



‘Our Stories’

Sheffield Domestic Abuse Service User Film & Training Guidance Notes

This film has been developed by members of the Sheffield Domestic Abuse Service reference group. To find out more about this group please go to www.sheffielddact.org.uk/domestic-abuse/

The women involved in this film are reflecting on their experiences with different agencies and their personal experiences of domestic abuse.

You will hear what they think about the response of Police, Health and Social Care services to victims. The purpose of the training is not to criticise, but to help professionals to think about the real barriers that exist when working with people affected by domestic abuse, and to provide an opportunity to explore ways of overcoming them.

What's covered in the DVD?

The DVD is split into six chapters covering the following topics:

Introduction to the DVD by Alison Higgins, Domestic Abuse Strategy Manager, Domestic Abuse Coordination Team, Sheffield City Council. Including the definition of domestic abuse, the estimated prevalence in Sheffield and a brief introduction to the women involved in making the film (5 minutes)

Living with Domestic Abuse: the women share their personal experiences, including 'not seeing the signs' and the emotional, psychological, physical and financial impact of Domestic Abuse on their lives. (20 minutes)

Police Response: the women talk about their personal experiences of police responses to domestic abuse. (15 minutes)

Health Services: the women talk about their experiences with GPs, midwives, dental and other health services. (3-4 minutes)

Social Care Services: the women talk about their experiences with Social Care and Child Protection services, at case conferences and with their children's schools. (10 minutes)

What helps? Here the women talk about what helped them and the longer term effects of abuse (what happens after leaving). They talk about the support their children received, and the benefits of confidence building courses and support groups. This chapter ends on a positive note, outlining what the women who took part in the film are doing now. (10 minutes)

Using this DVD for training

Depending on the needs of your organisation and how much time you have available for training you may choose to show the whole film or to break it down into chapters. The running time for the whole film is 60 minutes. For each chapter we have put together some questions and prompts for use in small-group discussions (see overleaf). We suggest about allowing about 10-20 minutes discussion per question.

If you decide to show the whole film

We recommend that you allow 2 hours for training as this will allow time for discussion and group work.

If you only want to show specific chapters

We recommend you allow 1 hour. We would recommend that as well as showing a service-specific chapter you also show chapters, 1, 2 & 6 (35 minutes).

(running time: 20 minutes)

The women share their personal experiences of what it feels like to live with domestic abuse, including not seeing the early warning signs.

Discuss the following questions, preferably in small groups. Allow 10-20 minutes per question

Suggested questions

Based on what the women shared in the video, what early warning signs were there, that could be defined as being abuse?

Prompts

Jealous and controlling behaviour

My time became restricted – you know – work, home, shopping home. Constant calling. I thought it was caring (Dorothy)

He controlled all my life...Finances, where we went, what clothes I wore and part of me, in the beginning was just accepting... that it was just him (Louise)

His anger just started to creep in (Louise)

But because I was doing things my way, and not his way, that was making him more angry and frustrated because he was the man, and I wasn't listening to him (Riffat)

I just didn't even see... I didn't see anything that he was doing. He just kept me isolated, he was so obsessed with me. (Chelsey)

So I suppose in a way, looking back, now, I should have seen it coming. There was something going on but I couldn't put my finger on it... I think perhaps I didn't want to believe it (Lisa)

Emotional abuse

blaming someone, putting them down, undermining them

The abuse started... but I didn't really see it then, it was just the norm then... it got so much. Because he promised he'd never do it again and he's sorry... all the normal things, which you believe, and then you get to really believe that it's your fault because they've said it so much (Lisa)

Other types of abuse:

Financial abuse

Stalking / harassment

Some women stayed in the relationship, even after recognising they were being abused, why do you think this was?

Prompts

Emotional attachment

I loved him... at the end of the day. (Lisa)

Financial commitments/ financial insecurity

I wasn't in a permanent job at that point... and it was the financial insecurity that meant he had a threat he could hold over me... he could take my home. If I'd had a permanent job, the next time he did something I would have walked. No question. (Rachel)

Family commitments

victims may be worried about the impact on children, family and friends: 'he's a good dad'

The only thing that I wanted was for him to change, for him to come back and see us as a family (Riffat)

...and I didn't want my family and friends to get involved because I knew he would start on them. (Dorothy)

The abuser promised they would change, they'd never do it again

He always said he'd never do it again (Dorothy)

Fear of the unknown, of being alone

It's not so easy just to, just to walk away. You just can't just pick up... you know... and you start believing to yourself that it's your fault. Everything that you do, you created this. (Louise)

Worried about what other people thought

people may think it's trivial, not take it seriously.

It's always been like that. All the really bad violence, and all the times that I've landed up calling the police, it's so embarrassing that you have to say 'This was over what level we had to cook a pan of rice at...' It's always been completely trivial stuff (Rachel)

Worried about who would believe you

He'd say 'you get the police involved again they're going to do you for wasting police time.' So I was afraid (Lisa)

Having no support to leave

It was really difficult to seek help because he came to every appointment... he managed who I saw. I didn't see my family, I didn't see my friends. (Louise)

Fear of retaliation or making it worse

Then I realised... he's more mentally gone than I thought and I thought if I just go or leave the kids he will do drastic things... (Dorothy)

He tried to commit suicide several times when I said I was leaving. He threatened to kill me and the kids when I said I was leaving and for safety measures a lot of the time I stayed to try and calm things down. (Dorothy)

Low self-esteem, feeling unworthy

Part of me believed him a lot of the time when he said I wouldn't be able to cope... that I was a bad mother to my older children... I couldn't cope on my own, I was a failure. (Louise)

And I just thought, oh it is all my fault.... obviously it's a lot for him to take on... a child as well. (Lisa)

Already vulnerable

I met somebody up here through friends... he was very good to us [Lisa and her daughter] showed us places, took us round, took us for food when we were at bed and breakfasts... and he was just really good to us and it ended up that I got into a relationship with him. (Lisa)

Also consider:

Stigma, feeling a failure

Issues around faith and culture

What are the signs that a professional might have noticed?

Prompts

Physical abuse

punching, kicking, slapping and biting;
burning;
choking, strangling and suffocating;
spitting;
throwing objects.

You may notice or be shown marks or bruises. Or a person may change their clothing or use make-up to disguise an injury

Emotional abuse

constant criticism;
threats to an individual or their family;
putting the victim down publicly;
accusing the victim of lying, sulking or cheating;
verbal abuse and name calling.

This may lead to changes in behaviour, someone being withdrawn or tearful. The victim may suffer from lack of sleep or become angry or irritable. She or he may start to drink heavily, use drugs or develop an eating disorder.

Sexual abuse

sex against the victim's will or in ways that make her or him feel uncomfortable or humiliated.

Sexual abuse is likely to affect someone's behaviour in a similar way to emotional abuse; they may also contract a sexually transmitted disease or have an unwanted pregnancy.

The kind of abuse I suffered a lot of women don't talk about - sexual abuse – it's not talked about, it's a taboo subject. Riffat

Financial abuse

not allowing the victim to have money;
spending food money;
running up debts in the victim's name.

You may notice that someone is unable to pay bills or pay for treats and activities. She or he may ask to borrow money. There may be little food in the house or the person and her or his children may be hungry.

Coercive and controlling behaviour

making the victim do things she or he doesn't want to do;
stopping the victim doing things;
isolating the victim from friends and family;
monitoring or blocking phone calls or use of social media;
preventing the victim from attending appointments and meetings.

You may notice that someone is not attending something she or he usually does or is making excuses not to come, or is always accompanied by a partner. Someone may have less contact with family or friends. Someone may give up activities she or he used to do.

Once you get married they think they own you. (Riffat)

He came to every appointment. (Louise)

It got to the stage where I totally lost my identity. I didn't know who I was. And my main being was about him and making sure he was all right, and then sorting out the kids. (Dorothy)

Forced marriage and so called 'honour' based violence

making a someone marry someone against her or his will;
bullying the victim and controlling her or his behaviour to protect the family's reputation.

The person's family may object to her or his choice of partner or sexuality. The person may not be allowed out, leading to isolation from friends, work or education.

Stalking and harassment

obsessive jealousy;
following and checking up on the victim;
embarrassing her or him in public or on social media.

Someone may be worried about being followed, anxious about going to certain places or being seen somewhere.

Denial

Abusers will sometimes deny their actions or suggest it was the other person's fault. They may beg for forgiveness and say it will never happen again.

The person may think she or he has exaggerated the abuse and that it wasn't serious. The victim may play down the abuser's behaviour or accept the abuser's excuses.

I only thought he was abusive when he started hitting me. (Dorothy)

Everything was my fault, why he hit me... I didn't do things right. And you believe all that (Louise)

Other useful quotes to discuss:

I thought he was a moral guy, with loads of integrity. He's the kind of guy that helps old ladies onto buses. (Rachel)

I loved him. (Lisa)

Looking back..., I should have seen it coming. (Lisa)

Why wouldn't someone want to disclose abuse to friends or family?

Prompts

Fear of being judged

Fear of being told to put up with it

In some cultures women are expected to put up with abuse whereas in other cases women are judged and seen as weak if they do not leave immediately

Chapter 3 Police Response

(running time: 15 minutes)

The women talk about their experiences with police, what happened when they called the police and why they often did not call the police.

Discuss the following questions, preferably in small groups. Allow 10-20 minutes per question

Suggested questions

What do you think the women wanted when they called the police?

Prompts

Safety

Prompt response

Control over situation – to understand what is going to happen next, to have choices

To be offered further support e.g. referral on

to feel comfortable and supported

to be given time to make decisions, a breathing space

When I got burgled I got more support from the police (Louise)

What do you think the barriers to contacting the police are for victims of domestic abuse?

Prompts

Worried about criminalising their partner

Cultural mistrust of police

Don't know what will happen / what police can do

Concerned about wasting police time

It's so hard to take that step (Louise)

I always felt to some extent that it wasn't serious enough (Rachel)

I called them one time out of twenty (Dorothy)

The police came. They arrested him took him away... within a couple of hours he was back knocking on the door. The only thing they gave him at that time was a caution. (Dorothy)

They could have been clearer with me about what my options were. (Rachel)

...and in my case there wasn't enough evidence, but it wasn't discussed or talked through or... once that video statement was done it was kind of forgotten. I wasn't updated or anything. (Louise)

I felt like I was being bullied by them in some ways, as well, because they were saying 'we're going to do this regardless...' (Rachel).

In the examples in the film what did the police do well? And why?

Prompts

Taking them seriously

Asking them what they want to happen

Support with how to gather proof of harassment

New option for giving victims breathing space – Domestic Violence Prevention

Notices

Those two police officers, who went that extra mile, they gave me back my life. (Rachel)

He was out, which helped. I think I was a little bit more relaxed. And I think they heard me when I said 'Look, really I'm fed up of this, I just want it to stop.' and they were like 'Okay. What can we do to help?' (Rachel)

When I first rang the police regarding the death threats and text messages ... they said 'would you mind if I phoned some groups for you, for them to contact you'... and from then I've had help' (Dorothy)

How can we support victims to see reporting as a positive thing?

Prompts

Being supportive

Taking appropriate action when possible

Being clear about what will or won't happen and why

Offering other support options

Follow up actions where possible

Being clear about the impact a successful conviction will have

Chapter 4 Health Services

(running time: 3-4 minutes)

The women talk about their interactions with health professionals. Sometimes they were treated with sensitivity, but not always.

Discuss the following questions, preferably in small groups. Allow 10-20 minutes per question

Suggested questions

What kind of presenting issues might indicate domestic abuse?

Evidence tells us that most people do not disclose domestic abuse when presenting with domestic abuse-related injuries at health care settings. Many women will not disclose when asked about domestic abuse by midwives or health visitors, so it is important to be aware of the signs which may indicate that someone is experiencing domestic abuse.

Prompts

This information is taken from <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/805546-clinical>

Physical symptoms

Traumatic injury.

Pain due to diffuse trauma without visible evidence, and symptoms without evidence of physiologic abnormality.

Acute pain with no visible injuries, chronic pain (especially if evidence of tissue damage cannot be found).

Although palpitations, dyspnoea, atypical chest pain, abdominal or other GI complaints, dizziness, and paraesthesias are common complaints, they are noted frequently with domestic violence.

Medical history

A history of multiple prior visits to A and E (traumatic and non-traumatic).

Repetitive complaints inconsistent with organic disease.

Medical recidivism for vague complaints without evidence of physical abnormality may result from psychosomatic complaints secondary to depression, the ultimate cause of which is domestic violence.

Non-specific complaints of ill or failing health.

Patient's response

A substantial delay between time of injury and presentation for treatment may stem from ambivalence about discovery of the true cause should the patient seek help.

The patient and/or partner may deny injury or minimise the incident(s).
Non-compliance with treatment regimens, missed appointments and failure to obtain or take medication.

Isolation and feeling threatened

The patient may feel isolated and may be kept socially isolated. The patient may provide a history of being restrained or locked in or out of shared domiciles. The patient also may feel threatened with violence, institutionalisation, abandonment, or guardianship.

Mental health issues

Depression / suicide attempts.

Stress/ anxiety.

Substance misuse. Be aware of frequent use of minor tranquilisers or pain medication.

Current or past self-harm may be noted.

Gynaecological and sexual health

Failure to use condoms or other appropriate means of protection is frequent and is suggested by a history of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly if recurrent.

Gynaecological complaints including frequent vaginal or urinary tract infections, dyspareunia, and pelvic pain.

Pregnant women may be homeless, may report sporadically or late for prenatal care; they may present with depression.

Other historical findings may include problem pregnancies, preterm bleeding and/or miscarriage and self-induced abortion.

What could agencies do, if they suspect domestic abuse?

Prompts

Ask about problems at home

Provide information about support

Offer to make a referral

Probe for concerns/ fears

Listen

Remember that victims often won't disclose at the first time of asking, consider discreet ways of offering signposting information e.g. helpline number included in a leaflet which is given to all patients

Women in the film did make disclosures to health professionals. What do you think helps victims choose to disclose?

Prompts

A safe environment

The patient is seen alone rather than with a partner/ abuser

The professional shows understanding and empathy

The professional is non-judgemental and respectful

The patient feels the professional would be confident in dealing with the issue

I had a nervous breakdown and only then, I spoke out and said what actually happened to me because I was in a safe environment (Riffat)

... it was only when I went to the doctor's for a routine smear test. I just broke down (Louise)

How can agencies prepare for responding to domestic abuse disclosures?

Think about how to ask the question and how to respond to a disclosure:

Be empathetic - Don't act shocked - Don't be judgemental.

Prompts

Training

Resources – leaflets, posters, pathway and referral information, DASH assessment forms.

Remember domestic abuse is common.

Don't make assumptions about who is or isn't likely to be experiencing domestic abuse.

Be sensitive to the impact of your words and body language on the victim when responding to disclosure.

Know your organisation's procedures

Find out about local services.

Chapter 5 Social Care Services

(running time: 10 minutes)

The women discuss their experiences with social care services and how they would have liked to be treated.

Discuss the following questions, preferably in small groups. Allow 10-20 minutes per question

Suggested questions

What are the barriers to working together with victims of domestic abuse to protect their children?

Why do you think trust can be hard to establish?

Prompts

Fear that children will be taken away

Victims may not recognise the risk to children as they are minimising the risk to themselves

Victims may not see a way out of the situation (refer back to issues raised in Chapter 2)

May view abuser as a 'good dad', don't want family to break up

Time and resources constraints on workers can lead to difficulties with communication / responses

They were just.... really... looking down their noses to say 'Oh look, she's back wi' him after what he's done.' They weren't very understanding. She [the social worker] were very ... just her attitude towards me and how she spoke... Didn't appreciate that. She weren't very consistent. (Chelsey)

My initial reaction were to lie because I thought 'Oh my god, they're gonna take me daughter' (Chelsey)

I could never get through to her [the social worker] on the phone. I just didn't feel like I could talk to her. I didn't feel like I could trust her. (Chelsey)

Social worker: 'Are you in touch with Mark?' Chelsey: 'No'.

How could a professional have encouraged Chelsey to tell the truth? What could professionals do differently to build trust with service users?

Prompts

Listen

Build trust with victim/ non-abusing parent based on clear understanding of concerns and what needs to change

If workers don't develop a relationship with them, victims will be in fear of what will happen

Be approachable and respectful

I just think Social Services need to be more tactful, and consider people's feelings.... I were really young... She just needed to be... more cautious of how I were feeling...(Chelsey)

Find out what they have done to protect their children up to now

I'd do anything to protect my child. Sometimes I took beatings', 'I tried every step to protect my family. (Louise)

Recognise resilience and where parent has been 'doing their best' in difficult circumstances over what may have been a long period of time - look at the whole picture not just one incident

We are mothers. We have gone through this abuse with our children and we have done our damned best to keep our children out of it. But they just come in and make you feel as if you've put them in danger and that they need to get the children out because they can look after them better. (Lisa)

Think about the victim/ non abusing parent as part of the solution not just part of the problem

Recognise the impact of domestic abuse on parenting

Help parents understand about the impact of domestic abuse without being judgemental

I didn't understand about child protection at the time. (Dorothy)

They blamed me for the situation. (Louise)

Be clear about your role, be consistent. Explain what is going to happen, what the processes are

Then we had to have a meeting... and that's the first time I went to a conference meeting. And there were so many people in the room and I just didn't know what was happening. (Dorothy)

Think about developing a realistic plan for change

Offer options for support

Listen to the voice of the child

Nobody really talked to the kids. (Dorothy)

Chapter 6 What Helps?

The women talk about the people who made a difference and the services which have helped them in their recovery.

Discuss the following questions, preferably in small groups. Allow 10-20 minutes per question

Suggested questions

What is the ongoing impact of domestic abuse?

Prompts

Three years later I'm still living with it. (Louise)

Recognise that it takes time to recover

Women that have gone through domestic abuse. They need to feel safe. They need to [be able to] put their trust in people (Chelsey)

Ongoing mental health issues

It wasn't until I came out of it... You think that just by leaving or just by shutting the door that that's it. That you get your life together and it moves on but it's just not like that (Louise)

Impact on children

Impact on rest of life

re-location, estrangement from family and friends

What do the women think has helped them and their children recover?

Prompts

Time

Confidence building courses

Peer support including support groups

Space to reflect

Being listened to

Giving something back

Getting involved with their community

Getting back into education and learning new skills