

Contextual Safeguarding: Children Living with Parental Domestic Abuse Webinar with Consultant Janine Ewen

Thank you for attending the training on **Contextual Safeguarding and Children Living with Parental Domestic Abuse**. This event was organised by the Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee (ESEC) Supported by the Edinburgh Public Protection Committees (30th of March 2026).

Below is a summary of the key themes, insights, and actionable takeaways discussed during the session to support your ongoing practice.

The collage features several key elements:

- Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre:** A website snippet titled "Working in policing and vulnerability: Insider tips from an early career researcher and harm reduction specialist" featuring a photo of Janine Ewen.
- Contextual Safeguarding Network:** A poster with the text: "Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to safeguarding children and young people which responds to their experiences of harm outside the home. We need to focus on getting basic child protections right, or seeing the child/young person first before the 'offender' label is slipped on them. We need to make sure support is given before young people encounter the criminal justice system. It's also vital to keep a strong focus on asking, discussing and seeking developments in how we can deliver the best prevention, harm reduction and treatment on the ground." It includes the Law Society of Scotland logo.
- Domestic Abuse Article:** A snippet titled "Understanding the impact of domestic abuse" dated 25/11/2024, stating: "Domestic abuse has far-reaching implications that affect every member of a household. Explore new resources that seek to understand and respond to its impact."
- Global Law Enforcement & Public Health Association Inc.:** A logo for the organization.
- Gender in Public Health and Safety:** A poster for a consultation event on Friday 18th and Saturday 19th October 2019 at COSLA Centre, Edinburgh. It lists sponsors like AMKA, 99, and CLEPH.
- The Sociological Review:** A book cover with the title "The Sociological Review".
- Research in Practice:** A snippet titled "research in practice" with a quote: "Young people are arrested while their exploiters usually go free, which is unjust".
- Drug Policy:** A snippet titled "Drug policy not protecting young people".
- Gender and Justice:** A snippet titled "Gender and Justice Volume 1: Issue 1".
- CRIMINOLOGY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE:** A logo for the journal, described as "An International Journal".
- Policinginsight:** A logo for the organization.
- Janine Ewen:** A photo of Janine Ewen with a caption: "Janine Ewen".
- Quote:** "Everyone assumes that the favelas are all unliveable, but they are bound together by close community ties. [Favela residents] had no choice but to make life as liveable as possible since the state turned a blind eye... Some of these evictions are corrupt, [looking] to gain the best areas in Rio de Janeiro." (James Freeman, Professor of the University of Concordia on the strategic mega-event thinning of Rio de Janeiro's favelas)

Core Training Themes

The Link Between Domestic Abuse and External Vulnerability

Pain or violence within the home often drives young people to seek "escapism" outside, where they may be more susceptible to grooming or exploitation.

Moving Beyond "At-Risk" Labels

There is a critical need to transition from Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) to **Healing-Centered Engagement (HCE)**, which focuses on holistic recovery, collective wellbeing, and a young person's future rather than just managing their symptoms.

The "Pre-County Lines" Context

Research as far back as the 1990s identified the grooming of young people and cross-border trafficking logistics, yet systemic lags meant these issues were not prioritised until much later.

Key Insights for Practice

Listening to Lived Experience

True child protection is rooted in understanding a child's actual lived reality. Young people who may "lie" about their situation are often trying to protect their families from official intervention rather than being "bad".

Strengths-Based Support

Focus on a young person's strengths and "nuggets of gold" within a community rather than viewing them through a "deficit model" or as a series of problems.

Spatial and Hyperlocal Context

Harm is often embedded in specific local cultures and geographic spaces. Effective solutions require a "bespoke, hyperlocal" approach that involves the community as part of the solution rather than imposing top-down measures.

Good Practice vs. Barriers to Safety

Effective Approaches

- Youth workers maintained a "hovering" presence in rural communities where criminal harm was emerging. They had a presence in spaces like pubs or clubs to build relationships.
- Grassroots, community-led support for both young people and their families is vital.
- Police and educators have shown a willingness to understand the deeper layers of domestic abuse and vulnerability.

Practices to Avoid:

- "Slapping on" immediate judgments or viewing complex harm simply as "risky behaviour".
- Short-term funding and the rejection of community-led initiatives.
- Allowing urban-centric definitions of harm to "colonise" or ignore the unique realities of rural communities.

Actionable Takeaways and Solutions

- **Prioritise Participation:** Meaningful participation is the only way to create accurate safety plans that make a real difference.
- **Foster Agency:** Reclassify children as active "rights-holders" rather than passive recipients of care.

- **Continuous Reassurance:** Be willing to hear the full story regarding domestic abuse and offer constant reassurance to prevent re-traumatisation.
- **Support Young Men:** Investing in support for boys and young men is essential for creating a safer future.

Cases for Reflective Practice

Case Study: Craig

Household Instability

Domestic Abuse: Mother is a victim of domestic violence.

Persistent Trauma: Craig and his sibling are targets of stepfather's abuse.

Escapism: Craig frequently flees the home to avoid the environment.

The Breaking Point

Tragedy: Craig's sister completes suicide following harm from their stepfather.

Escalation: Coping with an "impossible" situation, Craig turns to drug use.

Crisis: Domestic tension culminates in Craig lashing out physically at his mother.

Systemic Failure

Intervention: Police respond to the incident in Craig's bedroom.

Tunnel Vision: Authority focus remains strictly on the act of violence.

The Gap: No inquiry is made into the history of abuse or the sister's death.

Outcome

Displacement: Craig is told he is responsible for leaving the home.

Downward Spiral: Left without support, Craig's drug use and risk of harm escalate.

Case Study: Sarah

Household Context

Intergenerational Abuse: Mother experienced domestic abuse; Sarah also feels its impact.

Community Instability: After the breakdown of her parents' relationship, they relocate to a safer community, but stability is not immediate.

Needs: Sarah struggles with a lack of structure in her new surroundings and finds it difficult to cope with past trauma.

Conflicts with Family: Relationship with mother deteriorates, leading Sarah to feel like a visitor rather than a family member.

Escapism: She increasingly stays out of the home, prioritising outside connections as her primary way to cope.

Internal Struggle: Finding herself unable to leave, Sarah contemplates harming herself as a desperate escape.

Routine Substance Use: Heavy drinking becomes a regular coping mechanism for Sarah and her peer group.

Increased Vulnerability: This leads to "after parties" in private spaces with older, unknown men.

The Incident: Sarah passes out and wakes up the following day in physical pain, suspecting she has been raped.

Parental Burden: Sarah wishes to seek support from her mother but observes her mother is already "not coping" with her own trauma.

Protection of Others: She chooses silence to avoid adding more stress to an already unstable household.

Self-Blame: In the absence of professional support, Sarah rationalises the trauma as her own fault.

Cognitive Distortion: She uses the "heavy drinking" to excuse the harm done to her, further isolating herself from help.

Avoidance Strategy: Sarah continues attending after-parties specifically to avoid witnessing her mother's struggles at home.

Educational Disengagement: Overwhelmed by her external life, Sarah seeks to leave school entirely, removing her last remaining "safe" institution.

Addiction as Identity: Chronic substance use becomes her primary way of relating to the world; she no longer sees a life outside of this "world."

False Kinship: She perceives her high-risk peer group as the only people who truly "understand" her.

The Grooming Process: She enters a relationship with a local drug dealer who uses "emotional validation" (saying all the right things about her home life) to build trust.

Criminal Exploitation: This emotional bond is used to transition Sarah from a user to a participant in drug distribution, cementing her dependency on the perpetrator.

Case Study: James

The Driver of "Escapism"

Domestic Impact: James is constantly distracted by the domestic abuse at home and is worried about his mother.

Systemic Disengagement: Being placed in "bottom groups" at school and facing bullying further erodes his sense of belonging.

The Shift: This pain and lack of a "real place" within safe institutions (school/home) drives him to seek "escapism" outside.

Vulnerability and False Kinship

Acceptance: James finds a sense of being "accepted" by a peer group that engages in risk-taking behaviours like skipping class, smoking, and drinking.

Perceived Kinship: Like the "Sarah" case study, James likely perceives this high-risk group as the only people who "understand" him.

Increased Risk: The transition to "after parties" where drugs are present mirrors Sarah's trajectory, significantly increasing his exposure to potential exploitation or harm in private, unsupervised spaces.

False Kinship: James believes the older men are his "real friends". This mirrors the case of Sarah, where perpetrators use "emotional validation" regarding a young person's home life to build trust.

Cognitive Distortion: James perceives drug distribution as legitimate "work" in the oil and gas sector. This shows how exploiters manipulate a young person's ambitions to normalise criminal activity.

Isolation from Support: James's distance from his mother leaves her in a state of constant worry and guilt. Much like Sarah's mother, she may feel unable to cope due to her own trauma from domestic abuse.

Institutional Disengagement: His continued struggle at school and dismissal of its importance suggests he has fully removed himself from "safe" institutions.

Cycle of Dependency: By developing his own challenges with addiction, James's dependency on the perpetrator and the criminal environment is cemented.

Final Thoughts

**"They may forget what you said,
but they will never forget how
you made them feel."**

References/further reading (Janine can be contacted if access is a problem)

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Janine Ewen is a distinguished Global Consultant and Early Career Researcher (ECR) with over twenty years of expertise in safety, protection, and systemic vulnerability. Her influential work spans local and international landscapes, where she has shaped critical discourse on childhood domestic abuse, child-centered policing, and needs-based safety for underserved populations.

Janine continues to advance the field through innovative methodologies and pedagogy, focusing on the public health implications of inequality. Her work is dedicated to developing robust strategies that support individuals navigating the complex intersections of systemic risk.

Through her private consultancy, Janine provides expert support to students, practitioners, and academics in the following specialist areas:

- **Harm Reduction:** Strategies for children and young people.
- **Gender-Based Violence:** Advocacy and systemic reform.
- **Public Health:** Needs-based frameworks for undeserved communities.
- **Sensitive Policing:** Developing empathetic and effective tactical strategies

Explore her research and services www.janineewen.org.uk