



## Let's see domestic violence from a child's point of view

### NSPCC DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAMPAIGN BRIEFING 4

#### 4. The role of schools in addressing domestic violence

The NSPCC is calling on the UK Government and devolved administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland to see domestic violence from a child's point of view.

Every year, an estimated 750,000 children witness domestic violence<sup>1</sup>. Although not every child is affected in the same way, this can cause serious emotional harm in both the short and long term. More worryingly, in families where there is domestic violence, children may also be physically and sexually abused. Researchers estimate that in 30-60% of domestic violence cases, the abusive partner is also abusing children in the family<sup>1</sup>.

Children exposed to violence will react in different ways, and not every child who witnesses abuse will experience long-term difficulties. However **all children have the right to protection from violence and abuse and should have access to support.**

#### Summary of recommendations

- **The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) should ensure that information and awareness about domestic violence and personal safety are included in the national Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) curriculum.**
- **The DCSF should extend its targeted mental health in schools support programme to all age groups and all children, including children and young people who are experiencing domestic violence, regardless of whether or not they have a mental health problem.**

#### Introduction

The NSPCC is calling on the government to ensure that children and young people receive appropriate information about domestic violence through schools and other youth settings.

Personal safety and healthy relationships are fundamental elements in the education of any child if s/he is to grow into a confident adult with good interpersonal skills. Children need to receive appropriate information about domestic violence, be able to assess situations, make decisions, and identify sources of help and support. Underpinning this is the need for positive self-esteem, a crucial factor in leading a healthy life and in forming respectful relationships. This information should be provided as part of the content of Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE), which the government recently announced will be made a statutory subject for all key stages in England<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Jim Knight MP, Minister of State for Education, [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2008\\_0235](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0235)

Children and young people who use the NSPCC's There4me.com service want to be taught more about risks and how to stay safe and have told us:

*'I think children need to be taught about child abuse in school in PSHE, as many children don't understand what is happening to them. If I had been taught about it, it would have helped a great deal as maybe [I] would have sorted my life out sooner.'*

## The role of schools

The school is an important setting for preventive education in the form of key 'keeping safe' messages to the majority of children and young people during their formative years.

Schools also have a wider safeguarding role to play under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 and can identify children and young people who may be experiencing or witnessing domestic violence and appropriately referring them on to other services to ensure they are safe and properly protected providing that they are appropriately equipped and supported to do so.

The school may know of relevant circumstances and the facilitator should check before undertaking work about domestic violence. Teachers and facilitators should be alert to any signs that a pupil is distressed by the content of the lessons. Channels of help and support within the school should be flagged up as well as external helplines and sources of support. Teachers and other staff working in education settings should be familiar with *What to do if you're worried a child is being abused*<sup>2</sup> and also know how to deal with disclosures and where to access help for children and young people if they are experiencing domestic violence.

### Primary prevention

Recognition of the prevalence and impact of domestic violence on children and young people has led to more schools undertaking preventive work with general populations of school children.

This work aims to help children and young people to:

- identify causes of stress and conflict in relationships between parents/carers at home
- share ideas and strategies for coping with conflict in relationships and know when to access help
- practise dealing with difficult situations when they arise
- understand the nature and scope of domestic violence
- gain important information about sources of advice, help and support
- gain insights into how they can support friends who are affected by domestic violence.

This work aims to educate children and young people about domestic violence with the intention of limiting the incidence of violence in younger generations and helping children who are affected by domestic violence. Children and young people participating in programmes to raise awareness and understanding of domestic violence describe how they have changed their thinking saying that:

*It made my understanding clear. Before this was brought up I didn't even know what it meant. (Year 8 girl)*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> DfES (2006) *What to do if you are worried about a child* London: DfES

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, J, Stanley, N and Ball, J (2006) *Prevention Programmes for Children and Young People: Domestic Violence Child Protection* (eds Humphreys C, Stanley N) London: Jessica Kingsley

*I thought it was just one of those things that hardly happens but it showed me that it wasn't. (Year 8 boy)<sup>4</sup>*

A primary prevention strategy contrasts with previous domestic violence services for children and young people which focused on secondary and tertiary prevention -specialist and/or targeted interventions which were confined to addressing the needs of children and young people known to be living with domestic violence.

### **Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education**

The NSPCC welcomes the recent announcement made by the Government to make PSHE a statutory subject for 5 to 16 year olds in England and will be contributing to the forthcoming consultations on this. PSHE and Citizenship lessons offer opportunities to deliver universal preventive programmes to children and young people.

The NSPCC wants information and awareness about domestic violence and personal safety to be included in the national PSHE curriculum. This should include sources of help such as the ChildLine 24-hour free helpline: 0800 1111.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) must be used as a basis for teaching PSHE and we are keen for this curriculum area to be more rights-based. In Of particular relevance are children's right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse while in the care of parents (Article 19) and Article 17, the child's right to access information and material from a diversity of sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

PSHE should be integrated into the whole school curriculum. PSHE cannot just be taught to pupils, but must be an active process of learning. Drama and role-play can help engage and help children and young people explore issues which relate to values and morals. Children and young people need to be encouraged to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings and to be able to discuss them. Drama and role play can be particularly useful methods for communicating with deaf children and children with learning disabilities.

PSHE could include the use of curriculum resource materials such as the NSPCC's *Promoting Personal Safety in PSHE*<sup>5</sup>

### **Peer support**

In addition to raising awareness and promoting the development of social and relationship skills, peer support programmes have the potential to develop and build on the capacity of children and young people to offer support to one another:

*"It made you think that it does happen more often than you think, but people don't tell you".<sup>6</sup>*

*"It could be happening to someone you talk to but they don't tell you".<sup>7</sup>*

*"It helps you notice it more – like if someone was going through it you could help them out". (Year 8 girl)<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> NSPCC (2006) *Promoting Personal Safety in PSHE*, London, NSPCC

<sup>6</sup> Ellis, J, Stanley, N and Ball, J (2006) *Prevention Programmes for Children and Young People: Domestic Violence Child Protection* (eds Humphreys C, Stanley N) London: Jessica Kingsley

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

Children and young people experiencing abuse, relationship problems or domestic violence will often in the first instance confide in their peers<sup>9</sup>. Programmes delivered within the PSHE framework could provide the opportunity for young people to seek and offer this type of support as well as alerting participants to the existence and means of accessing formal services.

For example, CHIPS (ChildLine in Partnerships) works with schools and other youth settings to provide adults and young people with opportunities to improve the support available to young people. CHIPS' ethos is that children and young people can play a part in making changes to improve their own lives and the lives of other young people. Positive role models can also empower deaf and disabled children who often receive negative messages about their identity.

### **School-based counselling services**

*Working Together to Safeguard Children*<sup>10</sup> states that all schools and colleges should create and maintain a safe environment for children and young people and play a crucial role in helping identify welfare concerns and indicators of abuse or neglect, at an early stage.

Under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 local education authorities and schools are required to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Under these provisions, children and young people who are witnessing or experiencing domestic violence should be entitled to school-based welfare support services.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families is developing a targeted mental health in schools project. The project is currently in the second year of a three-year roll-out programme which has £60m funding to deliver holistic models of mental health support in schools for children aged 5 to 13. The NSPCC would like to see this extended to all age groups and to be available to all children, including children and young people who are witnessing or experiencing domestic violence, regardless of whether or not they have a mental health problem.

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<sup>9</sup> Vincent, S and Daniel, B (2004) *An analysis of children's and young people's calls to ChildLine about abuse and neglect: A study for the Scottish child protection review* Child Abuse Review 13, 2, 158-71

<sup>10</sup>

### NSPCC PETITION

The NSPCC is calling for the UK Government and devolved administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland to tackle domestic violence from a child's point of view.

We want to see:

- Adequate support services for children and families affected, so that when they are brave enough to speak out, they be safe and supported. (Current government funded provision is not enough)
- Training for professionals to identify children living with domestic violence so that whenever adults are working with domestic violence, they think about the children affected.
- Education about domestic violence in schools and other youth settings so all children learn that the violence is not their fault, and how to stay safe.

To support this campaign, please visit [www.nspcc.org.uk/dvcampaign](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/dvcampaign)

### HELPLINE NUMBERS

**ChildLine:** If you are a child or young person, for confidential advice and support from someone you can trust, call 0800 1111 or go to [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk)

**NSPCC helpline:** If you have concerns about the safety of a child please call the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000. It is free, confidential, and our advisors are there to help 24 hours a day.

**National domestic violence helpline:** Domestic violence can happen to anyone. If you or someone you know is affected you can contact: 0808 2000 247 – this is the Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge.

## Contact information

For further information about this campaign please contact :

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