



Kinship Care and Domestic Abuse

This guidance will consider the impact of domestic abuse on the child you care for and how you can support them.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner. Domestic abuse is overwhelmingly experienced by women and perpetrated by men. However, anyone can be a victim of abuse.

As a Kinship Carer you may have care of a child as a direct result of domestic abuse, where a parent of the child may have been unable to protect the Child from harm.

Adults often believe that children have not been affected by domestic abuse unless they have been abused themselves or were present in the room when abuse has been happening. This may not be the case, in households where there has been domestic abuse children are usually aware in some way that things are “not right”. They may have heard shouting; they may have seen parents being bruised or upset following a row or notice it when they return to the home.

The child that you care for may not have disclosed to you what they have witnessed or are aware of, they may not know that what they have experienced is domestic abuse and is not normal.

They may also be acting in a way that makes you concerned.

You may be aware that the child that you care for has witnessed abuse or lived in a household where domestic abuse was happening.

The effects of domestic abuse on children:

Children who have witnessed domestic abuse either knowing or unknowingly will respond and react differently. Some of the behaviours displayed may include any of the following:

- They may become anxious or depressed
- They may have difficulty sleeping and have nightmares and flashbacks
- They may complain of physical symptoms such as tummy aches and may wet their bed
- They may have temper tantrums and problems with school
- They may behave as though they are much younger than they are and have low self confidence
- They may become aggressive or they may internalise their distress and withdraw from other people
- Older children may begin to play truant, start to use alcohol or drugs, begin to self-harm or have an eating disorder
- Children may also feel angry, guilty, insecure, alone, frightened, powerless or confused. They may also feel responsible for what has happened.

Children may still have contact with an abusive parent or a parent who continues to experience domestic abuse. In this instance it is very difficult for the child to speak about what is happening for fear of being disloyal to the abuser. They may keep quiet to protect the victim and themselves. Contact with an abusive parent may not always be in the child’s best interest.



“When a child is removed from a domestic abuse situation they can start to recover from their experience, so by providing a home where the child is safe, secure and loved will enable the healing process to start.”

Kinship Carers should also be aware of their own safety if in contact with an abusive parent and we would encourage any incidents of domestic abuse to be reported to the Police who have trained domestic abuse officers.

The dynamics of Domestic Abuse often make it impossible for a victim to leave the perpetrator of abuse. Anyone who wishes to explore further the effects of Domestic Abuse, why Domestic Abuse happens and the improvements when a person manages to leave an abusive relationship could access the Pat Craven Freedom website: www.freedomprogramme.co.uk where literature is available to help increase knowledge and answer any questions you may have in understanding Domestic Abuse.

How can I support the child that I care for?

When a child is removed from a domestic abuse situation they can start to recover from their experience, so by providing a home where the child is safe, secure and loved will enable the healing process to start.

Talking to the child about domestic violence:

Listen: Try to listen to how they are feeling and encourage the child to talk about their feelings and any concerns they may have.

Acknowledge: Listening and acknowledging the feelings being expressed by the child, lets the child know you understand what they are telling you and you can reflect back and accept the feelings they have shared.

Be honest: Try to be honest about the situation, without frightening them and reassure them with measures that are achievable for you both.

Reassure: Try to explain that the abuse is not their fault and they are not responsible for the behaviour or the situation. Explain that violence is wrong and it does not solve problems. By telling them that you love them and that this will never change the child will feel more secure and physical acts of love will feel good to the child if they will allow this.

Some things you could say to the child:

- It's not your fault
- You can always tell me how you feel
- I will listen to you
- You have the right to feel safe
- There is nothing you could have done to prevent or change it
- We can think of ways to keep you safe in the future – this is important if the child still has contact with an abusive parent and may be worried about this.

By speaking with the child, they will come to understand that what has happened is not their fault and they may begin to feel less guilty, their anger may start to subside and they may begin to engage positively with you, their friends and school. They may start to be happy and enjoy many aspects of their lives with you.

Where the child you care for is classed as “looked after” (you can confirm with the social work department if this refers to the child you have care of) The local authority has a responsibility to keep you


involved in the Child's Plan and this should include addressing domestic abuse if it is/ was a factor. This should include safety measures and support for the child when they can discuss what has happened independently of you.

If your child is "not looked after" you can raise any concerns with your GP or the child's nursery or school and any other professionals involved with your family. If you are worried or have concerns about the child in your care you can also contact your local authority.

Professional help

There is support for children who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse. This is delivered by Women's Aid in Scotland and you can contact your local Women's Aid group who will offer confidential support for your child.

Scottish Women's Aid will be able to tell you where your local group is, you can contact them on 0131 226 6606 or email info@womensaid.scot



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Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

GET IN TOUCH

Call our helpline: 0808 800 0006 (freephone)
Lines open 10am-2.30pm, Mon to Fri

Visit our website at: www.kinship.scot

Email: kinship@adoptionuk.org.uk

 [kinshipcarecas](https://www.facebook.com/kinshipcarecas)

 [@kinshipscotland](https://twitter.com/kinshipscotland)



RESOURCES

Scottish Women's Aid:
0131 226 6606

info@womensaid.scot