

Domestic Abuse

Signs that a child may be at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse

Understanding Domestic Abuse

In Wales, domestic abuse is enshrined in the *Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015*. The UK Government defines domestic abuse as:

“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 can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

psychological, physical, sexual, financial, or emotional.

Controlling behaviour is 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, intimidation or other abuse used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”

Coercive or controlling behaviour is a **criminal offence** in the UK and can carry a prison sentence of up to 5 years.

Domestic abuse also includes so called ‘**honour**’-based violence, **female genital mutilation** and **forced marriage**. It can also include stalking, which may be perpetrated in person, or electronically.

Children may experience domestic abuse in multiple ways:

- As an **intended target** of the abuse perpetrated by a family member or a parent's partner / ex-partner
- **Seeing, hearing, and experiencing the effects** of domestic abuse perpetrated against another family member
- By **their own current or previous intimate partner**, if they are sixteen years or older (for relationship abuse by under-16s, see factsheet on **peer abuse**).

Domestic abuse is a violation of human rights; an adverse childhood experience; and can impact negatively on children’s well-being, achievements, and life chances.

Some children may face barriers to disclosing abuse. It is important that **all school personnel become familiar with the signs** that may indicate a child is at risk of, or already experiencing, domestic abuse.

If you observe signs and/or hear information suggesting that the child may be at risk domestic abuse, raise these concerns with your DSP.

- Anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts;
- Difficulties with sleep or settling;
- Delayed speech or development;
- Aggression or high tolerance of violence;
- Bullying and/or antisocial behaviour, like vandalism;
- Over-pleasing behaviour;
- Attention-seeking OR silent / withdrawn;
- Frozen watchfulness;
- Evidence of being monitored by family / other adults;
- Constant or regular sickness;
- Eating disorders;
- Problems in school and trouble learning;
- Drug or alcohol use.

Want to seek specialist advice?

Live Fear Free National VAWDASV Helpline

0808 80 10 800 / info@livefearfreehelpline.wales

BAWSO Helpline (specialist BME organisation)

0800 73 18 147 / info@bawso.org.uk

Useful Resources

[Welsh Government VAWDASV e-learning module](#)

[Welsh Women's Aid Bystander Toolkit](#)

[NSPCC 'Let Children Know You're Listening'](#)

Bawso

Providing specialist services for BME communities



PROFIADAU NIWEIDIOL MEWN PLENTYNDOD
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Llinell Gymorth Live Fear
Byw Heb Ofn Free Helpline

0808 80 10 800

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call • text • live chat • email



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Welsh Women's Aid

Domestic Abuse: Early Intervention and Prevention

In addition to schools' safeguarding 'duty to report' (see *Wales Safeguarding Procedures* and *Keeping Learners Safe* guidance), there are actions schools can take to **prevent** domestic abuse from happening / escalating, and to offer holistic **support** victims and survivors. In particular:

1. Educating staff, pupils, and the school community about domestic abuse

Some children (as well as adults) may believe that abusive behaviour is normal. It's imperative therefore that schools ensure that all children and staff understand:

- what domestic abuse is, and that **it is never OK**;
- that **coercive control** is a form of domestic abuse which can have debilitating effects on children and the non-abusive parent/partner, including their ability to seek help;
- that **school is a safe place** for them to discuss concerns and disclose any experiences or fears;
- that they will be **believed, listened to, and supported**.

2. Ensuring that *all* pupils are supported, including by offering specialist support, regardless of their level of 'risk'

Some pupils for whom concerns around their safety and well-being are raised will not meet the threshold for a Social Services report. Others might, but Social Services may decide that they do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention. *It is important that these children are supported too.* They may have needs which could escalate into a 'risk of harm' later on if inadequately addressed at this earlier stage.

Prevention, Early Intervention and Support

There are numerous organisations, including specialist domestic abuse services, who offer a range of services to children and young people and their families, as well as directly to schools. Specialist domestic abuse services can take referrals through schools. Examples of the services include:

Prevention / Education:

- **Safety, Trust and Respect (S.T.A.R.) education groups** - inform young people (11-25) about healthy relationships, coercive control, consent, and where to seek support.
- **Spectrum Project** and **School Beat** - both raise awareness and educate schools about domestic abuse.

Early Intervention and Support

- **One to one support** with a specialist children's worker.
- **Recovery Toolkit** for young people aged 11-18 who've experienced domestic abuse.
- **S.T.A.R. Recovery Groups** - (1) for children aged 7-11 who have experienced domestic abuse (does not have to be current / recent). They are supported to understand what has happened to them, their emotional responses, and learn strategies to manage their feelings safely. (2) for *children (7-11) and Mothers* - Mothers attend a 10-week programme at the same time as their child and are supported to communicate with their child about what has happened and how they are feeling.
- **Mentoring programmes** - either for small groups or individuals. Children are matched with a trained mentor who spends problem-free time with them, having fun and working towards goals set by the child.
- **Adolescent to parent violence support groups** - behaviour change programme that supports young people who are using abusive behaviours with their parents.
- **Therapeutic support** - such as Play Therapy or counselling.

Note that not all domestic abuse services will offer all the services above.

You can contact your local domestic abuse service to find out what services they offer.

Find your local domestic abuse service and contact details by clicking this [link](#) or visiting www.welshomensaid.org.uk/information-and-support/find-your-local-service