

## DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE



### Domestic Abuse Guidance

| Management Information |                                                           |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
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**Acknowledgement**

Dumfries and Galloway Public Protection Committee would like to acknowledge and thank the Safe & Together Institute who created the Safe & Together model as an approach to supporting better outcomes for families affected by domestic abuse. Their mission is to “create, nurture and sustain a global network of domestic violence informed child welfare professionals, communities and systems”. Dumfries and Galloway adopted the Safe & Together model in 2021 with a number of practitioners now trained in the approach to domestic abuse.

Dumfries and Galloway use a relationship and strengths-based approach to child and adult protection. The principles of Safe and Together complements this approach.

**1. Purpose**

- 1.1. The guidance outlines principles for good practice in response to domestic abuse in Dumfries and Galloway. It provides staff with tools to support survivors and their families affected by domestic abuse to achieve better outcomes.
- 1.2. Domestic abuse does not discriminate on the basis of age, disability, sexual orientation, cultural background, belief, gender, class, etc. Each of these characteristics may impact on the effects and extent of the abuse the victims will experience.
- 1.3. All available evidence suggests that Domestic Abuse is addressed most effectively by a joined up, partnership approach which includes statutory and voluntary

organisations, all accepting a shared responsibility, whilst understanding their unique role. We are committed to a shared vision with sustained and effective action across all agencies and disciplines evidenced by our adoption of shared principles and our pursuit of common objectives.

1.4. Embed the [Safe & Together](#)<sup>1</sup> principles as detailed below:

- **Keeping children safe and together with non-offending parent (including safety, healing from trauma; stability and nurturing).**

Recognising the harm caused by domestic abuse to children and communicating these to the victim without holding them responsible for the domestic abuse.

- **Partnering with non-offending parent as default position (efficient, effective and child centred).**

This will include working with the survivor to establish what they are doing to promote the safety and wellbeing of their child within the context of the perpetrator's pattern of domestic abuse. This will also include exploring the ways in which the survivor is managing the household and attempting to protect their child and supporting their children to recover from the trauma caused by living with domestic abuse. For staff, the starting point in partnering with the non-offending parent is to find ways that they are seeking to support their child(ren), with an expectation that such behaviour has been happening.

- **Intervening with perpetrators to reduce risk and harm to children.**

In practice this will mean that as well as holding the perpetrator to account and managing their risk, frontline staff working with the family should work with them to recognise the impact of, and support them to change, their abusive behaviour. This will not only increase the safety of current victims, but other families in the future. Allowing perpetrators to remain invisible puts the burden of change on victims and places them (and any children) at significant risk of continuing harm.

## 2. Scope

2.1. To ensure frontline professionals are equipped and have the appropriate skills to be able to:

- Assess and manage risk, specifically related to domestic abuse.
- Support victims/ survivors of domestic abuse and their families.
- Confidently and safely engage with victims/ survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse and their families.
- Appropriately respond to disclosures of domestic abuse.
- Share information where appropriate.
- Have knowledge of the available resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Mandel, D. (2019). Safe & Together Model: Glossary of Terms. Safe & Together Institute

### 3. Definitions

- 3.1. Domestic abuse is part of the continuum of gender-based violence (this means that many more women experience it than men and that it is rooted in gender inequality). Statistics identify that more women than men experience domestic abuse, but domestic abuse can take place in any relationship (including LGBTI and heterosexual) with men also experiencing domestic abuse with women perpetrators (although in considerably fewer numbers than women) and can overlap with other forms of gender-based violence (including forced marriage, rape, and stalking)<sup>2</sup>. Very often people are ashamed or frightened to admit that they are experiencing domestic abuse (this is true for women as well as men) and some people are unable to identify that their experience is abuse in part due to their expectations of what is a “normal” relationship. Children can be affected by living with parental domestic abuse and also in their own relationships.
- 3.2. Coercive control is a form of psychological and emotional abuse that involves controlling and manipulating a person's behaviour, emotions, and actions to establish power and dominance over them. It is often subtle and persistent, using tactics such as isolation, intimidation, threats, monitoring, and limiting the victim's freedom or choices.
- 3.3. Dr Emma Katz<sup>3</sup> suggests that if coercive control was a political system, it would be a dictatorship. Dictators keep their citizens under constant scrutiny, observing for any forms of opposition. With coercive control a perpetrator may isolate; monitor; bully and control their partner. It is very often invisible to outsiders because the abuser will use tactics and knowledge that only they (and the victim/ survivor) know – they may appear charming and polite. Coercive control may not include direct physical abuse but one partner creating a state of fear, isolation, and exhaustion it can be relentless. It can range from influencing what a person wears to controlling every move they make, who they see and where they go.
- 3.4. Domestic Abuse can take different forms. Research by M Johnston<sup>4</sup> identified three main categories of domestic abuse:
- **Situational Couple Violence** – this is where there is a degree of mutuality within a relationship – one person is not necessarily seeking to control the other (although sometimes this can move to become a controlling relationship). It can be as a result of an argument. This affects men and women in similar numbers.
  - **Intimate Terrorism** (Coercive Control) – where one person controls and uses power (often male power) to control the other.
  - **Violent Resistance** – where someone has experienced domestic abuse and fights back. It is not a form of domestic abuse, but it refers to a situation in which a victim of domestic abuse responds with violence in an attempt to

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<sup>2</sup> Equally Safe, 2024

<sup>3</sup> Emma Katz; (2022) Coercive Control in Children's and Mothers' Lives

<sup>4</sup> A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence – Michael P Johnson, 2011

defend themselves or resist further harm. It can occur when a person who has been subjected to abuse - such as physical, emotional, or sexual violence - tries to stop the abuse through their own violent actions. This can complicate their ability to access support, as they may be perceived as perpetrators of violence rather than victims.

- 3.5. In many cases, individuals who use violent resistance may face legal and social challenges, as the legal system may not always recognise the context of abuse.
- 3.6. If it is not initially easy to recognise who the domestic abuser is in a situation (where there are counter allegations, for example) it is helpful to identify who has the most power in the relationship; who is acting out of character; who shows greater levels of entitlement, self-centredness; who demands things and who tries to keep the peace and who is not happy unless they are in control to identify who is the perpetrator (Emma Katz, 2022).
  - **Gaslighting** is a tactic used by domestic abuse perpetrators to undermine someone's psychological wellbeing by manipulating them and planting seeds of uncertainty to gain control.
  - **DARVO** is an acronym for **D**eny, **A**ttack, **R**everse **V**ictim / **O**ffender. This is a manipulative tactic that perpetrators may use when challenged about their behaviour. This may lead to a victim being initially identified as a perpetrator.
- 3.7. **Service Generated Risks** relate to the way wider society, systems and services can increase risks to survivors of domestic abuse and their children. Such risks include blaming the victim/survivor (resulting in them not trusting you or your service to respond in their interest); a staff member's beliefs and attitudes (for example sexist or misogynistic views); ignoring the perpetrator (failing to recognise that without a perpetrator there will be no domestic abuse); lack of funding for services to respond adequately; lack of staff skills; and failing to recognise service generated risks. An example may be to include errors such as inappropriately sharing the whereabouts of a victim who is in hiding.

## 4. Background

- 4.1. Domestic Abuse is the most commonly known form of Gender-Based Violence/ Violence Against Women. Although it is acknowledged that reported domestic abuse does not show the full extent of the issue, in 2022/23 there were 1512 cases of domestic abuse reported to the Police in Dumfries and Galloway, but the actual figure is much higher due to the under reported nature of domestic abuse. The enactment of the [Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#) now recognises many different types of abuse as a crime, specifically emotional abuse and coercive control.
- 4.2. Responding to singular incidents of physical violence fails to recognise **the pattern of other abusive and controlling behaviours** and their wide-ranging impact on both adult and child victims. Research shows that families may receive 'start-stop' interventions, which cease when couples are seen to have separated. This results in poor outcomes for families, particularly as domestic abuse can be characterised by repeated separation and reconciliation. Periodic intervention does not address

the complex issues involved and fails to recognise domestic abuse as a long-term, chronic problem with a cumulative impact, which can include complex trauma.

- 4.3. Separation is a time of increased risk which can lead to an escalation of violence, stalking and harassing behaviour, and conflict over child contact. Services should work together to support families over the short, medium and long term, particularly those with multiple or complex needs.
- 4.4. In the past children were referred to as witnesses of domestic abuse and their experience of living with the abuse and experiencing coercive control was not always recognised. It is now recognised that living with coercive control reduces children's ability to make choices in what they do and when, which can increase their isolation from family and friends. This often continues following separation, with children being manipulated and used to further control the non-abusing parent, for example, during contact time the child may be asked to disclose information about the victim/ survivor by the offending parent. The impact of living with domestic abuse can take many forms and children respond in a variety of ways that are not always obvious.
- 4.5. **Parental alienation** or [child and mother sabotage](#) refers to a situation in which the abusive parent deliberately attempts to undermine or interfere with the relationship between their child and the non-abusing parent, this often increases significantly after separation or divorce where domestic abuse has been present. This can involve a variety of behaviours aimed at making the child feel negatively toward the targeted parent and can cause significant emotional harm to both the child and the alienated parent.
- 4.6. Further information on possible impacts on children can be found: [Children experiencing interparental coercive control | Iriss](#)
- 4.7. Safe & Together<sup>5</sup> is an internationally recognised approach to domestic abuse that supports services to be domestic abuse informed and protect children and the survivor whilst engaging with perpetrators in their role as fathers/ partners. It is recognised that society often has different expectations of women and men as parents – frequently expecting more from mothers than fathers in terms of parenting and domestic chores. In the past this has led to women as mothers being criticised for failing to protect their children from domestic abuse. Safe & Together emphasises that domestic abuse is a parenting choice. When a child's mother is abused, this has a negative impact on the child, it may take a mother's focus away from her children as they use up energy trying to create safety and stability.
- 4.8. The victim's parenting may have been undermined as part of the abuse they have experienced. Agencies should work to reinforce the authority of the protective parent. Mental and physical ill-health, substance abuse and nonengagement with services should all be understood as possible symptoms and consequences of the abuse the victim has suffered. Fathers and mothers should be held to the same standards of parenting. The Safe & Together<sup>6</sup> Institute provide information on the

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<sup>5</sup> Mandel, D. (2019). Safe & Together Model: Glossary of Terms. Safe & Together Institute

double standards agencies can hold in their expectation of parents:

<https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/episode-4partnered-with-a-survivor-podcast/>

## 5. Domestic Abuse-Informed Versus Domestic Abuse-Destructive Organisations

- 5.1. Domestic Abuse-Informed agencies commit to policies and practices that reflect competency in domestic abuse, and approaches that are reliable and consistent throughout all services involved with the child and their family. All documentation must be Domestic Abuse-Informed. Domestic Abuse-Destructive documentation focuses negatively on the survivor's decisions and uses language that blames them for the issue. Informed language is strengths focussed and clearly shows the efforts the survivor has made, and the actions they have taken, to promote child safety and wellbeing. It also holds the perpetrator to account and is clear about their pattern of behaviour and the negative effect of this on child and family functioning.
- 5.2. Domestic Abuse-Informed documentation supports managers and supervisors to respond helpfully to the situation. This will ensure interventions take place to support the family and increase safety. Domestic abuse-informed documentation provided to children's hearings and courts support effective child-centred decision-making and effective partnership working.
- 5.3. [Safe & Together Practice tools](#), such as [Multiple Pathways to Harm](#) and [Mapping Perpetrators' Patterns](#) can be applied in order to improve risk assessment, assess impact on children, provide understanding of the protective efforts of the survivor and assist important decisions.
- 5.4. Safe & Together has also created a tool to identify what domestic-informed practice looks like. This can be found at [JUL19-DV-Informed-ContinuumofPractice.pdf](#)

## 6. Intersections

- 6.1. It is important to recognise and understand the connections between complex needs and the challenges and conditions of these with the perpetrator's behaviours and how they interfere, cause and exacerbate issues for the survivor. The *complexities* in relation to the role of mental health, substance misuse, housing, culture and other socio-economic factors and domestic abuse is *complicated* and must be seen through a domestic abuse-informed lens. In doing so understanding is sought as to how the behaviour of the perpetrator, and the impact of this, intersects with other issues and causes harm.

## 7. Intersectionalities

- 7.1. [Intersectionalities](#) recognises the links between social categorisations and identities that may lead to oppression or discrimination of an individual or group such as gender, class, sexual orientation, ability issues and race. For example, additional power might be gained for domestic abuse perpetrators as a result of coming from a privileged group when their partner comes from a group that has been marginalised and historically oppressed. The powerful and complex dynamics related to intersectionalities increases the victim's vulnerability and entrapment. A

perpetrator who has experienced oppression may be both a perpetrator of abuse and a trauma survivor and therefore seeking the whole picture to partner effectively with survivors and intervene with perpetrators from diverse backgrounds is necessary. A perpetrator's trauma history is not an excuse for domestic abuse, but it is important to understand it to effectively intervene.

## 8. Assessing Victim's Strengths

8.1. A strengths-based approach is paramount when working with victims of domestic abuse. Ascertaining what the domestic abuse survivor is doing to promote child and family functioning in response to or in the context of the domestic abuse perpetrator's behaviour pattern is key to supporting the victim and children. A comprehensive strengths lens focuses on areas where the victim has created safety, promoted healing and provided stability and nurture for their children. It requires professional curiosity and is formed on the foundation of a 'partnering practice' with the adult survivor. To be effective, partnering requires the use of a perpetrator pattern-based approach and an understanding of gender double standards. The underlying principles of the Safe & Together<sup>7</sup> model challenge the 'failure to protect' narrative where mothers are held accountable for the impact that domestic abuse perpetrators' behaviours have on children.

## 9. Prompting Motivation

9.1. Being prepared, clear about purpose and planning are essential when undertaking interviews with the perpetrator of domestic abuse. This should be centred around the perpetrator's pattern of behaviour and be clear about the responsibilities of the perpetrator, avoiding mutualising language – abuse is solely the responsibility of the perpetrator, and the victim is in no way to blame for the abusive behaviour. When speaking to perpetrators of domestic abuse, consideration must be given to 'intersections' and 'intersectionalities'. The Safe & Together interview model – 'Prepare, Engage, Case Plan' provides guidance on interviewing perpetrators.

- **Prepare** – make sure that it is safe for you and the family; make sure that you have background information and have found out information from as many sources as possible. Identify any potential sources of harm.
- **Engage** – Develop a rapport but make sure that this doesn't involve any collusion. The focus is on the perpetrator's choices and behaviour and the impact on the children.
- **Case plan** – signed agreements may be appropriate; the focus is on behaviour and expectations as a parent.

NB the aim of the discussion is not to get a confession and remember that perpetrators are not the best source of information about the impact of their behaviour!

9.2. It is important to be clear about goal setting and that questions used prompt motivation regarding the perpetrator's parenting choices and impact on the

children involved. Educating perpetrators about how they have or might harm their children and exploring their hopes as a parent form the basis for motivation.

## 10. Engaging with Children

- 10.1. Speaking to children must be carefully planned to ensure this is supportive, empowering and takes place in a trauma informed way. There are many factors to consider, which include the child's age and stage of development, relationship with the perpetrator, and the number of siblings and their relationships. Children are the focus in every domestic abuse situation. Gaining children's experiences and views is important in order to assess the impact of domestic abuse on the child and the risk they are exposed to. If an incident has occurred, any questioning should be done carefully and within the context of any possible police investigation. When talking to children it is important that they know that they are speaking to a safe person. Professionals should always ask open questions to gain understanding of the situation and to explore the child's overall awareness of the perpetrator's behaviour. Positive aspects of family life should be captured. Using the child's own words is very powerful in understanding their experiences and strengthens assessments and legal decisions. Validating the child's experience and reminding them that it is not their fault is key.

## 11. Safety Planning

- 11.1. [Safety planning](#) is critical for survivors of domestic abuse, offering a personalised approach to help them protect themselves, their children, and others around them from further harm. It involves identifying potential risks, preparing for emergencies, and taking steps to increase safety in various situations. A safety plan can empower survivors by giving them tools and strategies to regain control, make informed decisions, and escape dangerous situations if needed. Children can have their own safety plan which may include actions for the child/ren to take, for example, calling a family member, neighbour or police, should be included.
- 11.2. As with all work with domestic abuse victim/ survivors, it is important to bear in mind that the survivor has been living with the abuse and will most likely, already have been undertaking safety planning. Any potential plans to support safety need to include an understanding of the perpetrator's pattern of abuse and be developed in partnership with the survivor<sup>6</sup>.
- 11.3. Safety planning must begin with assessment of the **perpetrator's pattern of behaviour** and focus on the actions they have taken that put the child at risk of harm. This then provides a central focus for behaviour change.

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<sup>6</sup> Mandel, D. (2019). Safe & Together Model: Glossary of Terms. Safe & Together Institute

- 11.4. Interventions with perpetrators must focus on the child and have a multiagency response. The principles of the 'Safe & Together' model should be prevalent throughout.
- 11.5. Improving child and family functioning to increase safety, aid healing from trauma and promote stability and nurturance<sup>7</sup> is central to intervention.
- 11.6. Coercive control and violence can "cause", "exacerbate" and "interfere" with children's behavioural health. There is therefore a higher probability of emotional and mental health issues; substance use; aggressive behaviours, including perpetrating sexual assault, and hyperactivity.
- 11.7. To support children appropriately, knowledge of the child's trauma history is required. Understanding this history helps ensure that the right support is provided to help children heal.
- 11.8. Further information on safety planning can be found at <https://womensaid.scot/tipsfor-staying-safe/>

## 12. Identifying and Responding to Concerns

- 12.1. To assess the risk faced by victims of domestic abuse it is recommended that the [SafeLives DASH RIC](#) (Domestic Abuse Stalking Honour-Based Risk Identification Check list) is used. This version should be used only for adult victims. Training on the use of this is available locally at the [Public Protection Partnership Website](#).
- 12.2. The tool, which provides quick start guidance, is available on the [SafeLives](#) website. As far as possible practitioners should ensure that they are familiar with the identified risks within the tool prior to using it. There is a local DASH-RIC training programme that staff can attend. Various versions of the tool are located on [SafeLives Website](#) (including versions for teenagers and in different languages).
- 12.3. The risk assessment should only be carried out when safe to do so- the victim should be on their own (ex/partner should not be nearby or able to hear or see any responses) and there should be enough time to make sure that the victim is emotionally safe and not further traumatised by asking them to report experiences of abuse.
- 12.4. **Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference – MARAC** - is a process established to respond to victims of domestic abuse who are at risk of significant harm and domestic homicide.
- 12.5. Referrals to the MARAC can be made on 4 grounds:
  - **Visible High Risk** – a score of 14 or over on the DASH RIC
  - **Professional Judgement** (where despite a lower score staff are concerned – this may be due to the survivors' level of fear/ history)
  - **Repeat Incident** within 12 months (same victim-survivor and perpetrator).

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<sup>7</sup> Mandel, D. (2019). Safe & Together Model: Glossary of Terms. Safe & Together Institute

- **Escalation** i.e., abuse is more severe, frequent, etc
- 12.6. To make a referral to MARAC or ask questions email: [marac@dumgal.gov.uk](mailto:marac@dumgal.gov.uk) See further information on the [Public Protection Partnership website](#).
- 12.7. [The Caledonian System](#) is nationally accredited, integrated approach to addressing domestic abuse, delivered by Justice Social Work. It combines a court-ordered programme for men, aimed at changing their behaviour, with support services for women and children. Working together with the whole family is central to the Caledonian System's aim of reducing the risk of harm to women and children. Research makes clear that working with men in isolation is potentially dangerous in terms of raising the risk of harm to partners, for example because men may resent having to attend and blame their partner for the fact they are on the programme. The systems approach also encompasses being embedded in a wider system of multi-agency working as a pre-requisite for successful intervention.
- 12.8. **The Caledonian Men's Programme** lasts at least two years and comprises a minimum of 14 one-to-one preparation and motivation sessions (Pre-Group stage), a Group Work stage of at least 26 weekly three-hour sessions, and further post group one-to-one work (Maintenance stage). **The Caledonian Women's Service** is a voluntary service which provides safety planning, information, advice and emotional support to women partners and ex-partners of men referred to the Men's Programme. It is provided by dedicated Women's Workers, who aim both to reduce the risk to women and their children, and to improve women's social and emotional wellbeing. **The Caledonian Children's Service** aims to ensure that the needs of children (whose father or whose mother's (ex) partner is on the Men's Programme) are met and their rights upheld. It is supported by Caledonian Children's Workers, who do not necessarily work with children directly but rather ensure their rights and needs are being considered both within the Caledonian System and by wider services.

### 13. Legislation and Policy Context

- 13.1. [Equally Safe 2023 – Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
- 13.2. The [Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#) enacted in April 2019, recognises that domestic abuse can be physical; sexual; financial; violence; and psychological. It identifies that domestic abuse can be coercive and controlling behaviour. Under this law, domestic abuse is carried out within the context of partners or ex-partners (note that in England other family members are included in their definition). The Act recognises that children are also victims and not just witnesses. Additional information can be found [here](#).
- 13.3. [National Child Protection Guidance 2021\(updated 2023\)](#). Aligns with [GIRFEC](#), [UNCRC](#), [The Promise](#) and the [Children's Charter](#). The National Guidance has a stronger focus on children's rights, engagement, collaboration with families, and on building on existing strengths. It considers children up to the age of 18 and recognises that physical and emotional safety provides a foundation for wellbeing and healthy development.

- 13.4. [Adult Support and Protection \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#) and the [Adult Support and Protection \(ASP\) Code of Practice](#)

## **14. Additional Resources**

- 14.1 [Caledonian System Evaluation: Analysis of a programme for tackling domestic abuse in Scotland](#)
- 14.2 [Safe & Together Institute - Strengthen Your Practice & Improve Family Outcomes](#)