

Guidance for Schools or professionals

Covid-19 – The increased risk for Children & Young People living with Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is rooted in power and control. At the present time it is likely that we are all feeling a lack of control over our lives with the Government directive for us to #StayHome.

We know that when an abuser loses power & control, they tend to take their frustrations out on their victim. With the increased time families are spending together the greater risk they face to being exposed to further Domestic Abuse Incidents as well as being directly harmed by the abusive parent.

Often school is a safe place for many children living with domestic abuse, during this time children may have no respite from the abuse happening around them. Increased stresses of social distancing, home schooling, finances, job security and lack of support networks means that domestic abuse may escalate to a much higher risk over this period; therefore, increasing the vulnerability of children and young people.

Children who have an allocated social worker are still able to attend school.

As a result of the pandemic some signs may be more prevalent:

<p>Children who experience domestic abuse are at greater risk of self-harm and anxiety, they may appear withdrawn or behave differently from their usual 'norm'. There is an increased risk of deterioration in their mental health and wellbeing. They may believe they have no one to turn to. They may feel they are not safe and have no place of safety, no respite. Terrified, not eating well/sleeping well, wetting bed.</p>
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<p>If children are still attending school, they may be fearful of leaving the non-abusive parent and not want to attend. Some children may refuse to attend school as they wish to protect a parent in the home, parents may decline the offer of school attendance. Children who are known to be in abusive households and not attending school should be contacted regularly.</p>

<p>Parents who are at home with the abuser may not have a safe way to talk freely to professionals. They may seem passive and anxious when taking calls or avoid contact attempts completely. It may appear that they are not engaging with services or support.</p>
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<p>Perpetrators may use this opportunity to increase isolation for support networks. If they are a parent, they may be insisting on making all contact with schools and services. They may decline a child attending school in order to keep the family isolated and the abuse hidden. They may refuse any services entering or having contact with the family due to the risk of COVID-19.</p>

<p>Abusive parents may use COVID-19 as a 'legitimate' excuse to isolate and keep victims prisoner within the home e.g. refusing them access to healthcare.</p>
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<p>If the abusive parent has shared contact- they may be refusing to allow the children to go back to the other parent. In particularly if they were in the care of the abusive parent at the time of the increased restrictions on movement between households.</p>
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<p>Children and Young People may be exposed to information about the virus that is not developmentally appropriate and used to instil fear into children about not leaving the home. It may then appear to be the child choosing to not attend school.</p>
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Children and Young People may also take desperate or dangerous measures to seek help, leaving the home, running away.

Suggestions for supporting families during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Trafford Domestic Abuse Services are continuing to offer support to CYP accessing our service. We have also developed resources packs for professionals to complete with children. If children are still attending school, weekly resource packs to support emotional wellbeing can be emailed.

School drop off and pick up may be the only time a victim is able to leave the house and be alone. This time needs to be utilised to check victim's safety I.e. is the abuse escalating, do they have access to a mobile phone, have they got a safety plan if they want to leave, are they in immediate danger.
Refuges are still open, and families can flee under government guidelines.
If the perpetrator is dropping and picking up, this time should be used to make phone contact with the victim.

Where possible regular support for the family should continue- if children are not attending school regular contact via phone or video support with children should continue.

Creating a new safety plan which takes into account the new isolation restrictions from COVID-19. Include numbers for Police, social worker, and trusted family members
-Suggest to parents to create a safe/code word to use for children to know to go to their room or in the garden if arguments begin.

Seek support from trusted neighbours to contact the police if they hear disturbances on the victim's behalf.

Make sure safety plans with the parent are completed- TDAS have safety plans available for professionals to use. Ensure victims have access to a phone to call for help.

Ensure school are continuing to receive notifications from operation encompass. If children are not attending school and notifications are coming in- make contact with the family and complete safety plans with non-abusive parent and children. Encourage where possible for the child to attend school.

Support the child to understand the COVID-19 situation that doesn't cause further trauma or fear.

Ensure children are aware school is accessible to them; a safe way to summon help and a named trusted person to rely on if needed.

A safety plan or DASH risk assessment to be completed with victims still living in the abusive relationship- review regularly and refer to MARAC when needed

If regular contact cannot be made and you are increasingly concerned about risks to a

family, contact the police to complete a welfare check.

