



Violence in young people's relationships

Practice messages

The development of a rapport is viewed as a prerequisite to exploring this issue with young people. All direct work should be undertaken in a reflective manner which seeks to explore and address specific issues relating to culture, ethnicity, sexuality or disability. As some young people may also be experiencing health related problems (such as mental health or drug/alcohol problems) partnership working may be necessary. In addition, IPV and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) distinctions require consideration, so that responses can be properly targeted (see Webb and Holmes, 2015, and Godar, 2013, for CSE).

Key messages include:

Discussing healthy relationships

- > Young people may not be aware they are in an abusive relationship. Practitioners should explore what a healthy relationship is with the young person and then ask them to compare this to their current relationship.
- > Discuss the young person's ideal relationship and encourage them to think about how their current relationship compares to this.
- > Don't be afraid to challenge young people if their understanding of what a healthy relationship is makes them unsafe.

Assessing abuse

- > Be prepared to spend time exploring what abuse is as young people may not identify their own experiences as abusive.
- > Validate the seriousness of young people's relationships.
- > Explore using the young people's version of the 'DASH' Risk Identification Checklist (formally called CAADA-DASH) or the Duluth Teen Power and Control Wheel to help inform conversations with the young person and identify the levels of risk they face. Both tools can be used as a guide to inform assessments, taking into account they may not always be appropriate depending on the age of the child.
- > It is important that this is handled in a sensitive manner. Revealing to a young person that they are at high risk of serious harm may well be frightening and overwhelming.
- > State exactly what your concerns are by using the answers the young person gave and by explaining your professional reasoning and judgement.

Online forms of abuse

- > Ask about a young person's online life/habits to ascertain risks, vulnerabilities and approaches to improve online safety.
- > The young person may fear that disclosing online abuse will result in limits to their use of online communications. Explain internet safety instead and work around limits so that the young person can continue to use social media.
- > Don't press the issue if the young person doesn't disclose. Instead, work with the young person on a more general theme of abusive behaviour and discuss how it can take place via social media/online.
- > It is important that you know how young people communicate online. When asking the questions as part of your risk assessment, give examples of how abuse can take place online so that young people can identify and feel confident you know how to respond to their disclosure.

Safety planning: During and after an abusive relationship

Many young people do not want to end the relationship (and may be very resistant to being told to do so), but they do want the violence to stop (Barter et al, 2015; Wood et al, 2011). Reflecting adult DV, the most risky time for victims is often when the relationship ends which can lead to an escalation of violence. It is therefore essential that any move to end a relationship is undertaken in a considered manner led by the young person and supported by a professional or adult, with an agreed safety plan in place.

The NSPCC and the Association of Teachers and Lectures (ATL) have developed a safety plan tool to assist adults with supporting a young person who is experiencing relationship abuse. The plan sets out key principles to follow:

www.atl.org.uk/Images/guidance-and-safety-plan-for-young-people-nov-13.pdf

Within these plans consideration should also be given to how wider peer groups or peer networks may present a risk (see Firmin, 2013b).

Prevention messages

A recent UK review of domestic violence prevention programmes for children and young people provides clear messages for what works (Stanley et al, 2015):

- > Programmes that seek to challenge social norms, including gender norms and victim blaming, and harness pro-social peer pressure to change attitudes.
- > Both young people and experts argued for the value of drama/theatre and narrative.
- > Authenticity achieved through material that delivered emotional charge, which was meaningful to young people and made 'it real'.
- > Authenticity enhanced when interventions delivered by those with relevant expertise or experience, including young people themselves.
- > Whole population interventions harness peer group power but can also identify those at risk who require additional services.
- > Interventions need to take account of power differentials, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality.
- > Messages should be positively framed, avoiding the blaming that can provoke resistance from some boys.
- > Children's and young people's perceptions and experiences should be incorporated into interventions and evaluations.

Wider practice messages on what works

- > Modelling of positive conflict resolution and healthy relationships.
- > Enhancing empathy for victims.
- > Supporting self-esteem.
- > Enhancing relationship attachments, possibly including work with parents/carers.

Working with young IPVA instigators

Less evidence exists on direct work with young instigators of IPVA. Some key messages for working with young people, and especially young men (whose violence and abuse has been shown to have the most significant impact), are provided by Fox et al (2014) based on their boys to men project:

- > Terminology must be carefully considered; referring to young people who have undertaken acts of abuse against a partner as 'perpetrators' may inhibit receptivity to professional support and intervention.
- > Young men who present the greatest dangers to partners often have multiple problems that leave them beyond the reach of schools and too difficult for offender managers to support in the context of time-limited interventions.
- > The absence of secure and trusting relationships in their past can make it difficult for some young men to form positive relationships and to engage effectively with organisations.
- > Commissioners and organisations need to develop structures that allow practitioners the time and space to build trust with young men who are resistant to talking openly about IPVA - providing a basis to initiate engagement.
- > Young people who perpetrate IPVA are more likely to have been exposed to abuse in the home during their childhood. Practitioners need to be able to provide young people with supportive mentors over the longer-term and to attend, where necessary, to the wider dynamics of family and community life that contribute to the occurrence of violence.

Practitioners working with young people in this context must be able to go beyond working with 'couples' in order to fully understand the family and wider dynamics involved, including peer groups and networks. The limitations of school-based universal interventions to change engrained IPVA perpetration need to be recognised (Fox et al, 2014; Barter et al, 2014). Similarly, The World Health Organization (2014) concluded that the only evidenced effective intervention for entrenched youth violence, including IPVA, was therapeutic programmes and that those based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) showed the best results.

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To help guide practitioners, SafeLives, a national charity working to combat domestic violence - www.safelives.org.uk - has developed a range of practice messages, based on the research evidence and their own practice experience, for engaging with young people experiencing relationship abuse.

The summary of these practice messages contained within this resource is taken from the accompanying Research in Practice Frontline Briefing *Violence in young people's relationships*. The full briefing provides further information about current research and outlines key findings and practice messages relating to two forms of domestic violence (DV) perpetrated by young people:

- > violence and abuse in adolescent relationships
- > adolescent to parent violence and abuse.

The main briefing, also published April 2016, includes full references.

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