

Multi-Agency Response to Domestic Abuse

November 2023

1 Summary

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) carried out a Learning Themes audit into multi-agency safeguarding responses to domestic abuse. The Audit considered four cases of children and young people who had been engaged with services in the last six months, and:

- Were open to Early Help,
- Were identified as a Child in Need,
- Were the subject of a child protection plan, and/or
- Had been identified as child on parent violence.

2 Children and young people Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can encompass a wide range of behaviours and may be a single incident or a pattern of incidents. Domestic abuse is not limited to physical acts of violence or threatening behaviour, and can include emotional, psychological, controlling or coercive behaviour, sexual and/or economic abuse. Types of domestic abuse include intimate partner violence, abuse by family members, teenage relationship abuse and adolescent to parent violence. Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of gender,

age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background and domestic abuse can take place inside or outside of the home. Domestic abuse continues to be a prevalent risk factor identified through children social care assessments for children in need. Domestic abuse has a significant impact on children and young people. Children may experience domestic abuse directly, as victims in their own right, or indirectly due to the impact the abuse has on others such as the non-abusive parent.

3 What considerations are taken by agencies and professionals?

When considering if a child is experiencing domestic abuse professionals should consider the impact domestic abuse has on a child or young person. Children and young people may experience domestic abuse directly or indirectly by witnessing or experiencing the effect of domestic abuse and they related to the person either as a perpetrator or victim (for example, parent, carer, person with parental responsibility or other relative). This can include:

- Hearing a person being abused in another room
- Seeing a person being subjected to domestic abuse
- Seeing damage caused to their home environment from domestic abuse (for example broken crockery or furniture)
- Being injured after trying to stop someone being abused

- Not receiving the care and support they need from their parents or carers as a result of the abuse

Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children and young people are now recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right.

Child to Parent Violence:

- It is also important to realise that the dynamic around abuse can involve children and young people engaging in abusive and violent behaviour towards a parent or adult carer. Professionals must be vigilant to the hidden nature of such behaviour.
- The majority of such cases involve boys in late adolescence on their mothers and will often involve physical violence and will only reach out when at crisis point.

4 What did the audit find – areas working well?

The Multi-Agency Audit Group identified good practice across cases including:

- Recognition of Domestic Abuse: There was evidence of good multi-agency recognition of domestic abuse in referrals
- Historical Information: There was evidence of the inclusion of historical information in some cases which helped develop a better understanding of the child's circumstances.
- Information Sharing: There was evidence of good information sharing between partners, for example, school having minutes of meetings and information being shared between primary and secondary schools. There was also an example of good cross border multi-agency working with the police.
- Engagement with Fathers: The audit demonstrated that fathers were engaged with services and integral

to the care of children in some cases; however, conversely this wasn't always highlighted in records.

- MACE Concerns: There was evidence that children had been raised and discussed appropriately at the local Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Meetings.
- Professional Challenge: In one case there was evidence of good professional challenge between agencies which was managed appropriately, professionals were allowed to professionally disagree and came together to identify an appropriate way forward.
- Coding of Records: The audit group found evidence of appropriate coding of records in primary care.

5 What did the audit find – areas for development?

The Multi-Agency Audit Group identified the following areas for development across cases including:

- Record Keeping: It was acknowledged that this is a developmental area, but further work is needed to ensure that historical paper records are more readily accessible. There were also issues identified regarding the need for information recorded to be clearer and in one case it was noted that a child's health records had not been flagged regarding domestic abuse.
- Minute Taking: Some evidence in one case that the minutes of meetings were more general rather than focusing on specific points.
- Assessment and planning: Assessments need to consider the cumulative impact of domestic abuse on the child. Assessments also need to look at parental behaviour and support.
- Parental Conflict: In one case it was identified that work needed to be carried out to examine parental conflict. This was fed back to the Social Worker to undertake further work.
- Working Together: In one case the school felt there wasn't a coordinated approach, and it would have been useful for them to understand what the role of the adoption Social Worker is and who to contact.
- Professional Curiosity: The audit group identified areas where issues could have been examined further, for example exploration of attachment issues or the risk of county lines and CSE - further work could have been completed to investigate risks and issues to be addressed.
- Voice of the child: It was felt that the voice of the child was not consistently clear in the cases reviewed and that more attention has been placed on other members of the family.
- Attachment issues: Where a child has been cared for by the Local Authority, there needs to be consideration of attachment issues which the child may have and how they can be supported.
- Parental Support: It was identified that workers need to be clear about what support is available and try different ways to engage.
- Parental Engagement: The audit group noted that it is important for professionals to recognise the difference between attendance and engagement.
- Information Sharing: It is important for professionals to ensure the information they are sharing is based in fact and evidence. This should be triangulated as required in meetings and discussions to develop a cohesive picture of the child's lived experiences, risk and support needs to assist in the development of multi-agency plans to support the child.

6 What has NYSCP done with these findings?

NYSCP has considered key learning points from this audit:

- A report with recommendations has been presented to the Learning and Improvement Subgroup (LIS).
- The approved actions have been transcribed to the LIS Action Plan and will continue to be monitored by the LIS on a quarterly basis until completed.
- The LIS will use the learning from this audit to identify any further actions required and develop appropriate guidance as required.

7 Next Steps and Resources

- All agencies involved in the audit will feedback specific good practice and areas for development identified for their service during the audit day discussion.
- The NYSCP LIS will monitor implementation of the actions to review how learning has been translated into practice

Framework for decision-making: Right help, at the right time by the right person

Worried about a child?

NYSCP Standards and Criteria

NYSCP Guidance on Professional Curiosity

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance (July 2022)

North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Joint Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

NYSCP Domestic Abuse Practice Guidance

North Yorkshire and the City of York Domestic Abuse Strategy

NYSCP Masterclass for Safer Recruitment and Domestic Abuse (October 2022)