

## Engaging Parents who are Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse in Child Protection Processes

**Be clear that the accountability for the abusive behaviour is solely with the parent/carer who is using abusive behaviours. Ensure that engagement with the person using abusive behaviours does not increase risk to the victims, including the children.**

### What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by someone [personally connected](#).

Women are generally the victims of domestic abuse, and it is perpetrated by men; however, it is important to be aware that men can and do experience domestic abuse and that abuse can and does occur in same sex relationships.

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence - this includes gaslighting).
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse.
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse

**It is important to remember that under the [Domestic Abuse Act \(2021\)](#), children are now classified as victims of domestic abuse in their own right.**



Being exposed to domestic abuse has serious consequences for children and young people and it can affect how they feel, think and behave in harmful ways. This can continue after the adults' relationship has come to an end, and post-separation abuse and coercive controlling behaviours can continue to remain a factor in the child's life.

## Domestic Abuse & Safeguarding

Professionals working with children and families have a responsibility to make sure that the domestic abuse stops and that children have a safe and stable environment to grow up in.

Where domestic abuse is perpetrated by the child's parent or an adult who has parental responsibility and there is concern that the child is at risk of significant harm, professionals need to consider carefully how the parent/carer is engaged in any child and family assessment and any subsequent child protection planning. The robustness of the assessment and effectiveness of any plan to safeguard the child may be impacted without this engagement.

However, the parent using abusive behaviours must be engaged in a way that does not increase the risk of harm to the child and the non-abusive parent.

## Practice Principles for Engaging People Using Abusive Behaviours

The principles below are intended to guide professionals when they are seeking to engage parents/carers who are using abusive behaviours.

### 1. Hold the Person Using Abusive Behaviour Accountable

- Professionals should have a clear, factual overview of the behaviours that are of concern. This should include any changes in the harmful behaviour over time. With this knowledge, professionals should focus on naming the abusive behaviours (rather than labelling the person using abusive behaviours) and detail their impact on children and the non-abusive parent.
- Avoid language that shifts responsibility onto the victim. For example, instead of saying, *"They have a volatile relationship"* a professional might say, *"He chose to use violent behaviours"*.

### 2. Safety as a Priority

- Ensure that any engagement with the person using abusive behaviours does not increase risk to the victim or children.
- Engage in multi-agency collaboration, including domestic abuse services and police, to monitor risk.

### 3. Respect and Professional Curiosity

- Approach the person using abusive behaviours with a focus on their responsibility and choice to change.

- Use motivational interviewing techniques to explore their willingness and capacity for change.

#### 4. Non-Collusive Practice

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- Avoid minimising the abuse or accepting justifications for abusive behaviour.
- Challenge excuses such as stress, substance use, or victim behaviour - external factors can be acknowledged without reducing accountability.

#### 5. Strengths-Based, Changed Oriented

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- Recognise the person's capacity for change while emphasising that the onus is on them to stop the abuse.
- Support their engagement with behaviour change programs. As part of this, professionals should consider any additional needs that may need to be considered for the parent using harmful behaviour, to support them with accessing the behaviour change programme.

### Applying the Principles in Action

The bullet points below are intended to support professionals in considering how they can apply the practice principles above within their own direct work with children and families.

#### 1. Prepare and Plan

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- Gather information from all available sources, including the victim-survivor's and child's perspective. This is vital to inform understanding of the relationship where there is domestic abuse and the risk of harm to the child.
- Plan for safety and engage with other professionals to assess risk before and after conversations.

#### 2. Start with Clear Expectations

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- Set the tone by being clear that abusive behaviour is unacceptable and that their behaviour has harmed the children.

#### 3. Use Direct, Non-Blaming Language

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- By using clear, direct and non-blaming language, professionals can support parents who are using abusive behaviours to engage in planning to reduce the risk of harm to the children and non-abusive parent. For example, *"Your children have described feeling scared when you shout at (non-abusive parent). How do you think that affects them?"*

#### 4. Explore Responsibility and Impact

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- Ask questions that encourage reflection, such as, *"What do you understand about how your actions affect your children?"* and *"What steps are you willing to take to ensure their safety?"*

## 5. Challenge Minimisation and Denial

- An example of this might be, *“It sounds like you are saying that it wasn’t serious, but your partner described being frightened. How do you understand that difference?”*

## 6. Promote Change

- Emphasise that change is possible and link the parent using abusive behaviours to appropriate services. For example, *“Participating in a behaviour change programme can help you develop safer and healthier ways to cope”.*



## Focusing Child Protection Plans on Accountability

Where a child is at risk of significant harm and is therefore subject to child protection planning, the child protection plan itself plays a key role in engaging the parent who has used abusive behaviours and in reducing the risk to the non-abusive parent and the child. The child protection plan should be focused on accountability. The points below are intended to provide professionals with principles for how this can be achieved:

### 1. Avoid Victim-Blaming Language

- The language used within the child protection plan should be clear that the accountability for the abusive behaviour is with the parent who is using abusive behaviours. For example, *“Abusive parent to engage with a domestic abuse behaviour change program to address their abusive behaviour.”*

Professionals should avoid using language such as, *“non-abusive parent to prevent further incidents of violence,”* which places the accountability for the prevention of domestic abuse with the non-abusive parent.

## 2. Specific and Measurable Actions

- Specific and measurable actions help to ensure that the expectations of the parent using harmful behaviours are clear. This also allows professionals to challenge and hold the parent using harmful behaviours to account if actions are not being met. An example of an action might be, “*Abusive parent to attend and complete an accredited domestic abuse behaviour change programme.*”

## 3. Monitor and Review

- Regularly review the abusive parent’s engagement and the impact on family safety.
- Adjust the plan if risks increase or if the abusive parent disengages. Safety plans should always be understood as dynamic.

## 4. Support for the Non-Abusive Parent and Children

- Ensure the non-abusive parent and children have access to specialist domestic abuse support, as well as support that can be provided by other agencies.

## 5. Multi-Agency Coordination

- Work collaboratively with domestic abuse services, probation, police and other agencies to share information, monitor and respond to risk.

## Additional Resources to Support Professional Practice

**Paragon** is the Isle of Wight’s domestic abuse and sexual crime service provider. It also provides support and services to parents and carers who are experiencing child to parent violence. Abuse can be reported on 0800 234 6266 (free) or [ParagonIOW@theyoustrust.org.uk](mailto:ParagonIOW@theyoustrust.org.uk)

**Hampton Trust** provides a range of services for perpetrators to encourage healthy, non-abusive relationships. To make referrals or to share intelligence for tracking and disruption purposes contact the perpetrator service on 02380 009898. Alternatively call their front door services on 0800 234 6266 or [isva@hamptontrust.org.uk](mailto:isva@hamptontrust.org.uk). Hampton Trust also provide Children & Young People Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (C&YPISVA) support boys and girls (between 11-17) following an experience of rape or sexual assault.

**The Victim Care Hub** provides free, confidential support for victims of crime and those impacted by crime. Their aim is to help you cope and recover from the effects of crime, regardless of whether or not you have reported the crime to the police.

**Barnardo's Who's in Charge** is a nine-week group programme delivered by Barnardo's Family Centre staff, for parents and carers who have a child aged 8-18 who currently appear to be beyond parental control or who uses violent and abusive behaviour toward them.

**Isle of Wight Safeguarding Children Partnership (IOWSCP)** – IOWSCP provides a wide range of [free domestic abuse themed training](#) for all professionals working with children and families living on the IOW.

The learning and development supports professionals in developing their understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and knowing how to respond to disclosures of domestic abuse. Courses also cover important themes such as coercive control, stalking, post separation abuse, child and adolescent to parent/carer abuse and economic abuse.

[Domestic Abuse Referral Pathway](#)

[Domestic Abuse Referral Pathway for Children and Young People](#)

[Domestic Abuse STOP PACK for professionals](#)

[Multi-Agency Practice Resource: Cumulative Harm](#)