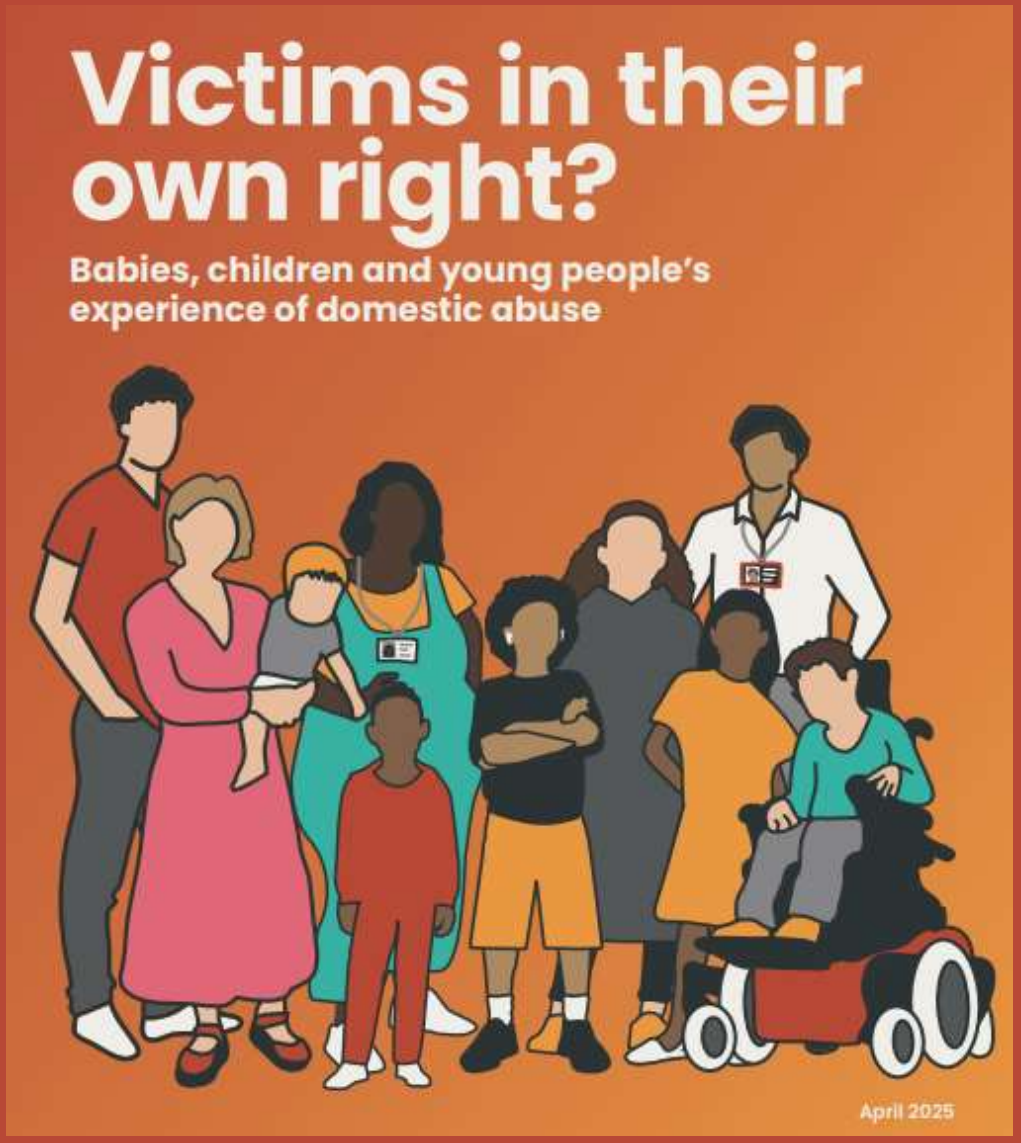


Victims in their own right

Webinar : Education

May 2025

domestic abuse commissioner

Agenda

Introduction
Tell Nicole
Key messages
Recommendations – for policy and practice
Q&A

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Content warning: The presentation does not include any direct descriptions of domestic abuse. There are words and pictures that children have written and made, which describe their feelings about the help they did or did not receive. They also describe what they wish would change. Some people may find the children's words upsetting. Please take a break away from the presentation if you need to.



Background

In 2021, children were, for the first time, recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right in England and Wales.

Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines a child victim as any child who “sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse.”

Despite this welcome change, it is still unclear what this means in practice.




tell
nicole

Tell Nicole enables children and young people to have the opportunity to ‘tell’ the Commissioner what they think about domestic abuse issues in a way that is meaningful to them.

The key to this framework is to collaborate with professionals who are already involved in children’s lives through voice, participation and engagement work. Materials and guidance documents were shared by the DAC team to enable engagement.

The guidance is flexible and encouraged workers to tailor sessions according to age, needs, and interests of young people



HAVING SOMEONE ELSE THERE TO SUPPORT ME ... LIKE A FRIEND

on our level

Ask us what we want to happen...

Let us decide who we share our story to.



quicker support and warning signs noticed by schools

more support from school about safe relationships

For the police to ask us our version of events

listen to both sides equally and not be more likely to believe adults over children

Key themes: Schools

Teachers being able to **identify signs** of domestic abuse.

"Schools need to look out for the signs. If someone is acting up, instead of being hard on them, pay attention, find out why, give them a safe space."

(Postcard, young person aged 7 to 19 years)

Helping children to recognise what is an abusive relationship.

Providing support to children experiencing abuse.

Better **understanding of trauma**.



Children experiencing trauma

"Schools need to look out for the signs. If someone is acting up, instead of being hard on them, pay attention, find out why, give them a safe space. If someone changes, i.e. quieter, ask them if they are OK. Kids from domestic violence aren't attention seeking. This is our way of asking for help."

(Postcard, young person aged 7 to 19 years)

"Stop judging me - least I've come in."
"Stop telling me to do better."
"Getting shouted at for talking, but I am talking for a reason."
"Our wellbeing is more important than if we have the right equipment or uniform."

(Flipchart comments, young people aged 7 to 19 years



Teachers versus specialist workers

"I think there should be a counsellor per school for anybody struggling with domestic abuse or their thoughts and feelings to share with while parents are at work and teachers aren't really taught how to deal with it."

(Poster, secondary school-aged children).

"Teachers haven't got it easy either, students insult [them], and [they] put up with a lot of stuff. Teachers in the mainstream [schools] don't maybe get enough training."

(Group discussion, children aged 7 to 19 years)



Support services for children affected by domestic abuse

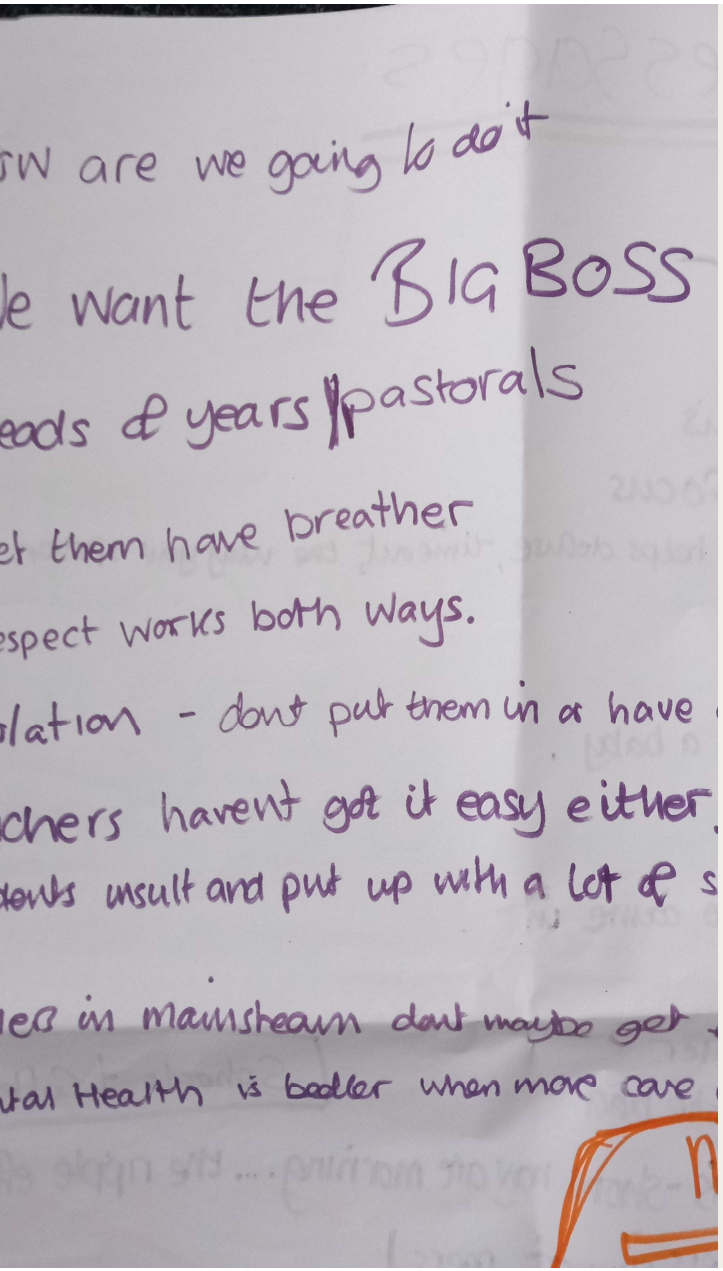
TECHNICAL REPORT



domestic abuse commissioner

April 2025

Two surveys of commissioners and providers of domestic abuse support services to children held during 2024.



This is a critical moment for the new Government.

- The forthcoming Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy,
- Spring 2025 Spending Review
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

Bold leadership is needed for the Government to meet its ambition to halve VAWG within a decade.

This requires contribution from the whole machinery of the Government, requiring buy-in and coordination across each of its missions.

The Commissioner's recommendations represent a blueprint towards supporting children subject to domestic abuse and preventing future harm; as such, they should be considered in full.

Seven key themes

Representing a consistent thread throughout the report.

Centring children's voices.

Stronger cross-departmental working and strategic leadership.

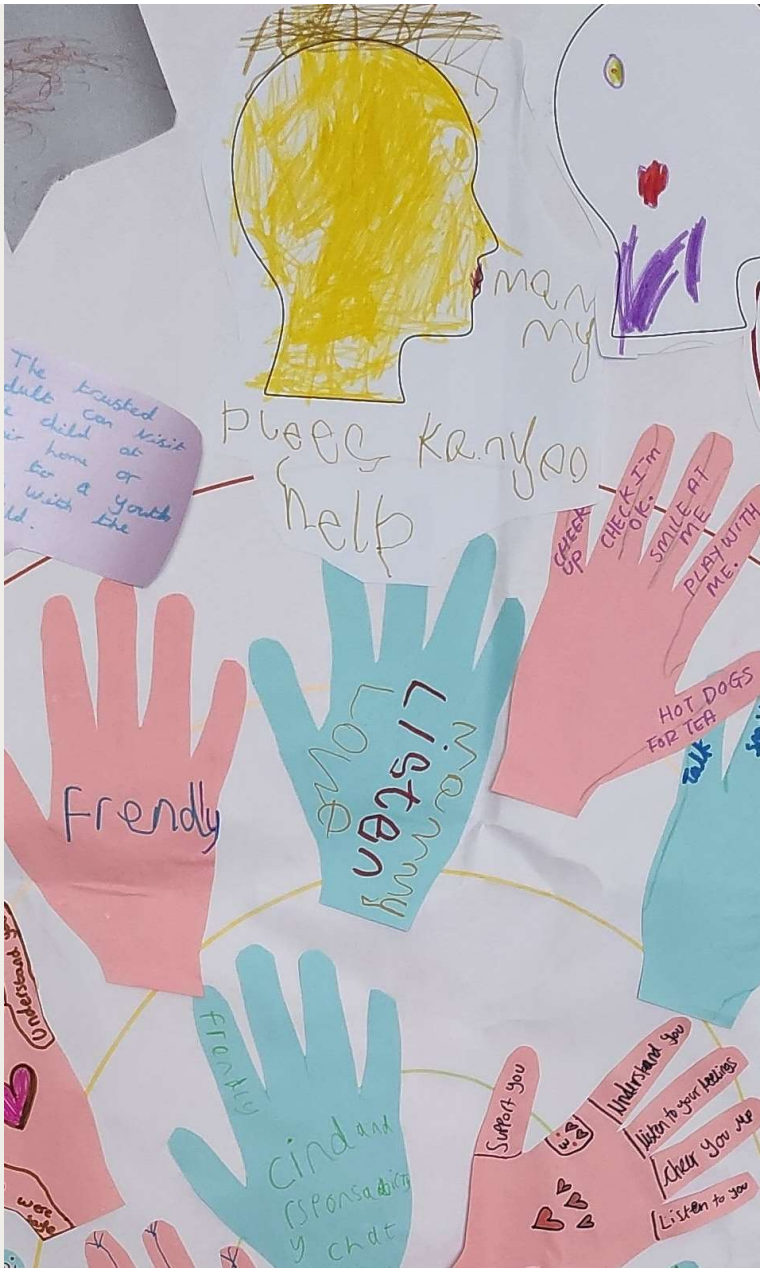
Holistic funding.

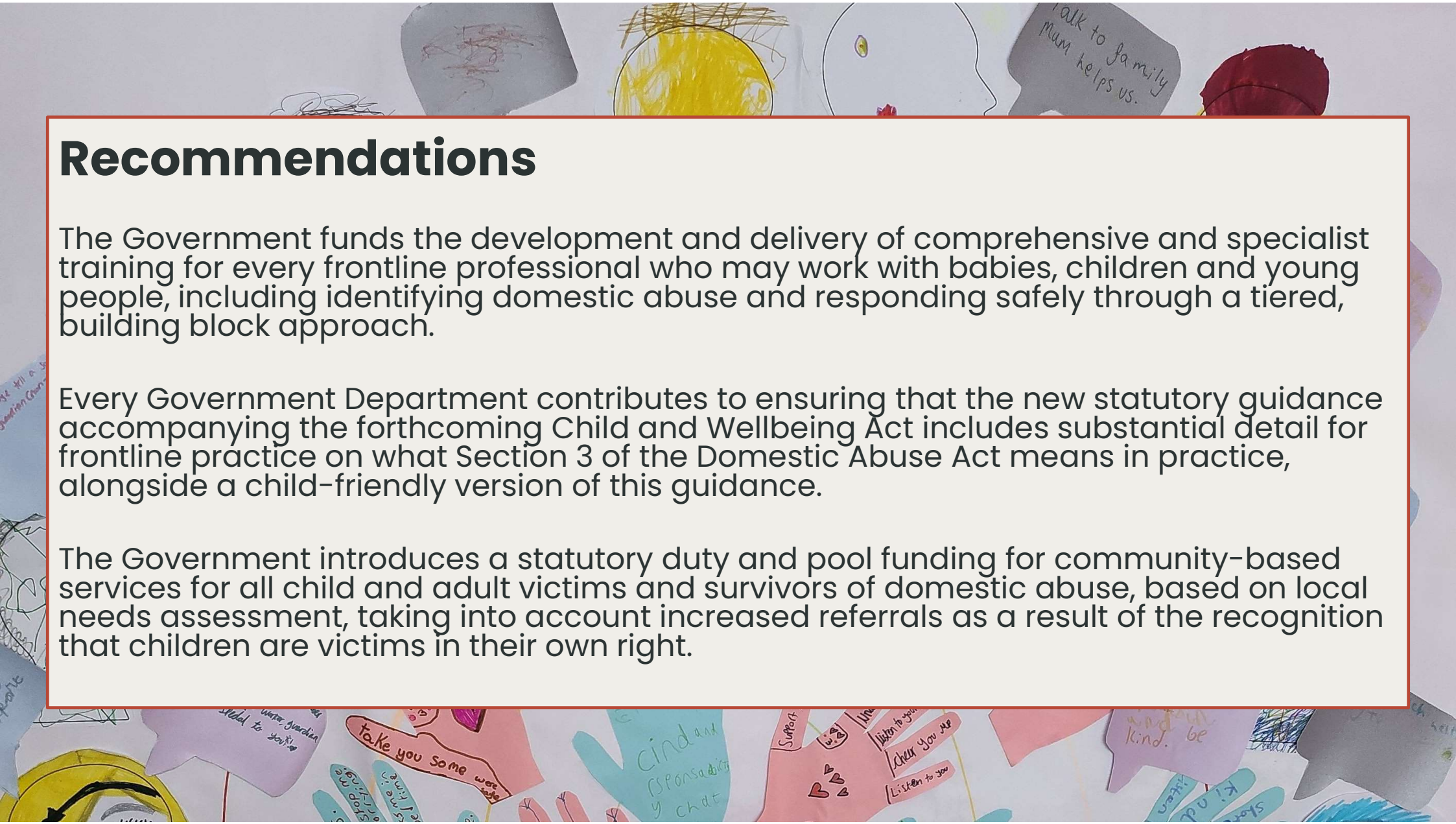
Data and evidence.

Specialist training for every frontline professional who may work with babies, children or young people.

Safeguarding.

Ensuring practice is informed by specialists





Recommendations

The Government funds the development and delivery of comprehensive and specialist training for every frontline professional who may work with babies, children and young people, including identifying domestic abuse and responding safely through a tiered, building block approach.

Every Government Department contributes to ensuring that the new statutory guidance accompanying the forthcoming Child and Wellbeing Act includes substantial detail for frontline practice on what Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act means in practice, alongside a child-friendly version of this guidance.

The Government introduces a statutory duty and pool funding for community-based services for all child and adult victims and survivors of domestic abuse, based on local needs assessment, taking into account increased referrals as a result of the recognition that children are victims in their own right.

The training ask

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 5: Specialist training for frontline professionals

Universal for all professionals that have contact with babies, children and young people	Exercise **professional curiosity** and confidently **spot the signs** of all forms of domestic abuse (including coercive and controlling behaviour, technology-facilitated abuse, so-called 'honour-based' abuse and harmful practices) for all children. Respond appropriately to children who are experiencing domestic abuse. This **includes demonstrating trauma informed practice, age-appropriate communication methods, understanding barriers to engagement**, and best responses for children with diverse identities and needs, and protected characteristics, recognising the importance of **intersectionality**. Refer children (and associated adults) to relevant services. This includes **knowledge of local specialist services** and understanding both organisational and statutory **safeguarding systems and local protocols** for all levels of need, including early help. Professionals should be confident navigating local and interagency referral pathways.

The training ask

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 5: Specialist training for frontline professionals

Tailored for professionals who have contact with children and young people in the context of their experiences of abuse	Understand children and young people's experiences of domestic abuse as **complex trauma,** including the **challenges faced by children and families.** Understand the **impact** of domestic abuse for children, young people, their families, and wider relationships and the coping mechanisms they may use in the context of intersectionality, recognising the **diverse nature of identities and need.** Understand the importance of **information sharing and multi-agency working** when working with children and young people with lived experience of domestic abuse. Understand **the link between domestic abuse and other forms of risk and harm**, including serious violence. Understand the **dynamics of domestic abuse,** including recognising 'victim blaming' and placing responsibility on perpetrators using harmful behaviours. Competence in **documenting interactions with children**, being mindful of appropriate terminology. Recognising **the protective role and strengths of the non-abusive parent** and the importance of protective relationships. Understand **typologies of perpetrators** (including various forms of presentation). Understand effective **strategies for prevention, identification and intervention** that ensure children and their non-abusive parent/guardian receive appropriate and timely support

The training ask

domestic abuse commissioner

Specialist training for frontline professionals

Specialist for professionals supporting children and young people affected by domestic abuse/professionals providing interventions for individuals using harmful behaviours	Competence in **assessing risk and need** and **tailoring support** for children experiencing domestic abuse. Competence in **planning focused support sessions** with children that are appropriate for children's age and development and align with their individual and intersecting needs. Understand how **to tailor support for children bereaved by domestic abuse-related deaths.** Understand how to **deliver domestic abuse content in an RSE setting** for various age ranges. Understand how to **engage with perpetrators**, supporting them to engage in behavioural change programmes while holding them to account. Understand how to **advocate for children**, both on an individual and institutional level.

Relationships and Sex Education - Findings

Over 46% of teachers do not feel confident to deliver RSE and only 58% of teachers agree that they have had sufficient RSE training

Nearly half of children and young people reported learning insufficiently about pornography, power imbalances or attitudes towards women, and 40% said they did not learn enough about how to tell if a relationship is abusive.

“it was too little, too late … not equipping them with the information and advice they needed to navigate the reality of their lives. – Ofsted

Children have reported turning to online sources like social media, going to peers who they assume to have expertise or experience, or having no access to advice at all.

Under half of the children within Key Stage 2 that they surveyed could select the correct definition for ‘unsafe relationship’.

Children are unfortunately experiencing a number of harms from a very young age and must be given the tools to talk about such experiences and address the harm that is already occurring.



Recommendations

The DfE develops updated RSE guidance.

Government commits to stronger governance and coordination in the response to child victims and development of an RSE taskforce

The Department for Education creates a clear, evidence-based framework that sets out how to sequence and order RSE topics. This would help to model what age-appropriate teaching involves, but with added flexibility where necessary to meet the needs of children.

Ofsted captures local information about the RSE curriculum and shares the findings with the Department for Education, to ensure the curriculum and statutory guidance remains as relevant as possible.

The Department for Education ensures that where external, specialist experts are not available to deliver quality RSE, teachers (or other school staff) are funded to access high quality RSE training, as part of their core teacher training, as one part of the overarching effort to professionalise RSE teaching.

What this means for you



Schools should conduct **regular consultation** with children about their views on the **quality and efficacy of the RSE curriculum** at their school by implementing feedback loops to ensure that the RSE curriculum is meeting their needs and is relevant to their experiences. This must go beyond pupils in mainstream public education and also include those in private education, alternative provision, those not in education and those in home education

Local multi-agency fora should ensure that **RSE and children's experience of domestic abuse is a priority** and discussed as a standing item at least quarterly. This includes Designated Safeguarding Lead Networks, Heads groups, Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships, SEND meetings, school pastoral support teams, leadership groups and Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards.

Domestic abuse leads in local authorities should coordinate with schools in the local area to deliver effective and consistent RSE content on domestic abuse, with **input from local specialist services.**

Where children are bereaved by a domestic abuse-related death, children are given a voice and included in decision making about their future.



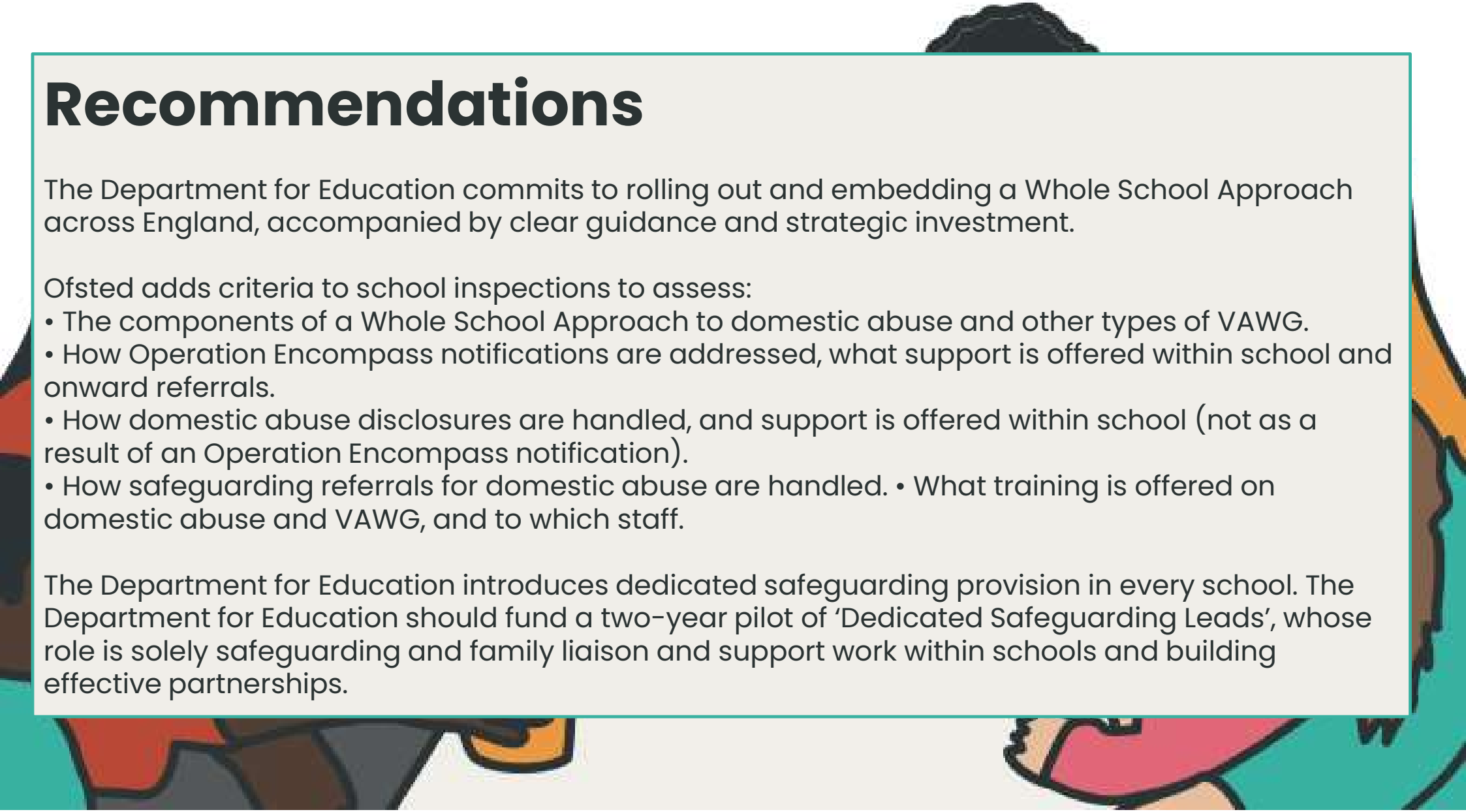
Whole School Approach - Findings

A 'Whole School Approach' to domestic abuse and VAWG is when schools develop an ethos and environment that supports learning and promotes the health, wellbeing and safety of all pupils, staff and the wider community across the whole learning environment.

- Institutional and policy development
- Training and support for staff
- Support, safeguarding and signposting to specialist services
- Education for pupils

Education staff rely too heavily on children directly telling someone about the abuse they have experienced, instead of being curious about changes in behaviour or difficulties with regulation.

Many teachers lack confidence in handling disclosures, spotting signs of abuse, including so-called 'honour'-based abuse and harmful practices, and supporting children, despite usually being the most present professionals in children's lives.



Recommendations

The Department for Education commits to rolling out and embedding a Whole School Approach across England, accompanied by clear guidance and strategic investment.

Ofsted adds criteria to school inspections to assess:
• The components of a Whole School Approach to domestic abuse and other types of VAWG.
• How Operation Encompass notifications are addressed, what support is offered within school and onward referrals.
• How domestic abuse disclosures are handled, and support is offered within school (not as a result of an Operation Encompass notification).
• How safeguarding referrals for domestic abuse are handled. • What training is offered on domestic abuse and VAWG, and to which staff.

The Department for Education introduces dedicated safeguarding provision in every school. The Department for Education should fund a two-year pilot of 'Dedicated Safeguarding Leads', whose role is solely safeguarding and family liaison and support work within schools and building effective partnerships.

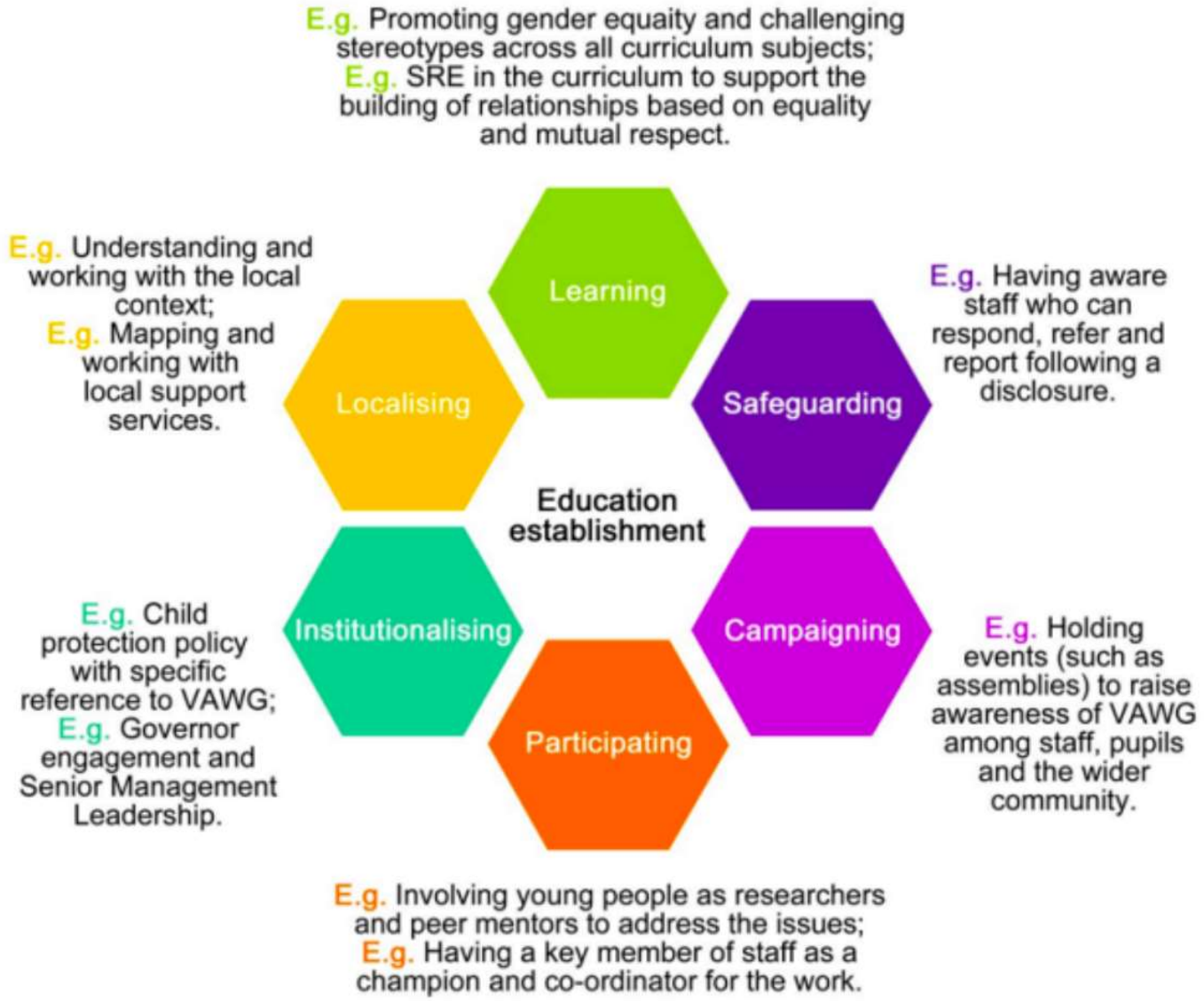


Image from End Violence Against Women Coalition. (2015) **A Guide for Schools**

What this means for you



All schools review the **Whole School Approach** and consider how they can strengthen the culture and policies within their schools and Trusts to ensure that **misogynistic attitudes and behaviours are challenged, young people feel safe to report inappropriate behaviours, and staff feel equipped to respond**.

Schools and other education settings should **record domestic abuse specifically for any children where safeguarding concerns are raised** and that this data is shared with school leadership and governors on a regular basis, with a view to implement improved responses.

All child safeguarding policies must be updated to reflect that children are victims in their own right as per the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 definition.

Multi-Agency Working - Findings

Professionals told the Commissioner that partnerships with schools must be strengthened, and that education settings should be better integrated into the local response to domestic abuse.

Schools' capacity: a common theme was schools' lack of resources and inability to find time to adequately engage with local partners.

Lack of a dedicated Designated Safeguarding Lead: DSL within schools usually cover multiple roles so dedicated time for safeguarding comes at a premium. DSLs participating in roundtables estimated that at least 30% of their caseloads were domestic abuse related.

Information sharing: there are problems with data and information sharing between other agencies and schools

Inconsistent relationships with LSCPs: Some LSCPs work closely with schools to understand children's and teacher's needs and put protocols for information sharing in place. For others, LSCPs only included education on an ad-hoc basis and only in response to individual cases that have reached crisis point.

Capacity of local specialist services: despite the value of their work in schools, the specialist sector remains chronically underfunded.



Recommendations

The Department for Education funds the specialist domestic abuse sector to support prevention activity work with schools in every local area, in addition to carrying out their other roles to support victims and survivors.

The Department for Education makes education the fourth statutory safeguarding partner through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

The Home Office and Department for Education funds the introduction of Education Domestic Abuse Advisor roles, as part of the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership, who can provide training and guidance to schools and share best practice across local areas. This role would entail:

- Taking a strategic role in the coordination of the local Education sector's ability to respond effectively to child victims of domestic abuse.
- Representing the education sector at Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards (DAPB), Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac) steering groups and other relevant fora
- Collating and analysing key data from safeguarding referrals, to feed into Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.
- Monitoring the provision of RSE and share best practice in the delivery of this curriculum across an area.
- Providing or sourcing domestic abuse training and guidance to education staff

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

There must be regular representation at Marac meetings from children's social care, **education safeguarding**, children's health safeguarding, probation, police, housing and the specialist domestic abuse sector to specifically represent child as well as adult victims. These representatives must prepare for, attend, and take actions from Marac.

Local authorities should ensure that **school places** are prioritised for children residing in safe accommodation settings, where they have had to move area due to fears for their safety.

The Commissioner recommends the introduction of **Education Domestic Abuse Advisor roles** at a local authority level, who can provide training and guidance to schools, capture insights and themes from schools and DSLs, and share best practice across local areas.

Strategic leads and commissioners should develop localised understanding of intersectional needs based on the demography of their area and specific schools, to determine areas of additional focus within the curriculum and work to facilitate 'by and for' delivery of lessons, to help build trust with victims and to embed domestic abuse specialist expertise.

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