

# Domestic Abuse – Impact on Children

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The fact that Domestic Abuse impacts children is now widely accepted.

It is enshrined in law in s102 of The Adoption and Children Act 2002

Understanding of how and why Domestic Abuse is an issue for children and young people varies within and between professions, as does understanding and knowledge of how to mitigate against this impact.

# What are we talking about

- Government definition is very wide – the main focus of this presentation is Intimate Partner Violence
- Research shows that both perpetrators of domestic abuse and situations of domestic abuse are heterogeneous – i.e. Domestic Abuse is NOT all the same
- Key research – Johnson 2008
- Until very recently, the vast majority of research has been carried out looking at heterosexual intimate partner violence
- We need to question our assumptions about risk and impact – most domestic homicides do not occur in cases that are identified as high risk

# Johnson (2008)



Intimate Terrorism  
(Coercive controlling violence)



Situational Couple  
Violence

Also Violent Resistance  
Violence in response to Intimate Terrorism  
– may be self defence but is not the same  
thing

# Impacts on children

- Practical
- Physical
- Emotional/psychological
- Indirect due to impact on parenting
- Young people can also be affected in their own relationships, although until age 16 these are outside scope of Government definition (TRA)

All conflict, violence or arguing can impact children, and the nature and degree of impact will depend on both the nature of the abuse and the child's resilience

# One aspect of practical impact - Learning

“Our brains will continue to take in new information and construct new realities as long as our bodies **feel** safe. But if we become fixated on the trauma, then our ability to take in new information is lost” (Van der Kolk, 2003)

# Physical impacts on children

- Children may be “caught in crossfire”
- We see many children who feel that they should intervene to protect their parent, increasing the risk to themselves
- Children are more likely to experience direct physical abuse if there is domestic abuse between their parents
- The risk of the partner using violence also assaulting the child if there is one violent act in 12 months is 5%. This risk increases where there is one violent act a week to 30% for female perpetrators, and to nearly 100% for male perpetrators (Ross, 1996)
- There is also an increased risk of physical chastisement by the victim of domestic abuse (Smith Slep & O’Leary, 2005)

# Emotional/psychological

- There is emerging evidence that maternal stress has an impact on brain development ante-natally (Bea et al, 2005)
- After birth, the brain develops in response to experience, influencing cognitive ability, stress responses and personality
- Children living in a consistently traumatic environment will develop either passive or active defence systems
- Having a warm, loving relationship with a safe adult is a significant resilience factor





# Impact on Parenting

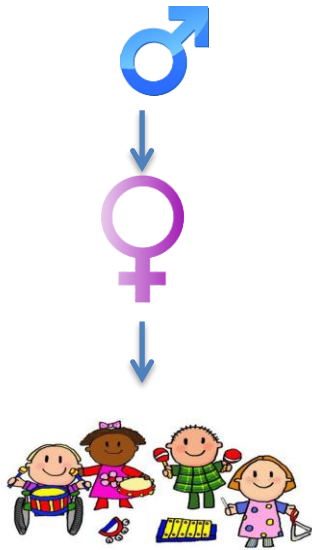
## For victim/survivor

- Lack of self confidence makes authoritative parenting harder
- Partner deliberately undermining boundaries/authority
- Seeing partner in child/young person's behaviour affecting responses

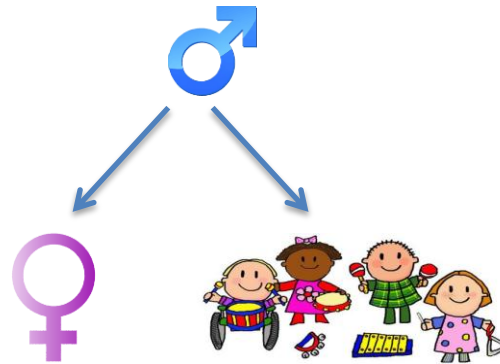
## For perpetrator

- Lack of respect and/or atmosphere of fear affects child's response
- Use of child to undermine partner
- Unrealistic expectations (borderline/dysphoric type perpetrators)
- Lack of cognitive/communication skills (family only type)
- Concentration on own needs/wants (anti-social/narcissistic type)
- Their violence/abuse models inappropriate behaviour

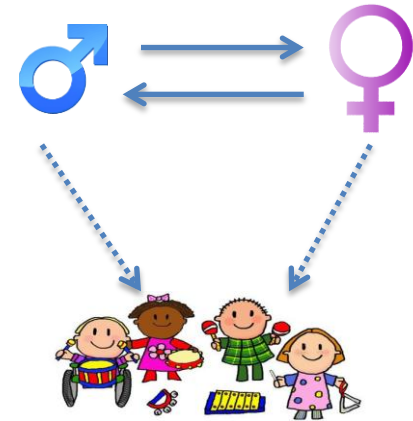
# Family Dynamics



Heirarchical



Patriarchal



Reciprocal

# Summary

- Domestic Abuse wide ranging and not all the same
- Impacts on children are wide ranging
- We need to listen to the experience of children and keep them at the centre of our thinking
- Social Marketing Campaigns like the “Be a Lover, not a Fighter” campaign can contribute to reducing the number of children affected