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Background

In 2021, children were for the first time recognised in law (Domestic Abuse (DA) Act 2021) as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. Section 3 defines a child victim as any child who 'sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse. The Act also specified that the duty to provide safe accommodation would apply to child as well as adult victims & survivors of domestic abuse. Any adult, child/young person witnessing or experiencing domestic abuse has a right to access specialist support.

Children who grow up in a household where there is DA WILL be affected. throughout their development & can seriously affect them which can affect them also into adulthood, especially where coercive control is present.

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Why it matters

The impacts of domestic abuse upon children can be profound. Alongside the distress experienced while abuse is occurring (such as increased levels of fear, inhibition, isolation, loss, anxiety and depression), is the likelihood of longer term trauma that affects physical and mental health, development, behaviour and emotional wellbeing'

This means that all professionals need to understand domestic abuse, the significant impact it has on children's emotional, physical and psychological development, how they can make a difference, what services are available and when statutory safeguarding services are required.

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Information

Children are victims if they see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse.

Children and young people might feel frightened and confused, keeping the abuse to themselves. There may be signs such as anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts, bed wetting, nightmares, regular sickness, drug or alcohol use, missing from home, eating disorders, not wanting to leave the non-abusive parent.

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Experiencing domestic abuse during pregnancy can also impact babies as they become toddlers, as their development has already been impacted by the domestic abuse experienced by their mothers.

Domestic abuse was reported in nearly half of Serious Incident Notifications, Rapid Reviews, and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews occurring from 2023 through to 2024, and was more likely to be present in incidents where the child died'

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Domestic abuse impact on whole family - consideration should be given to all family members.

Domestic abuse = Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) that impacts on health risks and disease into adulthood.

Increased vulnerability to managing & regulating emotion, cognitive functioning, health, social interaction difficulties.

Chronic exposure to coercive and controlling behaviour creates ongoing stress responses in the child's brain, increasing risk of physical and psychological illness.

Children who experience domestic abuse more likely to be diagnosed with different mental health issues.

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Questions to consider

Is this included in your organisations safeguarding policy?

Do you know where and who your local domestic abuse services are?

Do you implement routine inquiry into DA? if not then make this standard practice straight way.

Do you know what early help support is available and how to access local family hubs?

Do staff have access to specialist training on domestic abuse, & the impact on children and young people?

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What to do

If a child talks to you about DA, listen carefully. Tell them they've done the right thing by telling you & it's not their fault.

Take Action: If you have serious concerns about the safety of the victim and their children, you must complete a Safe Lives DASH risk assessment and if appropriate a referral to MARRAC and children's social care.

Think Family: If a child or young person has disclosed domestic abuse, make sure you use a think family approach.

Report what the child has told you as soon as possible.

