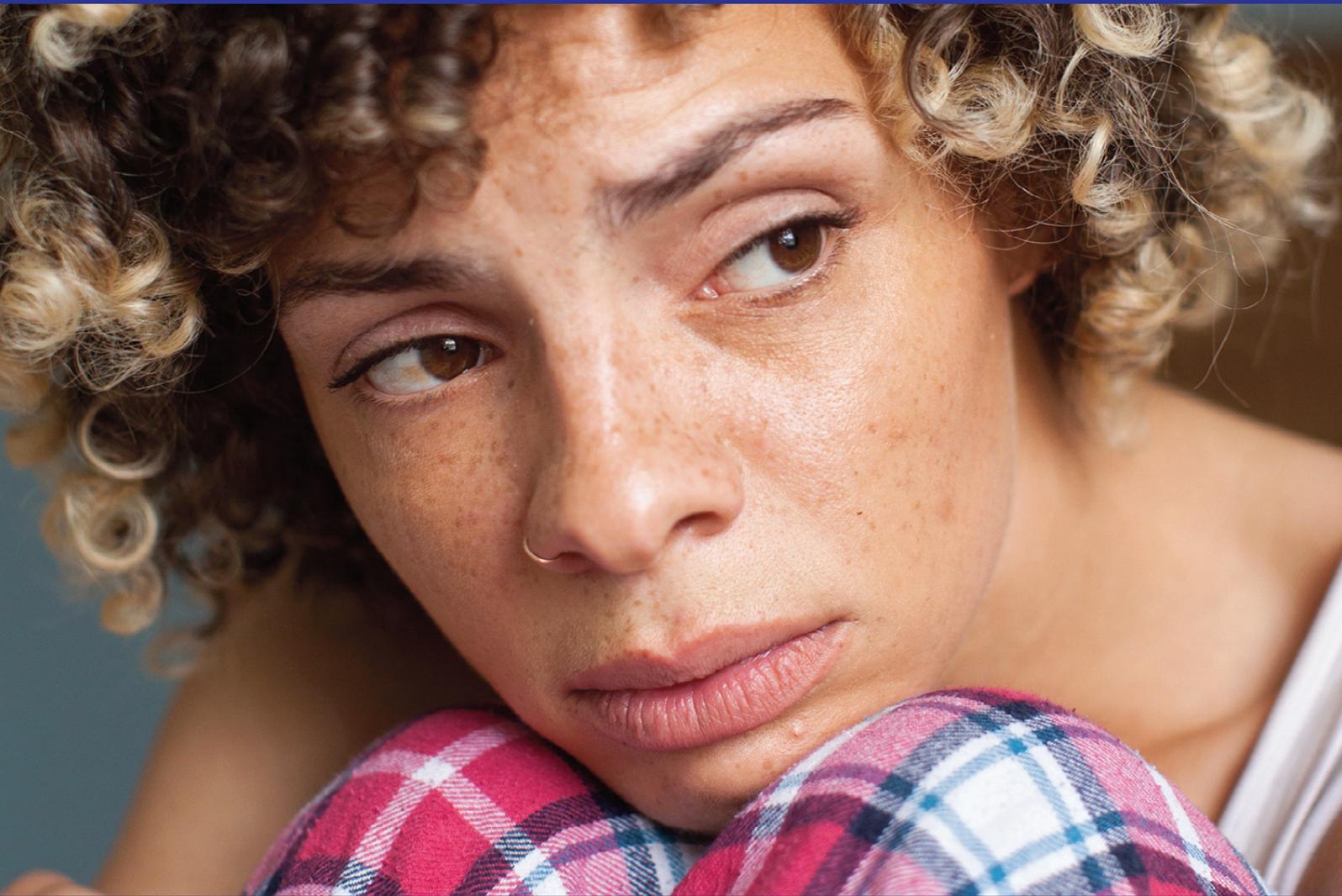


SASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers



Domestic abuse and child welfare: a practice guide for social workers





Domestic abuse and child welfare: a practice guide for social workers

This guide aims to support social workers to respond effectively to domestic abuse, with a particular focus on situations where children are involved.

It covers:

- understanding domestic abuse
- relevant legislation and policy
- supporting adult survivors
- supporting children
- working with perpetrators
- useful practice models
- links to other resources

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those involved in reviewing the guide, including individual social workers, Scottish Women's Aid and the Safer Families Project at City of Edinburgh Council. We are particularly grateful to the women from Saje Scotland, who provided invaluable feedback from the perspective of those who have lived with domestic abuse.

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Introduction

Domestic abuse is everywhere in social work, no matter what specialism you work in. It knows no cultural, class or race boundaries. It can happen in any intimate partnership but in most cases is perpetrated by men against women. In 2018-19 in Scotland in 4 out of 5 incidents (83%) where gender was recorded by police the perpetrator was male and the survivor female.¹

The Scottish Government's definition of domestic abuse recognises it as a form of gender-based violence.² This guide approaches domestic abuse from that perspective and in the broader context of gender inequality. It builds on a series of events held between 2017-2019 by SASW, Scottish Women's Aid and partners and is underpinned by a series of legislation, principles and codes that can be viewed in Appendix A. We know that domestic abuse does happen in other relationships, and there are some signposts to specialist services at the end of this guide.

Respect for human rights and promotion of social justice are core social work values, enshrined in BASW's Code of Ethics. Social workers empower people to make the changes necessary to live lives free of abuse and all its consequences. Our aim in producing this guide is to support you to embed principles of safe and effective approaches into your engagement with those experiencing domestic abuse and those responsible for it. It's about taking good social work practice and framing it within an understanding of the dynamics and impact of domestic abuse.

This is a core issue for our profession. One in four women experience domestic abuse. It is one of the most common reasons for children being placed on the child protection register and is [present in almost two-thirds of significant case reviews](#). It has links to offending, homelessness, mental health and substance use. Some groups can be

particularly vulnerable, for example those with learning disabilities. It exists in every arena in which social workers practice, and there is some excellent work going on to try to address it.

Yet research suggests that in some instances there's room for improvement in the response of social work and that of other services³. We must practice in a way which really recognises the experiences of those affected by domestic abuse and empowers them to achieve safety. In the context of child protection, we need to move away from a 'failure to protect' discourse that sees the responsibility for keeping children safe laid solely at the door of their mother, and move to an approach where we work with her to ensure the safety of the whole family. Domestic abuse is often a feature in repeat removals of children, suggesting that effective support could reduce the likelihood of this happening.⁴

There is plenty of powerful practice going on in Scotland and there are some useful models that we can draw on. Examples are included here that we hope can help keep practice moving in the right direction.

The guide is by no means an exhaustive manual. It signposts to other relevant resources, services and literature. It aims to offer a basis for practice, further study and enquiry. We hope it proves a helpful tool for making the case for adequate training and resources for all social workers to work confidently on this issue and spread awareness of it amongst colleagues in health, education and justice.

Whether you work in statutory or voluntary services, with children or adults, you'll come across people who have experienced, been affected by or have perpetrated domestic abuse. It might not be the presenting reason for your involvement, but you are in a key position to be able to identify and initiate action to address it. We hope this guide helps you in doing so.

¹ Scottish Government (2020)

² Scottish Government (2018)

³ Robins & Cook, 2018; Witt et al, 2018

⁴ Broadhurst & Mason, 2017



PART 1: UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC ABUSE

What is domestic abuse?

1. What it is and what it isn't

Domestic abuse is persistent and controlling behaviour by a partner or ex-partner, which causes physical, sexual and/or emotional harm. It is common but often concealed. In most cases, it is experienced by women and children and is perpetrated by men. Sometimes wider family and community members can be involved in the control. This can be a particular issue in some black and minority ethnic (BME) families.

Domestic abuse is **NOT** an isolated incident or a 'one-off'. Nor is it a fight or an argument between two people who are in an equal relationship. Rather it is a pattern of surveillance and domination by one partner over the other, where fear is not just a by-product, but a central tactic used by the perpetrator. We'll look at what that pattern can look like shortly. It may, but does not have to, include physical violence.

2. Different typologies of violence

It is important to be able to distinguish between different types of what Michael P Johnson calls 'intimate partner violence'. He sets out three 'typologies of violence' – each type is different from the other in origin, nature and consequence.⁵

They are:

Intimate terrorism. This is the pattern of controlling behaviour outlined above and as such is domestic abuse. It is important to understand that children in these situations are taken hostage every bit as much as the adult victim. Intimate terrorism is not an expression of frustration but is used with intent to control the partner.

Violent resistance. This occurs when victims of intimate terrorism/domestic abuse act to defend themselves and/or their children or retaliate against the perpetrator's abuse. Often it can be the culmination of years of living with intimate terrorism. It can lead to a victim being labelled as a

perpetrator or being viewed as 'giving as good' as the perpetrator.

Situational couple violence. This is where disagreement arises and conflict – verbal and/or physical – ensues. The violence may be extreme, but it is not part of a pattern of other controlling behaviours by one partner to maintain dominance over the other. This use of violence represents an expression (however unacceptable) of frustration and tension.

This guide focuses mostly on intimate terrorism (sometimes called coercive control). Although some of the key principles outlined will be useful to apply in cases of situational couple violence, the differences in motivation and impact in each of these typologies means that different interventions are generally required to support all those involved. For example, where couple counselling or anger management might be effective in cases of situational couple violence, it would be wholly unsafe and inappropriate where intimate terrorism is the situation because of the perpetrator's controlling behaviour. Careful assessment is important to ascertain what the situation is to ensure the proper intervention.

3. How do perpetrators exert control?

Physical violence – of different levels and frequency – can feature but may not (for further reading on the nature and dynamics of coercive control try reading Luke and Ryan Hart's book *Operation Lighthouse*).⁶ Women can also often experience high levels of sexual violence and financial control. The perpetrator builds a world in which the victim is constantly monitored and criticised. Every move is checked against an unpredictable, ever-changing, unknowable 'rule book'.

⁵ Johnson, M P (2010)

⁶ Hart, R & L (2019)

Other tactics include isolation, degradation, mind-games, and the micro regulation of everyday life. The monitoring of phone calls and social media (women are often forced to divulge passwords), dress, food consumption, social activity and use of medication are also common tactics. These often go unnoticed by the outside world.

Surveillance continues even when the perpetrator is not present (constant phone calls, using children to report on movement, using location services on mobile phones, using smart home devices etc). Experiencing this kind of abuse is like being taken hostage: the victim becomes captive in a real/unreal world created by the perpetrator, entrapped in an environment of confusion, contradiction and fear.

Women (and their children) are sometimes killed by a partner or ex-partner, with the point of a woman leaving the perpetrator being a particularly vulnerable time.

4. What is the impact on children?

Children are not just affected by domestic abuse, they experience it. Research suggests that coercive control/intimate terrorism can have a negative impact on children and young people equal to that of physically violent domestic abuse.⁷

The harmful impacts include:

- **Control of time, movement and activities within the home.** Children and young people can be affected by the control imposed on their mother. Children and mothers can be restricted in the time they can spend together and the capacity to enjoy each other's company. This can undermine their relationship, depriving children of feeling stable, protected and nurtured.
- **Restricted space to act.** Children's freedom to act and speak may be restricted by the rules imposed by the perpetrator; for example, not being able to play or have friends over, or being made to keep quiet.
- **Isolation from sources of support.** Control of the mother's movements outside the family home can also negatively impact on children, who may not be allowed to see friends and other family members (for example, grandparents), or take part in extra-curricular activities. This deprives children of the resilience-building influence of positive relationships and connections outside the family home.

Child Contact

Coercive control can continue after separation from an abusive partner. Child contact and legal proceedings are often used by the perpetrator as a means of maintaining and continuing to exert control over the woman's life and that of children. Children often continue to be used as a means of monitoring their mother's actions and are under pressure to report back to the perpetrator.

5. How does the law treat domestic abuse?

Until recently the most common charge used for domestic abuse related crimes was "alarming and threatening behaviour" under section 38 of the **Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010**. A range of other charges might be brought including stalking offences under the same Act, assault, or sexual offences. The **Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016** allows for a domestic aggravator to be applied to any individual offence committed against a partner or ex-partner to draw the court's attention to the nature and seriousness of the offence.

The **Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018**, which came into force on 1st April 2019, creates a "course of conduct" offence intended to cover ongoing patterns of behaviour where a person is abusive towards a partner or ex-partner. As well as physical abuse, it specifically covers other forms of emotional, financial and psychological abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour that could not be easily prosecuted under pre-existing law. It is important to be aware that many victims will experience abuse and there will be no police involvement and/or no conviction. **Given the nature of coercive control it is vital that social workers do not rely on either of these to judge the severity or impact of abuse being experienced. They should also not conclude that the absence of any criminal justice involvement proceedings throws doubt on the veracity of the victim's experience.**

⁷ Katz, E (2016)



The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 also introduces a statutory aggravator when domestic abuse involves or affects a child. This includes a child hearing, seeing or being present during an abusive incident.

The **Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006** includes domestic abuse in its definition of factors that a court must consider when making decisions about Parental Responsibilities and Rights (PRRs) and the welfare of the child. The **Children's Hearing Act (Scotland) 2011** (section 67 (f)) created a specific referral ground relating to domestic abuse and permits referral to the Reporter in the course of relevant proceedings (section 62).

6. What other key policy and guidance should I know about?

The **National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland, 2014** highlights that:

- Domestic abuse can profoundly disrupt a child's environment, undermining their stability and damaging their physical, mental and emotional health.
- If the non-abusive parent/carer is not safe, it is unlikely the children will be. Supporting the adult victim of domestic abuse ultimately supports the child.
- The impact of domestic abuse on a child should be understood as a consequence of the perpetrator choosing to use violence rather than the non-abusing parent's/carer's failure to protect.

Scotland's overarching strategy to eradicate violence against women is called **Equally Safe**. Drawn up jointly by the Scottish government and local authorities umbrella body COSLA, it sets out a vision for a Scotland where women and girls are safe, respected, equal and free from all forms of violent and abusive behaviour.

[A joint protocol between Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service \(COPFS\)](#) on the investigation and prosecution of domestic abuse has been developed with the specific input of Scottish Women's Aid. This public facing document is helpful in setting out the procedures that will be followed by police and the COPFS in responding to reports of domestic abuse, the investigation and evidentiary processes needed, and how the prosecution will be dealt with. It includes support available for women and children as vulnerable witnesses. It is recommended that you familiarise yourself with this document.

In addition, victims of crime have specific rights in relation to access to information about the police investigation, prosecution, court's decision on sentencing and release of prisoners. These are set out in a [Victim's Code and Standards of Service](#) for the relevant statutory agencies. Awareness of these rights and the obligations on statutory services will be helpful to you and the people you support. More can be found [here](#)

Five-minute reflection

- Do you feel confident distinguishing between domestic abuse and other forms of violence that might exist in a relationship?
- Do you know why you should not rely on police involvement and/or a conviction when judging the severity of abuse someone is experiencing?
- Can you list some of the tactics perpetrators might use to control people's behaviour?
- Does leaving an abusive relationship equal safety?



PART 2: RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

Working with survivors

1. Understand what is really going on

The foundation for good practice in supporting women who have experienced domestic abuse is an awareness of the dynamics of coercive control, as discussed in the previous section. The next thing we need to do is try to understand what is going on in a particular situation, so that we can act appropriately. To do this we must really listen to women's accounts of their experience and feelings, look beyond individual incidents, identify patterns of abuse, and explore the impact on the whole family.

Before engaging with a survivor ask yourself:

- What do I know about what is going on in this family?
- What gaps are there in my knowledge?
- What questions can I ask to help me understand what the pattern of abuse is and how it's impacting on the woman and the family as a whole?
- How does the pattern of abuse impact on this person's education, employment and income?
- How is it affecting her housing and health?
- What about social activities, family connections and friendships?
- How can I engage her in this assessment in a way which doesn't place the responsibility for safety with her?

2. Recognise strengths

It is important to highlight what a woman is doing to protect herself and her children despite the abuse she is experiencing. For example, she might be keeping her children in a routine, making sure they are fed and clothed, making sure they get to school and to medical appointments. Although these sound like everyday parenting tasks, imagine how challenging it might be to perform them when every aspect of your life is controlled and subject to surveillance.

Ask her about her experiences, help her to identify abusive behaviours and explore how they impact on everyone involved. Remember each woman

and child will experience abuse in different ways and have developed individual and family coping strategies. It's important that each person in the family is listened to, their feelings validated, and account taken of their protective efforts.

Instead of "why does she not just leave?" ask yourself "why does she stay?" Try listing, together with her, the reasons she is still in the relationship. This will help build an understanding of the barriers to leaving. These can include financial dependence, social isolation, low self-esteem, threats (to the woman, children, extended family members, pets) and simply having nowhere to go.

Consider the impact of wider issues such as mental health, substance use, socio-economic status. Do they exacerbate the abuse? Is there a causal link? Domestic abuse can have an impact on mental health and drug or alcohol use. There are other factors which can be used by the perpetrator to secure and maintain power, for example controlling/administering alcohol, drugs or prescribed medication. Are wider socio-economic issues having an impact?

Consider for example race, religion, poverty, disability, sexuality, gender identity, immigration status and how these might impact on a woman's potential to leave an abusive relationship. Perpetrators are likely to threaten to share intimate knowledge they hold about a woman with friends, family, co-workers, for example information about their sexuality or previous relationships. Research suggests women in rural areas are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse and find it harder to access support and to leave.⁸ Women with insecure immigration status, who may have no recourse to public funds, face extra barriers to leaving.

Be aware of these and make yourself familiar with organisations who have specialist knowledge about such concerns (see links to Shakti Women's Aid, Amina Women's Resource Centre).

What is the perpetrator's position in the community? Is he someone who is admired/revered/feared? How might this impact on her decision to leave and her options for

⁸ National Rural Crime Network (2019)

A note on language

Think about the way you frame questions to a survivor of domestic abuse. Instead of 'why haven't you/why didn't you...?' try asking 'what does that mean for you?' 'how does that feel? how does it impact on you and/or children?' 'what do you think might happen if...?' 'what do you want to happen?'. Reflect this in your recording as well. Remember that what goes into a report often forms the picture a Sheriff or another decision-maker has of what is going on in a family. Try to frame things around what she has done despite his behaviour and place the responsibility for abuse with the perpetrator, not the survivor.

support? We must thoroughly examine the risks a woman might face in leaving and what they need to weigh up when considering their safety. In doing so we must not make assumptions but carry out assessments in partnership with women.

3. Don't see it as a 'stay or go' choice

Understand that it is not a simple choice between "stay" or "go". Not when she's been cut off from family and friends, has no access to finances, he's threatened to kill her and/or her children, her self-esteem has been destroyed, she feels ashamed, humiliated and terrified.

Even if she can get out, where does she go, who can help, will people even believe her? And we know that after a relationship ends, the abuse does not necessarily finish. It can continue and indeed escalate, and it can go unrecognised by those not immediately impacted. The majority of domestic homicides happen shortly after a woman leaves an abusive relationship. 55% of women killed by their ex-partner or spouse in 2017 were killed within the first month of separation and 87% in the first year.⁹

When there are children involved, mothers can find themselves in a 'catch 22' situation, and staying put can sometimes seem like a safer option than leaving. We need to explore how we make sense of a woman's actions in such a situation, and to do so we must keep in mind those of the perpetrator.

As social workers we must support people to make the changes they need to and support mothers to look after their children. This involves recognising and appreciating all the factors that are preventing her from doing so, and not holding her to account for those which are beyond her control.

We must be careful to practice in a way which does not lay the responsibility for protection of her children solely at her own feet. We should not insist she takes action that ultimately puts her and

her children at further risk. Account must be taken of trauma and complex needs that might co-exist and intersect with domestic abuse. [The NES National Trauma Training Framework](#) indicates standards for child and family workers at the trauma enhanced level.

Effective support for children

1. Listen and validate

Each child in a family will experience abuse differently. We cannot assume that each sibling in a family will have the same recollections or feelings. Give each child the opportunity to talk about how they feel and what the impact has been for them.

Children will often internalise responsibility for the abuse, and indeed they may have heard messages from the perpetrator which affirm this. It's also common for a child to hold their mother to account, especially if the perpetrator has outwardly blamed her, for example using something she has done or omitted to do as justification for his actions. It's worth taking some time to explore with a child that domestic abuse is never a child or a mother's fault, that we're each responsible for our own behaviour, not that of others, stressing that everyone has a choice about how they react to situations.

Validate their feelings and try not to judge children for actions they might have taken, or choices made in an abusive situation. Often children feel an obligation to try and intervene in an abusive situation, especially where their mother is getting hurt, and this can result in them being physically hurt themselves. Explain why it is not safe to intervene while helping them to recognise that there are things they can do to try and keep themselves safe and to get help.

⁹ Femicide Census: 2017 Findings

2. How can I help children to keep safe?

Work with a child to develop a safety plan which is realistic and removes any responsibility for abuse, or for intervening in abusive situations, from them. Research suggests that listening to children and involving them in planning and decision-making can have a positive impact on their ability to cope.¹⁰

A safety plan is a tool you can use with women and children to help them plan their response should an abusive situation occur. It can help children to feel safer as they have thought about what they can do to get help. It can be a written plan, suited to the child's age and stage, and it can involve activities such as drawing round your hand and naming people you could talk to/ask for help on each finger, or using a doll's house to explore safe places to go in the house.

As well as how to get help, support the child to think about who they can speak to about their feelings. If you're using a written plan with a child, remember to speak to them about who they want to share the plan with and where they will keep it. Understand and acknowledge why a child might try and intervene when abuse is happening but support them to think about action they can take which does not place them at greater risk, for example finding a place to be physically safe, contacting someone they trust. It is important to emphasise to the child (ren) you are working with that keeping themselves safe does not mean that they are failing to protect their mothers.

The Cedar network website has a short animation called '[Mikey and Jools Keep Safe](#)'. The film and the accompanying guidance notes can be used with young children when looking at safety planning.

Local Cedar Projects and Women's Aid organisations will have examples of safety plans you can use with children and women. See Appendix B & C for examples.

Children who've been exposed to domestic abuse may be at increased risk of other forms of abuse. Talking to children about safety in general, how to recognise unsafe situations and how to get help, is good practice.

3. Who else can help?

There are specific supports available for children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse.

Local Women's Aid organisations can often provide 1:1 or group support for children, and they do not have to be in refuge to access this. They can provide support while children are still living in the abusive situation.

Other organisations, such as the Cedar Project (in several areas of Scotland) provide a 12-week group to help children recover from their experiences of domestic abuse once they are safe from the abuse. Children's groups run concurrently with groups for mothers, with a focus on how the mother can support her child through recovery, and how their relationship (often damaged by domestic abuse) can be strengthened.

It can be difficult for children to talk about domestic abuse, for all sorts of reasons including fear and worry about being "different" and a desire not to upset others, especially their mother. But research tells us that children do want to talk, and they often especially want to talk to their mothers.

Mothers also struggle to talk to their children about what is or was going on. They too worry about causing distress, of bringing up things that are "in the past", of being judged for what they did or did not do. Often mothers are unsure how much their child knows or remembers of what went on.

Encouraging communication between children and mothers can help each of them to understand the other's actions and feelings and can be a huge part of the safety planning and recovery process. Try to offer support for this to happen. If there's a waiting list for specialist services, ask those services for some tools or resources that you might use yourself with the family to facilitate communication.

Domestic abuse can impact on a child's presentation and performance at school, and it's important that teachers have the information they need to understand and support a child. A good working relationship, and open channels of communication with a child's school is important, where appropriate, and taking account of the need for confidentiality. Ensuring relevant information is shared in a sensitive way can help improve the child's experience of school and facilitate positive, supportive relationships with school staff.

¹⁰ Mullender et al (2002)

Young people and domestic abuse

Remember that young people can experience domestic abuse in their own close relationships. Please bear this in mind when working with young people. Help them to understand what constitutes healthy behaviour in a relationship, and what to do to get help if they are concerned, either about their own behaviour or that of their partner.

Want to read more about this? Try these links:

<http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Young%20Lives%20web.pdf>

<https://library.nspcc.org.uk/HeritageScripts/Hapi.dll/search2?searchTerm0=C1739>

www.preventionplatform.co.uk/?page_id=2346

Assessing Risk

Every attempt should be made to keep a child with their non-abusing parent **whenever possible**. However, there are times when the child's safety simply cannot be assured and it's necessary for them to be separated. When this happens it's important to remain clear that the abuse is not the fault of the survivor and acknowledge all she's done to try to protect her child.

There are some models of risk assessment which you can find online but to date there is not one that deals comprehensively with coercive control. Another thing to remember about formal risk assessment tools is that they should be carried out by someone who is specifically trained, experienced and skilled in assessing risk in domestic abuse situations.

There are people in specialist organisations such as Women's Aid who meet those criteria, and wherever possible you should aim to carry out risk assessments in partnership with one of those specialists. It's a good idea to make sure you know who to contact in your locality who can support you with this. Good starting points are your local Women's Aid service or Violence Against Women Partnership.

Another point of contact is your local MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) Coordinator. A MARAC is a meeting where representatives of local organisations (statutory and non-statutory) meet to discuss the situations of people who are deemed to be at high risk due to domestic abuse. The focus is the safety of the adult survivor, but consideration is also made to the safety of any children involved, and links are made with organisations who can support this.

Five-minute reflection

- What is a 'failure to protect' discourse and why is it unhelpful when supporting women?
- Why it is not a simple 'stay or go' choice for women experiencing domestic abuse?
- What do you need to consider when speaking to women and children about their experiences of domestic abuse?
- Why is it important to give children a space to talk about their experiences and feelings?
- Why is safety planning important?

Intervening with perpetrators

1. Why is it important to engage with perpetrators?

It's an area which social workers can have concerns about or lack confidence with but engaging with perpetrators is essential if we are to accurately assess their risk to partners and to children. If we engage perpetrators effectively, we can also be more successful in persuading them to seek help.

Ideally, that help will come from specialist domestic abuse services. There is no substitute for the focused behavioural change work these offer. Unfortunately, across much of Scotland these programmes are only available to men on court orders.

Where this is the case other services that address substance use or mental health issues may help to reduce risk. It is important to emphasise that neither substance use nor mental health issues **cause** domestic abuse. They can, however, exacerbate the behaviour and increase risk.

2. What if a perpetrator is hard to engage?

Some men may refuse to engage with you. If this is happening, consider the barriers to engagement and reflect and record these in your assessment. Whether he does or doesn't engage, the man's behaviour, its impact and his willingness to acknowledge and change should be the focus of your assessment and intervention.

There are specific models of intervention which are perpetrator-focused (see the following section for examples). Keeping a perpetrator focus throughout your engagement with the whole family will help ensure that the formulation of plans will better reflect the experience of the family. It will mean interventions to address and manage risk and increase safety may be more effective.

3. Remember - safety is paramount

The primary purpose of this work must be the safety of women partners and children. For you to accurately assess a man's behaviour and ongoing risk to his partner, child/children and, in some cases himself, it is essential to attempt to contact his partner/partners as part of your assessment.

This should be a feature of any structured behaviour change work with men who abuse. That includes work that has been court mandated or voluntary. Contact and support should be offered

to their partners, including signposting to specialist domestic abuse support services.

Any intervention with an abusive man has the potential to increase risk. This means good risk assessment and risk management is essential.

This needn't be daunting. It may be that others can take the lead and it should always be a shared task with all other professionals involved.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACS), professionals' meetings and Risk Management Case Conferences (RMCC) can all be used in this regard.

Using validated tools specific to assessing domestic abuse risk is vital in informing these processes. The Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) is the one that is most widely used in Scotland and the one for which training is most readily available (the tool can only be used under licence once training has been undertaken).

It is important to consider your own safety too. Whilst most men who are abusive to intimate partners are not abusive or threatening towards professionals, some are. Certainly, initial assessments should be carried out in an office that has staff safety measures in place. This should generally be the case for any ongoing work.

4. Involving the non-abusive partner

Given that most abusive men will either continue to be in a relationship with, or have contact with their partner, strenuous attempts should be made to work in partnership with those women.

It is essential that women do not have unrealistic expectations that their partners will change as a result of any intervention. But they need to be aware that the work is being done and that they are able to inform risk assessments. This should ensure that their safety plans are more effective.

There may be other professionals involved with a man's partner. She might, for example, have support from a domestic abuse advocacy worker, a social worker from children or adults' services, a counsellor or an addiction worker. In such cases it might not be essential to work with her directly - you might be able to keep her informed and seek her views through those professionals.

Creating good and mutually respectful relationships with specialist support services working with women and children is crucial to working effectively and increasing safety around domestic abuse.

5. Motivation to change

Behavioural change work with abusive men should only be undertaken through specialist programmes. However, it is important to try to engage with perpetrators outside of these programmes, as part of your assessment and to help plan interventions.

Most men who choose to seek help are, at some level, unhappy about their behaviour. They may approach professionals through personal motivation to change, or because their partner or other professionals have encouraged them to do so.

They may also be motivated by a hope that they can mitigate the legal consequences of their behaviour. They might hope to boost their chances of having contact with children. Or they may wish to reconcile the relationship without a genuine understanding of the need to change their behaviour. It is important that the man's motives in "seeking help" are thoroughly explored.

Even where the man's motives are initially self-serving, it is possible to help him shift his motivation towards, for example being a better parent, or being more accountable for his abusive behaviour.

6. Applying core values

Engaging with a domestically abusive man who is seeking help, while certainly requiring an understanding of a range of causes underpinning domestic abuse, is largely about applying core social work values.

It is essential to work in a motivational way. Create the conditions where they can engage honestly. Be empathic. Listen reflectively. Developing discrepancy is important, as is "rolling with resistance", which we'll explore below.

It's crucial to let the man tell you his story, so you can understand the beliefs and attitudes that underlie his behaviour. This doesn't mean colluding. Reflect that you are listening and trying to understand his perspective, not that you agree with it.

Once you understand his beliefs and attitudes you can help him develop discrepancy. Ask him to describe the father/man he wants to be. Ask him to look at which behaviours, attitudes and beliefs are getting in the way of that.

"Rolling with resistance"¹¹ is simply recognising that direct confrontation is unlikely to work. He is likely to batten down the hatches, It is better to say,

"let's put that aside for now" and re-visit it when he is more ready to reevaluate these beliefs and attitudes.

Always remember that for many abusive men minimisation, denial and blame are defence mechanisms. They will often use them either to mitigate the consequences to the individuals, or against feeling the shame of their behaviour.

So, if you see minimisation, denial and blame don't assume it's because they're indifferent to the effects of their abuse. However, those that are will be the most difficult to engage and potentially the most risky.

7. Blame and trust

At the same time, because of the above, it's highly likely that in the early stages of your work with a man he will give you accounts of his – and indeed his partner's – behaviour that underplay his abuse and attempt to blame his partner.

It can be helpful to acknowledge this in the early stages and say that, for the reasons outlined above, you would not expect him to be entirely honest with a stranger. Tell him that you hope that by working together and establishing trust you will get to a place where he can be as honest as he will have to be if he is going to affect real and long-lasting change.

However, given all that, it is vital to be aware of the experiences and perceptions of his partner in relation to the abuse she has experienced.

It is therefore extremely helpful to meet her, if she is willing, or at least have some phone contact; knowing the woman's reality helps safeguard against collusion. If you have made every effort to engage with the man's partner without success, there are no other professionals involved with the partner and you have no historical information from the partner regarding his abusive behaviour, you should consider what her account of what he tells you might have been.

When working with perpetrators on a behavioural change programme it will be important to familiarise yourself with the Scottish Government's [Community Payback Order Practice Guidance](#) which contains helpful instruction around engaging with perpetrators and their partners.

¹¹ Miller, W.R., and Rollnick, S. *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People To Change Addictive Behavior*. New York: Guilford Press, 1991.

8. Perpetrators as fathers

A crucial step in our journey away from the failure to protect discourse is to hold men to account for their actions as fathers.

If a father exercises coercive control, he has made the choice to do so, and as such it must be viewed as a parenting choice. More positively, the experience of perpetrator programmes is that being a better father is one of the most positive motivating factors at our disposal, so focusing on being the best father he can be should be a major focus of behavioural change work.

It is essential to a GIRFEC and child-centred approach that we hold men to account for their abusive behaviour in every forum where the welfare of their children is discussed. When planning a child protection case conference, for example, ensure the father is invited and include his criminal justice social worker if he has one.

In this context, while acknowledging their abusive behaviour is unacceptable, it's less about condemning perpetrators for their actions and more about building working relationships with fathers so that they can begin to be open about – and be accountable for – their behaviour.

It is also likely to ensure that child protection agencies make more accurate and comprehensive assessments of men's parenting and risk to children. The focus must always be on his behaviour and on promoting behavioural change.

Five-minute reflection

- How can engaging with men lead to better assessments?
- Why is it important to involve the survivor in any work with the perpetrator?
- Is direct confrontation likely to be effective?
- Do we routinely hold men and women to equal standards of parenting?

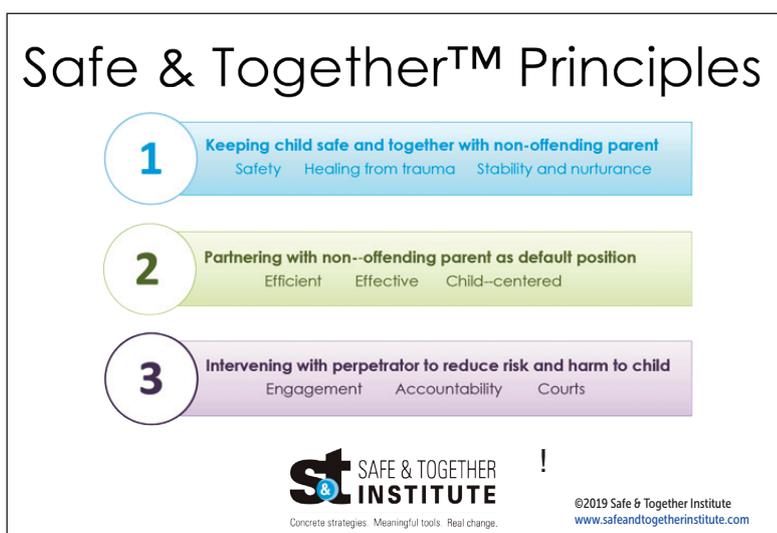




PART 3: MODELS OF INTERVENTION

There are different models of intervention, designed to support women, children and men. Here we will summarise two which are in use in parts of Scotland, and which have the backing of the Scottish Government.

1. The Safe and Together™ Model



The Safe & Together™ Model is an internationally recognised suite of tools and interventions designed to help child welfare professionals become domestic abuse informed. The Scottish Programme for Government 2019-2020 has outlined a commitment to promote the principles of the Safe & Together™ Model and over half the local authorities in Scotland have undertaken training in how to use the Safe & Together™ tools and approach.

This child-centred model derives its name from the concept that children are best served when we can work toward keeping them safe and together with the non-offending parent (the adult domestic abuse survivor). The Safe & Together™ Model provides a framework for partnering with domestic abuse survivors and intervening with domestic abuse perpetrators in order to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children.

The Safe & Together™ approach can easily be imposed on our existing processes and systems – it simply requires us to think differently about what we already do. It fits well with other models currently in use and encourages us to move away from looking at individual incidents of abuse, to identifying patterns of behaviour, and exploring their impact on the family. Because it not only considers safety, but wider wellbeing, it fits with

Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) and enshrines the SHANARI indicators.

Remember that domestic abuse perpetration is a parenting choice. The Safe & Together™ Model advocates that where children are involved, and their safety is being considered to keep the perpetrator's actions at the fore. Explore his parenting choices, identify how his actions are impacting on the family.

Try to adopt a 'perpetrator pattern-based approach' (Mandel, 2019)¹². This is more than a 'perpetrator engagement' approach which has a limited focus on the practice of finding

and meeting with the perpetrator. A perpetrator pattern-based approach is applied regardless of whether the perpetrator is engaged or not.

It has the following characteristics:

- 1) the perpetrator's pattern of behaviour and choices are identified as the sole source of the harm to children caused by domestic abuse
- 2) the perpetrator is exclusively responsible for their own behaviours and choices
- 3) it applies high standards for men as parents, and
- 4) it understands the foundation of good child-centred domestic abuse practice rests on the ability to describe the specific behaviours of the domestic abuse perpetrator and their impact on child and family functioning.

"When domestic violence is the concern the perpetrator and his behaviour are the foundational source of the risk and safety concerns for children NOT the adult survivor or her behaviour."¹³

¹² Mandel, D. (2019). Safe & Together Model: Glossary of Terms. Safe & Together Institute.

¹³ Mandel, D. (2019). Safe & Together Model: CORE Training Participant Guide. Safe & Together Institute

- Try to hold a perpetrator pattern-based approach:
- At case conferences
- At core groups
- At children’s hearings
- In case notes and reports
- In conversations with other professionals
- In conversations with family members

The Safe & Together Institute is dedicated to:

- Advancing inquiry, knowledge, practice and collaboration related to a perpetrator pattern-based approach within the intersection of domestic abuse and children
- Developing a network of professionals, organisations and communities that work together to create domestic abuse informed-child welfare and related systems

It does this by providing:

- Organisational Assessment & Consultation
- CORE and Advanced Training
- Mapping and Other Practice Tools
- Coach and Trainer Certification
- Advocate Certification
- Data and Research
- E - Courses

Want to know more? To read more about:

- The Safe & Together Model visit: www.safeandtogetherinstitute.com
- For online learning and resources visit: <https://academy.safeandtogetherinstitute.com>
- Safe & Together Events in the UK visit: <https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/events-main/europe>

Or contact Anna Mitchell, Safe & Together Institute UK Lead – annamitchell@safeandtogetherinstitute.com

2. Working with perpetrators: the Caledonian System

The Caledonian System is an approach to working with perpetrators that has been developed in Scotland. It combines a court-ordered programme for men, aimed to bring about behaviour change, with services for women and children. There are moves to develop it further to include a non-court mandated programme, but so far only one local authority is offering this.

The key principles of the Caledonian System are:

- A ‘systems approach’. Working with men in isolation is potentially dangerous in terms of raising risk to women. The approach advocates working with the whole family, and combining services for men, women and children.
- Working towards ‘good lives’. The approach doesn’t just focus on the abusive behaviours, it looks at how men can be motivated to achieve goals for a better life.
- An ‘ecological model’ of behaviour. The model takes account of wider structures and systems and takes account of, for example, social stereotypes about gender roles and how these might impact on abusive behaviours.

Core elements of the Caledonian System are:

- A Men’s Programme. This lasts at least two years, is highly structured and is delivered by case managers and group workers.
- A Women’s Service. This offers information, safety planning, advice and emotional support to partners and ex-partners of men on the Men’s Programme. Women are under no obligation to take part in this, and it’s provided by dedicated women’s workers.
- A Children’s Service. This aims to ensure the needs and rights of children are upheld. It is provided by dedicated children’s workers.

Want to know more? To read more about:

For more details about Caledonian and how it works visit: www.gov.scot/publications/caledonian-system-evaluation-analysis-programme-tackling-domestic-abuse-scotland/pages/1

Appendix A

This practice guide is underpinned by the following legislation, principles and codes.

- The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. Controlling, coercive and manipulative behaviour is now fully recognised as an offence, account is taken of the damage and hurt that non-physical abuse can cause, and includes abuse carried out by former as well as current partners. It has been described as ‘world leading’ legislation which ‘could change Scotland forever’. We need to ensure that our practice reflects the positive change to the legislative landscape.
www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2018/5/contents/enacted
- All policies and procedures established by the Scottish Government in respect to the welfare and protection of children and adults.
- Equally Safe: joint Scottish Government and COSLA strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls
www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/pages/1
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Domestic abuse is a human and children’s rights issue.
www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights
www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf
- The overarching principles of social work – respect for worth and dignity, for diversity, doing no harm, and upholding human rights and justice
www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work
- The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers
www.sssc.uk.com/the-scottish-social-services-council/sssc-codes-of-practice
- BASW Code of Ethics. All BASW/SASW members sign up to this code, which has underpinned social work practice since 1975.
www.basw.co.uk/about-basw/code-ethics

Appendix B – Example of a Child’s Safety Plan

My name is:

and this is *My Safety Plan*

If there are angry actions or words in my house

I can't stop it
but

This is what I can do:



1 GET OUT OF THE WAY!

2 Find a safe place

In my house this is:

.....

.....

.....

**3 If it is SAFE,
phone the police**

Dial 999

Say my name is:

.....

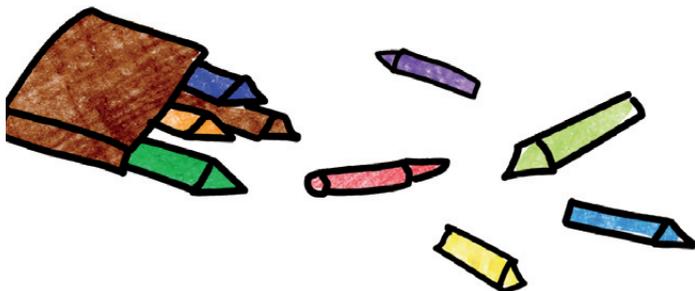
Say my address is:

.....

Say what is happening:

.....

.....



4

I can also get help from:

.....



6

If I am hurt
I will tell:

.....

5

Later I can talk to:

.....



7

It is ok to feel:

.....

8

The people who know about this plan are:

Me

family

others

Name:

date:

Appendix 3 – Example of a Young Persons Safety Plan

My Safety Plan



If we have an argument on a date and I feel unsafe, I will:

(Who could I call to get a safe ride home? What would I do if I'm left in an isolated area? Do I have a mobile phone?)

If we have an argument at school and I feel unsafe, I will:

(Who could help you? Where could you be safe at school? Which teacher or staff member do you trust?)

If we have an argument in a house and I feel unsafe, I will:

I will use this word as my code word with my family and friends so that they can call for help:

What's your worst fear if you leave?

What's your worst fear if you stay?

Who can you talk it through with?

What can you do to feel safer (if you stay or go)?

What strengths do you have to help you through this tough time?

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www.basw.co.uk/about-basw/code-ethics

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National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland, 2014 (This is currently under revision, due for publication in 2020)

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland/>

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www.basw.co.uk/resources/refuge-and-asylum-scotland-guidance-no-recourse-public-funds

Safe Young Lives: Young People and domestic abuse.

<http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Young%20Lives%20web.pdf>

Further Reading

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Other Resources

General

<https://womensaid.scot>

Scottish Women’s Aid can provide information about training and services, and local Women’s Aid groups across Scotland, as well as publication and research.

<https://sdafmh.org.uk> **0800 0271234**

Scotland’s Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline, open 24 hours a day

www.zerotolerance.org.uk

Zero Tolerance is a Scottish charity working to end men’s violence against women by promoting gender equality and by challenging attitudes which normalise violence and abuse.

<https://womenssupportproject.co.uk>

The Women’s Support Project is a feminist voluntary organisation working to raise awareness of the extent, causes and effect of male violence against women, and for improved services for those affected by violence.

www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Rape Crisis Scotland are a charity working to end sexual violence. There are local centres across Scotland. Free national helpline **08088 010302**

www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk

The Scottish Women’s Rights Centre provides a free helpline and face to face confidential legal advice. **08088 010 789** (see website for opening hours)

www.scotland.police.uk/contact-us/disclosure-scheme-for-domestic-abuse-scotland

Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland. Application can be made to check whether someone has a history of domestic abuse.

<https://www.sajescotland.org>

Saje Scotland provides support for women in Fife experiencing domestic abuse, including the Freedom Programme. Their website has useful resources including a section on safety planning for women. They have also published a book: **Her-story Rewritten: true stories of women and girls surviving partner abuse** (2019) Saje Scotland.

Publish Nation www.lulu.com/shop/product-24275643.html and

www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B07ZGFMW4S

Services for BME women and children

<https://shaktiedinburgh.co.uk>

Shakti Women's Aid is based in Edinburgh and the Lothians, with an outreach service in Fife, Dundee and Forth Valley. They offer information and support to Black Minority Ethnic women, children and young people experiencing and/or fleeing domestic abuse.

<https://mwrc.org.uk>

Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre Awareness raises awareness, trains and campaigns to address key issues and needs of Muslim women and girls living in Scotland, including VAWG.

www.hematgryffe.org.uk

Based in Glasgow, Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid provide support and refuge services for BME women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

Children

www.cedarnetwork.org.uk

The Cedar Network. Cedar is a unique way of working with women and children who have experienced domestic abuse. As well as useful information and resources, the website contains contact details for local Cedar projects in 11 areas across Scotland.

<https://womensaid.scot/information-support/children-young-people>

Information about children's experiences and ideas on how to help.

www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/domestic-abuse

Advice and information if you're worried about a child who might be experiencing domestic abuse.

Abused men

<https://abusedmeninscotland.org>

AMIS provide information and support to men who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse.

See also Fearfree (below)

LGBTQI+

www.galop.org.uk

UK specialist LGBTQI+ anti-violence charity. Advice, support and advocacy to people who have experienced hate crime, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Includes National LGBTQI+ Domestic Abuse Helpline **0800 999 5428** (see website for opening times).

<https://fearfree.scot>

Support for people experiencing domestic abuse who identify as a man or from the LGBTQI+ community.

www.brokenrainbow.org.uk

LGBTQI+ domestic violence charity offering advice and support.

Older people

www.wearehourglass.scot/scotland

Hourglass are working to protect older people from all forms of harm, abuse and neglect, including domestic abuse.

www.safelives.org.uk/spotlight-1-older-people-and-domestic-abuse

A spotlight on older people who experience domestic abuse. Website includes link to their report which has policy and practice recommendations.

Allcock, A (2018) Older women and domestic abuse. ESSS Outline, IRISS.

www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/older-women-abuse

Women with disabilities

Of course, women with disabilities can access all the services above, but below are some specialist resources which might be useful.

www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/the-survivors-handbook-disabled-women

Information, advice and useful links for disabled women experiencing domestic abuse.

http://safelives.org.uk/practice_blog/recognising-and-supporting-disabled-victims-domestic-abuse

A spotlight, including case studies, on the particular experiences of disabled women experiencing domestic abuse.

www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Our-bodies-our-rights--Identifying-and-removing-barriers-to-disabled-womens-reproductive-rights-in-Scotland.pdf

Report by Engender on disabled women's rights as parents. Includes a section on disabled women's experiences of violence.

Cite as: SASW. (2020). *Domestic abuse and child welfare: a practice guide for social workers*.
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SASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers

www.basw.co.uk/scotland