

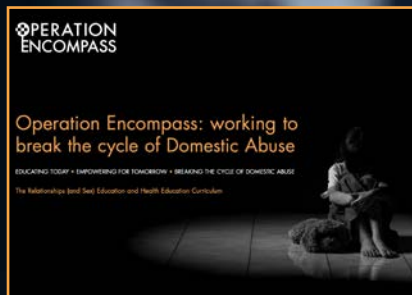


"At last there is someone I can talk to"

Children experiencing domestic abuse should be identified as one of our vulnerable groups?


A Handbook for Schools

This handbook should be read in conjunction with the other Operation Encompass Handbooks:



Updated February 2024





Children are legally recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. This was enshrined in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021)

The Act introduced the first ever statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognises the impact of domestic abuse on children, as victims in their own right¹.

Organisations and professionals who come into contact with children should be able to demonstrate the ways in which they have developed their services in response to this legal recognition.

“Children exposed² to domestic abuse are victims of child abuse”³

When considering the vulnerable groups of children within educational settings, we strongly recommend that children experiencing domestic abuse are recognised as part of this grouping.

We should view experiencing domestic abuse and our response as a society to this as a children’s rights issue as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁴

Educational settings should carefully monitor and support the development of children's outcomes over time including but not limited to:

- Safeguarding
- Their emotional health and well being
- Their academic progress and attainment
- Their attendance
- Their behaviour and risk of exclusion
- Their ongoing and changing need for support from their educational setting

They may see, hear, or experience the effects of abuse at home and/or suffer domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse). All of which can have a detrimental and long-term impact on their health, wellbeing, development, and ability to learn⁵.

² Please note that Operation Encompass uses the word ‘experience’ rather than ‘exposed’ or ‘witness’ to refer to a child who is living with domestic abuse

³ Home Office Consultation and Response Draft Domestic Abuse Bill

⁴ UNCRC 1989

⁵ KSCIE 2023



The pandemic saw an increase in the numbers of children experiencing domestic abuse and some of these may be children not previously known to schools.

Noticing, listening to and supporting these children is part of the professional duty of every teacher/key worker, in every educational setting and forms part of a safeguarding response to Domestic Abuse:

Domestic abuse is the most prevalent risk affecting children in need, who receive statutory help and protection from children's social care.

These children have complex needs, and in school they do far worse than their peers⁶.

KCSIE 2020 states that: 'all school and college staff should be particularly alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

Is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse;'⁷

There is a wide range of research which clearly demonstrates the harm done to children, throughout their lifespan, when they experience Domestic Abuse in their life.^{8 9}

This harm can be caused at each and every stage of their lives, from conception onwards and, whilst the impact may change, develop and vary dependent upon the individual, the age of the child, and the nature and duration of the domestic abuse, the harm is very real.

Experiencing domestic abuse is recognised as an Adverse Childhood Experience¹⁰ (ACE) and as such, helping children to heal from this trauma is a crucial aspect of the work of all schools.¹¹

It is estimated that 827,000¹² children experienced domestic abuse in 2023.



6 Home Office: Response and Consultation Draft Domestic Abuse Bill

7 KCSIE 2023 Page 7

8 John-Devaney-Research-Review-The-Impact-of-Domestic-Violence-on-Children

9 Royal College of Psychiatrists Domestic Abuse and Violence: The impact on children and adolescents

10 Felitti and Anda

11 KCSIE 2023 Page 11

12 Children's Commissioner Vulnerability Report 2019

It is estimated that 827,000 children experienced domestic abuse in 2023¹³

The Government do not currently count the number of children experiencing Domestic Abuse so we do not know the scope of the issue and therefore the number of children who need our support.

Living in a home with domestic abuse may also bring other risks to the child especially if the adult victim experiences the other two most commonly identified co-morbidities of mental health issues and substance abuse. These are frequently referred to in Serious Case Reviews (SCR), now known as Child Practice Reviews and were identified in the triennial reviews of SCRs.

It is acknowledged that educational settings may be the only support these children have as 'many are not known to any other services'¹⁴ and the domestic abuse in their home may well not reach the threshold of intervention by Social Care or other commissioned therapeutic services.



¹³ Foundations.org.uk

¹⁴ Children's Commissioner: Vulnerability Report

Domestic Abuse has been described as domestic terrorism on an epic scale, it is insidious, it is always harmful and the destructive thread of Domestic Abuse weaves its way through all society, every society, every country, every demographic; rich, poor and everything in between, every race, colour and creed, every make-up of relationship and every age.

The pandemic and the associated lockdowns have exacerbated this situation¹⁵.

During the lockdowns and subsequent partial school closures, every police force and domestic abuse charity saw a rise in the number of reports of Domestic Abuse; this increase in the number of incidents occurred globally and was foreseen by all governments.

For those working in educational settings it meant that there were and still are a greater number of children experiencing more frequent incidents of domestic abuse in their homes and children were experiencing this at the very time the support, nurture and understanding normally accessible in educational settings was not available. Schools were no longer a place of safety available to all children.¹⁶

*'Movement restrictions, loss of income, isolation, overcrowding and high levels of stress and anxiety are increasing the likelihood that children experience and observe physical, psychological and sexual abuse at home - particularly those children already living in violent or dysfunctional family situations... The situation is aggravated by children's lack of access to school friends, teachers, social workers and the safe space and services that schools provide.'*¹⁷

Whilst there has always been a need for educational settings to identify and support children experiencing domestic abuse as one of their vulnerable groups, there was an even greater imperative to do so during that unprecedented time.

Economic stress and unemployment are very strong stressors at any point for perpetrators which can lead them to increase their abuse but the pandemic made these worse for many of our families. Whilst the pandemic is over the impact upon our children is still present. They need the support and nurture of their educational setting more than ever and it is important that educational staff understand the ongoing impact on the children in their care.

¹⁵ The Pandemic Paradox: The impact of Covid-19 on Domestic Abuse

¹⁶ Operation Encompass Response to Covid-19

¹⁷ WHO Leader's Statement April 2020



The seriousness of this should not be underestimated:

‘Everyone needs to recognise that children exposed to domestic abuse are victims of a crime. They do not need to be directly physically harmed, but suffer when they are exposed to domestic abuse and live in an environment of fear and intimidation.’¹⁸

Educational settings also can support children and families by being alert to the signs that domestic abuse may be occurring in a family: ‘School and college staff are particularly important as they are in a unique position to identify concerns early, provide help for children and prevent concerns from escalating.’¹⁹

The Joint Targeted Area Inspection 2017²⁰ highlighted the need to:

Develop age-appropriate tools to understand the range of risks that children face;

Help schools support victims and families, particularly given the protective role education can play when the impact of domestic abuse is fully understood and taken into account.

¹⁸ Home Office: Response and Consultation Draft Domestic Abuse Bill

¹⁹ Home Office: Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance 2021

²⁰ JTAI 2017: The multi-agency response to children living with domestic abuse

A protective role involves linking our knowledge of domestic abuse as an ACE, to an educational setting response to the needs of these children with a trauma informed approach that permeates the culture and ethos of the whole educational setting:

“A trauma informed approach should be at the centre of all support provided to children and young people affected by domestic abuse. A strengths- based approach to recovery, building on ‘the resilient blocks in the child’s life’, has been shown to be effective in interventions for children.”²¹

We must also ensure that teaching about domestic abuse is a key aspect of Relationships and Sex Education²², and should start from educating the very youngest children about healthy relationships:

We recognise that if we want to change attitudes we need to engage with children at the earliest possible opportunity.

“We know that exposure to domestic abuse can have a serious, lasting impact on children, with negative effects on their future behaviour and relationships. All children should be supported to understand that abuse is never acceptable.”²³

No child should ever experience the trauma caused by domestic abuse.”²⁴

21 Home Office Domestic Abuse Statutory Draft Guidance 2020

22 Operation Encompass working to break the cycle of Domestic Abuse

23 Home Office Response and Consultation Draft Domestic Abuse Bill

24 Home Office Response and Consultation Draft Domestic Abuse Bill



Some of the data around domestic abuse

Domestic Abuse is often not reported to the police so any figures we have are likely to be the tip of the iceberg and they give us only a partial picture.



One in five adult victims report their abuse to the police²⁵



In the year ending March 2022, an estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in the last year²⁶ 1.7 million women and 786,000 men



Research suggests that between 1 in 4 or 1 in 3²⁷ of children in the UK have experienced domestic abuse



Domestic Abuse is the most common factor at end of assessment for children in need, November 2023²⁸

²⁵ Crime in England and Wales 2015

²⁶ ONS survey ending March 2023

²⁷ Home Office Consultation and Response

²⁸ Department for Education Characteristics of Children in Need - November 2023

Children are at greater risk of direct harm if they live in a home where there is domestic abuse.

We should remember that there is no such thing as a typical victim. Domestic abuse is complex and nuanced and victims' responses to it are also complex.

Domestic Abuse still possesses a stigma, with victims feeling embarrassed and ashamed. One of the roles of educational settings and other professionals can be to ensure that the non-abusing parent understands that you will provide support for them and their children, without judgement.



The Impact on Children

We know domestic abuse can have a devastating, long-term impact on children.

‘Growing up in a household of fear and intimidation can profoundly impact children’s wellbeing and development, with lasting effects into adulthood. Children exposed to domestic abuse are more likely to suffer from mental health difficulties, do worse at school and experience domestic abuse in later life’.²⁹

But early intervention and a safe and secure nurturing relationship with at least one individual can disrupt that damage and can help a child develop resilience and enable healing to take place.³⁰

Early intervention has been proved to be more effective, less expensive and therefore more cost effective and to have an impact sooner than if we wait to intervene. ‘The earlier we intervene, the less expensive, less intensive and more effective intervention is likely to be.’³¹

29 Home Office Consultation and Response page 16

30 Centre on the Developing Child Harvard University

31 Dr Nadine Burke Harris ‘The Deepest Well’



We have a responsibility to show professional curiosity especially when a child's behaviour changes:

'XX's school was not aware of anything specifically to suggest domestic violence or abuse was happening within the family home. With hindsight there is some learning relating to changes of patterns of behaviour that may be indicators of domestic violence within families.³²

Some children are very quiet and studious in school and academically may be very successful. This does not mean that the domestic abuse is not harmful to them.

There are children whose needs can go unnoticed because they are internalising their response to the trauma. This can make it more difficult for adults to recognise their need for support, whilst those children who show challenging behaviour are more easily identified.

Children in the same family may have dramatically different memories, reactions to and vantage points on shared experiences of the abuse.

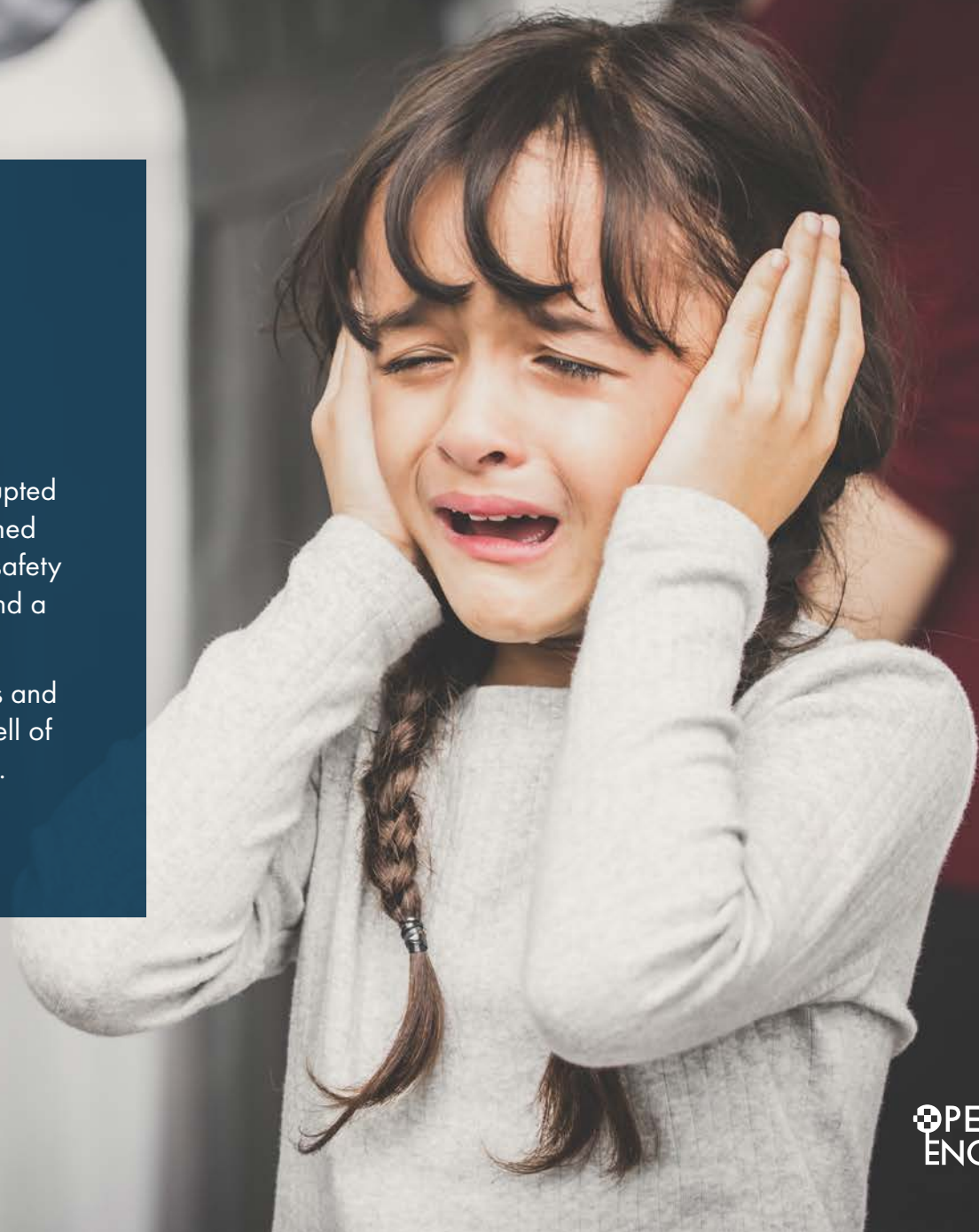
Children do demonstrate agency and take many different actions to keep themselves, their siblings, the non-abusing parent and often their pets as safe as possible.



The impact can be severe

The implications for children have been well researched. Experiencing Domestic abuse can have a life long negative impact. It can affect health, emotional wellbeing, behaviour, academic success, physical development and can create disrupted relationships. These children are often living a state of heightened anxiety and hyper vigilance, with home not being a place of safety and security as it should be, but rather one of stress, trauma and a feeling of insecurity and danger.

Responses may be triggered by any and all of a child's senses and even they may not recognise these triggers; it could be the smell of a scent or aftershave, a particular noise, or the taste of a food.





The impact can be long term

For those children where there is a negative impact upon academic performance, where there is risk of exclusion and higher rates of absence from educational settings, where the child is struggling to concentrate. All of these factors can negatively impact upon outcomes for employment in adulthood.

These children may be more likely to be involved in bullying as either a victim or perpetrator.³³

They are more likely to:

- Show challenging behaviour, which can lead to exclusion, be that fixed term or permanent. Research shows that if a child is excluded from school by the age of 12, they are four times more likely to end up in prison by the age of 22.³⁴
- Have difficulty sleeping.
- Have issues forming healthy relationships as they grow up, usually resulting in less friends and relationships with supportive peers and adults. When they then experience future stressful situations, they have fewer people to support them through this.
- Take part in risk taking behaviours which as they grow up may bring them to the notice of the police.
- Self-soothe using drugs and alcohol, which again may bring them to the notice of the police.
- Grow up to be victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse themselves.

33 Bullying in schools and exposure to domestic violence Anna Baldry

34 The University of Edinburgh Professor Susan McVie

When supporting our children in educational settings we must remember that every behaviour is a communication.

There are the children where we know about the domestic abuse at home, especially through participation in Operation Encompass.

There are the children where we feel that there may be domestic abuse at home.

There are the children where we have no idea about the domestic abuse, but it is just as real.

The culture and ethos of our schools must support all three of these groups.

Professor Eamon McCrory explains:

“While the brain changes triggered by trauma can make it harder for a child to navigate and cope with everyday challenges, increasing the risk of mental health problems in the future, recovery is possible. We now know their brains adapt to help them cope. Relationships play a key role in that recovery, as they directly influence how the brain grows and develops. So parents, carers and professionals have a crucial role to play in promoting resilience. These relationships are at the heart of what drives positive change.”

In our educational settings we can provide those safe, secure, nurturing relationships as described above and make a difference to a child.

That is why Operation Encompass was created.



To support those working with children experiencing Domestic Abuse Operation Encompass has created:

Free National Online Operation Encompass Training

The training, which should be undertaken by the Safeguarding Lead in every educational setting, can also be accessed, free of charge, by all staff and Governors. This can be accessed by all from our website: www.operationencompass.org

Advice and Guidance Line

The Helpline provides advice and guidance for educational professionals about Operation Encompass. Access to Educational or Clinical Psychologists can enable staff in educational settings to discuss how best to support individual children who are experiencing domestic abuse, or to discuss whole school policies for supporting children.

Resources

A range of free guides and handbooks together with other resources that support both police and schools to embed Operation Encompass and support the child victims of Domestic Abuse. Resources include the wording that educational establishments should place in their Safeguarding Policy regarding Operation Encompass:

www.operationencompass.org

A simple one-page poster Recovery and Resilience Planning resource for schools to use, created in partnership with Psychology Associates, considered as an 'aide memoire' to supporting children experiencing domestic abuse, trauma and adversity.

The areas on this Recovery and Resilience Planning sheet are interconnected and interdependent, a positive effect in one area will positively impact the other areas.

Relationships



Interpersonal contact between staff, children and families.

Loss of relational support is a significant threat to resilience.

- ✓ Time is needed throughout the school day to talk, play interact and engage in a shared activity.
- ✓ Observe and notice any changes in a child's behaviour and what this may be signalling.
- ✓ Ensure targeted and individual child and family needs are identified.
- ✓ Be kind and compassionate to others and yourself.

Engagement



Increased distractibility, day-dreaming, zoning out and irritability. Tiredness, apathy, disrupted sleep routines and loss of interest.

- ✓ We need to feel secure before we can focus and actively listen and engage.
- ✓ Accept the child is doing the best they can.
- ✓ Build on areas of interest in meaningful, practical and creative ways and elicit the child's views.
- ✓ Model curiosity and engagement alongside them.



Emotional Wellbeing

Bereavement and loss is at an unprecedented scale.

Loss of tactile social interaction.

Increased sense of isolation, rejection and heightened anxiety.

- ✓ Provide opportunities to connect with feelings that may be distressing and overwhelming.
- ✓ Fun and playfulness is protective to our threat-response system.
- ✓ Support emotion regulation and expression.
- ✓ We need to meet the emotional need before a child can effectively learn.


Learning



Social-emotional needs impact upon us cognitively. This can impede executive functioning and the capacity to focus, sustain attention, organise, plan and retain information.

- ✓ Establish routines, structure and predictability.
- ✓ Tailor the pace of learning and reduce cognitive load.
- ✓ Revisit earlier goals and interleave to test for mastery and retention.
- ✓ Build self-efficacy and a sense of achievement.

Psychology Associates

A child is seen from behind, standing in a field of tall grass. Their arms are raised high in the air, reaching towards a bright, glowing sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden light that fills the entire scene. The child is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and dark shorts.

Our children need to experience safe, secure, nurturing relationships within a safe, secure and nurturing environment.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Operation Encompass website:

<https://www.operationencompass.org/>

A person is seen from behind, standing in a field with their arms raised high in the air. The background is a soft, hazy sunset or sunrise sky with warm colors. The person is wearing a light-colored t-shirt.

OPERATION ENCOMPASS

Document created by

Elisabeth Carney-Haworth OBE

David Carney-Haworth OBE

www.operationencompass.org