**Domestic Abuse**

**What is domestic abuse?**

Domestic Abuse is defined as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over, who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour-based violence’, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

Domestic Abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

* psychological;
* sexual;
* emotional;
* physical;
* financial;
* coercive control;
* stalking and harassment.

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

A coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or another abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.

Research shows that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse at some point in their life. Domestic abuse is much more widespread than many people realise and anyone from any background can suffer. Sometimes it is a one-off incident of violence or abuse, but more often, it is a pattern of persistent abusive behaviour.

**Domestic violence and abuse – the impact on children and adolescents**

Domestic violence has a devastating impact on children and young people that can last into adulthood. Children can experience both short and long-term cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects as a result of witnessing domestic abuse. Each child will respond differently to trauma and some may be resilient and not exhibit any negative effects.

Children’s responses to the trauma of witnessing domestic abuse may vary according to a multitude of factors including, but not limited to, age, race, sex and stage of development.

Studies show that living with domestic violence can cause physical and emotional harm to children and young people in the following ways:

* ongoing anxiety and depression;
* emotional distress;
* eating and sleeping disturbances;
* physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomach aches;
* find it hard to manage stress;
* low self-esteem;
* self-harm;
* be aggressive towards friends and school mates;
* feel guilt or blame themselves for the violence;
* have trouble forming positive relationships;
* develop phobias and insomnia;
* struggle with going to school and doing school work;
* use bullying behaviour or become a target of bullying;
* difficulty concentrating;
* find it hard to solve problems;
* have less empathy and caring for others.

Young people exposed to domestic and family violence are more likely to:

* suffer from depression;
* be homeless;
* abuse drugs and alcohol;
* engage in risk-taking behaviours;
* experience or use violence and be controlling and manipulative in relationships.

**Operation Encompass**

Operation Encompass is a police and education early information safeguarding partnership-enabling schools to offer immediate support to children experiencing domestic abuse.

The purpose of Operation Encompass is to safeguard and support children and young people who have been involved in, heard or witnessed a domestic abuse incident.

Following an incident, children will often arrive at school distressed, upset, worried and unprepared. Operation Encompass aims to ensure that appropriate school staff are made aware early enough to help and support children and young people in a way that means they feel safe and included.

This valuable initiative means we can help and support students and their families within our school when they need us most.

**Useful Links**

<https://www.operationencompass.org/>

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/>

<https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>

<https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/crime-info/types-crime/domestic-abuse/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/getting-help-for-domestic-violence/>