

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

Davina James-Hanman



Home Office

BULLYING AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

When developing bullying initiatives, it is important to also consider the issue of domestic violence as the two issues are closely linked. For example:

- Both issues are about the exploitation of power differentials.
- Both issues can have a profoundly negative impact on children's emotional and physical well-being, which in turn, can negatively affect their educational attainment.
- Bullying in childhood or adolescence may be early practise for later behaviour. Experiencing negative consequences for bullying behaviour can act as a powerful deterrent to its continued use.
- Experience in London schools has shown that addressing the issue of domestic violence within schools has a significant impact on reducing bullying.
- A child or young person experiencing domestic violence may be bullied at school and be less likely to tell anyone if 'permission' is not given to speak about such behaviour. For many pupils, the experience of domestic violence increases their risk of being bullied as they may: abruptly change their location, leaving behind all their friends and other support networks; be unable to fully participate in school life due to restrictions imposed by the abuse; appear secretive about their home life; not be allowed to socialise with other children and young people. These factors create a heightened risk for becoming the target of bullies.
- Conversely, a child or young person experiencing domestic violence may become the bully at school as this may be the only environment in which they have 'control'.

Preventing domestic violence can take several different forms. For example, it can include:

- Primary prevention (e.g. intervening early to stop further abuse).
- Secondary prevention (e.g. helping victims to overcome the negative effects of abuse).
- Tertiary prevention (e.g. educating all children and young people about the issue so that they have the necessary knowledge to identify such behaviour later in life and equipping them with the skills to have relationships based on respect and a mutual commitment to non-violence).

Schools will primarily be involved in tertiary prevention although teachers will also often be in a position to identify children and young people in need of primary or secondary interventions. In such cases, schools will need to be aware of other domestic violence services in their area who are able to provide specialist support.

It is important to understand that schools are not expected to address domestic violence in isolation. Domestic violence work is most effective when undertaken within a multi-agency context. This allows each agency to focus on its primary role yet have the support of other service providers should a need arise that falls outside of their remit.

Most local authority areas now have a Domestic Violence Forum (usually part of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership) which co-ordinates local activity. They will be a useful source of information and materials.

“All children deserve the opportunity to achieve their full potential”. They should be enabled to:

- Be as physically and mentally healthy as possible.
- Gain the maximum benefit possible from good quality educational opportunities.
- Live in a safe environment and be protected from harm.
- Experience emotional well-being.
- Feel loved and valued and be supported by a network of reliable and affectionate relationships.
- Be competent in looking after themselves and coping with everyday living.
- Have a positive image of themselves and a secure sense of identity including cultural and racial identity.
- Develop good interpersonal skills and confidence in social situations.

If they are denied the opportunity to achieve their potential in their way, children are at risk of an impoverished childhood but they are also more likely to experience disadvantage and social exclusion in adulthood.” (Keeping Children Safe, Department of Health and Home Office, 2003).

Why should schools address domestic violence?

Schools should address domestic violence because:

- The skills and knowledge gained in work to prevent domestic violence also informs pupils’ behaviour within and outside of school. In particular, it can be an effective way of reducing incidents of bullying.
- Schools are legally obliged to promote pupils’ ‘moral, spiritual and social development’. Helping pupils to take responsibility for their own actions, as well as preparing them for dealing with the actions of others, is a critical part of this legal obligation. As such, work on

domestic violence can be integrated into a range of other issues that schools currently address such as bullying, forced marriages, emotional literacy, healthy schools and teenage pregnancy.

- Schools also have a legal duty under the National Curriculum requirements for Citizenship and for Personal, Health and Social Education to help pupils' learn social skills and acquire information that will assist them in becoming active, responsible adults.
- School is a safe place where positive relationships based on respect can be modelled.
- School is a universal experience and education staff are thus ideally placed to reach all children and young people.
- Adult abusers come from both violent and non-violent backgrounds. Interventions solely with children who have experienced domestic violence is insufficient to prevent future abuse and a more general approach is required.

Including domestic violence within the school curriculum is not *additional* work. Rather its inclusion will aid schools in meeting their obligations as well as benefiting the pupils and the wider community.

Preparation

It is essential that schools undertake some preparatory work before raising the issue of domestic violence in the classroom. This is not just to allay the possible concerns of staff, governors and parents but also to ensure that the correct information is being taught! Domestic violence is a subject about which many people have beliefs that are, in fact, inaccurate stereotypes. Moreover, evaluation studies of schools that have undertaken domestic violence work, find that pre-training for staff was an essential component in generating both commitment and confidence.

The most common concern raised by teachers about including domestic violence within the curriculum is that they will end up uncovering a need for support services with which they will be unable to cope. Although this might seem like a logical concern, experience in those schools who have already undertaken this work has been very different. Despite taking care to provide additional on-site counselling and support services for pupils, the staff were surprised to discover that demand lessened rather than increased. Classroom behaviour was much improved and incidences of bullying in the playground noticeably decreased. This may be because research with children and young people who have experienced domestic violence consistently reveals that they want someone to talk to, preferably in the first instance, a knowledgeable peer. Including domestic violence issues within the curriculum thus creates the very support system that many children and young people say they want.

Schools are often also concerned with disrupting relationships with parents. However, this can be overcome by encouraging parents to participate in their child's education and the life of the school. This will help to break down some of the barriers that may prevent the child and the family from getting the support they need.

Staff Safety Procedures

There is a potential risk to the safety of staff in schools where there are families experiencing domestic violence. There have been cases where the father (who is the perpetrator) has demanded to see their child at school without the mother's consent. These situations can place staff in a very difficult position, particularly, if the school does not have a clear policy on how to deal with violent, threatening or abusive visitors. Schools' should follow the guidance set out in the Department for Education and Skills 2002 'A legal toolkit for schools' which makes the following suggestions:

- Schools' should have a clear statement displayed in school stating that 'this school does not tolerate violent, threatening or abusive behaviour to any member of the school community'.
- The school safety policy should provide a set of procedures on:
 - What to do when an incident occurs
 - Who to contact during an emergency at the school (i.e. LEA or police)
 - How to record incidents and who to report to
 - What follow-up action may be necessary (e.g. should a parent be refused entry to school premises?)

Different ways domestic violence can be integrated into schools include:

- Holding specific separate sessions or activities.
- Using domestic violence or violence against women, or violence in general as a topic for work in specific parts of the curriculum or across the whole curriculum.
- Integrating work done in specific sessions into other aspects of school life, e.g. by using work done by children and young people on rights, roles and responsibilities into development of behaviour or anti bullying policies.
- Making domestic violence or violence against women or violence in general a theme for whole school activity over a period of time. This approach has the additional advantage of relieving the burden on the PHSE curriculum and staff. Domestic violence can be a topic in many

other subjects such as English literature, history, geography, drama and art.

- Bringing in individuals or groups from outside school to provide specific activities or information.
- Focusing sessions on topics related to violence and conflict, such as fairness, anger, relationships, expectations etc.

Other ways schools can respond

There are other actions schools can take to address domestic violence these are detailed below:

Offer practical and emotional support to children and young people living with or leaving domestic violence.

Practical support could include assistance with uniforms or not insisting that they be worn from the first day of attendance; helping new pupils to understand any changes of syllabus for particular subjects; making sure the child doesn't feel isolated or left out if they start school part way through a term; allocating places in homework clubs if they have nowhere safe or practical to do homework, either because of the abuse or because they are living in temporary accommodation, discreet assistance with the cost of trips or extra-curricular activities and so on.

Undertaking child protection work

The designated member of staff will be responsible for making any referrals to outside agencies, but child protection includes more than referral. Staff should be trained on the links between domestic violence and child abuse and on the range of ways domestic violence can affect children and young people so that they can make appropriate referrals or know what else to do to help. Also, training can help staff to be able to respond better to pupils who may be affected by domestic violence, which in turn may reduce the number of unnecessary referrals, as teachers are often able to give a helpful response with little time or help, providing they know what to do. The school child protection policy may also need revising to take domestic violence into account.

Provide informal support to individuals

Support staff as well as teachers have a key role, as they are often well placed to give such support as well as often being the adults that children and young people turn to for this help. Support staff will benefit from domestic violence training specifically designed for their role.

Facilitate peer support

Children and young people frequently say that they want to talk to their friends when they have problems. Children and young people can and do help each other and can be helped to do this well and more safely. Training for children and young people or selected groups of children and young people on peer support skills including safety planning and when to tell an adult what is happening, can equip them to do this effectively. Some schools, for example, have a quiet space at play times where there are two peer support counsellors to talk to if needed, with books and games as well. This can be done in conjunction with other work, for example, on bullying, drug abuse or other problems.

Provide information for survivors of domestic violence

Unlike many statutory agencies, schools are seen as non-stigmatising places to go. School notice boards or waiting rooms are ideal places for distributing leaflets or putting up posters about domestic violence and sources of help. They can be discreetly read, particularly if there are other notices or leaflets around. They also provide a clear message to abusers that violence is not tolerated in that school.

Child protection information and guidance

The needs of the child can be overlooked, as the primary target of the abuse is an adult. However, it is not uncommon for a perpetrator to mistreat the child as part of the abuse against the mother. A study carried out by Farmer and Owen (1995) looking at child protection practice found that in three out of five cases where a child was being neglected or abused the mother was also experiencing domestic violence.

The safety of the child is paramount in any domestic violence situation where children are involved. It should be remembered that children and young people are not only affected by domestic violence against a parent, but as they begin to develop their own intimate relationships they may also perpetrate or become victims of domestic violence themselves. A supportive pastoral care system, a consistently implemented behaviour policy and a comprehensive PSHE and citizenship programme will equip schools to deal with issues that relate to domestic violence.

The effects on children

The effects of domestic violence on a child will vary, as it will depend on their age, gender, maturity, personality and family circumstances. However, many children affected by domestic violence report that they feel:

- Stress
- Confusion
- Lack of trust
- Guilt
- Isolation
- Shame
- Anger
- Loss of confidence
- Anxiety

As a result of living with or witnessing domestic abuse children or young people may:

- Exhibit signs of physical abuse (either inflicted by self or others)
- Become a victim or perpetrator of bullying
- Present violent and disruptive behaviour
- Experience difficulty in concentrating on school work
- Focus on school and attaining good results as a way of blocking out difficulties at home
- Experience difficulty in making friends at school
- Become withdrawn
- Use drugs or alcohol as a way of escaping from their problems
- Have poor or irregular school attendance
- Run away as a way of escaping from problems at home
- Become involved in inappropriate or exploitative sexual relationships in an attempt to find comfort and security
- Develop an eating disorder

The indicators above are not conclusive evidence that a child is affected by domestic violence but the presence of one or more should alert staff to the possibility that domestic violence may be the root cause.

Parents have a duty to ensure that their child attends school regularly. Poor attendance can be one of the first signs that a child is experiencing abuse or neglect as result of Domestic Violence. It is important that any concerns about absence are referred to the home school liaison worker (if your school has one) and the educational social worker.

If you suspect or know that a child or young person is being abused, either directly *or* indirectly, such as witnessing the abuse of their parent, you should report the matter to the designated child protection officer who will make the appropriate referrals.

Practical resources

Below is a selection of useful teaching resources on domestic violence for schools;

- **‘Stop Hitting Mum’ – Children talk about domestic violence** (2003) Mullender A, et al Young Voice.
- **‘Hitting and Hurting – Living in a Violent Family’** Pickering, F (2000) The Children’s Society.
- **‘Safeguarding Children and Young People in Wales’ – Good Practice on Domestic Abuse** Welsh Assembly Government (2004)
- **‘Child protection and domestic violence’** Mullender A, Dobbonair T (2000) Venture Press.
- **The Hidden Victims: Children and Domestic Violence.** NCH Action for Children (1994).
- **The Woman who Walked Into Doors**, Roddy Doyle, Random House (1997).
- **Children’s Perspectives on Domestic Violence**, Mullender A, Hague G, and Regan L (2002), Sage.
- **Forced Marriage in the Bangladeshi and Somali Community**, Eversley J, Khanom H, Iman F – Public Policy Research Unit, Queen Mary University, London (2002).
- **Respect Training Resources for primary and secondary schools** – developed in Scotland but an excellent resource for use in all schools. www.zerotolerance.org.uk
- **Westminster Domestic Violence Forum** have developed domestic violence curriculum materials for use in primary and secondary schools www.westminsterdomesticviolenceforum.org.uk
- **Stop The Violence**, Armitage M etc al (2003). A resource for work in schools on issues of domestic violence and child protection.
- **‘Just Another Day’** video produced by Newham Asian Women’s Project, 661 Barking Road, London E13 9EX. Tel: 020 8472 0528.
- **‘Worried? Need To Talk?’** NSPCC leaflet. Publications & Information Unit, Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH. Tel: 020 7825 2775 www.worriedneed2talk.org.uk

- DfES (2004) **Safeguarding Children In Education** Ref DfES/0027/2004.
- **Making an Impact: Children and Domestic Violence Training Resource**, Hester M, Pearson C and Harwin N – Barnardo's (1998). NSPCC Training, 3 Gilmour Close, Beaumont Leys, Leicester LE4 1EZ.
- **Public Service Announcement (PSA) Campaign** to alert young people about dating violence and unhealthy relationships www.seeitandstopit.org
- **Missdorothy.com** is a charitable foundation that was created by Sharon Doughty, a TV news presenter who herself suffered domestic violence and sexual abuse as a child. She has created an interactive learning programme for primary and secondary school children ('Watch Over Me') www.missdorothy.com / www.watchoverme.info
- Womankind have produced curriculum materials on violence against women www.womankind.org.uk

Children's Safety Plan

Below is a safety plan, specifically designed for children and young people that can be adapted according to specific circumstances. It should only be used as *part* of a response; child protection procedures will also need to be followed.

- Communicate four key points to children:
 - 1. It's NOT your fault**
 - 2. You're NOT alone**
 - 3. Don't get in the middle**
 - 4. When you're feeling afraid, find a safe place**
- Make sure children know how to dial 999 in an emergency and to keep a list of any helpful friends and relatives.
- Have children identify escape routes and talk about safe homes or places to which they can run (e.g. neighbour, other relative, police station, etc.).
- Have children identify school personnel in whom they can confide.
- Affirm that you are committed to the child's safety and that they can grow up to be non-violent adults.
- Affirm that they are right to tell, they have a right to be safe and that you believe them.

If at all possible, children and young people should try to have access to some money for emergency calls and transport. However, 999 calls are free.

Other Useful Organisations

Childline

Freepost 1111

London N1 0BR

Freephone 0800 1111

<http://www.childline.co.uk>

This service is open 24 hours a day and is free to call. It offers advice for young people in distress or danger with any problem.

National domestic violence help-line (24 hours)

0808 2000247

Samaritans

The Upper Mill

Kingston Rd

Ewell

Surrey

KT17 2AF

08457 909090 (Calls charged at local rate)

e-mail: jo@samaritans.org

<http://www.samaritans.org.uk>

Samaritans provide confidential support for anyone in crisis. Specially trained volunteers will listen to callers without judging them or telling them what to do.

NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)

Weston House

42 Curtain Road

London

EC2A 3NH

Freephone 0800 800 500

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/html/homepage/home.htm>

This is a free 24 hour helpline for anyone who is at risk or is worried about anyone else who is at risk.

Shelter

88 Old Street

London

EC1V 9HU

Freephone 0808 800 4444

<http://www.shelter.org.uk>

This free 24 hour helpline is for anyone who needs help and advice about finding somewhere to live.

Relevant Government Policies and Strategies

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (Delivering Success): A Strategy to 2006

This strategy is concerned with ensuring that:

- Children have an excellent start in education.
- Young people develop and equip themselves with skills knowledge and personal qualities needs for life and work.

DfES: Social Inclusion: Pupil Support – Circular No. 10/99

This document gives schools guidance to assist them in reducing the risk of disaffection amongst pupils.

DfES: Education Protects – Guidance on The Education of Children and Young People In Public Care (2000)

This guidance tackles the serious underachievement of pupils in residential and foster care and aims to bring their attainment closer into line with that of their peers.

DfES: Inclusive Schooling – Children with Special Education Needs (2001)

This document outlines the following key principles:

- Inclusion is a process by which schools should develop their culture, policies and practices to include pupils.
- With the right training strategies and support nearly all children with special education needs can be successfully included in main stream education.
- The interest of all pupils must be safeguarded.
- Schools should actively seek to remove barriers to learning and participation.
- All children should have access to an appropriate education that affords them the opportunity to achieve their full personal potential.

DfES: Excellence in Cities (1999)

This initiative tackles the particular problems facing children in inner cities. It aims to raise the aspiration and achievements of pupils and to tackle disaffection, social exclusion, truancy and behavioural problems. Schools involved in this initiative will have a Learning Mentor in place – whose role will be to support children need additional help at school.

DfES: National Healthy School Standard (1999)

Through a local health and education partnership, schools are supported in becoming healthier places for staff and pupils to work and learn. The aim is to improve pupil's confidence and motivation, as well as to provide them with the skills and information they need to make important life and health choices. The initiative supports schools in looking at issues such as leadership and managing change: staff professional development; school culture; policy development; whole school management; consultation and teaching and learning in PSHE and Citizenship. Schools can ensure that their work is grounded in supportive whole school practice and therefore be more likely to have a greater impact on pupils' health and achievement.

The National Curriculum (PSHE and Citizenship)

This provides schools with a framework to develop innovative preventative work with pupils. The programme of study gives pupils the knowledge, skills and understand to:

- Develop confidence, responsibility and to make the most of their ability.
- Prepare them to play an active role as citizens.
- Develop a healthy and safe lifestyle.
- Develop good relationships and respect differences between people.

Perpetrators tracking down their former partners through the education system

Definitions of 'parent' in education law

Section 576(1) of the Education Act 1996 defines a 'parent' to include:

- (a) Anyone with parental responsibility
- (b) Anyone who has care of a child

By implication, the Education Act includes all birth parents within its definition of 'parent'. However, the wide definitions contained in this Act apply only in specific contexts, and are not relevant to school practice in all situations.

Definitions of 'parental responsibility' under the Children Act

The concept of 'parental responsibility' under the Children Act 1989, which is different from the concept of 'parent', provides the starting point for schools in considering what rights, if any, a non-resident parent may have in relation to information about a child's schooling. The categories of people included in the concept of 'parent' contained in the Education Act 1996 are much wider than those included in the concept of 'parental responsibility'.

In situations where a non-resident parent who is a perpetrator of Domestic Violence is attempting to use the school to try to track down a former partner (usually the child's mother), one of the first issues which the school should consider, is whether the non-resident parent has parental responsibility, and whether there is clear legal advice that should be followed.

The Children Act 1989, as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, provides that;

- All mothers automatically have parental responsibility
- A father who is married to the child's mother at the time of the child's birth has parental responsibility
- In relation to children whose birth was registered before December 2003, a father who was not married to the mother at the time of the child's birth does not have parental responsibility unless he acquires it by means of a Court order or a Parental Responsibility agreement with the mother. Such an agreement must be in writing and in a prescribed form (Section 4 Children Act).

A step-parent may acquire parental responsibility by entering into a parental responsibility agreement with a birth parent who has parental responsibility, or by means of a Court order.

A carer of a child who is not a parent, but who has been granted a residence order in respect of the child, obtains parental responsibility for the duration of the residence order.

General Principles for Schools

Those who hold 'parental responsibility', whether they are a resident or non-resident parent, generally have the right to participate in decisions about a child's education and receive information about the child. However, this right is not absolute, and in practice it may be limited in a number of ways in order to protect child and their resident parents from perpetrators of domestic violence.

In situations where the school is unclear about the safety of a child they should seek legal advice from their Education Department.

While all fathers come within the definition of parent contained in the Education Act, not all fathers have parental responsibility. When schools are dealing with a father who is a perpetrator of domestic violence, it is important that the school tries to establish, firstly, whether he has parental responsibility, and secondly, if he has, whether there are any Court orders in place which limit his exercise of parental responsibility in practice.

Where there is a history of domestic violence, violence towards children on the part of a parent, or a risk of abduction of a child by a violent parent, the Courts may make a range of orders to protect the child or resident parent.

For example, the Court may make a prohibited steps order under section 9 of the Children Act preventing a parent from going within a certain distance of the school, or otherwise limiting their access to the school. In some cases, the Courts may make an order preventing all contact between a perpetrator of domestic violence, in order to avoid taking actions which may place children or resident parents at risk.

The school's day to day contact will be with the resident parent (usually the mother), and in situations where there is a risk to a child or mother from a perpetrator of Domestic Violence, schools should liaise closely with the resident parent in an attempt to minimise that risk.

- Schools generally should not give out contact details of any child at the school to a person other than the resident parent/ primary carer without first checking with the resident parent.
- Schools should not be used for contact visits of any kind.
- If a non-resident parent who is estranged from the child's resident parents comes to the school wanting to take the child out of school, the resident parent must be contacted immediately to let them know. If this is during a school led activity, school release must be refused.
- Schools should not give out any details of pupils or their resident parent out over the telephone.

- In cases where there is known domestic violence, residence or contact disputes between parents, or other marital/family disputes, child protection procedures should be followed if a child repeatedly demonstrates a distressed reaction to their parent.
- Every effort should be made to monitor pupil's reaction to either parent and inform the appropriate agencies if there are concerns.
- In cases where there is known domestic violence schools should encourage the resident parent to share information about any court orders in place.
- Where a parent reports that she or her child(ren) are being threatened by a former partner the school strongly suggest she seek legal advice.
- Copies of any court orders, such as residence orders, contact orders, prohibited steps orders, injunctions and non-molestation orders, emergency protection order etc., must be kept on the child's file. All relevant people should be aware of the situation and in situations of risk, the child should not be allowed to go with the non-resident parent.
- In all cases of attempt contact, the parent with whom the child resides must be informed and written permission for contact sought.

Provision of Information to Parents

In considering the provision of information to non-resident parents who are perpetrators of domestic violence, the school should be aware of the risks to children not only while living with a perpetrator of domestic violence, but also after the relationship has ended.

In cases where the school does not know the whereabouts of the non-resident parent, the school could (but is not obliged to) make the resident parent aware that a non-resident parent who has parental responsibility may be entitled to be involved in the child's education.

If they request it, non-resident parents with parental responsibility could be offered separate copies of school reports. The school must ensure that the contact address, telephone number, or any other information that may lead to the location of the resident parent being discovered, is never disclosed, and that the safety of women and children is paramount. The school should not take the decision whether contact for a child with a father who has been violent is in the child's best interest. Social Services or legal advice must be sought. In some cases, there may be a Court order in place preventing or limiting contact between the non-resident parent and the child.

If the non-resident parent is not aware which school their child attends, there is no obligation on the school to make contact or disclose to that non-resident parent the child's whereabouts or school progress. Where there is a history of domestic violence, a school may be placing children and resident parents at risk by disclosing this information, and may also be acting in a way which assists the non-resident parent in breaking the terms of a Court order.

If the non-resident parent should contact the school and request access to information about the child's education, the school should only provide this information after:

- Taking all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the child(ren) and non-resident parent, (including consulting the Council's Legal Department).
- Ensuring 'the General Principles for Schools' are adhered to.
- Satisfying themselves that the individual has parental responsibility, and that information provided does not place the child(ren) or non-resident parent at risk.

References: 'The Equal Parenting Council CAFCASS Reports & Complaints Schools, 'Parents & Parental Responsibility' ref (DfES 0092/2002).

Case studies

Mohammed, aged 9, transferred to St Anne's primary school in the middle of the Autumn term, due to his mother relocating. He was a quiet boy and didn't talk about himself much. He appeared reluctant to join in group activities, both within school and during breaks and didn't seem to make any friends.

He was, however, a good student, and seemed eager to impress his teacher. Unfortunately, this quickly marked him out as a target for the bullies who were disrupted one day by a teacher pushing and shoving him around and calling him 'swot' and accusing him of being gay.

The Head arranged to meet with Mohammed's mother. When told of Mohammed's experiences, she began to cry and revealed that their move to the area had been as a result of her separating from her violent husband. She expressed her feelings of guilt because anxious to minimise the impact on Mohammed, she had been regularly reminding him to study hard at his new school.

The school's response:

Following a staff meeting, the school decides to develop a 'buddy' system for new pupils, allocating two students to each new arrival who take responsibility for helping them to settle in.

Materials on bullying, including the use of 'gay' as an insult, are also included in the classroom focusing on issues such as 'what makes a good friend?' and 'what does being a 'real man' mean?'

Mohammad's mother is given information about the local domestic violence survivors group

Case Study 2

Claire, aged 15, was caught extorting cash from younger pupils. Challenged by her teacher, she reveals that she recently lost her Saturday job. Upon being further questioned, she eventually admits that she has not told her mother about the loss of her job and has been trying to raise the equivalent of her wages. This is because Claire's father is violent and abusive and controls all the family income. Claire has been giving her extorted cash to her mother for food and other essentials.

The school's response:

A meeting is arranged with Claire's mother to discuss the situation. Although initially reluctant, Claire's mother eventually agrees to the school making a referral to Social Services. They provide benefits advice, information on her housing and legal rights and reassurance that the abuse is not her fault. Claire is referred to an adolescent counselling service. Two months later, the family move to a refuge.

Case Study 3

Apple Grove School is visited by a man claiming to be the father of Morag McSweeney, one of their pupils. He requests access to Morag's school file, wanting information about her progress at school. The school is aware that there has been a history of domestic violence and that Morag has no contact with her father.

The school's response:

Following verification of Mr. McSweeney's identity, the school informs Morag's mother that her ex-husband has made contact with the school so that she can make any steps she may need to for her, and her daughter's safety. As Mr McSweeney has parental responsibility, arrangements are made for Mr. McSweeney to receive regular schools reports but he is only permitted limited access to the school files. All information containing Morag's address is removed.

The school also arrange for Morag's mother to attend parents' evening a little earlier to help her avoid a face-to-face meeting with her ex-husband.