

end **violence** against  
**women & children**  
south ayrshire multi agency partnership



## **UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

### **Information Guide For Workers**

## **Contents**

- Page 3: Response to Disclosure
- Page 5: Domestic Abuse and Confidentiality
- Page 7: Practical Issues
- Page 8: Response to Children and Young People
- Page 10: Safety Planning
- Page 11: Why women stay
- Page 13: Personal safety of staff
- Page 14: Myths and Realities
- Page 17: Support Agencies

## **Response to Disclosure: a positive approach**

Be aware that you, whatever your role within your workplace, could be the first point of contact for a woman who is seeking help and support because of violence against women. Your role could be vital. Any woman can suffer gender-based violence; this means any of the women you encounter through your work, including your colleagues.

To support a woman:

- Believe what she is saying and let her know you do. Be aware that your role places you in a position of power, which may make it difficult for a woman to talk to you about her situation.
- Listen to what she is saying. Show that you are interested and concerned. Don't collude in the effects of abuse by seeing her as less than you see yourself or other women.
- Give her time to talk and don't rush her to make decisions. Remember, many women feel they had no choices. Don't put any pressure on her to do anything that she isn't ready to do.
- It is important to be aware of your own feelings when you are listening to or talking to a woman. You may feel shocked at some of the details. If you show you are distressed, horrified or disgusted by what a woman tells you, it may put her off talking to you.
- Be careful not to seem to pass judgment or blame the woman for her situation. Don't ask her to justify her actions eg "Why on earth did you go back to him?" Accept that she will have had her reasons for making any such decision.
- Ask her about her safety. Ask "Is it safe to go home?" Help her to look at what she might be able to do to feel safer. She might want to look at planning for an emergency by gathering information and preparing for a time when she may feel the need to get help.
- Take her fears seriously - remember she knows her situation better than you do.

- Let her know in advance if you will be unable to keep what she tells you in confidence.
- Respect her autonomy and her decisions. Don't make assumptions about what she might want or need. Put aside your own feelings when you believe she is making choices that are not in her interest or that you disagree with.
- Check whether it is safe to contact her at her home address. If not, identify a way of communicating with her that will not endanger her.
- Encourage her to recognise and build on her strengths. Remember that gender-based violence is damaging to women's self esteem and sense of self worth. This is likely to make it difficult for her to recognise the potential she has to make changes for herself and her children.
- Do not make promises or raise expectations that you cannot deliver. There will be limits to what you can and can't do and how much time you have. Do not try to offer information that you are not sure of eg legal issues. Where possible, assist the woman to access information for herself. If this is not possible or appropriate, offer to find out information for her.
- Tell her that she has rights and that everyone has the right to safety and respect. No-one has the right to abuse another person.
- If the woman does not want to get further help, then it is important that you respect this. There are many reasons why a woman might stay in an abusive relationship.
- She may not be ready to take any actions or make decisions at the moment, but she will need to know that someone will be there to support her when she does feel able to make choices.
- Don't be tempted to take over and do everything for her - she needs to be able to take control of her own situation.
- No matter how many times you talk to her, always offer her the same respect and support.

## **Domestic Abuse and Confidentiality**

*\*Refer also to your own policies and procedures.*

Confidentiality is an important part of most people's work. However, where domestic abuse is concerned, staff need to be particularly cautious. The following precautions should be standard practice for all staff working with domestic abuse:

- Any notes taken during an interview and any information the woman offers must be kept confidential.
- Check whether or not it is safe to send her correspondence to her home address. If not, make alternative arrangements.
- Records, written and electronic, should be clearly marked to ensure her whereabouts remain confidential.
- Talk to the woman and find out her views on whether or not she wants contact with anyone, eg family members, other agencies. Discuss whether she wants messages and correspondence passed on or not.
- Permission should be obtained if contact is to be made with any other person or agency.
- If you get a request for information from another agency such as the police or other services, always take a name and telephone number and phone them back to check the call is genuine. Many agencies still operate via a switchboard. Information should be shared on a need to know basis only.
- You should only pass on information about an address if the woman has given clear consent in writing. (Except in cases which involve child protection issues.)
- If the woman is concerned that she could be traced through the Benefits System, it is possible for her to change her National Insurance Number.
- Don't accept or agree to pass on messages, letters or gifts unless the woman has explicitly requested this. By agreeing to take a message or letter, you are letting the man know you

know how to make contact with the woman, putting the woman, yourself and other staff at risk.

- Remember that abusers can be extremely ingenious in finding ways to elicit information.
- Keep clear records of all attempts by anyone to trace the woman, and the reasons given. This may be important if there is an assault and evidence is needed against the perpetrator.

**The sharing of anonymised information between domestic abuse service providers is of great importance in identifying gaps in service provision**

## **Practical Issues**

Be aware that the woman may not always be able to talk openly, which may result in her giving inconsistent or varying accounts of her situation on different occasions when she may be in contact with you. Give her the choice of having a female member of staff carry out the interview. Always check how much time she has and whether she has other commitments, eg children to pick up from school.

Be clear about what you need to know from her, and let her know that she doesn't have to talk to you about the abuse if she doesn't want to discuss it.

Interviews should be in private, although you might want to offer her the option of having a supporter in with her. If her partner (or another family member) is with her, or if she sees people she knows at your offices, then she may not feel able to explain her situation safely.

Welcome children who accompany their mother and acknowledge them. However, it is often difficult for women to talk about their experiences with children present so, if possible, try to provide somewhere else for any children to play safely while you are talking with their mother. Make sure they are comfortable, have access to juice, a toilet, etc. Don't use children as interpreters in the interview.

If using an interpreter, make sure it's an independent interpreter from the interpreting services (not a member of the family/ also check that the woman feels comfortable with the interpreter). If this is not possible, organise an interpreter for her next visit.

Alternatively, have written materials available in the woman's language. Never attempt to contact the abuser to verify the woman's story. This also applies to young people.

## Response To Children and Young People

‘Self-esteem is a powerful human need. It is a basic human need that makes an essential contribution to the life process, it is indispensable to normal and healthy development: it has survival value.’

Ref: Dr Nathaniel Branden

The language we use when talking to children and young people (CYP) can have a huge impact on how they relate to us as individuals and to other adults.

Our use of inappropriate language in the context of supposedly supporting the needs of CYP can never be justified.

As the *adult* in the room, our need to get *our* point across should not be at the expense of a CYP's self worth.

At times we are ALL guilty of using negative phraseology when talking to CYP and we should consider the power of our words eg "the trouble with you is..." or "you're wasting everyone's time..."

Traumatic life experiences aren't the only factor in determining effects on a CYP's mental health - the way we support CYP through their experiences plays a substantial role in the consequential future outcome.

<b>An encouraging adult</b>	<b>An inhibiting adult</b>
allows time	is inattentive
values creative ideas	is authoritarian
encourages play	is pessimistic
uses open-ended questions	promotes dependence
sees learning in mistakes	is critical



<b>An encouraging adult</b>	<b>An inhibiting adult</b>
is available for help	is disapproving
deals as an equal	acts as superior
speculates along with	makes fun of
follows child's interests	predetermines response
accepts child's decisions	rejects new ideas
focuses on child's thinking	imposes decisions
defers judgement	limits time
stresses independence	maintains fixed routines
is optimistic about outcomes	devalues suggestions
actively listens	domineers
shows real interest	interrupts
assumes it can be done	is impatient
shares the risks	cross examines
challenges the child to try ideas	gives no feedback
is available	lacks interest

## **Safety Planning For A Woman Experiencing Domestic Abuse**

A safety plan needs to reflect each individual's specific circumstances. Remember to discuss any risks associated with the safety plan, eg where will she keep emergency numbers so that the abuser won't find them? What if he finds out she is intending to leave?

Your role is to support/work with the woman to develop her own safety plan - not to construct one for her. Empowerment is part of the process.

Safety planning is not a one-off process. The safety plan will change as her situation changes.

### **Crucial questions to address include:**

- What does she need to be safe?
- What has she considered or done in the past to keep safe?
- What's worked in the past?
- What hasn't worked?
- Does she have friends or family she can stay with?
- Would she consider going to a refuge?
- What is her financial situation?
- Does she have access to transport?
- Does she have someone she can trust, friend or agency, to store a set of clothing or small amount of money for her?
- Has she considered calling Women's Aid for support and information?

In almost every situation, children are aware of the abuse. Children want to be told what's happening. Generally it is important that the woman talks to the children and explains the situation. However, the woman should decide how much information it is safe to give.

## Why Do Women Stay?

### **A woman might stay in an abusive relationship because she:**

- wants the relationship to work and hopes her partner will change and the abuse will end
- still loves the man - it's the abuse she doesn't want
- feels it's her duty to help the man overcome his violence
- feels guilty, embarrassed or responsible for the abuse
- has low self esteem and self confidence as a result of the abuse
- wants to keep the family together for the children's sake
- is worried about coping on her own
- wants to stay in her own community
- fears she (and her children) may have to uproot and leave the area
- is worried about what kind of home/neighbourhood she will end up in
- fears her partner will take revenge if she leaves
- doesn't know what options are available to her
- services may be inappropriate and inaccessible
- is convinced he will find her wherever she goes
- is concerned she won't be able to keep her children
- may have strong cultural or religious pressures to keep the family together
- doesn't have supportive friends or relatives, perhaps as a result of the abuser's strategies to isolate her
- has a drug or alcohol addiction and thinks it may be difficult to find a support organisation who can help her
- has no financial independence so the cost of getting away might be prohibitive
- is a disabled woman and may have to find the cost of a carer
- may be being kept prisoner in her own home
- believes it may be the safest option available to her and her children

A woman cannot protect her child if she is not protected, but if she asks for protection for herself, her child(ren) may be removed. A non women-blaming attitude is undoubtedly one of the most effective tools you can equip yourself with when supporting Children & Young People who have experienced Domestic Abuse.

Mothers may be reluctant to admit the abuse of children has occurred due to:

- fear that her children will be taken from her, regardless of who did the abusing.
- fear of repercussions from the abuser
- fear of being seen as having failed as a parent
- fear of being unable to retrieve the relationship

## **The personal safety of staff**

- Abusive men often pursue women who have left them and they may attempt to gain information about a woman's whereabouts from a professional.
- If you are working with a woman who is fleeing from an abusive man, make sure that you follow the relevant guidelines on staff safety for working in potentially violent situations.
- If you have any concern about your personal safety, raise them with your supervisor.

## **Myths and Realities**

**Myth:** "She must deserve it or provoke it."

**Reality:** There is no justification for using violence, unless your life is in danger. No-one deserves to be abused, and there is always an alternative, no matter how angry you are.

**Myth:** "She must enjoy it, otherwise she'd leave."

**Reality:** Women stay with abusive men for many reasons, but not because they enjoy being abused. They may not know they are entitled to permanent re-housing if they leave home because of violence, and think they would be homeless. They may not know they are entitled to Income Support for themselves and their children, and think they would be penniless. They may fear they would lose their children if they "desert" their partners. They may not know Women's Aid can provide safe, secret refuge, and fear that they would be found wherever they tried to go. They may feel that it is unfair to take the children away from their father. They may feel the abuse is their fault. Or they may have been told by their partner that he will find and kill them if they try to leave. None of these have anything to do with enjoying being abused.

**Myth:** "It's just the odd domestic tiff. Everybody has arguments."

**Reality:** The difference between the occasional argument, which all couples have, and domestic violence is that the latter is quite deliberate behaviour which is used by men to exert power and control over their women partners. A range of different types of controlling behaviours are used, from depriving her of money or sleep, criticising her appearance, telling her who she can be friendly with, locking her in the house, hitting her 'sometimes with weapons - raping her, threatening to kill her and her children.

**Myth:** "It's all caused by drink."

**Reality:** Some men only abuse their partners when they have been drinking, but some only do it when they are sober, and some do it

drunk or sober. Drink can provide an easy excuse, but is more of a trigger than a root cause of violence.

**Myth:** "It only happens in problem families."

**Reality:** Men from all walks of life, all ethnic backgrounds and all ages abuse their women partners. There is no typical abuser, and no typical abused woman. Women's Aid has supported women whose partners were for example doctors, social workers, ministers, solicitors, psychiatrists or teachers.

**Myth:** "These men must be mentally ill."

**Reality:** For a lot of people, it is easier to believe that an abusive man is mentally ill than it is to accept that he knows exactly what he is doing when he assaults, rapes or tortures his partner. Most men who abuse their partners are only violent to them, never to anyone else. Most men who abuse are able to function normally in society, in the workplace, in all their other contacts with people.

**Myth:** "Men who abuse were abused themselves as children."

**Reality:** There is no evidence that there is a 'cycle of violence', whereby children who were abused, or who witnessed abuse, go on to become abusers themselves. Many men who abuse come from families with no history of violence. Many have brothers who are not abusive. Children who witness abuse do not automatically grow up to be violent towards their partners; many completely reject the use of abusive behaviour as a result of their experiences.

**Myth:** "It was one-off. He's really sorry, and it won't happen again."

**Reality:** Once a man has started to abuse his partner, it is likely to happen again. It is rarely an isolated incident; usually it is part of a pattern of controlling behaviour, which may not have been recognised as such eg telling her what to wear, who to see, being very possessive and jealous. Men often say they are sorry afterwards, make promises and say they'll never do it again. Often women who have left return to violent partners because of these promises, and there may be a 'honeymoon' period when he appears

to be the perfect partner. However, most abusers will abuse again, maybe in a different form, and women should be wary of their promises.

**Myth:** "Women should stay for the sake of their children. Children need a father."

**Reality:** Children who experience domestic violence suffer emotionally and some may also be physically or sexually abused. Many women leave when they see the effects on their children of their partner's abuse. Children's emotional and physical health tends to improve when they come into refuges. Children need love and security, which they can get from their mother, more than they need a 'father figure', especially one whom they know to be abusive to their mother. Some children of abused women do, however, have a good relationship with their father, and want to continue to see him. Access visits can be arranged to allow this to happen. Women and children have a right to a life free from violence for the sake of both the women and the children.



## Support Agencies

**Broken Rainbow LGBT DV (UK) Helpline: 0300 999 5428**

### **Domestic Abuse**

Name	South Ayrshire Women's Aid
Address	28 Sandgate, Ayr KA7 1BW
Opening Hours	Monday-Thursday 9am - 4.45pm Friday 9am - 4pm
Telephone	Crisis line: 01292 266482 Children and Young Person's Support Workers: 01292 267 067 Office line: 01292 885667
Services	Crisis support and counselling service Refuge accommodation and support service Children and young people support service (refuge and non refuge) Outreach support service for rural areas Group support. Training and prevention education service.
Referral	Agency referral, self-referral
Name	Domestic Abuse Unit (Strathclyde Police)
Address	10 St Marnock Street, Kilmarnock
Opening Hours	Monday - Friday 8.00am - 4.00pm
Telephone	01563 505131
Services	Plain-clothes officers provide a professional, caring and victim-centred approach, offering advice and support throughout the process of reporting a domestic incident.

Name	Domestic Abuse Helpline
Address	44 Springvale Street, Saltcoats KA21 5LP
Opening Hours	24 hour opening - 365 days a year
Telephone	0800 027 1234
Website	<a href="http://www.domesticabuse.co.uk">www.domesticabuse.co.uk</a>
Services	Telephone support to those affected by domestic abuse.

### **Rape and Sexual Assault**

Name	Moving On South Ayrshire
Address	21 Wellington Square, Ayr KA7 1EZ
Opening Hours	Monday - Thursday 10.30am - 4.30pm Friday 10.30am - 2.00pm
Telephone	01292 290546
Services	Moving on Ayrshire is a charity based in Ayr which provides a counselling service at locations throughout South Ayrshire. We offer survivors of sexual abuse and rape free one to one person-centred counselling in a safe environment which can enable them to address their issues and helps them work towards a healthier and happier future. In the immediate aftermath of rape we provide support and counselling to help victims deal with the complex feelings and emotions that have resulted from their trauma.
Referral	Services are free and confidential

Name	Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline
Address	46 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 1HG
Opening Hours	Daily 6pm - 12 midnight
Telephone	08088 01 03 02
Website	<a href="http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk">www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk</a>
Services	Support for anyone aged over 13 who has experienced sexual violence, their friends, family or support workers. A free and confidential service offering initial support and information. The withheld number will not show up on your phone bill. Can arrange a telephone interpreter if English is not your first language.

## Children and Young People

Name	Barnardo's 'Hear 4 You'
Address	John Pollock Centre, Mainholm Road, Ayr KA8 0QD
Telephone	01292 285372
Services	<p>Hear 4U in South Ayrshire has two advocacy workers (both part time) who are based in Ayr. They provide advocacy across the local authority area for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and young people aged under 18 who are struggling with their emotional health and well-being under the terms of the Mental Health Care &amp; Treatment (Scotland) Act 2003</li> <li>• Children and young people aged between 5 - 15 who are involved in child protection processes</li> </ul>

Name	Children and Young Person's Worker (CYP), South Ayrshire Women's Aid
Address	28 Sandgate, Ayr KA7 1BW
Telephone	Crisis line: 01292 266482 Children and Young Person's Support Workers: 01292 267 067 Office line: 01292 885667
Services	CYP Workers at Women's Aid offer emotional and practical support to boys and girls of all ages.

## Housing

Name	Housing Options Team - South Ayrshire Council
Address	80-88 Kyle Street, Ayr
Opening Hours	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 8.45am-4.45pm Wednesday 10.00am-4.45pm, Friday 8.45am-4.00pm
Telephone	01292 611600 , 0808 1003151 (Freephone outwith office hours)
Email	<a href="mailto:homeless.team@south-ayrshire.gov.uk">homeless.team@south-ayrshire.gov.uk</a>
Services	Provide housing options information, advice assistance and support to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
Referral	Services are free and confidential

## Other

Name	Victim Support South Ayrshire
Address	MacAdam House, 34 Charlotte Street, AYR, KA7 1EA

Opening Hours	Monday-Friday 10.00am-2.00pm
Telephone	01292 266441
Services	Trained volunteers provide independent help through telephone support, home visits or office appointments. You don't have to have reported the crime to get help. Time to talk Help with insurance / compensation claims Personal safety and crime prevention advice Support if your case goes to court Information about other agencies Help with criminal justice procedures
Referral	Open referral method
Name	Ayrshire Council on Alcohol
Address	24 Fullarton Street, Ayr KA7 1UB
Opening Hours	Monday - Thursday 9am - 5pm Wednesday 5pm - 8pm, Friday 9am - 4pm
Telephone	01292 281 238
Services	Alcohol counselling service that offers information, advice and support to individuals and family members.