

Domestic Abuse Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Guidance

A domestic abuse risk assessment may be required when there have been persistent patterns of domestically abusive behaviour which have impacted the child/children. A risk assessment will allow you to analyse in further detail the domestic abuse concerns in a structured way in order to support your decision making. The practitioner will use their discretion to determine if this risk assessment should be incorporated into current assessments (CFA etc.) or will be written as a standalone report.

A robust assessment of the domestic abuse risk should include obtaining information via interview from a variety of sources including the parent/partner causing the abuse (perpetrator), the non-abusive parent and the children affected (where appropriate). You should also review in detail external information available on file, as well as a thorough review of historical information as this will help provide an accurate prediction of future risk. This information will need to then be analysed in the wider family context to the individual being assessed.

It is important that any assessment of domestic abuse, does not consider physical acts and incidents of abuse alone. Instead the assessment should take full account of the range and duration of other abusive behaviours perpetrated in the relationship, including any abuse that is ongoing following the end of the relationship, particularly the patterns of coercion and control and how this has impacted the day to day functioning of the family. Furthermore, it is crucial to also consider the needs and the vulnerability of the non-abusive parent, to ensure that your assessment of risk is tailored to address the relevant risk factors and needs specific to the family's context.

Further risk assessment tools would be recommended to support the current assessment of risk. These may include but are not exclusive to;

- DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence risk checklist) – widely available online - to be used with non-abusive parent;
- Tool for Assessing Coercion and Control – Available from CAFCASS website – to be used with non-abusive parent; and
- Engage Toolkit tools can be used to review the abusive parents insight further – contact DomesticAbuseAPs@WestSussex.gov.uk for further details.

Ensure that you provide details of any tools and/or resources you have used to gather information for your assessment.

When making an analysis of your information gathered, it is important to consider the risk and impact of the abuse on the children, non-abusive parent and abusive parent/carer. This will be discussed in terms of imminent risk and future risk should nothing change. This will include looking at protective factors which can be built on.

WARNING: Always conduct interviews with parents separately, away from children and consider the safety and wellbeing of parties during and following sessions. Interviews should be undertaken away from the family home in a neutral space where you will feel safe as a practitioner to ask challenging questions and where the person being interviewed feels safe enough to engage with you.

TO BE REVIEWED BEFORE RISK ASSESSMENT MEETING TAKES PLACE

1. Understand the nature of the domestic abuse committed:

This is an important first step before your risk assessment takes place as you need to be able to understand the nature and severity of the past abuse reported in order to assess accordingly. You would be looking to gather information on past relationships as well as the current situation. This evidence may be obtained from Local Authority records, Police reports, Probation reports, review of convictions, non-convictions, MARAC reports, other Local Authority files, disclosures from other sources and services etc.

The detail you want to gather should include reviewing the following:

Is there a pattern of intimate partner abusive behaviour from one or more partners?

Has intimidation been used?

Have threats been made?

Any physical/sexual harm caused?

Was/is the domestic abuse severe/chronic/escalating?

Have there been any breaches of previous supervision requirements?

(bail/DVPO/injunctions/restraining orders etc)

Have any behaviour change programmes been accessed and engaged with? (Building Better Relationships, IDAP etc.)

*** The information above needs to be from reliable sources, it must be stated as to why information has been included if, for example, it is via third party reporting ***

AREAS TO EXPLORE WITHIN INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS/CARERS

2. Abusive parent/carer (perpetrator):

CHILDREN

- *What is the parent/carer's relationship to each child? For example, are they a birth parent, stepparent, partner, other relative?*
- *How does the parent/carer describe each child?*
- *How does the parent/carer describe their relationship with the child/ren? Explore the quality of this relationship and attunement to the child's needs.*
- *Does the parent/carer blame the child for causing the domestic abuse? Comment on whether the parent/carer can reflect on any possible role(s) the child/children may be adopting both now and in the past whilst residing in a home where DA occurs.*
- *What is their reflection on the child's experiences and exposure to domestic abuse? Explore remorse, taking responsibility and denial.*

- *What is their understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the child/ren? Both as a direct result of the domestic abuse and, also, if a period of time has elapsed since the most recent report/incident. Can the parent/carer put themselves in the child/children's shoes?*
- *What are the parent/carer's reflections on their prioritisation of the child/children's physical and emotional needs over their relationship with their partner/ex-partner?*

RELATIONSHIPS

History of intimate relationships

- *Explore history of relationships, how did they start and end? What is their reflection on these relationships and their ex-partners? What words do they use to describe them? What was their motivation to begin and end their relationship?*
- *Consider their individual history (using information above) and explore how they handled conflict, what would trigger conflict and what is their reflection on past incidents that have taken place?*
- *Were their triggers for escalating conflict? Was such conflict ever life threatening or ever pose a threat to the abused person's physical wellbeing?*
- *Evidence of distorted thinking? Or changing the narrative?*
- *Do they take any responsibility in the abuse? Do they blame their partner/ex-partner/others? Do they blame alcohol or substance misuse? Do they blame their life experiences?*
- *Do they show any reflection on what they could have managed differently? Are they showing any remorse or change in attitude?*
- *Have they accessed any behaviour change intervention to address their attitudes and beliefs? What is the evidence of this? What did they find useful and why? Evidence for this?*
- *Are they showing a pattern of abusive behaviours towards intimate partners? Is the type of abuse similar or has it changed? If it has changed, explore why it might have changed? When do the abusive behaviours escalate? Are there any warning signs that might signal risk behaviours are increasing or imminent?*
- *What does their PNC history tell us regarding past relationships? – review and explore with the participant. Appropriately challenge with existing reports you have – for example, police reports, MARAC minutes, evidenced third party reports.*
- *If there is denial, what is their understanding of why they are accused of things that they have not committed? What is their perception of their behaviour? Who do they think is to blame?*
- *Are there any similarities in the types of relationships the parent/carer enters into? For example, do they tend to have relationships with partners who are much older/younger than them?, do all of their past partners have children?, is there a pattern of behaviour which could indicate that the parent/carer relies upon their partner to provide for them, i.e., housing, finances, etc?, did they usually meet their partner in certain ways, i.e., via the internet?*

Current Relationship

As you have done above, explore the same areas in the context of their current relationship. Particularly what responsibly they take for their own behaviour, reflection on this behaviour and if they have done anything to address these concerns. Be mindful of blame on others and if remorse is shown, ensure to explore this in depth. Ensure to explore their understanding of what domestic abuse means to them and others.

WARNING: Be mindful of the non-abusive parent and the children's safety when using information that has not been shared with the abusive parent/carer beforehand, ensure to do so before challenge takes place. It might be necessary to safety plan with the abused parent/carer prior to any information being shared with the abusive parent/carer.

Non-intimate relationships (friendships/contact with family/co-workers, acquaintances etc.)

- *Exploration of their learning history including childhood experiences, does this help us understand the reasons for their current attitudes and beliefs? Explore trauma and loss, how would they describe their childhood?*
- *Current contact with family members – are these individuals supportive? What are their attitudes and beliefs regarding domestic abuse? Do they help to increase or reduce the risk?*
- *Exploration of friendship network – is this positive or does it enable abusive behaviour to thrive? Consider their attitudes and beliefs.*
- *How do they find making relationships with others generally? Are there relationships the parent/carer has been able to sustain for a period of time? If so, why?*
- *Consider the impact of their experiences out of the family home and if this has impacted on their belief system and functioning (schooling, friendships etc.)*

ANTISOCIAL CONDUCT AND OFFENDING

- *Exploration of their non-intimate partner offending behaviour, is there a pattern? Does the nature of these incidents involve high levels of violence?*
- *Explore levels of reflection, insight, remorse, denial into this offending behaviour.*
- *Views of violence and harming others.*
- *Have they taken responsibility and taken any steps to address this behaviour?*
- *Do their friends/family support antisocial behaviour and beliefs?*
- *Evidential reports, such as police reports, can be appropriately gone through with the parent/carer.*

MENTAL HEALTH

- *Explore the individual's mental health history, do they have any diagnosis? Is the diagnosis from a member of the medical profession or is it self-diagnosed/diagnosed by someone else?*
- *Have they accessed support or treatment? Historic or current? Does the parent/carer feel this has been effective?*
- *Are there issues with self-harm or suicidal ideation? Historic or current?*
- *How does their mental health impact on their behaviour in the context of their relationships?*
- *How do they manage difficult feelings generally – issues with emotional regulation? Coping strategies? Anger?*

SUBSTANCE/ALCOHOL USE

- *Explore the individual's substance use past and current.*
- *Is any current use impacting on behaviour? Is this increasing the risk?*
- *Rationale and triggers for substance use – consider coping strategies.*

- *Exploration of dependence on substances and what has been done to address these issues. How effective has this support been?*

EXTERNAL STABILTY – EMPLOYMENT/FINANCES/HOUSING/COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Explore if there are any other areas in the individual's life which may increase or stabilise the risks. Explore finances, housing and employment. If there is instability, how does this impact on them and their relationship?

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- *Do they have a good network of supportive people who they can talk to?*
- *Have they developed any healthy coping strategies to manage their thoughts/feelings/behaviours?*
- *Have they engaged with any intervention programmes to address their abusive behaviour? Explore their intervention with such support and reflection on learning. Ensure that this information has been verified – gain consent to speak to other professionals who can provide background information.*

3. Non abusive parent (victim):

CHILDREN

- *How does the parent describe their relationship with the child/ren?*
- *Explore the quality of this relationship and attunement to the child's needs.*
- *What is their reflection on the child's experiences and exposure to domestic abuse? Explore remorse, responsibility and denial.*
- *What is their understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the child/ren?*

RELATIONSHIPS

History of intimate relationships

- *Exploration of relationship history and if there has been a pattern of unhealthy and abusive relationships – does this help us better understand the current circumstances. How did these relationships start and end?*
- *What reflection and insight do they have into past relationships and how these past experiences may have shaped decision making, insight etc. Has this added to their vulnerabilities?*
- *Review history together to support discussion.*

Current relationship

- *Explore current dynamics of relationship How did they meet? How were things in the beginning? How are the dynamics now – has there been a change? If so when did this change happen?*

- *What are the plans for the relationship long-term?*
- *Is there a power imbalance? Explore how decisions may be made in the relationship and how equal the dynamic is.*
- *When arguments and conflict are discussed – explore triggers and who do they feel is to blame for these behaviours? Explore minimisation/denial.*
- *Explore patterns of fear/control and abusive behaviour – what did this behaviour look like and how did it impact on the non-abusive parent?*
- *If the parent has separated, consider what may be the likelihood of the relationship resuming based on the evidence and their account.*
- *What warning signs would they look out for in future to indicate that things had deteriorated?*
- *How do they view others' perception of their risk and safety?*
- *Review history together to support discussion.*

Non-intimate relationships (friendships/family/co-workers, acquaintances etc.)

- *Explore their network of support, how robust this is, and their views are of domestic abuse/unhealthy behaviours and the current relationship concerns? Do they reinforce positive messages about relationships?*
- *Exploration of their learning history including childhood experiences, does this help us understand the reasons for their current vulnerabilities? Explore trauma and loss, how would they describe their childhood?*
- *Current contact with family members – are these individuals supportive? What are their attitudes and beliefs regarding domestic abuse? Is this support helpful?*

Practical barriers to security for the non-abusive parent (relating to housing/employment/transport etc.)

- *Are there any concerns relating to the non-abusive parent's personal safety from their partner/ex-partner or their child/children due to where they live, work or how they travel around?*

Barriers to independence (security issues relating to problems with disability, employment, finances, physical health or responsibility for children)

- *Is the parent/carer experiencing any issues with their employment and/or finances which is making separating or keeping away from their abusive partner more challenging?*
- *Do they have any disabilities preventing them from distancing themselves from their partner, for example is the abusive parent a carer for them?*
- *Are there any legal orders in place etc. which encourage the non-abusive parents/carer to have unwanted contact with their ex-partner (contact orders etc.)?*
- *Is there anything in respects of the child/children which inhibits the non-abusive partner from distancing themselves from the abusive parent/carer or from taking further action?*

Interpersonal resources (access to friends/family etc.)

- What support is there from friends/family/others?
- What support do they provide? Does this need to change?
- What is the quality of the non-abusive parent/carer's relationships with friends/family?
- What do friends and family think of the problems the non-abusive parent/carer has experienced in their relationships? Are they supportive?

Community Resources (services such as Police/Domestic Abuse Services/Advocacy/Health etc.)

- What has been the non-abusive parent/carer's experiences of the services that they have worked with to date regarding the issues in their relationship?
- Have there been any barriers to accessing any of the support?

Attitudes or behaviours which impact on the victim's safety

- Does the non-abusive parent/carer feel fearful of their partner? Have they reported any of these concerns to the Police?
- How do they view the reported incidents of abuse against them?
- How do they view others' perception of their risk and safety? Do they acknowledge the Local Authority concerns for example?
- How do they feel about their relationship with XXX at this time?
- Have they maintained any contact with XXX? If so, then why may this be?

Mental health

- Does the non-abusive parent/carer have any identified mental health needs? Have these been clinically diagnosed?
- Have they ever received treatment for their mental health? Inc. community and inpatient. Are they currently receiving treatment?
- Have they ever experienced self-harm or suicidal ideation?
- Have they ever experienced any trauma to their brain?
- Do they have any diagnosed learning needs which impact on functioning?

4. Conclusion

Assessing capacity to change

- What is the person's motivation to change and ability to sustain change; where are they in the cycle of change?
- Has the person shown awareness and understanding of professional concerns?
- Are they able to take responsibility for their actions and decisions in their relationships?
- What is the level of denial (if any) and/or minimisation of the domestic abuse issues?
- What is the risk of Intimate Partner Violence occurring again? What might be the timescale for this?
- Does the person pose other risks? For example, risk of self-harm, sexual violence? Should the person be assessed for these risks?

- What is their ability to consider alternative behaviours to avoid acting in abusive ways or being the victim of abuse in the future?
- What evidence is there that the parent/carer has prioritised the children’s needs?
- Are they willing and motivated to engage in professional support to assist them in changing their behaviours and, also, in sustaining that change? What evidence do you have of this? How can the person be supported to access help?
- Describe the static and dynamic risk factors. What will increase and decrease these?
- What are the protective factors? What strengths can be supported and promoted?
- When should the case be reviewed? What circumstances should trigger a review?
- What would you need to see to indicate that the risk has reduced/increased?

5. Recommendations

What is your management plan?

What:

- treatment or rehabilitation strategies could be implemented to manage the risks posed by the perpetrator?
- multi-agency support can be put into place to support the family? What support is needed most urgently and what support should be sequenced?
- supervision or surveillance could be used to manage the risks posed? Should ‘disrupt’ activities be used, for example, meeting the abuser’s needs for housing, substance misuse support.
- support would the abused person benefit from? Think about timeliness and the needs led appropriateness of this.
- safety planning needs to be completed for both parties? Think about individual needs and behaviours.
- events or occurrences might trigger or increase risk? For example, if the abused person begins a new relationship.
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Review / Contacts / References	
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