

7 Questions to consider

6

Do we routinely ask about domestic violence?

Are we clear about our responsibilities when we encounter Domestic Violence?

Do we make sure we hear from children in domestic violence situations?

- Identify those who are responsible for domestic violence and abuse, in order that relevant legal responses may be made;
- Take into account there may be continued or increased risk of DVA towards the abused parent and/or child after separation, especially in connection with post-separation child contact arrangements;
- Provide non-abusing parents with full information about their legal rights, and about the extent and limits of statutory duties and powers;
- Help victims and children to get protection from violence, by providing relevant practical and other assistance;
- Support non-abusing parents in making safe choices for themselves and their children;
- Work separately with each parent where domestic violence and abuse prevents non-abusing parents from speaking freely and participating without fear of retribution.

1 Background

Domestic violence and abuse (DVA) is a complex issue which affects every one of us and reaches every corner of our society. DVA is a serious crime and should be treated as such. It does not recognise class, race, religion, gender, sexuality, culture or wealth and its effects on family life are devastating. In the overwhelming majority of reported instances, the abuser is male and the victim is female, although there are attacks by women on men and between two people of the same gender, whether current or ex partners or family members

2

Why it matters

Prolonged and / or regular exposure to DVA can have a serious impact on a child's development and emotional wellbeing, despite the best efforts of the victim parent to protect the child. DVA has an impact in a number of ways. It can pose a threat to an unborn child, because assaults on pregnant women frequently involve punches or kicks directed at the abdomen, risking injury to both mother and foetus. It can also lead to other possible risks, such as foetal death, low birth weight, early birth, infection etc.

Domestic Violence and Abuse

5 What to do

In responding to situations where DVA may be present, considerations include:

- Ensure the perpetrator and victim are not in the same room when being asked these questions
- Ask direct questions about domestic violence and abuse
- Check whether domestic violence and abuse has occurred
- whenever child abuse is suspected, consider the impact of this at all stages of assessment, child abuse enquiries (by CSC and Police) and intervention;

Definition of Domestic Violence

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
- emotional

Impact on children

3

Children may be injured in utero. Older children may also suffer blows during episodes of abuse. Children are likely to be greatly distressed by witnessing the physical and emotional suffering of a parent or other family member. Children's exposure to parental conflict; even where abuse is not present, can lead to serious anxiety and distress among children, particularly when it is routed through them.

4