



Strategic Partnership Boards
SAFETY SAFEGUARDING WELLBEING



Bitesize video guide: Domestic abuse

Hello, my name is Fozia Shaikh and I am an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate, known as an IDVA. I work for Solace, a charity funded by Waltham Forest to help both men and women over 16 who are experiencing domestic and sexual abuse.

As an IDVA, I often hear professionals ask: “why doesn’t the victim just leave?”, or they’re frustrated when victims reconcile with an abusive partner. But this is complicated and it’s important that your message to the victim remains clear and consistent: ‘You can talk to me; I can help you; I can support you to get to a safe place.’

On first reflection we think of all the positives a victim gains when they leave: Safety, freedom, independence, a new start, and so on. Children may be able to play, have positive adult role models and perhaps show improvements in school, and be safe.

However, if they leave, they lose what is certain, immediate, and tangible. These include basic needs, their home and possessions, money, their job, family and friends, possibly children, and the safety they’ve created by developing protective measures. The victim will be worried their children might lose their parent, relations, siblings and friends. Even their school, pets and toys, or finances for activities.

Professionals need to support domestic abuse victims in making these decisions while recognising the need to safeguard children. It is hoped victims working with professionals attain awareness and insight in to harm they are experiencing and effect change.

Research evidences the potential lifelong impact of harm to children and young people exposed to domestic violence, which in itself is a form of child abuse, in terms of mental ill health, criminal activity, sexual exploitation and the like.

Practitioners need to keep in mind that children's safety is paramount. This can mean taking appropriate action to safeguard children even if it conflicts with the choices the victim makes.

As a multi-agency network of practitioners working with families we need to plan and work together effectively with the victim and any children to enable the victim to make the choice that is right for them. This includes practitioners who can make sure the person responsible for causing the harm is held accountable – the perpetrator

Separating from an abusive relationship is a high risk time for the victim and their children, and includes the risk of death – 79% of all murders committed by a partner or ex-partner, happen after separation. It is therefore important you remember that separation does not imply safety. It is a time when vulnerability increases and often this, as well as the threat of further violence, accounts for why some victims choose to reconcile.

It has also been shown that domestic violence can escalate or start during pregnancy and in times of change in impairment or health so it's important at these times to look out for signs of domestic abuse.

In Waltham Forest there are a range of support for families who have experienced domestic abuse including the Solace IDVA service. In addition, our service is the gateway to the 'marketplace' which offers a range of therapeutic interventions for women and children, including counselling, group work, play therapy and interventions for young perpetrators. Waltham Forest also has a perpetrator programme.

Please see the web address on screen for more information.

<https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/domestic-violence>

The three messages I hope you take away from today are:

1. The decision to leave an abusive relationship is complex – please take account of these complexities, while ensuring that any children are safeguarded. A multi-agency plan and joined up approach is essential
2. Separation carries risk. We must increase not withdraw services available to the victim and their children after separation has occurred. Contact Solace to find out more about these services. (Onscreen only) 07340 683382 or walthamforestidvaservice@solacewomensaid.org
3. Finally, safety for the victim and children can only be ensured if the cause of the problem is addressed - and that is the person responsible for the abuse. Services should give the perpetrator the opportunity to change their behaviour by way of targeted programmes, which are available in Waltham Forest, and/or criminal justice to hold them to account. For more information about perpetrator interventions please contact RISE on the number onscreen. (onscreen 07535 651784)

Thanks for watching and goodbye.