



Edinburgh's Multi-agency Domestic Abuse Policy

1. PURPOSE

This policy is a statement of commitment from all partners in Edinburgh and provides a set of guiding principles and definitions in relation to the prevention of domestic abuse, the support and protection of victims and the management of perpetrators. It is based on awareness of the extent and impact of domestic abuse and the belief shared by all partners that it is never acceptable and will not be tolerated. It aims to reduce the risk generated by the lack of a shared understanding between services and agencies of the definition of domestic abuse, its causes and how it should be responded to.

The consequences of domestic abuse are widespread. It is devastating for victims, their children and society as a whole. Our vision is to work in partnership to encourage a community where domestic abuse does not happen and where, until then, all its victims, including children, are offered effective support and protection, whilst at the same time perpetrators are held to account and supported to change their attitudes and behaviours.

2. SCOPE

This policy statement is adopted by the Edinburgh Partnership and all the national and local agencies that work in Edinburgh to tackle domestic abuse and wider forms of gender based violence. It highlights domestic abuse as a priority in all areas of public protection, and sets out the key shared principles of effective intervention, with which all agencies' operations and procedures will be consistent. It will inform the development of the Edinburgh Violence Against Women Partnership domestic abuse action plan, which will be aligned with both the local and national Violence Against Women Strategies, currently being developed by the Scottish Government Equalities Unit and the Edinburgh Violence Against Women Partnership respectively.

Further background information is provided at [Appendix 1](#).

CURRENT PARTNERS:

The City of Edinburgh Council
Edinburgh Division Police Scotland
NHS Lothian

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Edinburgh Women's Aid
Edinburgh Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre
Shakti Women's Aid
Couple Counselling Lothian
Streetwork
Zero Tolerance
Saheliya
Victim Support Scotland

3. DEFINITIONS

The Partnership adopts a broad definition of domestic abuse articulated by the Scottish Government:

Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse) can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate victims and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour, such as isolation from family and friends).

Domestic abuse can be understood within the wider context of gender-based violence, which is defined as violence directed against a person on the basis of their gender. It is men who predominantly carry out such violence, and women who are predominantly the victims. For example, women and girls are predominantly the victims of domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and sexual harassment. Referring to violence as 'gender-based' highlights the need to understand violence within the context of women's and girls' disadvantaged status in society. Such violence cannot be understood in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women's vulnerability to violence.

Defining abuse as 'gender-based' means that interventions with victims and perpetrators need to be based on an understanding of what it means to be a man or woman within any given societal context. For example, men who abuse may justify their behaviour with reference to societal expectations of how women, and indeed men, should behave.

Domestic abuse can also be perpetrated against men; it can involve transsexual people and can occur within same sex relationships. Male victims of domestic abuse may find it difficult to report abuse because of gendered notions in society and in the services they approach, relating to masculinity and help-seeking. Someone's experience of domestic abuse can also intersect in complex ways with other protected characteristics like age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

It is important that any interventions with perpetrators or victims are sensitive to all parts of that person's life, on which the abuse may impact. The guiding principles for intervention outlined in this document can be applied to all the different contexts in which domestic abuse can occur.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

Guiding principles for Domestic Abuse Intervention

In order to achieve better outcomes for families affected by domestic abuse, the Partnership agrees to the following guiding principles:

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4.1 Solutions are best achieved through partnerships and collaborative working

Domestic abuse is a cross-cutting issue. All available evidence suggests that it 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 and to united, sustained and effective action across all agencies and disciplines. This commitment is evidenced by our adoption of these shared principles and our pursuit of common objectives.

4.2 Better outcomes are achieved when there is a universal, systematic approach to risk assessment and decision making

Effective early intervention requires frontline professionals to be trained in identifying and managing risk, specifically related to domestic abuse. They should be able to support victims if domestic abuse is known, suspected or disclosed; share information where appropriate; and have knowledge of the resources available. Our aim is to develop clear service-specific and multi-agency pathways from the suspicion, allegation or identification of domestic abuse to support for the victim and family, tackling the perpetrator's behaviour and attitudes, and intervening in accordance with the level of risk.

A shared understanding of risk and vulnerability factors among all agencies will assist the multi-agency collaboration and management of domestic abuse cases and ensure the needs, safety and wellbeing of victims are key priorities. It is essential to ensure that victims receive help and achieve safety as early as possible. The gathering and sharing of information should be considered in all cases, particularly where there are children. This will ensure that agencies can respond appropriately at the earliest possible stage, in order to increase the safety of victims and prevent further abuse. Lawful and responsible information-sharing and robust information sharing protocols are vital to help keep victims and their children safe; to facilitate risk assessment; to provide support and advocacy services; and to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour. A focus on early identification, assessment and intervention, including the provision of skilled and attentive universal services, in conjunction with the availability of and access to specialist services, is the best way to keep victims safe.

4.3 Partners will work together to protect victims and children and to hold the perpetrators to account

Research tells us that if the victim is not safe, it is unlikely that the children will be. The [National Child Protection Guidelines in Scotland \(2010\)](#) state:

The impact of domestic abuse on a child should be understood as a consequence of the perpetrator choosing to use violence, rather than of the non-abusing parent's / carer's failure to protect. Every effort should be made to work with the non-abusing parent / carer to ensure adequate and appropriate support and protection are in place to enable them to make choices that are safe for both them and the child. At the same time, staff should be maintaining a focus on the perpetrator and monitoring any risk resulting from ongoing abuse.

As well as holding the perpetrator to account and managing their risk, agencies should work with 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, but also places them at significant risk of continuing harm. 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 non-engagement with services should

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all be understood as possible symptoms and consequences of the abuse the victim has suffered.

Agencies intervening in relation to domestic abuse cases where there are children resident in the household, or with significant connection to the adult involved, should work in accordance with the principles of *Getting It Right For Every Child*. It is likely that children affected by domestic abuse will need a higher level of support than most children. This means that they should have a child's plan detailing what support will be provided, by whom and when, in order to keep them safe and promote their wellbeing. Agencies' intervention with adults should be consistent with the child's plan.

4.4 Protection needs to be long-term and should not cease after separation between the abuser and victim

A tendency to respond 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. Separation is a time of increased risk. It can lead to an escalation of violence, stalking and harassing behaviour, and conflict over child contact. Services should work together to monitor and support families over the long term, particularly those with multiple or complex needs.

4.5 Up-to-date training, information and guidance for agencies and individuals across the partnership will improve the quality of service to all victims, their children and perpetrators

A consistent, holistic approach to domestic abuse through the development of a skilled workforce and robust inter-agency training is essential. Victims of domestic abuse and the cultural change we want to see depend on both specialist services and generic and universal services being confident and competent in identifying domestic abuse and responding appropriately. A comprehensive training programme is essential and should include both single and multi-agency training at all levels. It should take account of the wide-ranging existing training, which is delivered by both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Organisations should provide opportunities for critical reflection and practice evaluation for workers. Additionally, multi-agency self evaluation can be used to improve and develop practice. This will create coherent, comprehensive and sustained learning, which builds expertise and confidence, and improves practice over time.

Research shows that without adequate awareness, training and support, practitioners are likely to avoid identifying and engaging constructively with those affected by abuse and with perpetrators. Gender based violence and domestic abuse training should bring about a shift in culture and practice so that all agencies have the capacity and commitment to develop interventions, which respond appropriately to the needs of adult and child victims and hold perpetrators to account.

4.6 Strategies to address domestic abuse should include primary and secondary prevention

Historically, some services have been reactive in nature, often responding to problems once they have become serious enough to have come to the attention of agencies. Although providing services to victims of domestic abuse is essential, tackling the root causes is the only way to eradicate it. Primary prevention seeks to prevent violence before

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it happens and targets the whole population, but particularly children and young people. It is largely focused on attitudinal and cultural change, including a critical reflection of historic and ongoing gender inequality, as well as the influence of the media. Secondary prevention targets perpetrators of abuse and victims who have experienced it. Both prevention strands need to continue to be included in domestic abuse service provision in Edinburgh.

4.7 The implementation of a domestic abuse action plan requires effective and accountable governance structures

A multi-agency domestic abuse action plan is being developed, involving all key partners. Clearly defined indicators and targets closely linked to the goals and objectives set out in the Violence Against Women Performance Framework will be used to monitor the progress of the plan's objectives and to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's activities. In order to do this, partners commit to sharing data within agreed protocols, and evaluating interventions. Regular reports on the implementation and progress of the plan will be provided to the Violence Against Women Partnership and the Edinburgh Chief Officers' Group – Public Protection. Service users will be consulted and involved in any significant changes to policy and provision.

The Violence Against Women Partnership's domestic abuse action plan will be integrated with the strategies and plans of Edinburgh's other public protection committees (adult, child, offender management and drug and alcohol partnership) and reflect the existing policies and practice of the City of Edinburgh Council, NHS Lothian, Police Scotland and voluntary sector partners. This will promote collaboration across all service areas, particularly between adult, child and public protection.

4.8 Adequate resources need to be allocated to achieve good outcomes for families affected by domestic abuse

It is important that services are resourced adequately and appropriately. In an economic climate, which requires us to spend less and work more efficiently, partners need to consider how staffing and financial resources can be used more effectively to achieve the improvement to which we aspire. The partners are committed to exploring the best way to target spending and access additional national and local resources to achieve the most positive outcomes.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

This policy will be monitored by the Edinburgh Partnership and the Edinburgh Chief Officers' Group – Public Protection. All agencies within the partnership will be supported to adopt this policy as a minimum standard, with acknowledgement and recognition of existing strategic objectives of the associated agencies. This policy should align with partner agencies equality policies to prevent discrimination across the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

6. LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

[Adult Support and Protection \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#)

[Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#)

[Children's Hearing \(Scotland\) Act 2011](#)

[Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2011](#)

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[Forced Marriage etc. \(Protection and Jurisdiction\) \(Scotland\) Act 2011](#)

[Protection from Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2001](#)

[Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#)

7. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

[Coordinated Community Response Model](#)

[Safer Lives: Changed Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland](#) (The Scottish Government 2009)

[National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland](#) (The Scottish Government 2010)

[A Partnership Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland](#) (COSLA / The Scottish Government 2009)

[No excuse! Violence against women](#) (partnership strategy 2008-2013; to be reviewed in 2013)

[National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People](#) (The Scottish Government 2008)

[Getting It Right For Every Child agenda](#)

[National Strategy for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse](#) (Scottish Executive, 2005)

[A place of greater safety](#) (Co-ordinated action against domestic abuse CAADA 2012)

[Beyond Violence: Breaking cycles of domestic abuse](#) (The Centre for Social Justice, 2012)

[Literature Review: Better Outcomes for Children and Young People Experiencing Domestic Abuse – Directions for Good Practice](#) (Scottish Government, 2008)

[Help for male victims of domestic abuse – Men's Advice Line website](#)

[Domestic abuse and gender inequality: An overview of the current debate \(Centre for Research on Family and Relationships, 2013\)](#)

[Stronger Together: Guidance for women's services on the inclusion of transgender women \(Tayside VAW Training Consortium / LGBT Youth Scotland 2011\)](#)

[Out of sight, out of mind? Transgender People's Experiences of Domestic Abuse \(LGBT Youth Scotland / Equality Network 2010\)](#)

Where do you go? Who do you tell? Consultation on the needs of gay, bisexual and transgender men who experience domestic abuse in Scotland (LGBT Scotland 2012).

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Appendix 1

BACKGROUND

Domestic abuse is costly, in both financial and human terms. Research has estimated that the cost of domestic abuse to the Scottish public purse is £2.3 billion. The costs are high, principally because opportunities for early intervention and prevention are missed routinely, leading to more expensive interventions later.

The monetary impact of dealing with domestic abuse is less significant than the costs to society. The ripple effects are long-term and far reaching; not just for the individuals and their children, but for the wider community. Domestic abuse features heavily in the lives of children on the Child Protection Register, looked after children, young offenders and in those displaying bullying and disruptive classroom behaviour. Domestic abuse is also a feature in the lives of many people with mental health problems, people who misuse alcohol and drugs and women offenders. It is a factor in many violent crime figures, including murder, and in a substantial number of homeless applications and disputed child contact cases, which tie up family courts.

The number of domestic incidents recorded by Police Scotland has increased steadily over the last four years to around 5300 in Edinburgh. In approximately 45% of these incidents, children were identified as present or resident in the home. These figures are concerning. Witnessing or experiencing domestic abuse represents one of the most serious risks to children in our society. This is reflected in the number of cases added to the Edinburgh Child Protection Register. Between August 2011 and July 2012, domestic abuse was identified as a concern in 40% of all registrations. As well as the risks related to domestic abuse, there is also a significant correlation with other child protection issues. Where domestic abuse is identified, it is related to emotional abuse in just over half the cases; parental alcohol and drug misuse in over a third; neglect and physical abuse in just under a quarter, and sexual abuse in just under a tenth.

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on the adult victim. Far from being limited to physical assault, the abuse can have a long-term emotional and psychological impact, which can cause knock-on effects to almost every other area of their life. Similarly, the physical, psychological and emotional effects of domestic abuse on children can be severe and long-lasting. Domestic abuse can disrupt a child's environment profoundly, undermining their stability and damaging their physical, mental and emotional health. Domestic abuse during pregnancy also has a long-term and wide-ranging impact on the mother and child.

The response of services to both the victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse is critical. Given its widespread nature, it is likely that it will be uncovered in a range of settings when services are engaging with families in Edinburgh. Whilst it is essential to guarantee that there are specialist services to tackle domestic abuse, we also need to ensure that professionals across all service areas know what to do when they interact with known or suspected perpetrators or victims. It is not enough for mainstream services to rely on referral to specialist resources, and a coordinated, informed response from universal and generic children and adult services is essential.

Edinburgh benefits from highly skilled professionals who are passionate in this field and are already at the forefront of innovation. Further co-ordination across all stakeholders will avoid responses becoming fractured and therefore less effective. Effective joint working, based on shared principles and priorities support positive outcomes for victims and their children. It is important that perpetrators are not left unaccountable for their actions, free to continue to abuse their current or future partners. The current change in focus from Police Scotland to the increased targeting of perpetrators is welcome and will form an integrated part of this work. By agreeing a shared understanding of the issues, progress can be made towards a consistent and better integrated approach. This document highlights domestic abuse as a priority in all areas of public protection, and sets out the key shared principles of effective intervention.