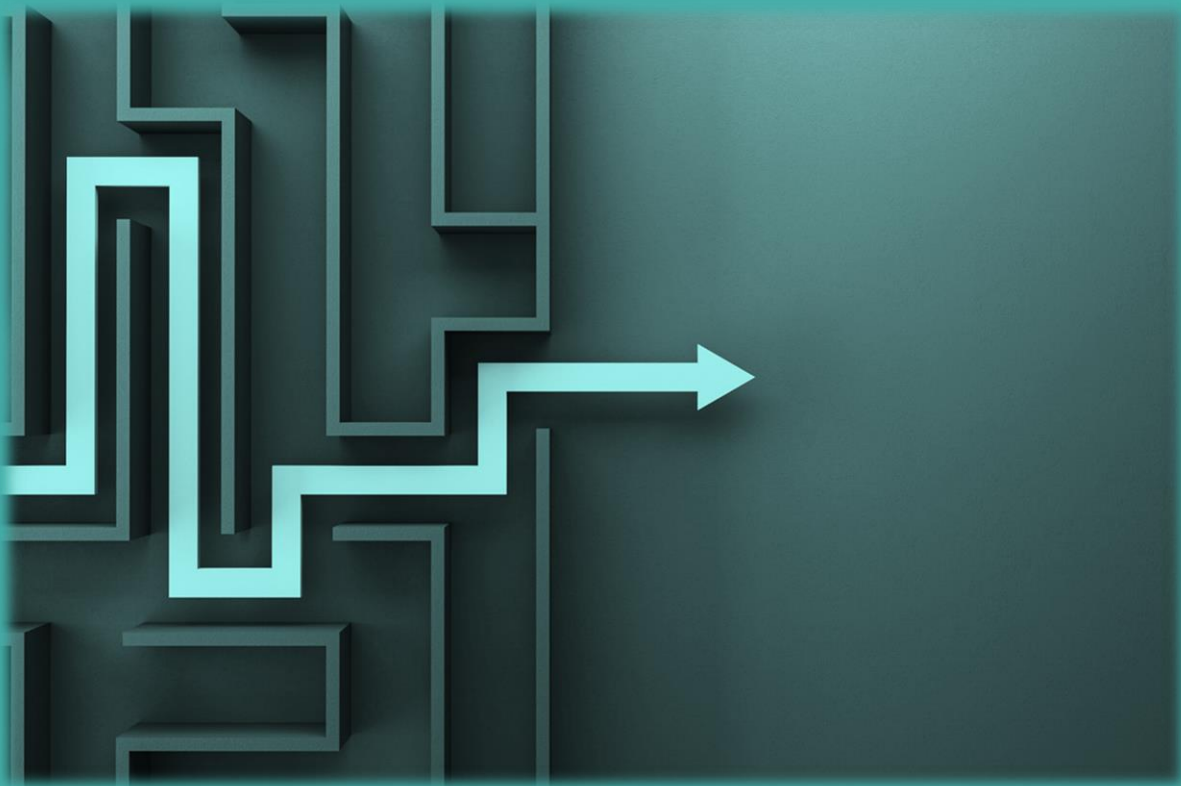


Domestic Abuse: Delivering Best Practice

And avoiding service-generated risks



A briefing for professionals by the Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee

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Introduction

The guidance provided in this document is **for professionals who do not work in specialist domestic abuse services** and whose remit is not to provide a specialist domestic abuse intervention. It is intended to support professionals across all sectors and areas of work to understand the **principles of how to deliver best practice and avoid service generated risks** when addressing domestic abuse specifically with victims/survivors. **To make best use of this document, please also make sure to read its accompanying documents**, particularly 'Supporting a Disclosure of Domestic Abuse', 'Responding to a Disclosure of Domestic Abuse' and 'Risk Assessment and Safety Planning'. These documents are all available on the [Domestic Abuse Information and Resources](#) page on the City of Edinburgh Council website, and they provide an introduction to best practice principles of domestic abuse.

What are Service-Generated Risks?

The term 'Service-Generated Risk' (SGR) refers to situations where a person's involvement with a service or system has the potential to increase the risk of harm to them rather than reducing it. Risk can be generated through the actions/inaction by services involved with either or both the victim/survivor and their child(ren). This can include any public, private or third sector service.

The information in this briefing is intended to demonstrate the principles of best practice on domestic abuse to help you build confidence in your practice. Working with people affected by domestic abuse always carries a level of risk – as does any work with people with varying degrees of vulnerability. However, implementing best practice can help you to minimise the level of risk generated by involvement in services and by domestic abuse overall.

Prerequisites for applying best practice

To help you apply the best practice principles outlined in this document, it is important that you:

1. Have all the up-to-date training you need to understand domestic abuse to a level that is consistent with your role within your organisation or service.
2. Make sure you are familiar with indicators of domestic abuse. If you identify indicators, listen out for potentially of high/escalating risk (please see the document titled 'Supporting a Disclosure: Trauma-Informed Practice', available on the [Domestic Abuse Information and Resources](#) page on the City of Edinburgh Council website for more information).
3. Make sure to share the risk and seek support and advice when you need it. Familiarise yourself with specialist services and organisations available in Edinburgh and nationally, who are happy to be contacted for guidance and advice, or to receive referrals. A list of specialist services and organisations can be found on the [City of Edinburgh Council Domestic Abuse website](#).

Best Practice Principles

Focusing on delivering best practice means that you can deliver the best possible support to a victim/survivor within your role and within the remit of your organisation or service, while avoiding generating risks.

1. The Priority is the safety and wellbeing of victims/survivors and children

In any situation where domestic abuse comes up, the first priority is to understand and assess the level of risk and to plan for safety. Be mindful that domestic abuse manifests in many different ways, and it's important to listen out for , financial abuse, sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation, 'honour' based abuse and other coercive and controlling behaviours. The best way to assess risk and safety plan is to use available tools and resources such as the [Domestic Abuse Safety Planning Booklet](#), bearing in mind the indicators of high risk outlined in the [DASH-RIC](#). It is also important to seek the guidance and support of more senior/specialist colleagues within and outside your organisation if needed.

2. Person-centred and trauma-informed support

When you are faced with indicators or disclosures of domestic abuse, it is vital to implement the principles of trauma-informed practice: Safety, Trustworthiness, Choice, Collaboration and Empowerment. Please also remember to place the person and their needs in the centre of your support, being sensitive to their identity, culture and their specific unique circumstances. More information can be found in the documents titled 'Supporting a Disclosure', 'Developing Trauma-Informed responses to Disclosures' and 'Individual Characteristics and Disclosure'. These documents are all available on the [Domestic Abuse Information and Resources](#) page on the City of Edinburgh Council website.

3. Responding to domestic abuse is a multi-agency responsibility

No single professional, organisation or agency will be able to respond to the full range of needs of victims/survivors and their children. It is really important that you communicate it to the people you support. Make sure to carry out actions that fall within your professional remit and share the responsibility of additional support actions with partners. Working in silos increases risk, but mistakes are less likely to happen when risk is shared and more professionals can contribute to safeguarding victims/survivors and children.

Don't be afraid to seek expert advice when you need it from specialist domestic abuse/Violence Against Women and Girls organisations and services, from Police Scotland, Health Services, Social Care Direct, Housing and others. These organisations are always happy to provide guidance and advice.

4. Use the resources available to you

There are a number of resources that can help you to provide the best support that you can. Such resources can include:

- The [Domestic Abuse](#) pages on the City of Edinburgh Council website
- Specialist support available from the [Council](#), [Police Scotland](#) and the [Third Sector](#)
- The [Domestic Abuse Safety Planning Booklet](#)
- Structures such as the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland ([DSDAS](#)) and the Edinburgh MARAC if necessary (**please always seek advice from a specialist organisation/service before referring to the MARAC**). More information can be found in the document titled 'Edinburgh Support Structures' on the [Domestic Abuse Information and Resources](#) page on the City of Edinburgh Council website.
- Support from within your organisation, such as your line management structure, or colleagues with experience in supporting people affected by domestic abuse.

5. Record the necessary information and keep it confidential

Make sure that you have made notes of all the necessary information to help you support a person to stay safe and to support their children to stay safe too. The Domestic Abuse Safety Planning Booklet provides a good introduction to the kinds of information that would be helpful to know when supporting people affected by domestic abuse.

It is also important that you keep good records of your work with a victim/survivor, and the two documents titled 'Record keeping and information sharing' and 'note-taking principles for domestic abuse' provide a good overview of the best way to record and safeguard information. For more information on best practice in record keeping for domestic abuse, see the relevant documents on the [Domestic Abuse Information and Resources](#) page on the City of Edinburgh Council website.

6. Sustain trust and maintain ongoing communication

Domestic abuse is often long-lasting and will not be resolved in a session or time-limited intervention. It is important that you practice in a trauma-informed way and that you apply best practice principles to make sure that you build trusting professional relationships with the people you support. That way, you can leave the door open for ongoing communication. It is important to demonstrate consistency and care in your approach, and to agree, if and where possible, to continue communicating with the person you support in a safe way. This will also support the person you are working with to trust you, and to reach out for support again if and when circumstances change in the future.

7. Looking after yourself

Domestic abuse can be challenging to work with. It can last for years, it can escalate, and no matter the victim's/survivor's, your own, your organisation's or your partners' best efforts, it may never resolve. These circumstances can give rise to work-related stress and burnout.

It is vital that you make sure to look after yourself, especially if you are dealing with high-risk cases of domestic abuse. Take time for breaks, share the load, seek advice from your colleagues and partners (including in team meetings and in support and supervision sessions). Make sure to take at least a few minutes a day to do something relaxing that you find fulfilling – listening to music, going for a walk, playing with a pet, speaking to a friend, doing a hobby, etc.

By looking after yourself, not only are you making sure that you are in the best possible place to support vulnerable people, but you are also demonstrating the importance of self-care in staying safe and well at work.

What if the person doesn't agree with the actions I'm proposing?

There may be times when the person you're supporting might not agree to the course of action you're proposing to take. They may not want any action taken at all, as they may state that they can manage the situation and keep themselves and their children safe. They may also not agree with your proposed actions because they don't want any of their information shared with partner agencies.

To mitigate situations where there may be a disagreement about next steps, remember the key principles below:

1. Always set out your confidentiality agreement from the start and be clear about when you may be required to share information – with or without consent. If

necessary, you may need to remind the person of this agreement throughout your work together, and if necessary, to involve a more senior colleague/team leader/manager in your discussion. They may be able to offer clearer guidance and information both to you and to the person you are supporting.

2. Always be aware of, and act according to, your organisation's policies and procedures, particularly those pertaining to the protection of children, adults and the wider public.
3. Remember that support from specialist services both inside and outside your organisation is always available. You can always reach out for support and guidance anonymously from professionals with expertise in domestic abuse.

What if something goes wrong?

It is normal to be concerned about doing or saying the wrong thing when faced with situations you have limited knowledge about. It's also normal to doubt what advice to give in any given situation for fear of making things worse. It's possible that despite our best efforts at supporting people, things can go wrong, and this can happen even when you have implemented all the best practice principles outlined in this document.

When things go wrong, which they sometimes do, it's important to approach the situation with a learning mindset. The aim should be to understand what did or did not happen as it should, and what consequently contributed to the situation deteriorating. Practices like learning reviews are important in helping us to understand how we can improve practice in situations where events unfolded in a way they shouldn't have. Placing blame might be tempting – but this hinders progress and positive partnership work, while it also compounds the detrimental emotional impact on the professional(s) involved in the situation.

No professional can ever fully control circumstances or outcomes to make sure that everything goes smoothly. However, what is important is that you apply the best practice principles outlined in this document to make sure that you are providing the best support possible at all times, and to seek support from more senior/specialist colleagues and partner organisations whenever you need to.

Conclusion

What is a good domestic abuse intervention when working with victims and survivors?

As discussed throughout this document, it is not possible to address domestic abuse alone, or to resolve it for someone. All we can do as professionals is to practice to the best of our abilities.

A best practice response to domestic abuse is one that:

- a. Places the victim/survivor and their children at the centre considering their unique safety and wellbeing needs and circumstances
- b. Is trauma-informed and demonstrates care
- c. Creates a trusting relationship with people, encourages and maintains ongoing communication
- d. Is based on up-to-date training
- e. Adheres to the policies and procedures of your organisation/service
- f. Shares the risk with partner organisations and services
- g. Includes the advice and expertise of specialists
- h. Makes use of relevant professional resources
- i. Involves the victim/survivor as much as possible based on their capacity
- j. Respects the victim's/survivor's agency and capacity to make decisions based on professional advice
- k. Is professionally recorded and demonstrates proportionate actions to the risks identified

List of Additional Resources

- Resources and Briefings by the [Scottish Women's Rights Centre](#)
- Resources on the [City of Edinburgh Council Website](#)
- 'I am worried about someone': Information on [Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline](#)
- Information and resources for people affected by domestic abuse on the [Citizens' Advice Scotland](#) website