



# **The DA Act – Children as Victims: Looking at Practice**

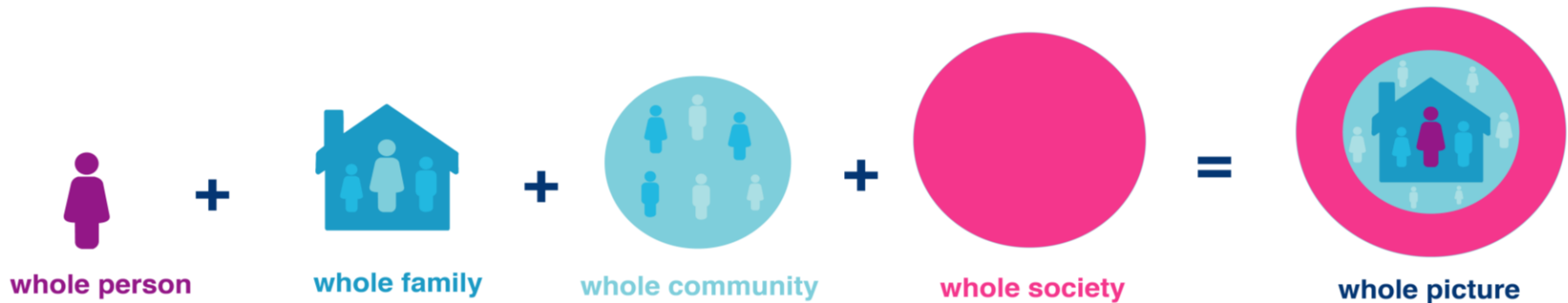
**SafeLives Practice Team**  
**September 2022**

# Agenda and introduction

What	Who	Timings
Introduction	Nikki	10:30 – 10:35
DA Act Update and Myths in Practice	Chris	10:35 – 10:55
A Pioneers Journey	Audio Life Experience	10:55 – 11:00
A Pioneers Journey	Sam	11:00 – 11:15
What does this mean for Practice	Nikki/Interactive	11:15 – 11:45
Questions and Close	Nikki	11:45 – 12:00

## Ending domestic abuse

# The Whole Picture and the Public Health Approach



**The whole person:**  
domestic abuse is never  
all of someone's  
experiences or situation.

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# The DA Act – Children as victims

## The DA Act definition 2021 –

The DA Act has changed how Children are viewed by authorities. Below is the change in the law:  
This section applies where behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is domestic abuse.

- Any reference in **this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who—**
  - (a) **sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse, and**
  - (b) **is related to A or B.**
- A direct Victim, DA Act Definition of ‘Abusive’ behaviour
- Whole family affects, personal connectedness
- *‘Disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress (known as the “revenge porn” offence) to cover threats to disclose such material’*. Research from a cross country study reports ‘62% of the UK respondents said that they felt that **‘if someone’s nude or nearly nude image is shared online, they are partly to blame’**,

[Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

[Children As Domestic Abuse Victims \(thestartingpointcentre.co.uk\)](https://thestartingpointcentre.co.uk)

[Young people’s experiences of online sexual harassment. A cross-country report from deSHAME December 2017](#)

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# Why have we seen a change?

- Local Authorities now have a legal obligation to support and house victims (including children) and will be given priority need for accommodation.
- Perpetrators will not be allowed to cross examine victims, so will not be able to put children under more stress, or re traumatise them in a court of law.
- Noting that the Act recognises children as victims for the first time, we still see Childrens Safeguarding and Mental Health poorly represented at Marac and fewer than half of education professionals having received training on domestic abuse.
- Domestic abuse undermines a child's basic need for safety and security. It can have a serious effect on behaviour, brain development, educational outcomes, relationships and their overall health and wellbeing.
- Children's brains are wiring to the 'perceived' threat of harm, just as much as we thought they were wiring to the actual harm.
- This means we now know more about brain activity within abusive households, we understand more about the manner in which brains adapt to their environment when they are under constant threat, regardless of the physicality of that threat.

[More support for domestic abuse victims and their children as Domestic Abuse Bill receives Royal Assent - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/more-support-for-domestic-abuse-victims-and-their-children-as-domestic-abuse-bill-receives-royal-assent)

## Ending domestic abuse

# CYP response from our National Public Health work

## Professionals response to children experiencing DA:

Three quarters (73%) of professionals surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:



"I feel confident in challenging professionals in other agencies to ensure children are seen as victims in their own right"



Just over **half (56%)** said they had **training in 'Domestic abuse – Children'** within the last two years



Training in domestic abuse – children within last 2 years?	
Agency	Yes
Probation	87%
Health (commissioning/leadership)	75%
Health (frontline practitioner)	72%
Domestic abuse service	67%
Education	66%
Children's services (universal/earlyhelp)	66%
Children's Social Care (statutory)	64%
Substance Misuse	57%
Mental Health (frontline practitioner)	51%
Police	49%
Voluntary or Community sector	47%
Housing	33%
Adult Social Care	20%

Highest from Probation at 87% and lowest from ASC (20%) and Housing (33%). Two thirds (67%) of professionals from DA services said they had received such training in past 2 years. Childrens social care still low



# CYP response – Gaps and ideas for improvements



## More support for CYPs needed:

**Half (52%)** of surveyed survivors with children said their **children received no support:**

“There is not enough support out there for children who still have to deal with perpetrators.” – Survivor survey

Lack of support for children was also highlighted by professionals:

“Children's needs can be difficult to access due to waiting lists for support.” – Professional survey

## Especially support for mental health:

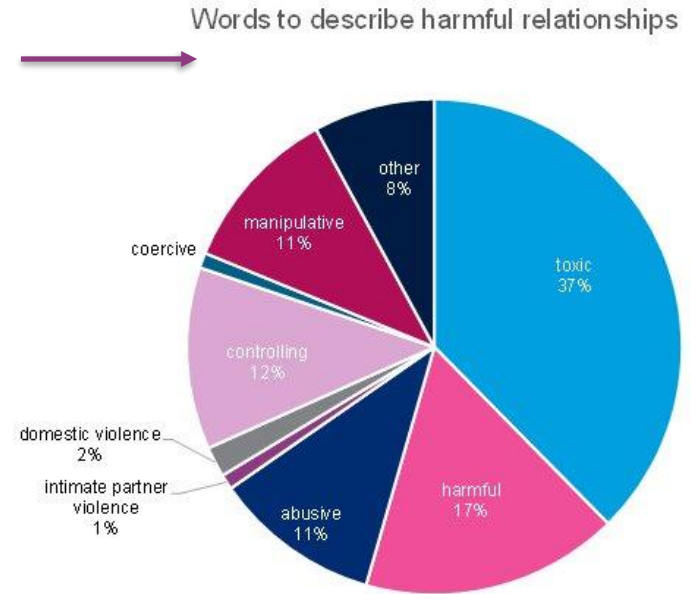
The psychological impact of domestic abuse was frequently highlighted by professionals and survivors:

“I think there needs to be some sort of, I don't like to use the word ‘therapy’, but some sort of support for children that have witnesses domestic violence, because there's just nothing available.” – Female survivor, interview

“I worry about the psychological impact on my daughter's and how it will impact their futures.” – Survivor, Survivor Survey

# Young people and domestic abuse

- (Talk about Toxic) Young People's recognition of DA.
- Your Best Friend, a project looking at how young people react to abuse in a close friend's relationship, found that many (92%) of the young people felt the time to step in and speak to a professional was when their friend was being physically harmed.
- A study conducted in Scotland by Voices Unheard (2017) with LGBT young people found that although 52% reported having had experienced some form of abusive behaviour from a partner or ex-partner, only 37% of the young people recognised this as abuse.



- They also found that 47.1% of the young people said that fear of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia from service providers would make them less likely to access domestic abuse support services.
- A Bristol based survey (2019) found that 52% of girls said physical violence in a relationship was always wrong, in comparison with 32% of boys

London based Youth Voice survey (2018) found that 47% thought that it was always or sometimes ok to **“check your partner’s phone or social media to see what they’ve been up to or who they’ve been talking to”**

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# Impact on the child = impact on services

## All ages

- Unhappy
- Poor attendance/unhappy/knowledge of adult sexual activity (consider age of adolescent as to whether appropriate)

## 0-2 year olds

- Withdrawn
- Apathetic
- Stressed
- Dysregulated
- Can't get contingent social responsiveness so can't develop strategies to get the comfort and soothing they need

## 2-5 year olds

- Severe tantrums
- Aggression to others
- Anxiety
- Somatic pain, 'my tummy's hurting'
- Regressions in Speech, Language, Toileting
- Limited capacity to understand and express what they see

Trauma and Domestic Abuse – Impact on Children and Young People - Barnardos Education Hub ([educators-barnardos.org.uk](http://educators-barnardos.org.uk))

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## 5-10 year olds

- Social relationships: feel isolated
- Self-esteem: feel shame
- Progress in school: can't concentrate and focus
- Shame - they realize that not everyone lives in a home like theirs
- Beginning to connect with the feelings of the abused parent
- Beginning to develop awareness that it might happen again

## 10-19 (Adolescents)

- Take sides
- Take on the behaviour of either the perpetrator or the victim (they internalize the model of intimate relationships)
- Escape through risky behaviour
- 'Mindlessness': can't recognize own thoughts or feelings, work out what the right thing to do is; doesn't think about what it means for others
- Ditch school
- Self-harm
- Fearful about what might be happening at home

# Myths

- **The Myth:** That children are not impacted by the abuse if they did not experience it directly
- **Our Pioneers said:** Children will always be impacted by DA in their family whether they experience it directly or not. Children do not witness abuse they experience it as victims in their own right. They may feel guilt, fear and shame and this can have long lasting impact on them. It is also very unlikely that they won't have seen what is happening either at the time or the aftermath. Abuse is not single incidences that can be hidden away - it is an ongoing pattern of behaviour that impacts every aspect of their lives
- **The Research says:** *Exposure to domestic abuse causes serious physical and psychological harm to children. As measured by the children's caseworkers, at intake 52% had behavioural problems, 60% felt responsible for the negative events, 52% had problems with social development and relationships, and 39% had difficulties adjusting at school.*

[Trauma and Domestic Abuse – Impact on Children and Young People - Barnardos Education Hub \(educators-barnardos.org.uk\)](https://educators-barnardos.org.uk)

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# Myths

- **The Myth:** That the abuse ends (for children) when the relationship ends
- **Our Pioneers said:** For a child the relationship never ends - they often have no control over this. There may be contact sessions (which due to guilt they may feel they have to do even if it continues to be unsafe). Even in the minority of cases where there actually is no ongoing contact the child will continue to have feelings of guilt - they may love their parent and feel that the abuse was their fault. They may struggle to come to terms with what their parent did. They may feel torn between their parents. Abusers will often use children as a tool to continue the abuse.
- **The Research says:** *‘There was evidence in the qualitative sample of children having experienced domestic abuse and other harmful parental behaviour such as excessive drinking or violence. In their parents’ relationship, children had experienced physical and verbal abuse, with some children being injured. For some children this had continued in parents’ subsequent relationships’.*
- *‘Sometimes when parents are separated, there is a court order in place that sets out who the child lives with, and has contact with. We heard from some parents and carers who felt that the need to comply with a court order was stopping them from taking action to keep their children safe from domestic abuse’.*

[Allegations-of-domestic-abuse-in-child-contact-cases-2017.pdf \(cafcass.gov.uk\)](#)

[Helplines briefing: The impact of domestic abuse on children and young people from the voices of parents and carers \(nspcc.org.uk\)](#)

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# Myths

- **The Myth:** That children who do well in School have not been impacted by the abuse
- **Our Pioneers said:** - overachieving in other areas of their life can be a coping strategy. School may feel like a safe space and there may not be any obvious signs that abuse is happening within the family.
- **The Research says:** *‘Especially in cases like recurring childhood abuse, narcissistic abuse, or domestic partnership abuse – where trauma is repeated, sustained, and hinges heavily on victim-blaming – hyper-compliance is common’.*

[Did You Know that Hyper-compliance is a Trauma Symptom? - The Urban Monk](#)

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# Myths

- **The Myth:** That the impact will not be severe or long lasting
- **Our Pioneers said:** DA can have long lasting impact on children causing issues with relationships, anxiety, physical and mental health issues in adulthood. Even for those children who appear resilient at the time - long lasting damage is done and this may not be apparent until much later on in life.
- **The Research says:** *Common mental health impacts long term may include, but not limited to 'Flashbacks, Panic attacks, Disassociation, Hyper and Hypo arousal, Sleep problems, Low self esteem, Grief, Self Harm, Suicidal feelings, Substance misuse, Guilt, Self blame...Studies suggest that trauma could make you more vulnerable to developing physical health problems, including long-term or chronic illnesses. This might be because trauma can affect your body as well as your mind, which can have a long-term impact on your physical health. You might also have been physically harmed during the trauma. Having a physical illness or disability can also make you feel stressed and anxious, which might make it even harder to cope with trauma.*

[Effects of trauma - Mind](#)

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# Myths

- **The Myth:** Children and Young People who live in abusive households go on to be perpetrators in future relationships
- **Our Pioneers said:** I lived in an abusive household, I was affected and I relive the trauma regularly but have coping mechanisms through therapy and healthy relationships to support me
- **The Research says:** *‘Being a child victim of Domestic Abuse, actually makes you more likely to be a victim of adult domestic abuse ‘Those who survived more than one type of child abuse were more likely to experience domestic abuse as an adult than those who survived fewer types of child abuse, the analysis found. Survivors of all four types of child abuse were the most likely to suffer domestic abuse; 77% had experienced domestic abuse after the age of 16, compared with 40%<sup>3</sup> who experienced one type of abuse as a child’.*

[People who were abused as children are more likely to be abused as an adult - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-population/families-and-households/relationships-and-domestic-abuse/people-who-were-abused-as-children-are-more-likely-to-be-abused-as-an-adult)

## Ending domestic abuse

# Pioneers Voice

## Confidentiality Statement

**We are privileged today to hear the words of a survivor of domestic abuse in childhood. Kathryn has written this piece, which is spoken by our Authentic Voice Coordinator Gemma Gall.**

**WARNING: it does cover a lot of traumatic topics, including child sexual abuse and self-injury. It is 6 and a half minutes long. You may want to mute the webinar during this time. We will move the slide on once the audio has finished.**

## Kathryn's Story



Please find the full text of Kathryn's story here (from partway down the page): <https://www.allie-crewe.uk/i-am-the-participants>

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# Mentimeter – interactive session

Please refer to additional attachments

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# Questions and Close

Please refer to additional attachments

# Keep in touch

[www.safelives.org.uk](http://www.safelives.org.uk)

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[community.safelives.org.uk](https://community.safelives.org.uk)



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