

The UK's cross-government definition of domestic abuse is:

'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.'

This abuse can encompass but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

**Controlling behaviour is:** a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

**Coercive behaviour is:** an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.\*

\*This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group."

(Home Office, 2013)

### Identifying and assessing Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA)

DVA can present itself in a number of ways including some victims being unaware that they are victims of DVA. Professionals need to consider the risks to the victim and child/ren and, when safe to do so, include the abusive partner in the assessment and planning, not leaving the responsibility for protection solely in the hands of the victim.

Examples of these behaviours are:

- **Psychological / emotional abuse:** intimidation and threats (e.g. about children or family pets), social isolation, verbal abuse, humiliation, constant criticism, enforced trivial routines, marked over intrusiveness.
- **Physical violence:** slapping, pushing, kicking, stabbing, damage to property or items of sentimental value, attempted murder or murder;
- **Physical restriction of freedom:** controlling who the victim or child/ren see or where they go, what they wear or do, stalking, imprisonment, forced marriage;
- **Sexual violence:** any non-consensual sexual activity, including rape, sexual assault, coercive sexual activity or refusing safer sex
- **Financial abuse:** stealing, depriving or taking control of money, running up debts, withholding benefits books or bank cards.

Other factors to consider include but not exhaustive are:

- Separation can increase risk
- The feelings of the victim
- The relationship dynamics including a clear individual displaying unhealthy behaviours to it being unclear who the victim or perpetrator is
- There is abuse in the childhood history
- A high level of generalised aggression



## One Minute Guide Domestic Abuse



- Substance misuse
- Mental health concerns

### Why is it important?

Keeping children safe: DVA can seriously harm children, either directly through them witnessing or getting caught up in the abuse or when their parents struggle to prioritise their children's needs. This may not always be due to neglectful parenting and sometimes professionals see victims' behaviour as increasing risk to their children when in fact this is to manage or reduce the risk.

Children can find it hard to talk to their parents about what has happened. They may start acting out the abusive, threatening or controlling behaviour they have witnessed. Children's Services will become involved when there is an identified risk of significant harm. Some of the families are already known to social care or a referral was made by the police following an incident of domestic abuse in Portsmouth, where a pregnant woman or children were present.

Working with children and families who need our help: As with all abuse, you need to be careful when sharing information that you do not increase the risk to the victim and should do this carefully in consultation with your supervisor. Professionals need to feel confident when talking to both parents regarding the abuse, but you need to be careful not to breach confidentiality between them and gain their consent for you to talk to other professionals involved with their family, unless you are undertaking a Section 47 Investigation.

Within the assessment, you will need to identify the parental behaviours that raised concern of DVA, an understanding behind these behaviours, any work already undertaken and any progress made by the family. When talking to children alone you will need to gain consent from their parent unless you are undertaking a Section 47 investigation.

Remember to make it fun and use visuals as children are ready to be entertained and are more likely to take your message to heart if they are enjoying themselves in the process. Also, 'keep your eyes and ears open for what's going on' and put yourself in their shoes, it will support your assessment and planning to assess the risk to the children and how to support them through this difficult time. The Let's Talk toolkit can assist with this.

A common theme from serious case reviews, has been the tendency for agencies to overlook the role of fathers, male partners and other men living within the families. Practitioners should involve fathers and other male figures in the family in assessing risk and in gathering all the information needed to make an assessment.

### What to do if you are concerned

In an emergency the police should be called on 999.

Support for the victim is dependent on the level of risk. The Safe Lives DASH risk assessment should be used to consider this risk with high risk victims being referred to the MARAC and Portsmouth IDVA Project, medium risk victims to Stop Domestic Abuse Service and standard risk victims to Victim Care service. There are also groups for victims and their children.

For those who acknowledge they use unhealthy or abusive behaviour and want to change within their relationship, support is available from Up2U.

Further information on support options and the referral process can be found on the PSCP website - <https://www.portsmouthscp.org.uk/professionals/domestic-abuse/>

Portsmouth MASH - 0845 671 0271 or [pcraduty@secure.portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:pcraduty@secure.portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

Out of Hours - 0300 555 1373

Women's Service - 023 9266 9511

Men's Service - 023 9266 9516

Recovery Hub - 023 9275 1617 for access to drug and alcohol support