

**Practice standards**

**Working with families where there is domestic abuse**

**These practice standards do not replace the professional requirements of social workers and their mangers to critically appraise the individual circumstances of case work. It is for line mangers to agree the specific circumstances where these standards do not apply. Any deviance from these standards must be explained in full on the child’s case file by the supervising case manager.**

**Introduction**

In order to assess, intervene and improve the outcomes for children when it has been reported that domestic abuse (DA) has taken place it is vital that the detail of the abuse is known and understood and that the impact on the child is known and understood. Social workers and managers should follow the Antecedence, Behaviour and Consequences (ABC) model. ABC relates to the circumstances leading up to the event; the triggers for it; importantly whether those triggers are recognised and understood by the perpetrator and victim; and the immediate and long-term impact of that event. The key measures of risk in domestic abuse are calculated on the basis of the harm caused and also the insight the adults have of what happened and the impact on the children. Without these factors being known, case work cannot proceed appropriately.

**Antecedence**

It is vital that the social worker understands all of the relevant circumstances that led up to the incident of domestic abuse. It is equally important that all previous incidents of DA are known and understood.

The social worker should be provided with an opportunity by their line manager to spend time preparing and planning their visit, considering the line of questioning and being clear on what is to be achieved. This pre-brief should also be followed up by a de-brief following the visit. The social worker’s first interaction with the family must include a detailed line of questioning that establishes what happened immediately prior to the domestic abuse incident. For example, the social worker should know what was said, what the dispute was about (if any), what time of day, where it happened, where the children were, and any other ‘triggering’ information that the family can identify themselves. The social worker will also need to know whether the perpetrator or victim were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, and if so the detail of that consumption.

It is expected that the views of the adults involved include their assessment of whether the domestic abuse follows a particular pattern or routine, and what the root cause is. If a pattern emerges, for example, that the dispute always happens on a Friday night after excessive drinking, then this would allow the family and the social worker to put in place actions that will reduce the likelihood of further occurrences. If there is no discernible pattern to the DA, and it appears to be random then the risk needs to be seen as being significantly higher. All assessments must cover off the full Antecedence.

**Behaviour**

The detail and analysis of the behaviour not only includes exactly what happened, but also should focus on how that behaviour may or may not be extended into other interactions. It is important to understand the level of possible controlling behaviour that might include restricted access to money, the internet, and communication with others.

Asking victims of abuse about what happened to them is clearly a sensitive task – however, it cannot be avoided. The triangulation of this information must include all relevant sources including other witnesses, what was reported, (i.e. police involvement), and the views and observations of the children, where relevant. The social work file must include the social worker’s professional opinion of what happened, particularly when contradictory or differing accounts are given.

**Consequences**

The social work assessment must reflect the consequences of the behaviour, not only in respect of the perpetrator and the victim of the domestic abuse but critically the impact on the children in the family and their experiences. The social worker must include an understanding of the relevant impact of the domestic abuse on the child(ren). This should include what physical signs of the incident that the children may have observed or heard, including injuries to the victim, and what the children may have heard or seen since the incident.

Once the social worker has a good understanding of the impact for the children it is then possible to measure through direct questioning of the adults their level of insight into what has happened. The perpetrator and the victim should be asked what they think the impact of the DA has/had on the children present and why they think that.

**ACTION**

All open social work assessments and all open cases where domestic abuse is a factor must be reviewed by the allocated social worker and the line manger to ensure that each case has sufficient detail that reflects the requirements set out in ABC above. All new assessments from the date this practice guidance goes live must reflect ABC as set out above. It is the responsibility of the line manager to use this practice guidance to appraise the work of their staff.

**Domestic abuse case work subject to a plan:**

* All plans of this type must be closely linked to the ABC above.
* The plan must be focused upon assisting a social worker to measure two critical factors: (1) the extent to which there has been further domestic abuse events and (2) measuring the insight of the parents into how domestic abuse impacts upon their children.
* Domestic abuse is not ‘solved’ by sending parents onto courses such as the freedom programme or the perpetrator programmes. These programmes, whilst a tool in planning to improve outcomes, must be assessed for impact throughout.
* Cases can move towards step down or closure when there is evidence of sustainable change in terms of the triggers that have led to domestic abuse being reduced, the parents demonstrating alternative responses to disputes and when the parents are able to fully understand how their children are affected by their behaviour
* Progress must be triangulated and include the social worker’s professional opinion.

**Visits to children:**

**This section applies to all case work not just domestic abuse cases**

* Case recording of visits must show the purpose of the visit
* The line of questioning used
* The area of the plan that the visit is related to
* The actions that stem from the visit, particularly in relation to triangulation of new information offered
* Case recording of visits must conclude with a note of the action that is now going to be taken
* The reader of the case note must have clear information about who is present in the family home and whether any members of the family were not at home at the time of the visit
* There should also be a clear account of and overview of the home conditions.

**Management oversight:**

* Management oversight must ensure that the case recording reflects relevant practice guidance
* It should also add value to case direction and progression
* It should explicitly agree the proposed future actions as set out by the social worker and when necessary make appropriate changes to these
* It should identify where risk increases or decreases and make actions clearly and timely
* Where necessary, the oversight should evidence challenge where the social worker has not considered the plan on a visit.

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