

## Learning Bulletin “Safeguarding is Everybody’s Business”

Welcome to the 2nd MKSCB Learning Bulletin. We have developed this bulletin to ensure that Milton Keynes practitioners have access to information from Serious Case Reviews both nationally and locally; including learning and evidence of good practice.

### *Our theme this time is Domestic Abuse (DA)<sup>1</sup> ...The Local Context:*



Locally, agencies work toward the Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Abuse. This involves all agencies working together to reduce risk and increase the safety of victims. This is about working with the Perpetrator, Victim and Children. Establishing a clear picture of DA patterns is extremely difficult. For example, a high level of reporting of DA is not necessarily synonymous with occurrence as victims are more likely to report and seek help when they feel confident in local agencies. Conversely, many incidents of DA are thought to go unreported because a victim may experience an ongoing pattern of abuse, rather than a one-off incident. Moreover, DA is often obscured or hidden due to the subtle forms that abuse can take such as threats, intimidation and coercion. Victims are often scared to come forward. On average a victim will experience 5 incidents of DA before they will seek help and support.

*Between April 2014 and October 2015 an average of 590 incidents of Domestic Abuse were reported to Thames Valley Police each month (for MK). Spikes in reports of Domestic Abuse were recorded in July 2014 and 2015.*

The responsibility for the violence rests with the perpetrator but there are some factors that increase the risk within a DA relationship, including:

**Substance Misuse; Parental Mental health; History of Violence; Young parents can be vulnerable; Non engagement in services offered; Different cultural norms; Possible ‘Triggers’ can include pregnancy, separation, breakdown of relationships<sup>2</sup>**

**The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare’s Law)** allows members of the public and professionals to request disclosure by the police to a potential victim of their partner’s history of domestic abuse. The scheme was recommended following the murder of Clare Wood in 2009 by her former partner, who had a history of domestic abuse. The aims of The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme are to enable a potential victim to:

-  Make informed choices regarding their relationship with their partner.
-  Take steps to better protect themselves and their children from the risk of harm from their partner.

The potential victim and the subject must be, or have been, in an intimate relationship.



### How you can use this information...

- Embed the learning into your single agency training
- Ensure your practitioners are aware of the learning

**Worried about a child? Call MK Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

**01908 253169**

**Questions?**

**MKSCB**

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<sup>1</sup> Domestic Abuse is defined as: **Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behavior, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological ; physical; sexual ; financial; emotional**

<sup>2</sup> For information about risk factors in regard to DA see this link

<http://www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk/uploads/pdfs/One%20Page%20High%20Risk%20Factor%20Definitons%20for%20Domestic%20Abuse.pdf>

It has been identified within a number of SCRs around the UK including local learning, that while assessing the risk posed to women and children who are experiencing DA, men within and around the family are not always included in the risk assessment process, which in turn can allow for non-identification of risks which maybe posed.

**NSPCC Key Points from National Learning and discussion points to consider in team meetings; find more learning from Serious Case Reviews @ the [NSPCC Website](#)**

**UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES OF MEN IN THE FAMILY** Any assessment should include information about all members of the household, including biological fathers, new partners or ex-partners who are back in the picture. The identity of any unknown males in the home should be investigated. ***'Think' – How do you identify hidden men in the family?***

**GIVING OPPORTUNITIES TO THE VICTIM TO DISCLOSE** Agencies must do their utmost to provide suitable opportunities for victims to disclose in private. An added risk is using text messages to communicate with vulnerable service users. A controlling partner can easily pick up messages so that they know about appointments, or can cancel or re-arrange appointments to suit them. ***'Think' – Have you allowed your client time to speak on their own?***

**AVOIDING AN OVER-RELIANCE ON A MOTHER'S ABILITY TO PROTECT HER CHILDREN** There is the danger that child protection plans focus too much on the mother's ability to protect her children. One example of this is that the father was present in the mother's home on a number of occasions when professionals visited; he was not supposed to be there but his presence was tacitly accepted by practitioners. In some cases, the mother did not feel that her partner was at any time a risk to the children. Information should be provided to mothers regarding the possible impact of domestic abuse, both emotionally and physically, on the children. ***'Think' – Do you regularly use professional curiosity? What supervision do you receive in relation to Domestic Abuse cases?***

**SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE** One-off incidents of domestic abuse or physical injury may not meet the threshold for child protection procedures. However these incidents need to be seen within the context of what else is known about the family. This usually means ensuring that relevant and up-to-date information has been gathered from all agencies in contact with the family. ***'Think' – Are your files up to date with all known information? Do you use chronologies to record events and build a picture? Are you discussing Early help? 'Think Family...'***

**TALKING ABOUT DOMESTIC ABUSE BETWEEN AGENCIES** Terminology used to talk about domestic abuse can be quite subjective. The danger of recording incidences as "family problems" or "arguing with partner" by some agencies minimises the seriousness of domestic abuse and may lead to it not being identified as a high risk by other agencies. A decision not to charge the perpetrator following an assault (maybe because the mother has minimised the incident) may lead other agencies to conclude that the risk is lower than if the perpetrator had been charged. ***'Think' – Do you challenge other agencies on information? Are you aware of escalation procedures?***

**UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN LIVING WITH DOMESTIC ABUSE** Often abuse against the mother is not recognised as a child protection issue, so assessments focus on the needs of the mother, rather than the safety of the children. Any professional who sees mothers who are victims of domestic abuse, should contact MK MASH for advice. ***'Think' – how do you work with other agencies; statutory and voluntary – to identify domestic abuse?***

#### What can MKSCB offer to support you in relation to Domestic Abuse ...

- ✓ Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence (DASH) Form - You can access DASH Training via the MKSCB [www.mkscb.org](http://www.mkscb.org)
- ✓ Milton Keynes local Domestic Abuse service is MK ACT – Find more information [here](#)
- ✓ Our SCR toolkit and procedures are available [here](#)
- ✓ Stay up to date with the latest safeguarding legislation and follow us on Twitter



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