



St Mary's Bryanston Square C of E Primary School

Domestic Abuse Policy

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Date of Next Review	February 2028
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Purpose of Domestic Abuse Policy

This is our school's policy that provides guidance on a whole-school approach to domestic abuse prevention. Other evidence-based approaches to address domestic abuse preventatively are mentioned throughout. Those approaches shall be used in our school to strengthen our response to domestic abuse.

The policy aims to:

- Create an environment that promotes our school's belief that domestic abuse in any forms is not acceptable. This means that at times, as a school, we will take proactive steps to hold those who use abusive behaviors to account. This applies to our staff.
- To optimize opportunities for safe disclosures through strengthening staff confidence in identifying and speaking about domestic abuse openly and confidently in the classroom environment and outside of it, using age-appropriate language. This also includes engaging parents and colleagues.
- Strengthen staff skills in creating and delivering spiraling curriculum linked to domestic abuse and in line with the most recent DfE Guidance on Relationships, Sex and Health Education (July 2025).
- Provide information about local specialist support services to those impacted by domestic abuse; and outline the procedure to follow when addressing domestic abuse internally within our school.
- Outline our school's duty of care towards the wellbeing of staff experiencing domestic abuse.

What is Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control?

The landmark **Domestic Abuse Bill** became law in June 2021. It is designed to provide protection to millions of people who experience domestic abuse, and to strengthen measures to tackle perpetrators. The Bill includes legal definition of domestic abuse and recognizes children as victims in their own right.

Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the definition of domestic abuse

Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "**domestic abuse**" if:

- a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
- b) the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is "**abusive**" if it consists of any of the following:

- a) physical or sexual abuse
- b) violent or threatening behaviour
- c) controlling or coercive behaviour
- d) economic abuse
- e) psychological, emotional or other abuse

It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct. **“Economic abuse”** means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to:

- a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
- b) obtain goods or services.

For the purposes of this Act A’s behaviour may be behaviour “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).

Children as victims of domestic abuse

Any reference in this Act to a victim of domestic abuse includes a reference to a child who:

- a) sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse, and
- b) is related to A or B.

A child is related to a person if:

- a) the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or
- b) the child and the person are relatives.

Serious Crime Act 2015 and Coercive Control

Coercive Control has become a crime as part of the **Serious Crime Act 2015**:

Person A commits an offence if:

- a) A repeatedly or continuously engages in behaviour towards another person (B) that is controlling or coercive,
- b) at the time of the behaviour, A and B are personally connected,
- c) the behaviour has a serious effect on B, and
- d) A knows or ought to know that the behaviour will have a serious effect on B.

A’s behavior has a **“serious effect”** on B if:

- a) it causes B to fear, on at least two occasions, that violence will be used against B, or
- b) it causes B serious alarm or distress which has a substantial adverse effect on B’s usual day-to-day activities (www.legislation.gov.uk).

Whilst domestic abuse and coercive control have individual legal frameworks, it is often used interchangeably. This is because the tactics used by perpetrators of domestic abuse will often involve coercion and control, e.g. limiting support network and socialising opportunities, controlling finances including partner’s access to work opportunities, obtaining consent under a threat of other type of violence escalating and similar.

Domestic Abuse and Gender

Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, can be experienced by any gender. It is, however, rooted in unequal power relations between men and women and is based on socially ascribed gender norms. Misogyny, gender stereotypes and sexism play a crucial role in maintaining patriarchal systems and, in turn, on-going gender-based violence. This context is important to consider when supporting the survivors of domestic abuse – it creates an environment in which every individual, based on their characteristics (gender, sexuality, race, disability amongst other), will have their own unique experiences of the same or similar events.

1 in 5 people experience domestic abuse in their lifetime in the UK: 27.4% of women and 13.7% of men (ONS, 2024). Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victims Report (2020-24) shows that in 70% of domestic homicides the victims were female and in 80% of the cases the suspects were male. It is widely recognized that whilst men experience domestic abuse, women are at greater risk of severe and repeated violence, including the risk of being killed and sexual violence.

There are no official statistics for children experiencing domestic abuse. However, through 2014 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, it was estimated that 26.7% 0-5 years-olds and 25.3% 6–15-year-olds lived with an adult who has ever experienced domestic abuse. Women's Aid Annual Survey 2017 showed that 1 in 7 (14.2%) children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic violence at some point in their childhood.

A whole-school approach to domestic abuse prevention

Domestic abuse and coercive control are a series of traumatic experiences that can significantly impact children's development and their long-term health outcomes, as highlighted by research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). In schools, this may present as emotionally based absences, behavioural challenges, or difficulties in academic attainment. We want to ensure that we provide equitable support to children and their families that has a lasting positive impact.

Our domestic abuse provision will fall under the following categories of the whole-school approach:

- Leadership and Management Commitment
- Policies
- School Ethos, Culture and Environment
- Teaching and Learning
- Staff CPD and Wellbeing
- Provision of Support Services for Pupils
- Partnership with parents/carers, local organisations.

Leadership and management commitment

This policy was created with the support of our school's senior leadership (SLT) team. It evidences our school's commitment to the cause. The SLT is familiar with the local VAWG Strategy that draws on the importance of preventative work in educational settings. To support the delivery of the VAWG Strategy, we will align our School Improvement Plan with it, where relevant and possible to do so.

Our SLT operates an open-door policy and encourages all staff to bring any domestic abuse related concerns or questions to their peers, supervisors, team meetings, etc. The SLT is looking to create a school community where everyone feels supported whether that is in terms of their personal experiences or in terms of disclosures made by families of pupils attending our school. Where necessary, we will consult a LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) to ensure we follow statutory safeguarding processes.

Policies

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Relationships, Sex and Health Education policy
- Safeguarding policy
- Staff Handbook
- Behaviour policy

Our school's approach will be guided by the following models of interventions.

Safe and Together model

This model is an internationally recognized suite of tools and interventions designed to help child welfare professionals become domestic violence informed. This model is focused on perpetrator's pattern of abusive behaviours holding perpetrator to account through the change of language and support systems that are put in place to keep children safe and together with a non-abusive parent.

<https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/about-us/about-the-model/>

The Relational approach

This approach draws on theory and research from the fields of Neuroscience, Attachment, Trauma, Adverse Childhood Experience, Intersubjectivity and Restorative Approaches and replaces Behaviourist approaches/methods. It promotes inclusivity through building positive relations and nurturing instead of the use of rewards and sanctions.

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Behavioural-to-Relational-Responses-at-School.pdf>

School ethos, culture and environment

This policy is informed by our schools' values:

Love, Respect, Feeling Safe, Honesty, Forgiveness, Curiosity

Our school staff promotes gender equity in the classroom environment and outside of it. They will challenge any behaviours and language that reflects misogynistic and sexist attitudes; and will encourage a healthy and balanced debate related to gender stereotypes. This is to offer more freedom for individual expression and to negate gender expectations.

As an educational setting, we believe we have an important role to play in changing cognitive language related to victim blaming. Where safe and reasonable to do so, we will ensure that we mindfully reposition 'the subject' in a grammatical sentence, making the perpetrator and their abusive behaviours and not the victim/survivor the centre of it all. We will avoid vague language when it comes to describing a pattern of abusive behaviour. For example, instead of saying 'Stacey is a victim of domestic abuse', we may say 'John has isolated Stacey from her extended family by taking complete control of their family money, and by being overly jealous. Recently, John punched Stacey to her head knocking her down to the floor.'

Teaching and learning

We recognise that there is a great need to speak to our pupils about domestic abuse, using age-appropriate language. This stems from the fact that children and young people feel confused about the issue. Furthermore, they want to make sense of their own experiences and feelings and be able to support their peers.

Our spiralling curriculum meets the developmental needs and cognition of our pupils. It meets the DfE statutory guidance on Relationships, Sex and Health Education (July 2025) that makes links to domestic abuse.

Primary schools

The guidance encourages teaching pupils:

- How to recognise that family relationships are making them feel unhappy or unsafe and how to seek help or advice
- How to manage conflict and that violence is never right
- How to recognise when a friendship is making them feel unhappy or uncomfortable and how to seek help
- Discussing differences between being assertive and controlling
- Stereotypes, boundaries, recognising abuse and getting support

Additionally, School Inspection Handbook, September 2024, states that:

- Schools should develop an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships through appropriate relationship and sex education.

- We will expect the school's RSHE curriculum (and wider curriculum) to specifically address sexual harassment, online abuse and sexual violence. The curriculum should also address safeguarding risks (including online risks), issues of consent, and what constitutes a healthy relationship both online and offline.

We will look to inform our lesson planning by using reputable and audited resources. Examples of resources, though not exhaustive, are below:

- **Tender Education & Arts in partnership with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), 'Ending Gender-based Violence and Abuse Teacher Toolkit':**
 - <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/mopac-guidance-and-resources/respect-and-healthy-relationships-primary-teachers-toolkit>.
- **PSHE Association**
- **NSPCC - Promoting Healthy Relationships**
 - <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection-schools/promoting-healthy-relationships>.
- **Equalityteach – 'Outside the Box – Promoting Gender Equality and Tackling Sexual Harassment in Schools':**
 - <https://equaliteach.co.uk/downloads/EqualiTeach-Outside-The-Box.pdf>
- **Let Toys Be Toys**
 - <https://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/resources/resources-teachers/>

Staff CPD and wellbeing

Staff CPD

We are committed to ensuring that staff feel confident in addressing the subject of domestic abuse. We will review the training needs of our staff on a two-yearly basis through individual supervisions and needs assessments of the whole school. As local training offers differ every year, we will explore training opportunities at the time of planning staff CPD. The below avenues may be used to find out about training offers:

- The Domestic Abuse Prevention in Schools Programme - <https://healtheducationpartnership.com/domestic-abuse-prevention-events/>
- PSHE support - <https://healtheducationpartnership.com/pshe-and-wellbeing-events/>
- School Health Service - cnw-tr.kandcshs.cnwl@nhs.net
- The LSCP Training Centre - <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/lscp/training-and-resources>
- PSHE Association - <https://pshe-association.org.uk/training-and-events/school-training>
- NSPCC - <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training>
- Respect - <https://www.respect.uk.net/pages/training>

Staff wellbeing

The data informs us that it is statistically likely that within a workplace, there will be members of the team who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse within their own homes, or that of a close friend or relative. Whilst survivors of domestic abuse will mostly welcome opportunities to talk about their experiences, they are less likely to voluntarily make a disclosure, without being asked or prompted. Whether or not one chooses to disclose may be influenced by their personal experiences in the past, institutional culture and their sense of safety. We hope that with this policy we will strengthen the culture of safe disclosures and alleviate stigma associated with domestic abuse.

As a school we can offer practical support around increasing staffs' safety. This may include the following:

- Providing free access to an Employee Assistance Scheme
- Through necessary adjustments in staff's working patterns.
- Through adjusting staff's working hours (flextime) and/or releasing staff for relevant appointments such as doctors, domestic abuse specialists, housing etc. and/or to attend court proceedings.
- Through linking staff with local support services such as specialist domestic abuse services, therapy, legal advice and similar.
- Free counselling service.
- Through recognition that domestic abuse can have an effect on people's mental health and cognitive performance and therefore adjusting the workload accordingly on case-by-case basis.
- Through extensively exploring the options of holding perpetrators to account with those experiencing domestic abuse and supporting them to take the next steps.

Domestic abuse perpetrated by staff will not be condoned under any circumstances nor will it be treated as a purely private matter. We recognise that schools have a role in encouraging and supporting staff to address violent and abusive behaviour of all kinds. Employees should report it if they suspect a colleague is a perpetrator of domestic abuse. Any allegation, disclosure or conviction of a domestic abuse related offence will be considered by the SLT on a case-by-case basis with the aim of reducing risk and supporting survivors of domestic abuse and their children. We will work with specialist services such as Respect to encourage behaviour change, where appropriate and safe to do so. We will also seek support from a LADO, where needed.

Provision of support services for pupils

Domestic abuse is a safeguarding concern. For that reason, we will ensure that all domestic abuse cases are recorded on our systems, following Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office recommendation in their report 'Victims in their own right?'.

Where domestic abuse is experienced by our pupils in the family context, the safest way to protect their wellbeing is through supporting a non-abusive parent. In case of disclosures,

information will not be shared with an alleged perpetrator of abuse as this may increase the level of risk. Where safe and appropriate to do so, alleged perpetrators will be signposted or referred to specialist services offering behaviour change programmes.

Identification of domestic abuse: in the family context

Whilst some pupils may display various signs of domestic abuse, some may not. It is important that staff use their professional curiosity and work as a team to share information about their observations so that our pupils are adequately supported.

Possible indicators of domestic abuse:

- poor health outcomes
- withdrawn behaviour
- aggression
- anti-social behaviour
- depression, anxiety or any other mental health problems
- not doing as well at school – due to difficulties at home or disruption of moving to and from refuges (NSPCC, 2019)
- overachieving – as a way of coping and shifting the focus away from the experiences at home
- bed wetting

Disclosures of domestic abuse in the family context: Receive, Reassure, Respond

Receive:

- If a child starts telling you something that may indicate abuse, listen carefully and non-judgmentally, show that you believe them and do not ask for specific details of abuse. Probing questions may undermine Police or Safeguarding investigations.

Reassure:

- Demonstrate empathy. You may be the first person they are talking to about their experiences.
- Be sure of your confidentiality policy and that a pupil understands you may not be able to keep this information a secret.

Respond:

- Without asking any probing questions, try to ascertain if a pupil is being harmed, are they currently at risk or will they be at risk when they go home, who else is at risk, what their overall needs are and what is important to them.
- Record and date information that you received in line with our school's safeguarding policies and procedures and inform your safeguarding lead about this case.
- Explain the next steps to a pupil and follow through those steps.

- Seek support for your own welfare – dealing with abuse vicariously may have an impact on your own emotional health and wellbeing.

Identification of domestic abuse: intimate relationships

Possible signs of domestic abuse:

- Bruises and injuries, often in places easily covered by clothing
- Mental health issues, including PTSD, anxiety and depression
- Substance use, as a coping mechanism
- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Sudden change in demeanor, dress code and social interactions

For more information about the dynamics of abusive relationships, see 'Power and Control Wheel' – <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/understanding-power-control-wheel/>.

Disclosures of domestic abuse in the context of intimate relationships: Ask, Validate, Assess, Action

Ask:

- Research shows that the survivors of domestic abuse do not have enough opportunities to disclose their experiences and are happy to be asked about it by another professional (Cry for Health, Safe Lives).
- Only ask in a safe and confidential environment.
- Make sure that school's confidentiality policy is well understood.
- When asking, frame your question first and give an explanation as to why you may be asking it. It may be that you observed specific signs and symptoms of domestic abuse. DA policy can be used to explain your intentions.
 - *For example, I have noticed that you may have been under a little more stress than usual and I also noticed a bruise on your wrist. I feel a little worried about you. I would like to ask you...*
- After framing your question, especially if you have limited timeframe, ask a direct question.
 - *For example, 'Would you like to tell me a little bit more about how you got this bruise?'. Or 'Have you ever felt frightened or threatened by your partner?'*
- Try not to use definitions such as domestic abuse, if possible, as they may be interpreted differently by different audiences, but if you do use it, then make sure that you explain what you mean by it. If speaking to young people, they may prefer and relate better to concepts such as toxic, unhealthy or abusive relationships.
- Question to avoid:

I am sure this is nothing to do with you, but this is part of our policies and procedures to ask about domestic abuse. Do you experience any domestic abuse from your partner?

Validate:

- Take a believing approach.

- Explain that it is not their fault and that there is support available. It is not your role to offer a full support to those in need. Use specialist domestic abuse services to meet the needs of the survivors.
- It is not your role to investigate the details of abuse.

Assess:

- Ascertain if they are in immediate risk. If they return home, will they be hurt?
- Ascertain if anybody else is at risk (any other children, vulnerable adults etc).
- Ascertain what their priorities are and what they would like to do.
- If you are worried about cumulative risk factors such as recent separation, pregnancy, escalation, isolation, strangulation, stalking and sexual abuse, consider making a MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk-Assessment Conference) referral, based on professional judgment.

Action:

- Explain the next steps you will be taking.
- Contact your safeguarding lead to discuss the case and agree on further actions such as referrals to Children's Services and/or MARAC.
- Follow up on the referrals made/agreed on.
- Refer/signpost to local domestic abuse services.
- Never disclose information to a perpetrator of abuse as this will increase the level of risk to a survivor and their children.

Partnership with parents/carers, local organizations

The landscape of specialist domestic abuse support services is constantly changing. To stay informed, our school will partner with relevant governance structures of the VAWG Strategy, for example, Children and Young People Operational Group.

We will use the below service directories to find out about existing support and promote it to our school community:

- Angelou Partnership - <https://www.angelou.org/directory>
- Women's Aid - <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-directory/>

Additionally, we will work in partnership with the below local organizations:

- Domestic Abuse Prevention in Schools Programme - viktorija.zdanoviciute@healtheducationpartnership.com
- School Health Service - <https://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/services/community-services/kensington-and-chelsea-and-westminster-school-health-service>
- Talking Without Fear (group therapy for children and young people – Westminster only) - 020 7641 5435/6 - https://fisd.westminster.gov.uk/kb5/westminster/fis/service.page?id=41NoZRL_Ja8&youthchannel=0

- SASH - offers counselling, coaching, support for hard-to-reach young men, psychoeducational group session for young women (14+) - Tel. 020 7851 2955, Email: info@SAHLondon.org

Other specialist support can be accessed via:

- Respect (for perpetrators and male survivors) - 0808 802 4040
- Galop - specialist LGBT domestic abuse, sexual violence, hate crime, trans* and young person's advocacy service - Tel: 020 7704 2040
- CAPVA support services in London – page 47 - https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/comprehensive_needs_assessment_of_child-adolescent_to_parent_violence_and_abuse_in_london.pdf

Confidentiality Statement

The school will ensure that pupils know that teachers cannot offer unconditional confidentiality and are reassured that their best interests will be maintained. They will be reminded that if confidentiality has to be broken, they will be informed first and then supported as appropriate. They are encouraged to talk to their parents or carers and are provided with support to do so.

Employees who disclose that they are experiencing domestic abuse can be assured that the information they provide is confidential and will not be shared with other colleagues without their permission.

There are, however, some circumstances in which the employer's duty of care is the overriding factor, and confidentiality cannot be assured. This may occur when there are concerns regarding children, vulnerable adults or where the school is required to protect the safety of their employees. In these circumstances, the employee will be informed as to the reasons why confidentiality cannot be maintained. As far as possible, information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.