

### Childhood Neglect: Improving Outcomes for Children

#### Learning Outcomes

To understand that development is a dynamic process shaped by historical and current interactions between child, family and environment.

**Audience** Groups 3-6 (Working Together 2010)

**Time** 30 minutes

#### Preparation

There are two short videos that are worth watching:

[http://youtu.be/\\_cZMhM9IW3c](http://youtu.be/_cZMhM9IW3c)

<http://youtu.be/itmVLytrN-s>

This debate is about an hour long, but is an excellent panel discussion amongst experts debating the effects on children: <http://youtu.be/L63wGOe3b34>

[http://www.rcgp.org.uk/news\\_and\\_events/college\\_viewpoint/position\\_statements](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/news_and_events/college_viewpoint/position_statements)

#### Key Reading

Department of Health (2009) Improving Safety, Reducing Harm. Children, Young People and Domestic Violence. A Practical Toolkit for Frontline Practitioners. London: The Stationery Office.

Cleaver, H., Nicholson, D., Tarr, S. and Cleaver, D. (2007) Child Protection, Domestic Violence and Parental Substance Misuse: Family experiences and effective practice. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Cleaver, H., Unell, I. and Aldgate, J. (2011) Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity. Child Abuse: Parental mental illness, learning disability, substance misuse and domestic violence (2nd edition). London: The Stationery Office.

HM Government (2010) Call to End Violence against Women and Girls. London: Home Office.

HM Government (2011) Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action Plan. London: Cabinet Office.

NSPCC (2011) Child cruelty in the UK 2011- An NSPCC study into childhood abuse and neglect over the past 30 years. London: NSPCC.

The Women's Commission (2010). "Women's Voices to Government [online]."

Available: <http://www.thewnc.org.uk/> Access Date: 24th May 2010.

#### Links to Common Core

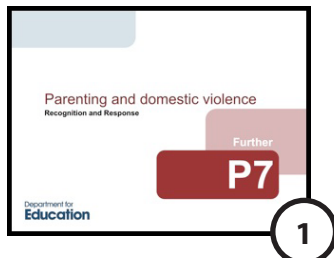
**Common Core 2** Child and young person development (knowledge: understand how babies, children and young people develop). Know that development includes emotional, physical, intellectual, social, moral and character growth, and know that they can all affect one another.

**Common Core 3** Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child (skills: personal skills). Understand the different forms and extent of abuse and their impact on children's development.

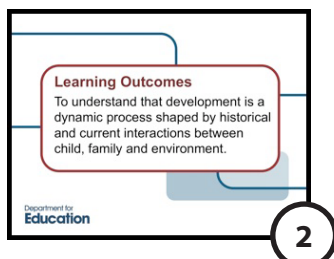
further

Parenting and domestic  
violence

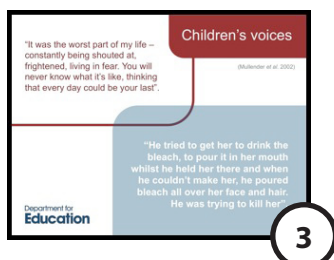
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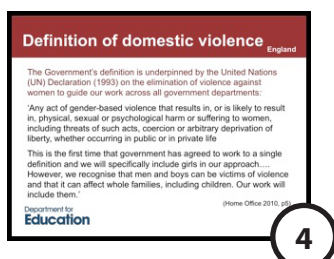
It is important for the trainer to bear in mind that the prevalence of domestic violence makes it entirely possible that participants on the course could be victims (or perpetrators) of violence themselves.



Learning outcomes.



These quotations from children give a small window into the prevailing backdrop for so many children in the UK who live in homes where fathers and other male figures are violent to partners and often also to children (Mullender et al. 2002).



The UK Government's definition is underpinned by the United Nations (UN) Declaration (1993) on the elimination of violence against women to guide our work across all government departments:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life

This is the first time that government has agreed to work to a single definition and we will specifically include girls in our approach.... However, we recognise that men and boys can be victims of violence and that it can affect whole families, including children. Our work will include them.

(Home Office 2010, p5)

Domestic Abuse National Action Plan

**Key goals:**

1. Reduce the prevalence of domestic violence
2. Increase the rate domestic violence is reported
3. Increase the rate offences are brought to justice
4. Ensure victims are adequately protected and supported
5. Reduce number of domestic violence related homicides

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Launched 2011

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During 2011, the UK Government published a national action plan that outlined future proposals to further improve support to victims and bring more perpetrators to justice.

Call to end violence against Women and Girls

**Key goals:**

1. To **prevent** such violence from happening by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early where possible to prevent it;
2. To **provide** adequate levels of support where violence does occur;
3. To work in **partnership** to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families; and
4. To take action to **reduce the risk** to women and girls who are victims of these crimes and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

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(HM Government 2010)

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More recently, the strategic direction of the coalition government was set in a recent document, Call to End Violence against Women and Girls (2010). The document states that the vision of the government is for a society in which no woman or girl has to live in fear of violence. To achieve this vision, society needs to:

- **prevent** such violence from happening by challenging the attitudes and behaviours which foster it and intervening early where possible to prevent it;
- **provide** adequate levels of support where violence does occur;
- work in **partnership** to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families; and
- take action to **reduce the risk** to women and girls who are victims of these crimes and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

Domestic violence can include

- Threats of physical violence even though no actual physical force occurs
- Physical violence (such as shoving, hitting, kicking, head-butting, burning, choking)
- Being forced to have sex
- Mental/emotional/psychological cruelty such as name calling, isolation from family and friends, deprivation of family income, being prevented from leaving the home, damage to pets or other personal items

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It is important to remind participants that domestic violence does not just manifest itself in physical violence, but for many women and by extension their children, the emotional abuse that either accompanies physical violence, or occurs alone, is highly distressing and corrosive to self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Domestic violence can include

- Using and abusing children in various ways to frighten or force compliance
- Forced marriage
- Female genital mutilation and so-called honour-based violence
- Elder abuse when committed within the family or by an intimate partner

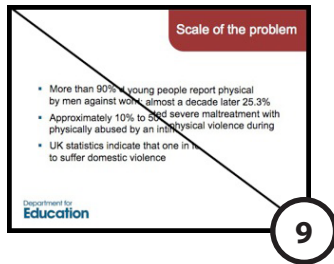
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further

Parenting and domestic violence

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The scale of the problem is rather alarming. In 34% of serious case reviews (Brandon et al. 2009), domestic abuse, mental ill-health and alcohol and/or substance misuse are present. These are often interlinked and overlapping. Each can be caused by or be exacerbated by the other:

- 26% of 18-24 year olds reported physical violence during their childhood in the last national prevalence study (Cawson et al. 2000); almost a decade later 25.3% of 18-24 year olds reported severe maltreatment with 11.5% experiencing severe physical violence during childhood at the hands of an adult (NSPCC 2011)
- 47% had experienced physical assaults
- 13% of these had used object or weapon
- 5% of children had experienced frequent violence.

The cost to the taxpayer is hard to calculate, given the long-term damage.

More than 90% of domestic violence is committed by men against women, but this is not to say women do not commit acts of domestic violence against men, and it is also known to happen within same-sex relationships.

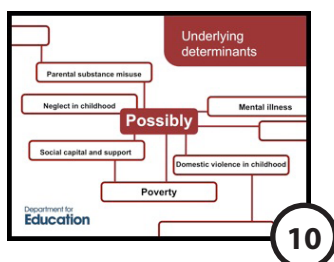
**Discussion point:** could ask the participants their experience of acts of domestic violence. For example, does the nature of violence vary between different types of relationships? Are professionals more attuned to acts committed against women?

Most perpetrators of domestic violence are men, and most victims of domestic violence are women. Approximately 10% to 50% of women have been physically abused by an intimate male partner and it is generally accepted from UK statistics that one in four women is likely to suffer domestic violence. The problem is slightly greater in Northern Ireland.

Domestic violence is a high prevalence problem with serious long-term effects; and current approaches, such as encouraging women and children to leave the family home, may cause further harm (homelessness, poverty).



**Please Note** Thumbnails of slides shown with a split screen indicate that the slide contains an animated sequence.

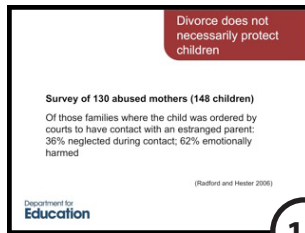


The evidence is incomplete regarding what may or may not cause individuals to be violent but some pointers are included on the slide.

further

Parenting and domestic violence

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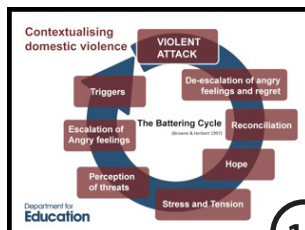
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The issue of post-separation contact between children and fathers is particularly challenging in the context of domestic violence. Radford and colleagues (2006) undertook a survey of 130 abused mothers (148 children). Of those who were ordered by the courts to have contact with estranged parent, 36% were neglected during contact; and 62% emotionally harmed. Hester and Radford (1996) and Hester, Pearson and Radford (1997) explored the impact of domestic violence on the negotiation of contact arrangements in Britain and Denmark for children after divorce or separation. Of significant concern from the study was the absence of clear linking between the safety of women and the safety of their children in the professional plans for organising contact between children and their separated parents.

They sum up their views in the following three points.

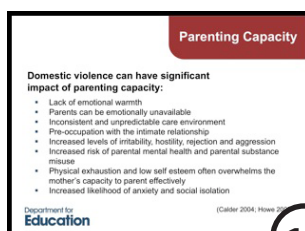
1. The lack of regard for women's safety amongst professionals and legal personnel, and the effect of this on the welfare of women and children.
2. The misguided belief of professionals and advisors that face to face visiting contact with an abusive father is always in the best interests of a child.
3. The difficulties which professionals and advisors have in considering the actual, rather than hypothetical, needs and views of a particular child (p.103).

The mother may be at risk of further violence or intimidation directly from the abusive ex-partner and needs ongoing post-separation support.



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The cycle can help practitioners to understand why women may not leave violent men. The feelings of reconciliation and hope can be powerful in persuading women that things have improved.



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Discussion point: Participants will be able to discuss the various ways in which domestic violence can affect the parenting capacity of mothers and of fathers. They could consider the dimensions of parenting and the ways in which domestic violence could affect both mothers and fathers capabilities to respond to the needs of their children:

- Basic care
- Ensuring safety
- Emotional warmth
- Stimulation
- Guidance and boundaries
- Stability

further

Parenting and domestic violence

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The diagram graphically portrays the extent to which domestic violence can create an ethos of tension that, in turn, may generate chronic anxiety in children.

**Children who live in households where their mothers are abused by partners or ex-partners are significantly affected and experience considerable distress**

- Clear and irrefutable link between presence of domestic violence and child maltreatment
- There is an impact on parenting abilities
- Jeopardises a child's developmental progress and personal abilities, contributing to cycles of adversity
- Disrupts broader family functioning and the home environment

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(Buckley et al. 2010)

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Although domestic violence does not automatically lead to child neglect, it is one of the parental factors known to be highly associated with neglect.

When mothers are experiencing domestic violence, they may not spend sufficient time with the child, either because they may not be allowed to or because they are not physically or emotionally capable. Often, the public and professionals may blame the mother for not nurturing the child as she should, for staying in a violent relationship, and for allowing contact between the child and the perpetrator. However, practitioners need to recognise the impact on the mother of the actual violence and the fear of violence.

Domestic violence may undermine a mother's parenting ability. In addition to the social deprivation and isolation experienced by mother often caused by domestic violence (whether or not she remains in the abusive relationship), she may also suffer specific health problems related to the violence. This may be a physical problem resulting from injuries or mental health problems such as the risk of depression, increased drug abuse and increased suicide attempts. An abused woman may become passive and paralysed by her situation, which can also affect her ability to protect and parent her children, sometimes known as the "battered wife syndrome" (Department of Health 2009).

**Living with domestic violence**

**Children may:**

- Be in same room when the incident is taking place
- Hear events as they unfold from another room
- Witness physical damage to an adult or property following an incident
- Be hurt accidentally while trying to intervene
- Be used as a pawn to bargain or threaten with, particularly post separation
- Become the direct subject of abuse, which may be physical, sexual, or emotional or a combination of these

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The next few slides are fairly self-explanatory and give a range of effects of domestic violence on children.

further

Parenting and domestic violence

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Living with domestic violence

And the effects on children:

- Disruptive behaviour; difficulties at school
- Sleep disturbances
- Bed wetting and nightmares
- Guilt, confusion, sadness, self blame
- Depression, resentment, anger
- Physical injury
- Sense of loss
- Children as carers
- Post-traumatic stress disorder

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Impact of domestic violence on children

**Early brain development**

Domestic violence poses a serious risk to the unborn foetus as violence may increase the risk of premature birth, low birth weight, foetal injury and in the worst case death.

Possible impairment of brain development because a child responds to a violent environment by becoming hypersensitive to external stimuli, hyper vigilant and being in a persistent stress-response state

**Attachment processes**

A child's healthy attachment development is dependent on his or her needs being met consistently by a sensitive and consistent caregiver. The existence of violence, aggression and hostility within the family situation can cause serious disruption to this process

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Impact of domestic violence on children

**Social and emotional**

- Witnessing violence will increase physical neglect, failure to thrive unpredictable fear, terror, and feelings of stress and anxiety
- Increased risk of the child experiencing problems may be impeded due to disorder
- Hostility and rejection increases risk of child feeling isolated, unloved

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Impact of domestic violence on children

**Behavioural development**

- Increased risk of behavioural difficulties including lower levels of tolerance and increased aggression
- Children may have increased difficulties building and sustaining relationships and poor peer relationships can feature
- Compulsive care giving including for the parent victim and other siblings
- Children may also be withdrawn or engage in attention seeking behaviour
- As the child matures increased risk taking behaviours may feature including substance misuse during adolescence

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**Discussion point:** Ask participants to consider the ways in which some of these signs may be picked up by teachers or other adults.

## Notes

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