

Domestic Homicide Reviews

Sheffield Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership

How does learning in Sheffield compare to national learning?



Sheffield key themes are very similar to those identified nationally by the Home Office and others:

Domestic Abuse Awareness

Workers should understand that the experience of living with domestic abuse can mean that victims may minimise what they are going through. Victims may hide or lie about abuse because of shame, stigma, cultural issues or fear of what agencies will do, particularly when they have children.

Some people living in situations of stress or poverty are more vulnerable to being abused e.g. refugees. Young people are also at increased risk of abuse and abuse can be harder to spot as their relationships can be hidden or abuse can escalate more quickly. Become familiar with the domestic abuse definition – remember it starts at age 16, abuse between family members is included and men can experience abuse too.

Workers should have knowledge of risk factors around domestic abuse – e.g. that if a couple separate that does not mean the abuse will end and it can often become worse. Poor mental health can result from living with domestic abuse, as can coping with abuse through alcohol or drug misuse.

Asking the question

Workers need to learn sensitive ways to ask questions about abuse and remember that the words 'domestic abuse' do not translate in many languages. Workers should record when they have asked the question – even if the answer is negative, and ask again, *don't just ask once, stress that domestic abuse is common and there is help available*. Be patient - it may take time before a victim trusts a worker enough to disclose.

Safeguarding

Agencies need to consider whether children are at risk when living in households where domestic abuse is taking place. *If adults are coping with mental health issues and substance misuse, professionals need to enquire about conflict or problems at home, especially if there are children in the family*. Adults who have care and support needs may be particularly vulnerable – domestic abuse can sometimes be overlooked as 'carer stress'.

Think others who may be at risk e.g. **children**

Don't treat incidents in isolation, domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour. Be patient, non-judgemental and keep trying to engage victims in support.

Pathways and Processes

Workers need to be aware of and understand domestic abuse pathways – how to identify domestic abuse, what the risk levels are, how to signpost and how to refer. Posters and leaflets are produced in a range of languages – *can your agency display these or help distribute them?* Agencies need to have processes and policies in place explaining what is expected of staff in relation to domestic abuse e.g. when staff should complete **risk assessments using the DASH tool**, who needs to know about domestic abuse within their organisation, what steps to take, and how their agency feeds information in to MARAC. Do not assume that another agency has done a DASH or is taking action to support or protect someone even if the victim tells you they are. *Do include all relevant information about previous abuse on the DASH – don't just focus on the current incident*.

MARAC is an important process in helping to keep people safe – all relevant agencies should engage with MARAC, and ensure that up to date appropriate information is shared at the meetings. Agencies that can't attend such as GPs and schools should also share information with the MARAC when requested.

Accurate record keeping and encouraging the use of flagging or coding on all case management systems - within all services is crucial. This ensures that the work undertaken with those affected is recorded for future reference and that those affected by abuse are easily identifiable when accessing the service in the future.

Discharge / exiting those affected by domestic abuse from the service – relevant for all services in contact with those affected - safety plans should be in place, factoring in victims who are returning to live with the perpetrator.

Public Awareness

Encourage third party reporting e.g. when you can hear or see a neighbour being abused. Increase awareness in local communities as victims are more likely to disclose first to family or friends.

Domestic Abuse is everyone's business. If someone discloses to you – do something with the information, don't assume someone else will.

Access FREE local training – details at: www.actionorg.uk/domestic-abuse-training/