

Lessons Learned Briefing

Domestic Homicide Review

Upcoming Reviews

This brief aims to help professionals improve future responses to domestic abuse, based on the learnings from Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) undertaken by the Wakefield Community Safety Partnership.

How can we improve?

Professional Curiosity

Victims may have significant contact with services but may refuse to provide information or provide inaccurate or misleading information. Practitioners must not accept information at face value and use professional curiosity to better understand the risks.

Research by Monckton-Smith et al points towards the fact that victims will not report abuse if they believe that the service won't be useful or helpful and this could prevent victims from reporting.

Where service users miss appointments or are unable to bring children to appointments on a number of occasions, practitioners should use professional curiosity to understand why. Professionals are sufficiently curious and confident to explore unsafe sexual practices.

DASH risk assessments.

Practitioners should understand the importance of seeking all relevant information from any available sources when assessing the risk of domestic abuse.

Where a victim, or potential victim, refuses to engage with the risk assessment process, decision makers should recognise this as a further indicator of risk.

Decision makers should be particularly careful where perpetrators of abuse make threats to kill victims, cases involving coercive and controlling behaviour, and those with substance abuse.

Practitioners need a sound understanding of controlling behaviour in order to use domestic abuse checklists, (i.e. DASH), effectively.

Using Chronologies

When information is shared between agencies, services need to be proactive to events rather reactive in addressing the risk to both the victim and to children. Using the totality of information available may assist in progressing referrals or assessment more quickly.

Practitioners should consider using chronologies to provide an overview of key information on the file of adults and children in complex cases to enable decisions to be made based on a more holistic understanding of the risks that individuals face.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse training is a key element of proving you with the skills and knowledge to identify the risk of domestic abuse and to make the appropriate referrals. The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act widened the definition of abuse, all practitioners need to be clear on this definition. Children can be victims of domestic abuse in their own right under the new definition.

Professor Jane Monckton-Smith has produced research that describes 8 stages in a sequence that can lead to domestic homicide, this provides a very clear understanding of the impact of coercive and controlling behaviour on victims. Where practitioners identify domestic abuse, all relevant information should be shared with partner agencies in a timely fashion.

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How can we improve? *(continued)*

Information sharing

Information sharing and sharing information consistently is essential to ensure risk assessments and decision-making is being based upon all the available information.

Where practitioners have concerns about the risks an adult faces or presents to others, but they don't fit with-in statutory frameworks for information sharing, (i.e.. MAPPA, MARAC etc), they should be encouraged to share information with, or seek information from, relevant agencies to support risk assessments..

Trauma

We know that traumatic events, often referred to as adverse childhood experiences, (ACEs), in a person's early years can have a significant negative impact on their adult life.

Identifying potential ACEs enables professionals to adopt a trauma informed approach and better meet the individual's care and support needs, whilst mitigating the risk of re-traumatisation. Trauma informed practice may also help to overcome the barriers that some individuals experience when accessing services.

Ask the Question

We need to ask the question about domestic abuse as a routine enquiry or targeted enquiry.

Training

Professionals to be aware of non-fatal strangulation and the risks associated with illicit drug use during sex. Professionals to understand the DASH the significance of non-fatal strangulation and substance misuse and the signs of coercive control.

Reports will be available once the DHRs have been approved by the Home Office DHR Quality Assurance Panel. For further info contact

DHR@wakefield.gov.uk

Assessment

Where there is steroid use and nitrate inhalation, assessments to consider the implications to emotional and physical health. Steroid use is associated with aggressive and/or violent behaviour.

Relationships

A short-term relationship can become abusive very quickly; therefore, professionals need to be aware and understand the complexities of domestic abuse and recognise the signs of coercive control. Raising awareness about the risks associated with the use of strangulation as part of sex.

Criminal Justice System

Professionals to respond to reports of domestic abuse effectively and promptly.

The Role of Health Professionals

Primary care staff to have an increased awareness of the required assessment of substance misuse when presenting in practice, sexual safety when using illicit substances, risks of non-fatal strangulation and when to enquire further on domestic abuse.

