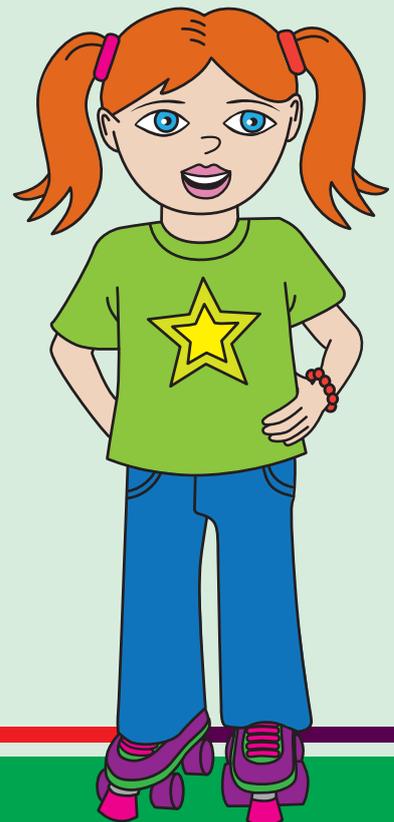


SECTION

1

# Introduction to the Education Toolkit



# 1. Introduction

Domestic abuse is a widespread social problem and living with domestic abuse is a painful and damaging experience. For the 750,000 children who witness domestic abuse each year<sup>1</sup>, the damaging effects can be long lasting and impact on every area of their lives.

There is a growing recognition that the home lives of children and young people can have a significant impact on their ability to participate fully in school life and achieve academically. Furthermore, children and young people are the next generation of potential victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Schools are therefore in a key position to raise the issue of domestic abuse in a safe, structured, learning environment. In particular schools can:

- **challenge the myths that perpetuate domestic abuse;**
- **support children to seek help and safety;**
- **model and promote healthy, non-violent relationships.**

Historically, however, the inclusion of the issue of domestic abuse within school lessons has been patchy and inconsistent. In order to address this, Women's Aid has undertaken research to identify the barriers facing schools and teachers, with the aim of developing an appropriate and helpful response. With funding from The Body Shop, Women's Aid has developed an online education toolkit, 'Expect Respect', that includes:

- an easy to use, one hour lesson plan for each year of school from reception to year 13;
- clear guidance regarding the links between the learning outcomes within the lesson plans and the relevant parts of the Early Years/National Curriculum, SEAL<sup>2</sup> and *Every Child Matters*<sup>3</sup> agenda;
- supporting information and resources for teachers;
- additional interactive activities for children and young people to access on line where appropriate;
- an online support service giving teachers individual advice and guidance about the delivery of the lesson plans.

The lesson plans were developed by experienced teachers in partnership with domestic abuse experts from Women's Aid. Each lesson plan has been tested in a variety of school settings by teachers not involved in their development, and has then been amended in light of this evaluation. Children and young people themselves were also involved in this evaluation, and their valuable feedback has informed the final documents.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Health (2002). *Women's Mental Health: Into the Mainstream – Strategic Development of Mental Health Care for Women*.

<sup>2</sup> The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme. See [www.bandapilot.org.uk](http://www.bandapilot.org.uk).

<sup>3</sup> 'Every Child Matters' was introduced by the Children Act 2004 and sets out the national framework for providing services to children and young people. See [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk).

Although the Expect Respect Education Toolkit is targeted for use by teachers within schools, it can just as easily be used by a range of other professionals working with children and young people in a variety of settings such as youth clubs or play schemes.

The lesson plans are designed to stand alone, although they do build on knowledge and awareness year on year. The resources needed to carry them out are provided with each lesson plan and, once the lesson plans have been downloaded, they can all be used without needing access to any form of technology.

If schools do have access to IT facilities however, then the lesson plans can also be delivered in conjunction with the supporting interactive activities available on Women's Aid's dedicated website for children and young people, [www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk).

Each lesson is designed to be active, fun and engaging, but also challenging. Whilst not all of the lesson plans raise domestic abuse directly, they have been written using themes found to be effective in tackling domestic abuse, such as:

- challenging assumptions about gender, power and equality;
- changing beliefs and attitudes about men and women;
- managing feelings and accepting responsibility for one's own feelings and behaviour;
- helping to resolve conflict;
- knowing the difference between abusive and non-abusive relationships;
- promoting the consistent message that abuse is not acceptable;
- understanding that domestic abuse is a crime;
- highlighting the role of peers in providing support;
- giving information about where to get help.

The Expect Respect Educational Toolkit is free and downloadable (in parts or as a whole) from Women's Aid's website [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk).

Dedicated support for teachers or other professionals delivering the Expect Respect Toolkit is available from [supportforteachers@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:supportforteachers@womensaid.org.uk).

## 2. Why focus preventative work in schools?

- Schools have a number of legal responsibilities towards the young people in their care, in terms of keeping them safe from harm and for their social and moral development.<sup>4</sup>
- School is where children learn how to interact with others and work together.
- Schools can help children grow up with the understanding that no one should be abused (through work on PSHE, Citizenship and other approaches such as SEAL).
- Schools can help to tackle beliefs and attitudes about gender and power, which, if unchallenged, may lead to abusive behaviour.
- School may be the one safe haven for children coping with domestic abuse, providing stability and support.

**'Research has demonstrated that, not only is it perfectly possible to talk to children and young people about interpersonal and domestic violence, but also that there is a great need to do so.**

**This is because children and young people are confused about the issue and want to learn more and because those children and young people who have lived with violence, or are living with it, want to talk about it and make sense of their experiences.**

**For all children and young people, whether or not they have lived with violence, peers emerge as an important source of support. Children and young people often find it easier to talk to their friends than to adults and discussing the issues together may be their favoured way of learning.'**

*Silence is not always golden, Tackling Domestic Violence, National Union of Teachers 2005*

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Adoption and Children Act (2002); Safeguarding Children in Education (2004); Equality Act (2006).

### Schools are therefore in a key position to:

- support individual children and young people who live or have lived with domestic abuse;
- model open and respectful relationships which enable children and young people to appreciate that there are alternative ways of relating;
- prevent domestic abuse by enabling children and young people to examine and challenge their attitudes to abuse and to choose healthy ways of conducting their own relationships.

The Expect Respect Educational Toolkit has been designed to help all schools to address the issue of domestic abuse. Tackling abusive behaviour and sexist attitudes that perpetuate violence against women should, however, be addressed on a continuing basis as part of the whole school culture, and not just a 'one-off' exercise.

**'It is important to make children and young people aware of behaviour towards them that is not acceptable and how they can help keep themselves safe. The non-statutory framework for PSHE provides opportunities for children and young people to learn about keeping safe and who to ask for help if their safety is threatened.'**

*Safeguarding Children in Education,*  
DfES 2004



### 3. Understanding domestic abuse

The Government defines domestic abuse as ‘any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.’

In Women’s Aid’s view, domestic abuse is a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are in themselves inherently ‘violent’. Domestic abuse is rarely a one-off incident, but may include physical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. All forms of domestic abuse – physical, sexual, psychological and financial – come from the abuser’s desire for power and control over other family members or intimate partners.

Research shows that domestic abuse is most commonly experienced by women and perpetrated by men<sup>5</sup>, and affects every community regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, age, social class, sexuality, disability or lifestyle.

- One in four women experience domestic abuse in their lifetime;<sup>6</sup>
- A third of domestic abuse starts or intensifies during pregnancy;<sup>7</sup>
- On average, two women are killed every week by their current or former male partner;<sup>8</sup>
- 54% of UK rapes are committed by a woman’s current or former partner;<sup>9</sup>
- Although only a minority of incidents of domestic violence are reported to the police, the police still receive one call about domestic violence for every minute in the UK, an estimated 1,300 calls each day or over 570,000 each year.<sup>10</sup>

The impact on the abused person can be devastating and can include for example, physical injury, psychological injury, depression, living in constant fear and self-harming behaviour. The impact, however, can be just as damaging on those who witness domestic abuse. Many children and young people see and hear domestic abuse within their own homes and are often at risk of being abused themselves by the same perpetrator.<sup>11</sup>

5 See Walby, Sylvia and Allen, Jonathan (2004) *Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey* (London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate). Their research showed that – while 45% women and 26% men had experienced at least one incident of inter-personal violence in their lifetimes – women are much more likely than men to be the victim of multiple incidents of abuse, and of sexual violence: i.e. women constituted 89% of all those who had experienced 4 or more incidents of domestic violence.

6 Council of Europe (2002). Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of women against violence. Adopted on 30 April 2002; and Explanatory Memorandum. (Strasbourg, France Council of Europe).

7 Lewis, Gwynneth, Drife, James, et al. (2001) *Why mothers die: Report from the confidential enquiries into maternal deaths in the UK 1997-9*; commissioned by Department of Health from RCOG and NICE (London: RCOG Press); Lewis, Gwynneth, and Drife, James (2005) *Why Mothers Die 2000-2002: Report on confidential enquiries into maternal deaths in the United Kingdom* (CEMACH).

8 Home Office (1999) *Criminal statistics*; Home Office (2001) *British Crime Survey, England and Wales*; Povey, D. (ed.) (2005) *Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004: Supplementary Volume 1: Homicide and Gun Crime*. Home Office Statistical Bulletin No. 02/05. (London: Home Office).

9 Walby, Sylvia and Allen, Jonathan (2004) *Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey* (London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate).

10 Stanko, E. (2000) *The Day to Count: A snapshot of the Impact of Domestic Violence in the UK*. Criminal Justice 1:2.

11 Radford, L., Sayer, S. and AMICA (1999). *Unreasonable fears? Child Contact in the Context of Domestic Violence: A Survey of Mothers’ Perceptions of Harm*. (Women’s Aid Federation of England: Bristol.) Humphreys, C. and Thiara, R. (2002). *Routes to Safety: Protection issues facing abused women and children and the role of outreach services*. Women’s Aid Federation of England: Bristol; Radford, Lorraine and Hester, Marianne (2007) *Mothering through domestic violence* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers).

### Research has shown that there is wide acceptance of abuse among young people in the UK:

- 45% of teenagers believe that, in some circumstances, it is acceptable for a boy to assault his girlfriend.<sup>12</sup>
- one in five teenage girls has been hit by a boyfriend, and one third say cheating justifies violence.<sup>13</sup>
- there is a clear link between girls experiencing domestic violence in the home and then later experiencing abuse by boyfriends.<sup>14</sup>
- a small-scale local study found that all participants had knowledge of friends or other young people who had experienced emotional or physical harm from a partner.<sup>15</sup>

This tolerance of abuse is linked to gender inequality and sexual stereotyping. Preventative work with children in schools, in relation to gender equality and from a young age, has therefore understandably been identified as important in changing damaging attitudes before they harden in the teenage years.

## Different forms of violence against women

Because women are the primary victims of domestic abuse, it is important to set this within the wider global context of violence against women and as a violation of women's human rights.<sup>16</sup> Violence against women encompasses rape and sexual assault, sexual abuse and exploitation, sexual harassment, trafficking and exploitation in the sex industry, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and so called 'honour crimes'. Some groups are particularly affected – for example, it is estimated that 1000 Asian girls are forced into marriage against their will each year.<sup>17</sup> Victims may experience several forms of abuse at one time and it is very possible that they are experiencing a range of these as part of the domestic abuse.

**“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation and it is perhaps the most pervasive.”**

Kofi Annan, Former Secretary General of the UN

**“Violence against women causes more deaths and disabilities among women aged 15 to 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or war.”**

World Bank Discussion paper 225 1994

<sup>12</sup> From a survey of 2000 teenagers undertaken by *Sugar* magazine in 2005.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Schutt, Nina (2006) Domestic Violence in adolescent relationships: Young people in Southwark and their experiences with unhealthy relationships (London: Safer Southwark Partnership).

<sup>16</sup> See UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993); see also Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (2006) *Blueprint of the Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence Against Women, including Domestic Violence* (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers 21st June 2006) (p.2).

<sup>17</sup> p.4: *Silence Is Not Always Golden: Tackling domestic violence*, National Union of Teachers, 2005.

## 4. The links between domestic abuse and child abuse

Domestic abuse is a major indicator of risk to children and young people. It has been identified within *Every Child Matters* as a cause of vulnerability in children, and as having a negative impact on the child's ability to achieve his or her full potential across the five outcomes – be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; achieve economic well being.<sup>18</sup>

- At least 750,000 children a year witness domestic abuse;<sup>19</sup>
- Nearly three quarters of children on local 'at risk' registers live in households where domestic abuse occurs;<sup>20</sup>
- Nine times out of ten, the child or young person is in the same or next room when violence occurs;<sup>21</sup>
- 70% of children living in UK refuges have been abused by their father.<sup>22</sup>

Research shows that, when domestic abuse is present, there is a greater risk of child abuse.<sup>23</sup> Perpetrators who are violent to their female partners are also frequently violent to their children, especially post separation when the risk to women, children and young people is heightened.<sup>24</sup>

More children than women are affected by domestic abuse, although they are not the primary targets of the violence.<sup>25</sup> Statistics collected by Women's Aid from local domestic violence services show that on a typical day 3156 women and 3648 children are resident in refuge accommodation in England.

### Legal obligations in relation to children and domestic abuse

The Education Act 2002 (Section 175) places a statutory duty on organisations and individuals to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

The Children Act 2004 established a duty on local authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation between agencies in order to improve children's well being.

18 Every Child Matters' was introduced by the Children Act 2004 and sets out the national framework for providing services to children and young people. See [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk).

19 Department of Health (2002). *Women's Mental Health: Into the Mainstream – Strategic Development of Mental Health Care for Women*.

20 Department of Health (2002) *Op. cit.*

21 Hughes, H. (1992) 'Impact Of Spouse Abuse On Children Of Battered Women' Violence Update, August 1, pp. 9-11.

22 Bowker, L., Artbitell, M. and McFerron, J. (1998) Domestic violence fact sheet: children (Bristol: Women's Aid Federation of England).

23 This has been established by a number of research studies; e.g. see Radford, L. and Hester, M. (2007) *Mothering through domestic violence* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers); Kelly, Liz (1994) "The interconnectedness of domestic violence and child abuse: challenges for research, policy and practice" in Mullender, Audrey and Morley, Rebecca (1994) *Children living with domestic violence* (London: Whiting and Birch).

24 Radford, L., Sayer, S. and AMICA (1999). *Unreasonable fears? Child Contact in the Context of Domestic Violence: A Survey of Mothers' Perceptions of Harm*. (Women's Aid Federation of England: Bristol.) Humphreys, C. and Thiara, R. (2002). *Routes to Safety: Protection issues facing abused women and children and the role of outreach services*. Women's Aid Federation of England: Bristol.

25 Humphreys, C. and Thiara, R. (2002) *Routes to Safety* (Bristol: Women's Aid).

As defined in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*,<sup>26</sup> 'harm' means ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development. 'Development' includes physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development, and 'health' includes physical and mental health. The legal definition of 'harm' to children was extended by Section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and now specifically includes harm suffered by seeing or hearing the ill treatment of others; hence children living in households where domestic abuse is taking place are now identified as 'at risk' of harm.<sup>27</sup>

**'The effect of domestic violence on children is such that it must be considered as abuse. Either witnessing it or being the subject of it is not only traumatic in itself, but is likely to adversely impact on a child and it should be treated as physical or emotional abuse as appropriate...'**

**It is widely accepted that there are dramatic and serious effects of children witnessing domestic violence, which often result in behavioural issues, absenteeism, ill health, bullying, anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse, self-harm and psychosocial impacts. Growing up in a violent household is also a major factor in predicting delinquency.'**

*Safeguarding Children in Education,*  
DfES 2004

<sup>26</sup> HM Government (2006) *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*; available from [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00060/](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00060/).

<sup>27</sup> Under s31 of the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

# 5. Effects of domestic abuse on children and young people

The impact of domestic abuse on the quality of a child's or young person's life is very significant. Children and young people who live with domestic abuse are at increased risk of behavioural problems, emotional trauma, and mental health difficulties in adult life.<sup>28</sup>

The impact of domestic abuse on children and young people can be wide-ranging and may include effects in any or all of the following areas:

**Physical:** Children and young people can be hurt, either by trying to intervene and stopping the violence or by being injured themselves by the abuser. They may develop self-harming behaviour, or eating disorders. Their health could be affected, as they may not be being cared for appropriately. They may have suicidal thoughts or try to escape or blank out the abuse by using drugs, alcohol or by running away.

**Sexual:** There is a high risk that children and young people will be abused themselves where there is domestic abuse. In homes where living in fear is the norm, and situations are not discussed, an atmosphere of secrecy develops and this creates a climate in which sexual abuse could occur. In addition to this, children and young people may sometimes be forced to watch the sexual abuse of their mother/carer. This can have long-lasting effects on the sexual and emotional development of the child/young person.

**Economic:** The mother or carer of the child or young person may have limited control over the family finances. Therefore, there might be little or no money available for extra-curricular activities, clothing or even food, impacting on their health and development.

**Emotional:** Children and young people will often be very confused about their feelings – for example, loving both parents/carers but not wanting the abuse to continue. They may be given negative messages about their own worth, which may lead to them developing low self-esteem. Many children and young people feel guilty, believing that the abuse is their fault. They are often pessimistic about their basic needs being met and can develop suicidal thoughts. Some children and young people may internalise feelings and appear passive and withdrawn or externalise their feelings in a disruptive manner.

<sup>28</sup> See for example: Kolbo, J.R., Blakeley, E.H. and Engelman, D. (1996) "Children who witness domestic violence: A review of the empirical literature" *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* Vol.11, No.2, p.281; Morley, R. and Mullender, A. (1994) "Domestic violence and children: what we know from research" in Mullender, A. and Morley, R. *Children living with domestic violence; Putting men's abuse of women on the childcare agenda* (London: Whiting and Birch Ltd.); Hester, M., Pearson, C. and Harwin, N. (2000; new ed. 2007) *Making an impact: Children and domestic violence: A reader* (London: Jessica Kingsley); Radford, L. and Hester, M. (2007) Radford, Lorraine and Hester, Marianne (2007) *Mothering through domestic violence* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers).

**continued...**

**Isolation:** Children and young people may become withdrawn and isolated; they may not be allowed out to play; and if there is abuse in the home they are less likely to invite their friends round. Schooling may be disrupted in many ways, and this may contribute to their growing isolation. They may frequently be absent from school as they may be too scared to leave their mother alone. They may have to move away from existing friends and family – e.g. into a refuge or other safe or temporary accommodation.

**Threats:** Children and young people are likely to have heard threats to harm their mother/carer. They may have been directly threatened with harm or heard threats to harm their pet. They also live under the

constant and unpredictable threat of violence, resulting in feelings of intimidation, fear and vulnerability, which can lead to high anxiety, tension, confusion and stress.

This clearly highlights that living with domestic abuse has a significant impact on a child's ability to achieve the five outcomes as outlined in the *Every Child Matters*<sup>29</sup> agenda:

- be healthy;
- stay safe;
- enjoy and achieve;
- make a positive contribution;
- achieve economic well being.

**What you might see in school**

- unexplained absences or lateness – either from staying at home to protect their mother or hide their injuries, or because they are prevented from attending school;
- children and young people attending school when ill rather than staying at home;
- children and young people not completing their homework, or making constant excuses, because of what is happening at home;
- children and young people who are constantly tired, on edge and unable to concentrate through disturbed sleep or worrying about what is happening at home;

- children and young people displaying difficulties in their cognitive and school performance;
- children and young people whose behaviour and personality changes dramatically;
- children and young people who become quiet and withdrawn and have difficulty in developing positive peer relations;
- children and young people displaying disruptive behaviour or acting out violent thoughts with little empathy for victims;
- children and young people who are no trouble at all.

This list is not exhaustive – this is intended to give you an idea of some of the types of behaviour that could be presented.

<sup>29</sup> 'Every Child Matters' was introduced by the Children Act 2004 and sets out the national framework for providing services to children and young people. See [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk).

## 6. What schools can do

Schools can create an environment which both promotes their belief and commitment that domestic abuse is not acceptable, and that they are willing to discuss and challenge it.

For many women, the school might be the one place that they visit without their abusive partner. It would help if schools displayed posters with information about domestic abuse and contact details for useful agencies: for example, Women's Aid or other local domestic violence service;

Domestic Violence Liaison Officer (Police); NSPCC and ChildLine **0800 1111**; Parentline **0808 800 2222**; or Women's Aid national website services – [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk) and [www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk)

Research shows that the repeated use of physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse is one of the ways in which male power is used to control women. The underlying attitudes which legitimate and perpetuate violence against women should be challenged by schools as part of the whole school ethos.

### Schools can support individual children and young people by:

- introducing a **whole-school philosophy** that domestic abuse is unacceptable;
- **responding to disclosures** and potential child protection concerns; schools should have their child protection policies and procedures displayed where all children and young people can see them and know about them; the policies and procedures must include domestic abuse;
- **giving emotional support** – the child or young person might need referral to a more specialist service or need additional support to complete coursework, exams etc;
- **facilitating a peer support network** – children and young people can become isolated but often welcome talking to friends about their problems;
- **offering practical support** – if children or young people are new to the school they may not yet have a uniform, they may also need financial help with extra-curricular activities, or they may be unfamiliar with the syllabus, the area, where to hang out, etc;
- **providing somewhere safe and quiet** to do their homework or just to sit and think;
- **improving the self esteem and confidence** of children and young people by:
  - offering them opportunities to take on new roles and responsibilities;
  - offering tasks which are achievable and giving praise and encouragement;
  - monitoring their behaviour and setting clear limits;
  - criticising the action, not the person;
  - helping them to feel a sense of control in their school lives;
  - involving them in decision making;
  - helping them to be more assertive;
  - respecting them as individuals;
  - encouraging involvement in extra-curricular activities.

# 7. Introduction to the lesson plans

The Expect Respect Educational Toolkit consists of one 'Core' lesson for each year group from reception to year 13. Each lesson is written in an easy to follow format, giving learning outcomes, resources needed and methodology. Extension activities are given in some of the lessons for those teachers that feel they would like to/need to devote more time to this important subject. Each lesson is approximately one hour in length.

In addition, there is a table for each lesson plan explaining how the lessons deliver on educational targets: PSHE and Citizenship, SEAL, *Every Child Matters*.

## Being prepared

Before carrying out each lesson, it is recommended that teachers ensure that they themselves understand domestic abuse and its impact. This could be achieved by:

- attending a short training course – this could be a one hour slot on a teacher inset day or a one day course provided by a local domestic violence service or co-ordinator;
- reading some literature about domestic abuse;
- visiting Women's Aid's websites [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk) or [www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk)

**As a bare minimum, teachers should ensure that they fully read this introduction to the Expect Respect Educational Toolkit.**

It is possible that a child or young person might disclose that they themselves are experiencing domestic abuse at home. It is vital that this is not dismissed, so the teacher should be prepared beforehand for how she or he can respond to such a disclosure (see section below on dealing with disclosures). It will also be helpful to know what services exist locally to support those affected by domestic abuse.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that teachers themselves may be affected by domestic abuse, either directly or otherwise. If this is the case, they may want to consider whether they are able to manage facilitating the lesson at this time.

## Setting the scene in the classroom

It is important to establish the right climate in the classroom when delivering the Expect Respect lesson plans. Domestic abuse is a sensitive subject and can be difficult for both teachers and children and young people alike. It is important to remember that it is highly likely that someone within the classroom will have experienced domestic abuse, or will know someone who has.

**Ground rules** should always be established with the class to enable the subject to be dealt with sensibly and in a mature manner. Some children or young people may have personal experience of domestic abuse. It is essential that they feel as safe as possible in discussing this issue with their peers. A set of suggested **ground rules** is provided in the 'Supporting Resources' section of the Toolkit.

**Getting help:** Remind the children or young people that they are not alone. They can get help if they, or someone they know, is experiencing anything similar at home. Always point out appropriate **sources of help**. Some helpful organisations are listed in the 'Supporting Resources' section of the Toolkit for your reference.

After the lesson some children or young people may feel the need to talk to someone. Remind them of who they can talk to in school. All children and young people should be aware of the school's Confidentiality and Child Protection policies.



## 8. Dealing with disclosure

A child may disclose that domestic abuse is happening in their home because they are hearing or witnessing the abuse of their mother/carer or other family member. It is possible that they may also be experiencing abuse directly.

Either way, what they are experiencing can be harmful to them. Any disclosure of domestic abuse should therefore, be treated as a potential child protection concern, and appropriate steps taken in line with the school's procedures.

### A 3 step approach – Receive, Reassure, Respond

If a child or young person starts to tell you about something that might indicate potential child abuse, listen but **do not ask for detail**. You need to let them know as soon as possible that if they tell you something that might cause concern, you will have to tell someone else, usually the school's designated Child Protection Officer.

**Under no circumstances agree to keep it a secret. Remember child abuse thrives on secrecy.** Make sure you are aware of your school's Child Protection Policy and associated procedures, and follow them, even if they are different from the information given below.

**Do not ask probing questions.** It may undermine any investigation by Police or Children and Family Services if it looked as though the child was led to give their answers. The Police, Child and Family Services and the NSPCC are the only organisations that have legal powers to investigate allegations of child abuse.

When listening, try to make sense of what you are being told:

- are they being harmed?
- are they **currently** at risk?
- is anyone else at risk?
- do they need medical attention?
- what are their overall needs?
- what is important to them?

It can help to keep in mind the 3 steps of behaviour outlined below – but as mentioned, follow your school's Child Protection Policy and procedures.

## Receive

- listen, do not look shocked or disbelieving;
- do not be judgemental;
- take what they are saying seriously and believe them;
- don't make the child or young person feel bad, for example by saying things like "You should have told me earlier".

## Reassure

- stay calm, tell them that they have done the right thing in telling you;
- acknowledge how hard it must have been to tell you;
- tell them that they are not to blame;
- empathise – but don't tell them how they should be feeling;
- don't promise confidentiality – explain that only those that need to know will be told (i.e. the designated person for Child Protection);
- be honest about what you can and can't do.

## Respond

- don't interrogate – let them tell you as far as possible;
- don't ask probing questions – it's not your job to find out "who, where, when?" etc;
- refer your concern on to your school's designated Child Protection Officer – in line with your Child Protection Policy and Procedure;
- record the date and time and any information given to you; always use the words said to you; never interpret what was said and put it in your own words (this information could be used as evidence);

- make a note of any injuries you have seen or been shown; this is very important as bruises, cuts, marks, etc. tend to heal, and this could be used as evidence;
- record what you did next and with whom you shared the information – ensure that all this is in line with your school's policies and procedures;
- sign and date everything that you record;
- don't criticise or judge the abuser – the child or young person may have feelings for him or her; remember abuse often happens by someone known and trusted by the child or young person;
- try to follow things through yourself so they don't need to repeat their story to other staff – again, only if this is in line with your child protection policy and procedure;
- explain what will happen next – for example, the designated officer will be informed, and they may want to speak to the child/young person further; if it is safe, the non-abusing parent or carer might also be informed (but always take great care where there is domestic abuse) – the police and social services might also be informed;
- get support for yourself. It can be distressing dealing with disclosure.

*Adapted from 'Heartstrings'<sup>1</sup>*

**Whatever you do, make sure it is in line with your school's policies and procedures. They may differ from what is written above. If in doubt speak to your designated Child Protection Officer, local Child and Family Services or the NSPCC.**

<sup>1</sup> *Heartstrings: A PSHCE pack for secondary schools to challenge domestic abuse and build healthy relationships.* Cheshire County Council Community and Education Service Secondary Schools Project.