

Guide 4

Perpetrators



Iùl 4
Luchd-adhbharachaidh

Introduction

A lot of staff are in contact with perpetrators of gender based violence, for example, Children and Families Social Workers, Police Officers, GPs, Health Visitors and Midwives. It is important that we develop good practice when working with perpetrators of abuse in order to challenge their behaviour. This should be done where possible and safe to do so in order to protect women, children and young people. In the past, staff have been concerned about addressing issues with perpetrators of abuse, however, we must ensure that perpetrators of abuse do not remain 'invisible' to services. When this happens we can focus on the abused person as the cause of the problem and expect them to be able to change the perpetrator's behaviour. It is unacceptable to put the abused person in this position.

The way you engage with perpetrators will depend on your role and whether they are directly acknowledging their problem, seeking help for a related problem, or have been identified by others as abusive. The extent of your involvement will also depend on your agency and your role.

All staff must:

- Be aware of the ways in which a person perpetrating abuse may present in services.
- Acknowledge that people always have a choice not to be abusive and that the vast majority of people make that choice everyday.
- Be knowledgeable about the myths that exist about why Violence Against Women happens.

Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

For domestic abuse, in particular, there are a number of **good practice** points, which are outlined here. You can:

- Be clear that abuse is always unacceptable.
- Be clear that abusive behaviour is a choice.
- Affirm any accountability shown by the perpetrator.
- Be positive and aware of judgements that you may make – the person can change if they want to.
- Be clear that you might have to speak to other agencies and that there is no entitlement to confidentiality if children are at physical or emotional risk.
- Whatever the perpetrator says, being aware that on some level, they are unhappy about their behaviour.
- Be aware, and tell the perpetrator that children are always affected by living with

it, whether or not they witness it directly.

- Be aware, and convey to the perpetrator, that domestic abuse is about a range of behaviours, not just physical violence.
- Be encouraging and don't back the perpetrator into a corner or expect an early full and honest disclosure about the extent of the abuse.
- Be aware of the barriers to the perpetrator acknowledging their abuse and seeking help (such as shame, fear of child protection processes, and self-justifying behaviours).
- Be aware of the likely costs to him of the continued abuse and assisting him to see these.
- If you are in contact with both partners, **always** see them separately if you are discussing the abuse.
- When working with perpetrators you can understand some of the underlying causes that the perpetrator says are the reason why they are abusive (for example they were abused as a child) but still not

excusing the behaviour or colluding with it. Making it clear that while you may hear what the perpetrator is saying that you cannot go along with their behaviour. Encourage them to get support to address the underlying causes – help them access help from appropriate agencies.

Source: A Guide for Health Care Staff in NHS Lothian: Domestic Abuse Toolkit (2007), NHS Lothian

Practices that are unhelpful for perpetrators of domestic abuse:

- Anger Management courses will not help with the abuse and will not protect their partner, ex-partner or children.
- Substance misuse treatments alone will not reduce the frequency of the abuse.
- Family mediation will not work as one partner has been controlling the other – they are not 'equal' partners.
- Focussing on the abused person as the cause of the problem removes responsibility away from the perpetrator.

Warning

A growing body of evidence highlights that men who perpetrate Violence Against Women, in particular, domestic abuse, may claim to be victims of women's violence. This is borne out locally with our MARAC statistics. Whilst all allegations of abuse must be taken seriously, it is vital that this fact is recognised by staff. It may also be appropriate to seek information from other services to clarify the situation, e.g. is there a police history of abuse or is the family already in contact with Social Work services.

Source: What does research tell us about male victims of domestic abuse? (2010), Respect & Domestic Abuse Against Men in Scotland (2002), The Scottish Executive.

