

Domestic abuse

Source: NSPCC

What is domestic abuse?

The Home Office definition of domestic abuse is:

"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.

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”*

*This definition includes so called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

Statistics

1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic violence (Radford et al, 2011)

1 in 5 teenagers have been exposed to domestic violence (Radford et al, 2011)

24% of women and 16 % of men report having experienced one or more forms of partner abuse during their adult lives (Walker et al, 2009)

4.8% of women and 2.9% of men say they have experienced some form of partner abuse within the past 12 months (Walker et al, 2009)

Children living with domestic abuse

Witnessing domestic abuse is really distressing and scary for a child, and causes serious harm. Children living in a home where domestic abuse is happening are at risk of other types of abuse too.

Children can experience domestic abuse or violence in lots of different ways. They might:

- See the abuse
- Hear it from another room
- See a parent's injuries or distress afterwards
- Be hurt by being nearby or trying to stop the abuse.

Domestic abuse can happen in any relationship, and it affects young people too. They may not realise that what's happening is abuse. Even if they do, they might not tell anyone about it because they're scared of what will happen, or ashamed about what people will think. 1 in 5 teenagers have been physically abused by their boyfriends or girlfriends.

Parents who suffer domestic abuse don't always realise how it affects their child. They might think that because their child doesn't see what's happening that they're not affected. But we know that living in a home where domestic abuse takes place can be really harmful for a child.

It can have a very serious impact on a child's behaviour and wellbeing, even if they're not directly harmed themselves. Children witnessing domestic abuse is recognised as 'significant harm' in law. Domestic abuse can also be a sign that children are suffering another type of abuse or neglect (Stanley, 2011).

The effects can last into adulthood. But, once they're in a safer and more stable environment, most children are able to recover from the effects of witnessing domestic abuse.

It doesn't matter what your age, race, gender or sexuality is - anyone can be affected by domestic abuse.

Signs and indicators

It's often difficult to tell if domestic abuse is happening, because it usually takes place in the family home and abusers can act very differently when other people are around.

Children who witness domestic abuse may:

- Become aggressive
- Display anti-social behaviour
- Suffer from depression or anxiety
- Not do as well at school - due to difficulties at home or disruption of moving to and from refuges.

If you're worried that a child is being abused, watch out for any unusual behaviour:

Withdrawn, suddenly behaves differently, anxious, clingy, depressed, aggressive, problems sleeping, eating disorders, wets the bed, soils clothes, takes risks, misses school, changes in eating habits, obsessive behaviour, nightmares, drugs, alcohol, self-harm, thoughts about suicide