Somerset Integrated Domestic Abuse Service

Family Intervention Team
supporting families in Somerset with children affected by domestic abuse

Helping Hands

LiveWest
Believe in children
Barnardo’s
South West
Somerset County Council
helping to keep you safe
This booklet has been produced by the Barnardo’s Family Intervention Team to provide information and practical ideas on how to help support children to recover from domestic abuse.

We hope that you find it useful.
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Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is more common than people think. One in four women and one in six men will experience it at some point in their lives. It can happen to anyone, in all types of relationships, regardless of race, ethnicity, religious group, class, disability, sexuality, lifestyle, nationality or age. It is rarely a one-off occurrence, but usually a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour.

Definition
The Safer Somerset Partnership has adopted the HM Government definition of domestic abuse (March 2013):

“All 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.”

The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Controlling behaviour
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

“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, which is not a legal 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.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse can take many different forms, and victims may be made to feel responsible and guilty for the abuse. It can go on for years, often increasing in frequency and severity. If you, or someone you know is in an abusive relationship, you can:

🧬 Recognise it is happening
🧬 Accept that you (or the person you know) are not to blame
🧬 Seek help and support

(from Somerset Survivors’ Website)

www.somersetsurvivors.org.uk
How does domestic abuse affect children?

The effects of domestic abuse on children can be severe and long-lasting. Some children may become withdrawn while others may become aggressive and display challenging behaviour. Children may blame themselves for the abuse. Some children may cope better than others.

We believe that all children living in a household with domestic abuse will be adversely affected. Sometimes families tell us that “the child wasn’t in the room” or “they didn’t really know what was happening” and therefore they haven’t been affected by the abuse. In our view this is very rarely the case.

The children haven’t just witnessed the abuse, they have lived with it; they will hear, see and observe it and may even try to intervene. Children will also be aware of tensions in the home.
Domestic abuse will have an impact on children and they may as a result show some of these signs:

**Behaviour**
- Withdrawal
- Aggression, tantrums or bullying
- Vandalism
- Re-enacting abuse witnessed
- Controlling behaviour
- Attention seeking
- Conflict between family members

**Emotional**
- Low self-esteem and confidence
- Limited social skills
- Anxiety, depression, fear of abandonment
- Feelings of inferiority

**Bedtimes**
- Nightmares or night-terrors
- Insomnia
- Bed-wetting

**Physical responses**
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Eating disorders
- Constant colds, headaches, ulcers, asthma, eczema, stomach aches
- Self-harm
- Speech problems
- Flashbacks

**School**
- Truancy or poor school attendance
- Difficulties concentrating and learning
- Overachieving or underachieving

*With the right help and support, children can cope with and recover from domestic abuse*
Family Intervention Team

The Somerset Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (SIDAS) has a Barnardo’s Family Intervention Team to help children aged 3 to 15 years recover from the trauma and impact of the domestic abuse they have experienced. We work in both schools and family homes.

The team takes referrals for families who have previously been supported by any element of the SIDAS service.

We are a recovery service, this means that if domestic abuse is on-going, or if there are still high levels of risk and concern, you may need to be supported by a different part of the SIDAS service. You can call the Somerset Domestic Abuse Support helpline on 0800 69 49 999 to talk to our colleagues, who can help you to understand what level of risk you are experiencing.

If you are ever concerned for the safety of a child you should immediately call Somerset Direct (0300 123 2224) or the Police.
We aim to:

- Help parents develop a greater understanding of how their children have been impacted by domestic abuse and how to support them to recover from their experiences
- Build self-esteem and confidence, resilience, understanding of behaviours, increase feelings of safety, increase awareness and understanding of domestic abuse and knowledge of healthy relationships
- Enable children to express their feelings and emotions safely

We achieve this by:

- Schools and Professionals training and consultation
- 1:1 work with parents and children
- 8 week Parenting after Domestic abuse groups for parents
- Group family sessions for families affected by Domestic abuse

To contact the Family Intervention Team please call the domestic abuse helpline: 0800 69 49 999
Supporting children

Children who have lived with domestic abuse may feel:

- **Confused** because they are uncertain of what life will be like now
- **Angry** because it shouldn’t have happened and it was not fair
- **Guilty** because they blame themselves and think they have done something wrong
- **Sad** because it hurts and they have ‘lost’ something or someone
- ** Alone** because they think it has only happened to them
- **Afraid** that the violence might happen again
- **Unsure** of the future and what is going to happen to their family
- **Relieved** that the abuse is over
- **Frustrated** as perhaps they feel that no-one listens or understands them and how they feel
- **Anxious** they may worry about things a lot without knowing why
- **Denial** as they learnt that abuse is normal or are afraid to talk about it so deny it has happened

**Things it may be helpful for children to hear:**

- It wasn’t okay - Abuse is not okay
- It wasn’t your fault - make it clear that the abuser’s behaviour was wrong, this can help children make decisions about their own behaviour
- If you want to talk about it I’m here for you
I will help you to stay safe

It is okay to still love X (the abusive parent)

It is okay to feel ……. e.g. angry / sad

**The tip of the iceberg**

The behaviour a child displays is driven by their underlying feelings, thoughts and emotions, it is their way of telling you that inside they are hurting/scared/anxious etc..

Like an iceberg you can’t always see what lies underneath.
Practical tips for parents to help their children

- Listen to them (it can come out at any time). Acknowledge how they are feeling (It’s okay to feel ……).

- Talk about it with them when they are ready, either verbally or via drawings, paintings or play dough. They may act out to get your attention if they feel unheard or confused.

- Take some time each day to play and talk. It has been scientifically proven that play helps to calm children. If your child is older, try to spend time with them doing something they enjoy.

- Be patient! If they do not want to talk don’t push them.

- Acknowledge that it may be difficult or scary for them to talk to you about what happened and how they feel. This is important because once they start talking about it, it becomes less scary for them.

- If you cannot talk to your child or they won’t talk to you, try to find another safe adult they trust, e.g. a teacher, another family member.

- With your child make a list of how to keep safe, e.g. keeping your phone on, letting them know where you are.

- Set firm, consistent and realistic boundaries and consequences - this will help them feel safe and secure.

- Be a positive role model for them as they learn by watching and seeing what you do, e.g. if you do not want them to swear, don’t swear yourself, if you do not want them to shout, don’t shout.
Try to focus on the positive behaviour you see in them.

Praise as often as you can, be specific and use the child’s name first if there is more than one child in the house, e.g. Charlie, well done for putting your shoes away.

When reinforcing your boundaries focus on the behaviour not on the actual child, e.g. ‘You are messy’. Instead say ‘You have left your favourite toys in a mess’.

When making requests ensure you do not phrase them as a question, e.g. ‘would you like to ….’ or ‘please can you ….’ If worded like this you have to be prepared for a ‘no’ response. Word requests clearly, e.g. ‘please will you …’

State things positively, e.g. ‘sit on the sofa’, rather than ‘stop jumping on the sofa’.

Find ways for them to relax, if possible on a daily basis, e.g. listen to music, having a bath, having a bedtime story.

Have clear and consistent routines at home, e.g. at bedtime have a specific order that things are done in and ensure bedtime is around the same time every day.
Give your child outlets for their feelings:

**Throwaway bag:** A bag can be drawn or made that contains negative feelings, actions and words. The bag is then thrown away or kept depending upon the child.

**Using their imaginative play:** Be a part of it, join in and allow them to express their feelings via mediums such as play dough, paint, sand, water, model toys - even if their play is aggressive. Allowing them to play gives them a safe outlet for their emotions.

**Calm zone:** Create a special, safe place at home with your child/children that they can go to when they start to feel emotionally upset. Put calming items in this space, such as books, teddies etc. This should not to be used as a punishment space.

**Paper and pens:** Allow your child/children to have access to pens and paper so they can draw or write.

**Bad dreams:** Allow them access to paper and pen in their room so they can draw their bad dream. They may want to show it to you and talk about it, afterwards screw the drawing up and throw it away. Drawings of good dreams can be kept.

**Family memory jar:** on slips of paper draw or write about a positive family moment and store this in a jar. On 31\textsuperscript{st} December empty the jar out and look back over the year. Start the jar again on 1\textsuperscript{st} January. The time scale can be shortened, e.g. weekly, monthly, depending upon the age of your child and circumstances.
Other things to remember

1) Keep adult issues to adults. If you need to talk about the severity of the abuse find another adult who can support you.

2) Do not treat your child as a friend or confidant. Remember you are and need to be the parent and they are the child. This will help restore their feelings of safety.

3) Remember that you know your child best, you are the expert; use your own instincts.

4) Take time to calm your own emotions before responding to a situation with your child. Take a deep breath and think about what you are going to do and say before you react.

5) It’s okay to say sorry to your child if you have overreacted and got angry.

6) Keep your expectations realistic. Remember that your child will be affected by the domestic abuse, and they may behave in a way that helps them cope with the confusion and mixed feelings they have. Try and put yourself in their shoes and think about what it is they are trying to say by behaving the way they are.

You are the most important person for your child and you can heal together
Support for Parents

Sometimes as a parent affected by abuse you may:

- feel that you are a bad parent
- believe that you are to blame for the abuse
- feel guilty
- think you have lost touch with your child
- feel helpless to support them
- lack confidence to re-establish boundaries or healthy relationships with your child
- be exhausted physically and mentally, making parenting much harder

How to care for yourself as a person

When you are feeling better about yourself, it is much easier to be a consistent parent.

Here are some tips on how to care for yourself:

1) Try to stop being so hard on yourself.

2) Try not to scare yourself with negative thoughts. Find a mental image that makes you smile and feel happy. Think of this when you start having negative thoughts.

3) Be gentle, kind and patient with yourself.

4) Be kind to your mind. Don’t hate yourself for having negative thoughts, acknowledge that you have them and then try to move on from them. Writing them down and then throwing the piece of paper away may help.
5) Praise yourself. Tell yourself how well you are doing. Start by paying attention to small events and details that have had a positive impact on you.

6) Start a positives book. Write down positive changes that you notice in yourself and your child. During tough times look back through this book to reflect on how far you have already come.

7) Find support for yourself from friends and family. Speak to your GP; possibly discuss a referral to Talking Therapies or other counselling services e.g. SARSAS (see Other Useful Contacts).

8) Take care of your body - e.g. nutrition and sleep. When you are well nourished and have enough sleep you will be physically and mentally better able to parent.

Find time for you as an adult. You are not just a parent. Treat yourself from time to time.
Nurturing your child

Here is a useful summary of practical ways you can nurture and care for your child.

LOVE AND CARE FOR YOUR CHILDREN

TRUST AND RESPECT
- Acknowledge children’s right to have their own feelings, friends, activities and opinions
- Promote independence
- Allow for privacy
- Respect feelings for other parent
- Believe your children

PROMOTE EMOTIONAL SECURITY
- Talk and act so that children feel safe and comfortable expressing themselves
- Be gentle
- Be dependable

PROVIDE PHYSICAL SECURITY
- Provide food, shelter, clothing
- Teach personal hygiene and nutrition
- Monitor safety
- Maintain a family routine
- Attend to wounds

GIVE AFFECTION
- Express verbal and physical affection
- Be affectionate when your children are physically or emotionally hurt

CARE FOR YOURSELF
- Give yourself personal time
- Keep yourself healthy
- Maintain friendships
- Accept love

GIVE TIME
- Participate in your children’s lives: activities, school, sports, special events and days, celebrations, friends
- Include your children in your activities
- Reveal who you are to your children

ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT
- Be affirming
- Encourage children to follow their interest
- Let children disagree with you
- Recognize improvement
- Teach new skills
- Let them make mistakes

PROVIDE DISCIPLINE
- Be consistent
- Ensure rules are appropriate to age and development of child
- Be clear about limits and expectations
- Use discipline to give instruction, not punishment

NURTURING CHILDREN

LOVE AND CARE FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Helpline: 0800 69 49 999
## Other useful contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
<th>Website Link</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getset</td>
<td>0300 123 2224</td>
<td><a href="http://www.somerset.gov.uk">www.somerset.gov.uk</a></td>
<td>Early help services supporting children, young people and families. Their support covers varied areas such as school attendance, healthy living, parenting classes, pre and post birth groups and emotional support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARSAS (Somerset and Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support)</td>
<td>0808 801 0456</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sarsas.org.uk">www.sarsas.org.uk</a></td>
<td>A specialist sexual violence support service covering Bath &amp; North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset, and South Gloucestershire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Aid</td>
<td>0808 2000 247</td>
<td><a href="http://www.womensaid.org.uk">www.womensaid.org.uk</a></td>
<td>A key national charity for women and children experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse in their homes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hideout</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.thehideout.org.uk">www.thehideout.org.uk</a></td>
<td>Created by Women’s Aid, to help children and young people understand domestic abuse and how to take positive action if it's happening to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChildLine</td>
<td>0800 1111</td>
<td><a href="http://www.childline.org.uk">www.childline.org.uk</a></td>
<td>Private and confidential service for children and young people up to the age of 19. They are able to contact a counsellor to talk about any issues they may be experiencing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Support</td>
<td>0300 303 1972</td>
<td><a href="http://www.victimsupport.org.uk">www.victimsupport.org.uk</a></td>
<td>An independent charity supporting people who have been affected by a crime or traumatic events. They aim to help people feel safer and find the strength to move forward after crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lighthouse</td>
<td>Call 101</td>
<td><a href="http://lighthousevictimcare.org">lighthousevictimcare.org</a></td>
<td>A team of staff from the police and victim support organisations, who work together to guide, advise and support victims and witnesses of crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds</td>
<td>0808 802 5544</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk">www.youngminds.org.uk</a></td>
<td>UK’s leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset Survivors</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.somersetsurvivors.org.uk">www.somersetsurvivors.org.uk</a></td>
<td>Website providing information for families and individuals affected by domestic abuse and information for professionals who may be supporting victims of domestic abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Victims Service</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.youngvictims.wordpress.com">www.youngvictims.wordpress.com</a></td>
<td>For young people from 5 to 18 (can be and up to 25 for those with additional needs) who need help and support having been victims of crime and/or anti-social behaviour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Domestic abuse helpline
0800 69 49 999

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