can find extra support from external organisations. It is also very important that colleagues understand the dynamics of an abusive relationship, for example; it is very tempting to encourage a woman to just leave a harmful relationship but others need to be sensitive to why a woman chooses to stay, or cannot leave. For perpetrators who recognise patterns in their own behaviour there must be information available for them to find help and work to change their behaviours.

A few common myths surrounding Domestic Violence:

'Domestic violence only happens in certain types of problem families' – domestic abuse does not discriminate on any grounds and happens in families of every class, race, religion and culture, it is no higher in any particular type of family.

'Some women like violence' – women and children living with domestic violence are living in fear and terror. This myth often stems from a misunderstanding of why women don't leave abusive men. Women often *cannot* leave for a variety of reasons: no money, nowhere to go, fear of losing their children, fear that an abuser will come after them and hurt them more seriously, guilt, shame, having had her self esteem worn down so much by abuse that she feels she could not manage on her own, loss of job, fear of going to a refuge, the stigma of being on benefits, unhelpful responses from friends and family, lack of support services in her area. Unfortunately leaving often doesn't end the abuse and the point at which a woman leaves is the point at which she is most at risk of serious injury or death. Remember also that many families have to comply with court contact orders after separation, women, children and young people have frequently experienced abuse on these visits.

'She must have done something to deserve it' – everyone has the right to live a life free from fear and abuse. Women do not 'ask for it' and no matter

what someone may or may not have done, they do not 'deserve' to be continually abused in their own home. The only person who chooses Domestic Abuse is the abuser, the victim is *never* responsible for the abusers behaviour, and even find they 'can't win', as the abuse happens no matter what they do or don't do. Domestic Abuse is learned behaviour, is entirely intended, and is used as a way of controlling the victim. It occurs as a consequence of strongly held beliefs that men have the 'right' to have power over women and is rooted in gender inequality and our long history of living in a patriarchal society.

'It's only drunks who are violent to their partners'- alcohol is not the reason domestic abuse occurs. Some men have been drinking, but the alcohol is just an excuse, abusive behaviours do not just start as soon as someone has been drinking. Many men who abuse do not drink. Alcohol cannot somehow turn a non abusive person into an abusive one, if it exacerbates abuse it is only because the tendency towards abusive behaviour is already there. Remember there is no one particular type of man who abuses women and Domestic Abuse is about POWER and CONTROL.

'We should be teaching girls how to avoid abusive men' – unfortunately abusive men do not come with a health warning! They look like everyone else, because they are ordinary men who come from all walks of life and all backgrounds. In most cases the abuse doesn't begin until he 'has his feet under the table'. Abusive men are often charming, likeable and romantic until some form of commitment has been made, such as moving in together, marriage or pregnancy; women are 3 times more likely to be assaulted when they are pregnant; domestic violence accounts for the largest number of non medically related miscarriages. It is often a surprise to friends and families that abuse is taking place as the abuser behaves so differently in public. We need to be providing understanding and awareness for *both* girls and boys to prevent Domestic Abuse happening by tackling the root causes and promoting respectful relationships.

'Domestic violence happens between adults and does not affect the children' – from the figures above we can see this is not true. Children living with domestic abuse are being emotionally abused even if they are not being directly abused themselves.

'Domestic violence is equally perpetrated by women as men' – 45% of women and 26 % of men have reported that they have experienced at least one incident of violence in a relationship in their lifetime, but where violence is repeated and ongoing 89% of victims are women. Women are also most frequently the victims of harassment, stalking, rape, and sexual assault perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner. We know that abuse occurs against men as well as in LGBT relationships; support and understanding should be available for everyone and everyone benefits from a greater understanding of Domestic Abuse and an anti-violence message.

Potential warning signs of Domestic Abuse in children and young people:

- Evidence of injury
- Anxiety or depression
- Easily startled

- Behaving as though they are younger than they are
- Problems with concentration
- Tiredness
- Becoming aggressive
- Becoming withdrawn
- Losing interest in their work, grades dropping
- Playing truant
- Experimenting with alcohol or drugs
- Self harm
- Eating disorders
- Pregnancy
- Changes in mood or personality
- Changes in the way they dress
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour or language
- Isolation from friends and family
- Receiving frequent texts and calls from a boy/ girlfriend
- Complaining of illness, for example tummy ache frequently

Dealing with disclosures:

Some basic points to remember:

Whether a child/ young person (or adult) is disclosing that Domestic Abuse is happening in their home because they are witnessing it or experiencing it directly themselves, what they are experiencing is harmful to them. Any disclosure should therefore be treated as a potential child protection concern (and as a serious issue for adults).

RECEIVE, REASSURE, RESPOND

Do listen and tell the child/ young person you believe them.

Do not ask for detail, let the child/ young person disclose only what they wish. Probing questions may also undermine any investigation by the Police or Child and Family Services.

Don't agree to keep a secret, child abuse thrives on secrecy. Make sure you are aware of your school's Child Protection Policy and associated procedures. Let them know as soon as possible that you will have to share information, normally with the school's Child Protection Officer.

Do contain your own feelings, showing shock or horror may reinforce a sense of shame.

Do tell the child/ young person they were right to tell you and very brave to do so.

Do use the child's vocabulary.

Do acknowledge that it is difficult to talk about these things.

Do tell them that they are not responsible for what has happened.

Do everything you can to support, comfort and reassure the child/ young person.

Do ensure that the child/ young person feels safe following disclosure.

Try to listen and make sense of what they are saying in terms of whether they are being harmed, are they currently at risk, is anyone else at risk, do they need medical attention, what are their overall needs, what is important to them?

These points are equally important when a friend or colleague is confiding in you, especially establishing what it is **they** want to do and what help they want.

Be aware of appropriate referrals.

These few pages are by no means all inclusive and are intended only as an introduction to some of the issues. For further training and information please see your school's White Ribbon Liaison Officer or please contact the White Ribbon Campaign Education Coordinator directly on 01422 886545/
info@whiteribboncampaign.co.uk

Places to find support and further information:

Women's Aid:

Expect Respect Educational Toolkit – free download

www.womensaid.org.uk

www.thehideout.org.uk

Refuge:

www.refuge.org.uk

The National Domestic Violence Helpline - Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline:

0808 2000 247

www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Rape Crisis:

T: 0845 122 8609

www.respectphoneline.org.uk

Respect - For those who inflict domestic violence to seek support:

T: 0845 122 8609

www.respectphoneline.org.uk

Men's Advice Line - Helpline for male victims of domestic violence:

T: 0808 801 0327

www.mensadvice.org.uk

Broken Rainbow - Support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans–people experiencing relationship abuse:

0300 999 LGBT (5428)

www.broken-rainbow.org.uk

Victim Support:

0845 30 30 900

www.victimsupport.org