

CHILD PROTECTION
UPDATE 2015

Module 1
Identifying and
responding to
domestic and
family violence



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Slide 1

Facilitator notes

Allow 45 minutes for this session.

Prepare handouts:

- Case study
 - 1 copy per participant
 - Same case study for primary and secondary schools
- Case study facilitator notes
 - 1 copy only for facilitator/s
- Reading: “How are children affected by family violence” (refer slide 11)
 - A small number of copies, as this is optional and will be made available at close of session.

Throughout this module, the term ‘parent’ should be read to be inclusive of carers.

Session outline

This session includes information on:

- new directions in NSW for domestic and family violence
- indicators in children and young people of possible exposure
- appropriate responses to safety, welfare and wellbeing concerns for those children and young people
- staff roles in follow up support.

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Slide 2

Facilitator notes

The Child Protection 2015 update aims to build on the knowledge and skills of staff in addressing child protection and child wellbeing concerns.

Staff working with children and young people are required to have up to date knowledge and skills to identify and respond to child protection concerns according to their roles.

This is a training session which deals with a sensitive and controversial issue in the community. The information may raise strong emotions and bring issues or experiences of staff to the surface. The facilitator should remind participants that, if the presentation raises issues, a staff member can discretely leave the room or speak to you after the session. In some circumstances services could be accessed if the staff member feels distressed or should they wish to discuss personal experiences – such as the Employee Assistance Program, private counsellors or a general practitioner.

Messages that may be helpful (optional):

- domestic violence is a complex issue that has a significant cost to our society
- staff have a duty of care to assist vulnerable children and young people
- staff within schools, due to their unique and trusted role with families play a key role in recognising domestic violence and linking non-offending parents and their children to support.

The new NSW plan –
It stops here: Standing Together to end domestic and family violence

In 2014 the NSW government made a commitment to improving the response to domestic and family violence by all organisations, including schools, through:

- increased collaboration
- integrated service provision
- improved information sharing.



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Facilitator notes

In 2014 the NSW government released a new plan for improving the response to domestic and family violence – *It stops here: Standing Together to end domestic and family violence*.

The NSW domestic and family violence reforms follow a recent inquiry that found:

- the NSW response to domestic violence for adults and for children has been fragmented, complex and inconsistent
- victims faced different service standards and complex service pathways
- the system focussed overly on criminal justice interventions at the expense of victim support.

(Domestic Violence Trends and Issues in NSW (2012) NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues)

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New strategies under *It Stops Here*

- a common *Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool* (not for Education staff who will continue to use the Mandatory Reporter Guide)
- Central Referral Point for electronic referrals
- state-wide Local Coordination Points
- Safety Action Meetings – interagency meetings to discuss local victims at serious threat
- additional information sharing provisions.



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Facilitator notes

It Stops Here Safer Pathway has a number of components:

- A common Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool is used to assess the level of threat to the safety of victims of domestic and family violence. It is for mandatory use by police. It is not mandatory for other agencies.
- The Central Referral Point is for electronic referrals of victims who are found to be at serious threat following the application of the Safety Assessment Tool. The Referral Point sorts the referrals and allocates them electronically to a local coordination point.
- Local coordination points are a network of non-government services that assess the cases and make referrals to appropriate services.
- Where the threat to the victims of domestic violence is assessed as serious, the case is referred to a Safety Action Meeting.

Education staff have been involved in a trial of Safety Action Meetings in Orange and Waverley. The meetings have occurred fortnightly. Cases involving children at local schools are discussed and information shared. The education representatives have liaised with the relevant schools before and after the meetings. Those involved have reported that the information exchange and coordination of interventions between agencies have been useful.

In addition to Chapter 16A (of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act) where information can be shared about the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people; Part 13A of the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* has been amended to allow information collection and sharing at the Central Referral Point, local coordination points and at Safety Action Meetings.

Schools often have good information about how children and families are functioning, about family relationships, networks and strengths and this information can help agencies to work better with families.

Slide 4

Domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear. It is usually manifested as part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.

*It Stops Here- Standing together to end domestic and family violence
(NSW 2014)*



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Facilitator notes

The intersection between domestic and family violence and child abuse is well established. Children who are subjected to or witness domestic violence experience significant trauma as a consequence of living in fear. They are more likely to experience or perpetrate domestic violence as adults.

“The toxic stress and complex trauma caused by living in a perpetual state of alert can damage the developing brain and have profound long-term psychological effects.”

Violence and childhood: How persisting fear can alter the developing child's brain (Bruce Perry 2001).

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Behaviours that may constitute domestic and family violence:

- physical violence
- sexually abusive or coercive behaviour
- emotional or psychological abuse including verbal abuse and threats of violence
- economic abuse
- harassment, intimidation or coercion of the other person's family (continued)



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Facilitator notes

The presence of domestic violence puts children at high risk of experiencing physical abuse with rates of co-occurrence ranging from 45% to 70%. There is evidence that the presence of domestic violence also increases the risk of child sexual abuse.

Economic abuse includes denying a person reasonable financial autonomy or denying financial support. It can include threats to withdraw financial support and manipulative provision of financial support. It can also be not allowing a person to seek or hold employment.

Behaviour towards the other person's family, such as rudeness, harassment or intimidation, is often a strategy to alienate the person from their support networks of family and friends. Other strategies to isolate a person include restriction on the use of the phone, car or other transport or moving to an area where the other person has no family or social contacts or employment opportunities.

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Behaviours that may constitute domestic and family violence: (continued)

- deprivation of liberty
- preventing the other person from making or keeping connections with her or his family or kin, friends, faith or culture
- damaging property
- hurting family pets or animals.



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Facilitator notes

Depriving a person of their liberty can be forbidding or physically preventing the person from going out and meeting people. It can also be by making excessive demands on a person so they have very limited free time.

Damage can be to any property, irrespective of whether the other person owns the property. It can also be denying that the other person has any entitlement to joint property.

Violence can be indirectly wielded by causing injury or death to an animal that is important to the family, irrespective of whether the other person owns the animal.

Slide 7

Domestic violence-related assaults recorded by NSW Police Force

In NSW during the 12 months prior to September 2012 there were:

- 20,709 female victims and 9,199 male victims
- 11% of female victims were aged 0-17 years
- 18% of male victims were aged 0-17 years.



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Facilitator notes

Domestic violence assaults recorded by Police include physical violence and threats of violence. They don't include sexual offences or other forms of domestic violence – such as emotional or social abuse or isolation.

The statistics include children and young people who were assaulted during a domestic violence incident. They do not include children who witness or who are present in a household when domestic and family violence has occurred. Many of these children are reported to Family and Community Services for child protection concerns.

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Statistics show:

- the majority (86%) of incidents of domestic assaults occurred on residential premises
- the peak days for domestic assault are Saturdays and Sundays
- the peak time is between 6pm and 9pm
- there are more domestic assaults in the period between October and March
- the rate of domestic violence peaks on the first of January.

Where the victim is under 15 years of age, male victims of assault usually outnumber female victims.

The prevalence of domestic violence is higher in areas that have:

- a higher percentage of sole parents under 25 years of age
- a higher percentage of public housing, a higher male unemployment rate
- a higher percentage of Aboriginal residents
- higher rates of residential instability (i.e. population turnover). (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2005-2013)

Despite these trends, the facilitator should stress that domestic violence can affect anyone in the community, regardless of age, sexual or gender identity, race, culture, ethnicity, disability, religion, economic status or location.

How many children and young people are affected by child abuse in NSW?

Reports to Family and Community Services Helpline in 2012/13

- 246, 173 reports of concern
 - representing 103,645 children and young people.
- 104,817 were risk of significant harm
 - representing 64,470 children and young people.

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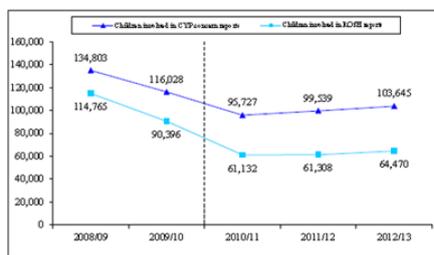
Facilitator notes

The number of children and young people represented in the reports received in the 12 month period 2012-2013 indicates that a many individual children and young people were reported twice or multiple times.

The next slide shows the pattern of reports over the past few years.

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Reports to Family and Community Services Helpline in 2012/13



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Community Services Annual Statistical Report 2012/13

Facilitator notes

Reports to Family and Community Services decreased after 28 January 2010, when the threshold for reporting was raised from suspected risk of harm to suspected risk of significant harm (ROSH).

At the same time, Child Wellbeing Units were established in the Department of Education and Communities, NSW Health and Police. During 2013 the Education Child Wellbeing Unit received over 12,000 contacts.

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Domestic violence is represented in these statistics in a number of ways:

- as a single reported issue of *carer concern: domestic violence*
- as a co-existing concern with other reports of *sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological harm, neglect: shelter/environment, neglect: food, neglect: hygiene/clothing, carer concern: substance abuse and carer concern: mental health.*

Children living with violence are at increased risk of a range of negative outcomes including:

- depression
- anxiety
- post-traumatic stress symptoms
- interpersonal problems
- developmental problems
- behavioural problems.



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Facilitator notes

The facilitator should emphasise that this is not a complete list.

There are many ways that children and young people can be negatively affected by experiencing or witnessing violence. They include physical, developmental, psychological and behavioural impacts.

Behavioural problems which may be observed in a school setting include acting out, violence and aggression towards others. It may also be observed as withdrawal, compliance, anxiety and disassociating behaviour.

Violence is frequently accompanied by other family problems that are detrimental to children's safety and development. These may include parental substance abuse or mental health problems, neglect and disrupted living arrangements.

Not all children and young people will be affected by violence in the same way. Impacts may be influenced by the characteristics of the child or young person, characteristics of the violence, the attachment experiences of the child or young person and the impact of the violence on the primary carer.

The extent to which parenting capacity is affected by violent behaviours is also influenced by the presence of protective factors in the family or extended family.

Responses within families can be different. Some children are able to experience supportive and nurturing environments despite the presence of parental problems.

Inform participants that, if they are interested in reading the optional Handout "How are children affected by family violence" pp22-26 in *Working with families where an adult is violent*, Human Services, Victoria 2014 it will be available after the session.

Slide 11

Brainstorm:

What are some behaviours of children in our school that may indicate they are exposed to, or are experiencing, domestic and family violence?

Primary schools



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Facilitator notes for primary schools

Large group brainstorm – What are some behaviours of children in our school that may indicate they are exposed to, or are experiencing, domestic and family violence?

Reinforce that witnessing or experiencing domestic and family violence often leads to trauma in children and young people. Unresolved trauma can affect brain development, emotional development and relationships with others. This is often evident in specific behaviours in children and young people.

Brainstorm responses may include:

- loss of self esteem and confidence
- aggression
- problems with anxiety and fearfulness
- decreased academic performance
- developmentally inappropriate sexualised play or behaviour
- sleep disturbance, nightmares
- difficulty in seeking or accepting comfort
- regression
- running away from home
- changes in personality and important relationships
- problematic sexual behaviour such as promiscuity and exploitation
- withdrawal and loss of enjoyment in activities
- attempts to manage overwhelming feelings with substance use or numbing out and dissociating.

Note: Emphasise that often children and young people's behaviours are a way of communicating their distress. In responding to difficult or challenging behaviours, consideration should always be given to what has happened to the child or young person rather than focussing on what may be wrong with the child or young person.

Slide12

Brainstorm:

What are some behaviours of children and young people in our school that may indicate they are exposed to, or are experiencing, domestic and family violence?

Secondary schools 13



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Facilitators note for secondary schools

Large group discussion – What are some behaviours of children and young people in our school that may indicate they are exposed to, or are experiencing, domestic and family violence?

Reinforce that witnessing or experiencing domestic and family violence often leads to trauma in children and young people. Unresolved trauma can affect brain development, emotional development and relationships with others. This is often evident in specific behaviours in children and young people.

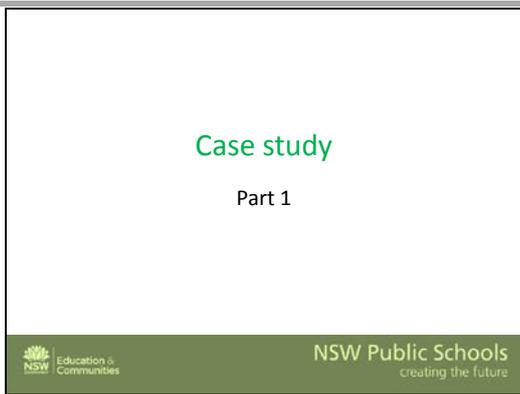
Brainstorm responses may include:

- loss of self esteem and confidence
- aggression
- problems with anxiety
- decreased academic performance
- regression
- running away from home
- changes in personality and important relationships
- problematic sexual behaviour such as promiscuity and exploitation
- withdrawal and loss of enjoyment in activities
- risk taking
- suicidal behaviours
- self-harming behaviours
- mental health problems such as depression and anxiety
- attempts to manage overwhelming feelings with substance use or numbing out and dissociating.

Note: Adolescents frequently demonstrate behavioural changes and interpersonal difficulties that may be misinterpreted and simply put down to ‘adolescence’.

Emphasise that often children and young people’s behaviours are a way of communicating their distress. In responding to difficult or challenging behaviours, consideration should always be given to what has happened to the child or young person rather than focussing on what may be wrong with the child or young person.

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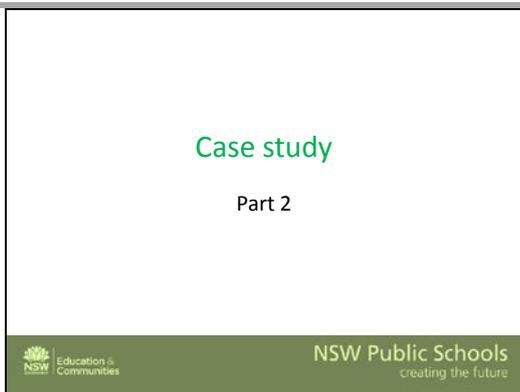
Facilitator notes

Print and hand out pages 1 and 2 of the case study.

Allow 15 minutes for this activity

- divide into smaller groups
- handout Part 1 of case study
- allow 7 minutes for discussion based on the questions
- allow 8 minutes for groups to share their responses to each of the questions with the large group.

Possible responses are included in the information for the facilitators.



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Facilitator notes

Print and hand out page 3 of the case study.

Allow 6 minutes for this activity

- remain in the smaller groups
- handout Part 2 of case study
- allow 3 minutes for discussion based on the question
- allow 3 minutes for groups to share their responses to the question with the large group.

Possible responses are included in the information for the facilitators.

In discussing this case study, reference is made to the mother as the adult victim and the father as the domestic violence offender, in the next few slides. It should be noted that this is not always the case. In 2011 the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research found that 18% of domestic violence offenders were female.

Why doesn't she just leave?

It would seem a simple solution to leave an abusive relationship however this does not take into account the complexity of issues women may face.

- What could be some issues Pamela may need to deal with if she ended her relationship with Bob?



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Facilitator notes

The following slides consider some of the dynamics of domestic and family violence and the impact this has on family relationships.

It is likely that Pamela will not leave Bob at this point in time. Although it may seem the best solution for her and the children, this solution does not take into account the complexity, dynamics and constraints of her relationship with Bob and the issues she would have to deal with if she ended her relationship with Bob.

Call upon suggestions of the issues Pamela may need to deal with. Responses could include:

- We do not know the level of threats and violence Pamela has experienced, she may be afraid of what Bob will do. The risks to women and children, post-separation, are very high
- Pamela says she has “bad nerves” and that she is taking medication. We do not know the extent of her mental health problems and how dependent she is on Bob
- Pamela does not work and is not financially independent
- She may believe that although Bob is violent towards her he is a good father and it would be better for the children if they stay together as a family
- She has lived in this community for a long time, the shame and stigma of what people may think of her may be too overwhelming
- Pamela may not have a support network of her own
- She may believe that Bob will change, once things settle down at work
- Pamela may be under pressure to stay from the extended family.

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Impact of domestic violence on parenting

- a parent's confidence, authority and relationship with their children being undermined.
- real and perceived parenting capacity being diminished
- staying in a relationship as they feel their children would be better off in the family unit.



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Facilitator notes

Pamela may be staying in the relationship because she believes she cannot manage the children on her own - as Bob may have undermined her confidence as a parent.

The following is a list of tactics perpetrators may use to undermine the other parent:

- repeatedly denigrating a mother's character and her worth as a mother – to her and to her children
- undermining her parental authority (for example, by constantly over-ruling them in front of the children)
- attacking women's confidence in their capacity or effectiveness as mothers
- undermining women's relationships with their children
- dominating her attention and time so that she has little to spend with her children
- making women physically or psychologically unavailable to parent
 - physically because they are injured, lack sleep or are unwell
 - psychologically because they are suffering post-traumatic symptoms or are emotionally drained
- encouraging some children to side with the perpetrator, who may be perceived as having the most power
- harassing women via child contact and using the family law and child protection systems against women (for example, by threatening to expose them as 'bad mothers' or to report them to child protection).

It should be noted that many mothers manage to parent very effectively even when they suffer the severest forms of violence – going to great lengths to counteract its effect on their parenting. Many more mothers can improve their parenting and the support they provide to their children if they are referred to support services.

What would our school do to support the Green children if they attended our school?

Secondary schools: Robert
Primary schools: Mary and Jess

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Facilitator notes

Before posing the question, the following points should be made:

- From a child protection perspective, Pamela may be seen as not being protective of her children if she remains in the relationship with Bob.
- This is a complex issue. Many women experiencing domestic or family violence are very concerned that their children may be removed from them if a report is made, and they may try to hide or minimise domestic violence.
- Rather than blame the mother, it is far more effective to support her to protect the children from the domestic violence perpetrator. The long term wellbeing and safety of children is closely interwoven with that of the adult victim.

Pose the question to the larger group. Some suggested responses could include:

- Listen to Robert, Mary and Jess and respond to their needs
- Consider what systems already exist within the school to provide ongoing support to the children
- If needed, seek additional services from the local educational services team
- Contact the Child Wellbeing Unit for advice, any available family information and suggestions on actions to take
- Contact services such as Family Referral Service, the local domestic violence network and local council services and seek advice about support services for Pamela and the children. Pick an appropriate time and discuss possible support services with Pamela.

Ongoing staff roles:

- providing support to students
- monitoring, such as observing the child or young person's relationships with others, taking note of any patterns of behaviour, noting patterns of absences
- asking how things are going at home
- continuing to identify, respond to, or inform the principal of further concerns.

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Facilitator notes

Staff have a significant role to play in the safety, welfare or wellbeing of children and young people. This does not stop once a report is made to the Child Protection Helpline or once contact is made with the Child Wellbeing Unit.

Where contact has been made with the Child Wellbeing Unit, an assessment officer may suggest that particular support is offered to the child, young person or their family. This support could be provided by the school, it may involve wider departmental support, or support from other agencies. The school may be advised on how it can contribute to the children's safety.

The principal may ask a staff member to be the contact person for liaising with the child or young person and the non-offending parent and to assist in the consultation and coordination of support as necessary.

In general this may be the person with whom the child, young person or family members have the best relationship.

The contact person may be called upon to provide feedback or discuss progress of the child or young person with other agencies/workers providing support to the child/young person; attend case management meetings and to provide sensitive and appropriate information to other school personnel as relevant.

Resources

- [*It Stops Here- Standing together to end domestic and family violence \(NSW 2014\)*](#)
- *Working with families where an adult is violent*, Department of Human Services, Victoria, 2014
- [Family Referral Services](#)
- Local domestic violence network/s
- Local Council