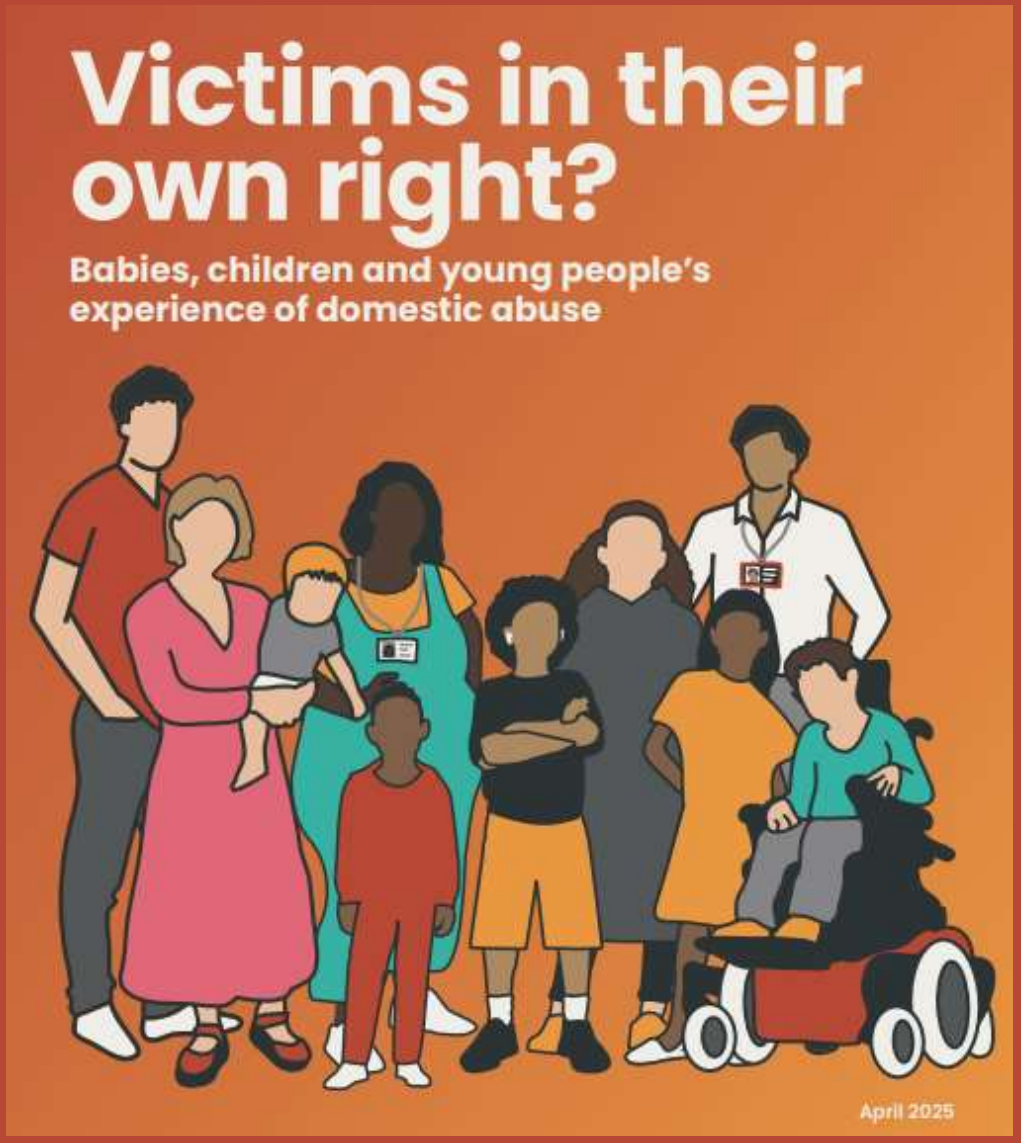


Victims in their own right

Webinar: Children's Social Care

June 2025

domestic abuse commissioner

Agenda

Introduction
Tell Nicole
Exploration of support services
Recommendations – for policy and practice
Q&A

Commissioner@domesticabusecommissioner.independent.gov.uk

Go to Menti.com and type code:
3605 5267

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.



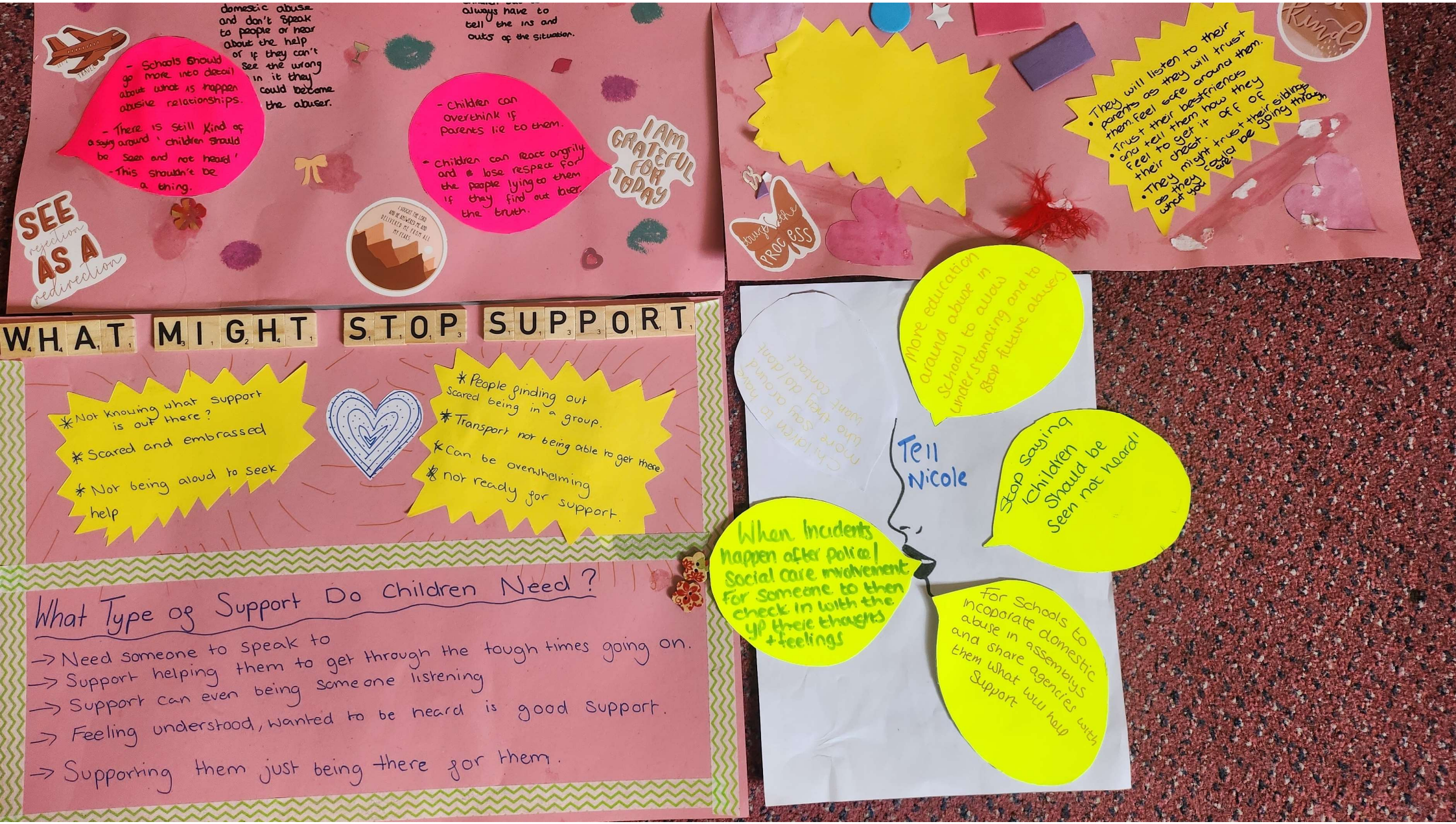

tell
nicole

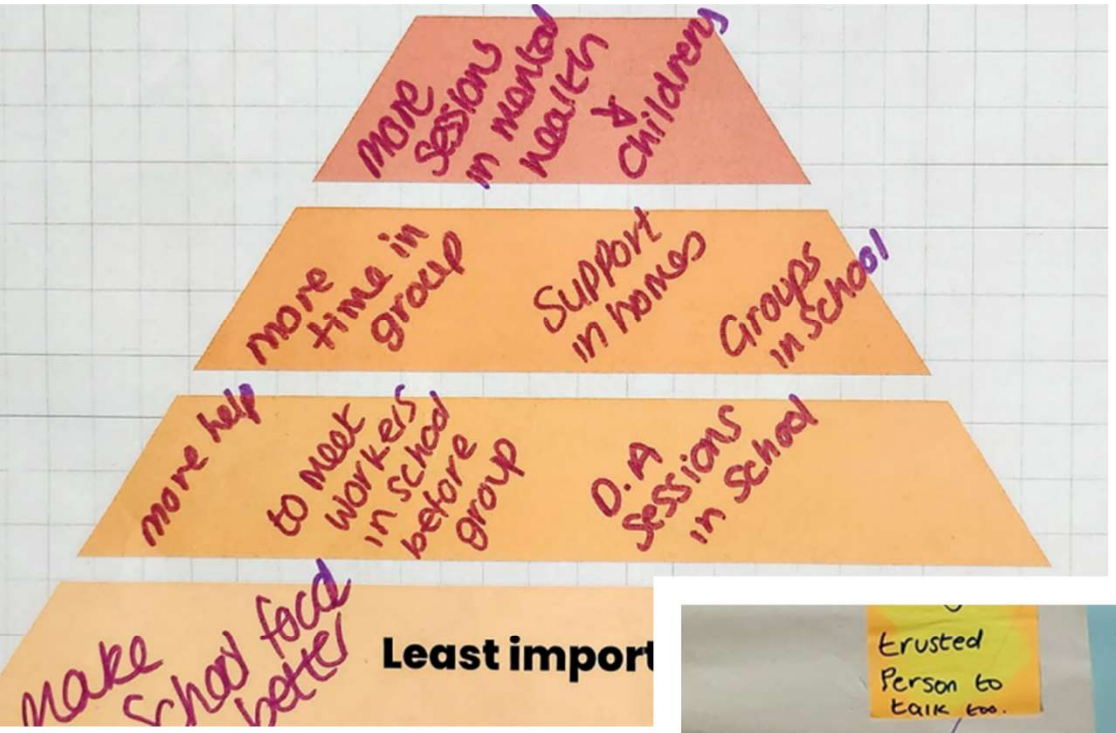
Tell Nicole enables children and young people to have the opportunity to ‘tell’ the Commissioner what they think about domestic abuse issues in a way that is meaningful to them.

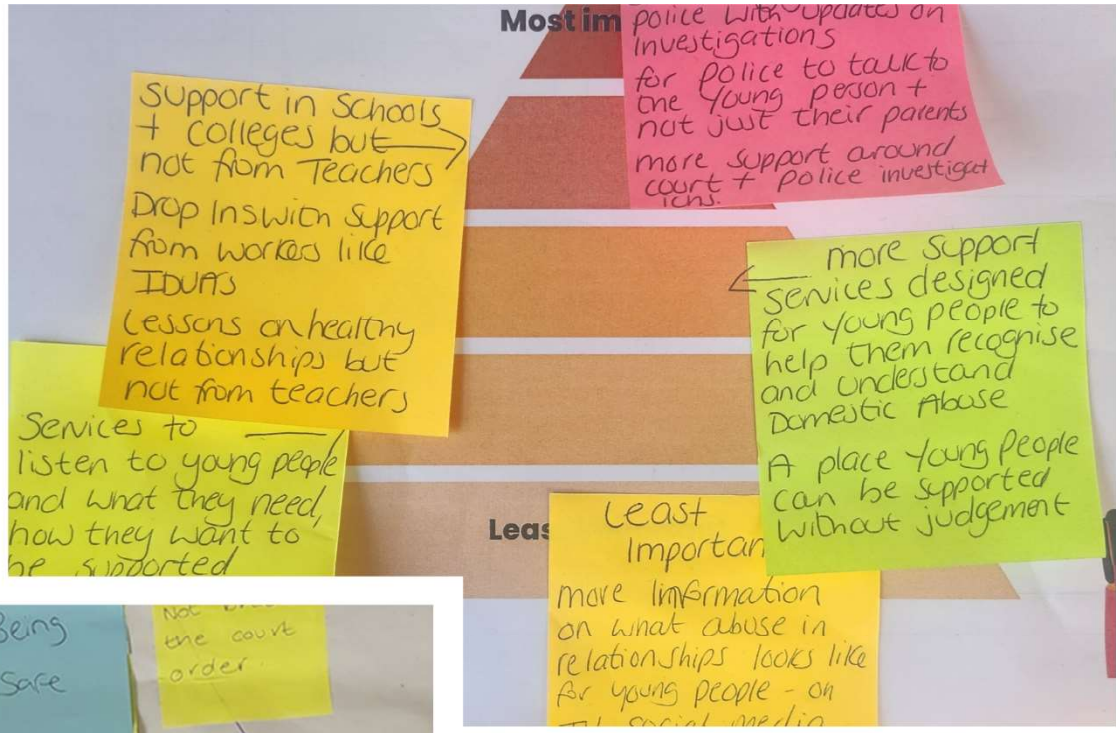
The key to this framework is to collaborate with professional who are already involved in children’s lives through voice, participation and engagement work. Materials and guidance documents were shared by the DAC team to enable engagement.

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

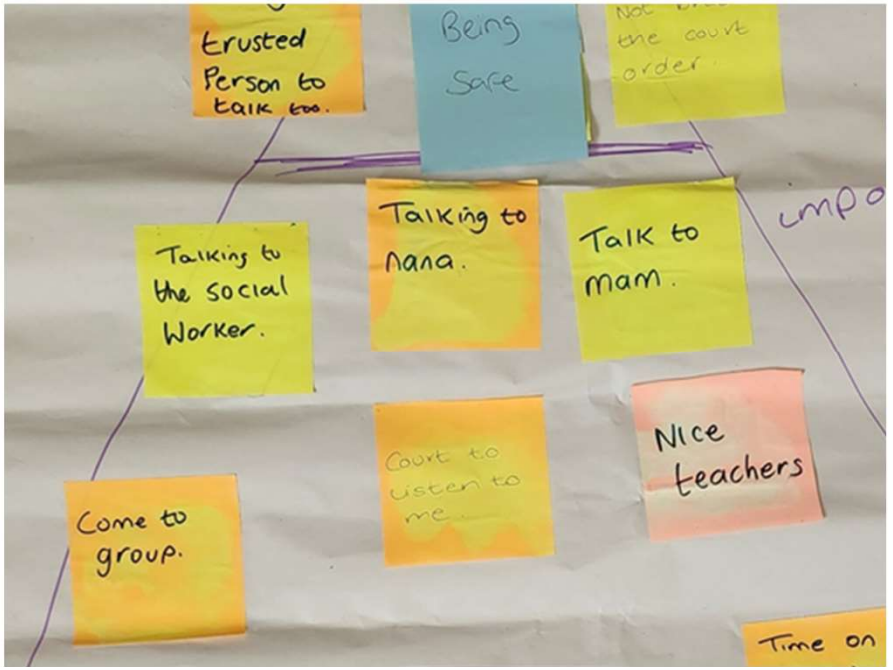


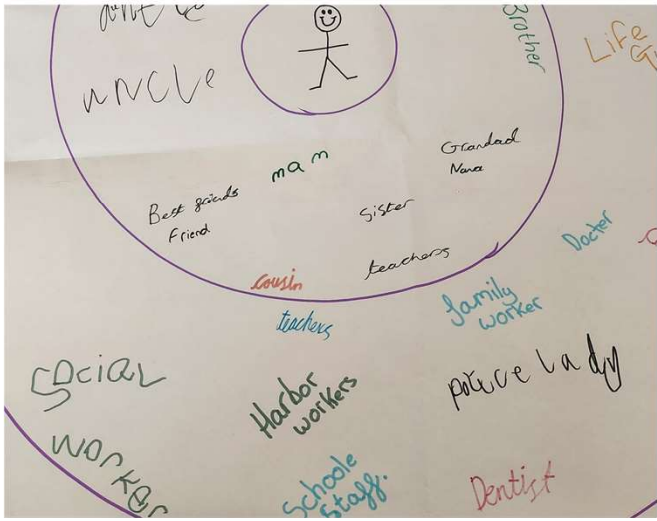

domestic abuse and don't speak to people or hear about the help or if they can't see the wrong in it they could become the abuser.
always have to tell the ins and outs of the situation.
- Schools should go more into detail about what is happen abusive relationships.
- There is still kind of a saying around 'children should be seen and not heard'
- This shouldn't be a thing.
- Children can overthink if parents lie to them.
- Children can react angrily and lose respect for the people lying to them if they find out later the truth.
I AM GRATEFUL FOR TODAY
SEE rejection AS A redirection
They will listen to their parents as they will trust them. Feel safe around them. Trust their bestfriends and tell them how they feel to get it off of their chest. They might trust their siblings as they are going through what you are.
WHAT MIGHT STOP SUPPORT
* Not knowing what support is out there?
* Scared and embrassed
* Nor being aloud to seek help
* People finding out
Scared being in a group.
* Transport nor being able to get there.
* Can be overwhelming
* Not ready for support.
What Type of Support Do Children Need?
-> Need someone to speak to
-> Support helping them to get through the tough times going on.
-> Support can even being someone listening
-> Feeling understood, wanted to be heard is good support.
-> Supporting them just being there for them.
More education around abuse in schools to allow understanding and to stop future abuses
Tell Nicole
Stop saying Children Should be Seen not Heard!
When Incidents happen after police/ social care involvement for someone to then check in with the yp their thoughts + feelings
For schools to incoporate domestic abuse in assemblys and share agencies with them what they help support


more sessions in mental health & childrens
more time in group
Support in homes
Groups in School
more help
to meet workers in school before group
D.A Sessions in School
make school food better
Least import


Most im
police with updates on investigations
for police to talk to the young person + not just their parents
more support around court + police investigat
Support in Schools + Colleges but not from Teachers
Drop Ins with support from workers like IDVAS
Lessons on healthy relationships but not from teachers
more support services designed for young people to help them recognise and understand Domestic Abuse
A place young people can be supported without judgement
Services to listen to young people and what they need, how they want to
Leas
Least Importan
more information on what abuse in relationships looks like for young people - on


POLICE
Social Worker
teacher
harbour
Neighbour
My Friend
My Mum
My Sister
counsellor
my baby
This is me!
Uncle
Aunt
grandaddy
doctor
I would like Support from Teacher.


Trusted Person to talk too.
Being Safe
the court order
Talking to the social Worker.
Talking to nana.
Talk to mam.
Come to group.
Court to listen to me.
Nice teachers
Time on


uncle
Brother
Life
mam
Grandad
Nana
Best friends
Friend
sister
cousin
teachers
Doctor
family worker
teachers
social
Harbor workers
police lady
worker
schools staff
Dentist

Qualities that children valued in professionals

Experienced and have a good understanding of domestic abuse.

Able to relate, having been through things themselves.

Kind and respectful to children.

Good listeners and able to keep calm and positive.

Patient and non-judgemental.

Children want professionals to:
Take more time to listen to them and work at their pace.

Recognise that adults have more power, which can be unfair for children, e.g. confidentiality.



Key theme: “Our feelings matter”

The importance of listening to children: and the consequences of failing to listen, e.g. contact arrangements

I want court to listen to me because I don’t want to see my dad.”
(Child aged 4 to 11 years)

“We need to be listened to and taken seriously and be believed - especially around contact arrangements.”
(Postcard completed by a child aged between 7 to 19 years)

Check in with young people



"When incidents happen after police and social care involvement for someone to check in with the young person – their thoughts and feelings."

(Poster secondary school-aged children)

Children want professionals to recognise that **children's accounts may differ** from those of their parents and carers.

"I would like to be able to talk openly about what has happened."

(Child aged 4 to 11 years)

Support services for children affected by domestic abuse

TECHNICAL REPORT



domestic abuse commissioner

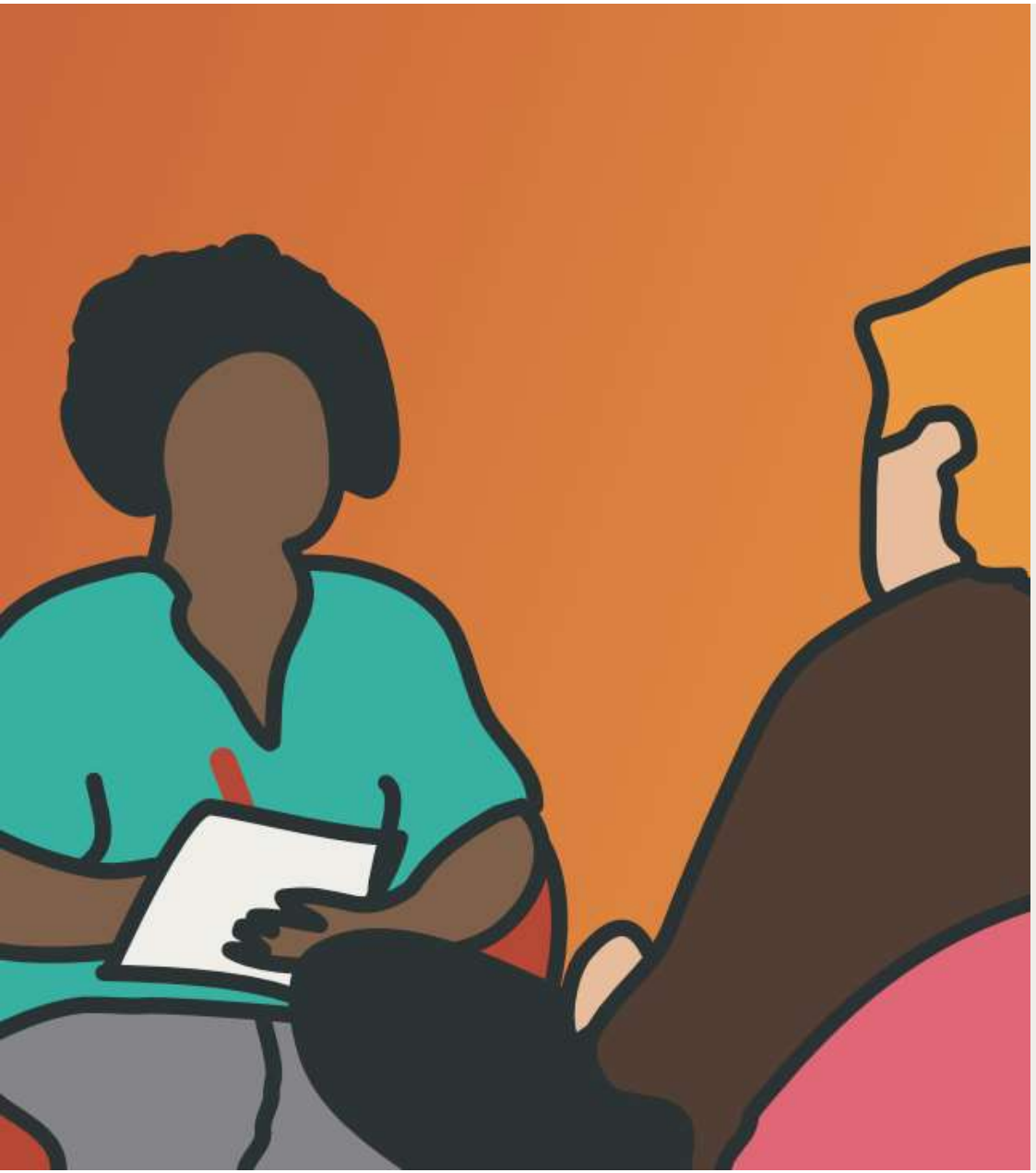
April 2025

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

Chapter 7

The crisis response





The Scale

Domestic abuse is present within 55% of cases subject to a Child Safeguarding Practice Review.

Domestic abuse is the most common family-level risk factor featuring in Serious Incident Notifications relating to a child death

Yet, it is currently impossible to accurately understand on a national scale how many families in touch with children's social care have domestic abuse as their presenting, primary need.

The issue

CCB can be misunderstood by practitioners, and there is little acknowledgement of the impact of CCB on the child victim.

Risk assessments tend to focus on single incidents, so lack a comprehensive picture of the child's life

Children are categorised as experiencing harm or neglect, minimising their experience of domestic abuse

Assessments must ensure that they reflect that the non-abusive parent and the child victim are both at risk from the perpetrator

Undue attribution of responsibility on the protective non-abusive parent.

Experiences of migrant victims, failure to uphold Section 17.





The context

ADCS reported that since 2007/8, referrals to children's social care have increased by 21%.

Sheer number of complex cases and high incidence of professional burn-out and vicarious trauma.

High staff turnover, limited resource linked to the crisis in local government funding, and a high proportion of social workers employed by local authorities in managerial or non-case holding posts

In the year ending March 2024, there were 621,880 referrals to children's social care. Of these referrals, 6.3% were deemed as NFA, and 30.3% were closed after assessment.

CIN statistics for the year ending March 2024 show that almost one-quarter of referrals were repeat referrals from within the previous 12 months.

Engagement

Children are pushed to the periphery of their own safeguarding systems. There are barriers to seeking the voice of the child.

As a result, children can self silence, not wanting to burden their non-abusive parent with their own feelings.

Children's social care's engagement with a non-abusive parent is often framed through a conceptual lens of 'failure to protect.' The onus is placed on the non-abusive parent to protect the child from the actions of the abusive parent – in the worst case, this leads to harrowing public law proceedings.

Perpetrators of abuse are described as being routinely missing, or invisible to services. Alternatively, perpetrators are using similar coercive tactics to present themselves as non-abusive, or even as a victim themselves (DARVO).

These barriers are often only intensified for those with protected characteristics.





Risk assessment

The DASH risk identification checklist was first introduced in 2009.

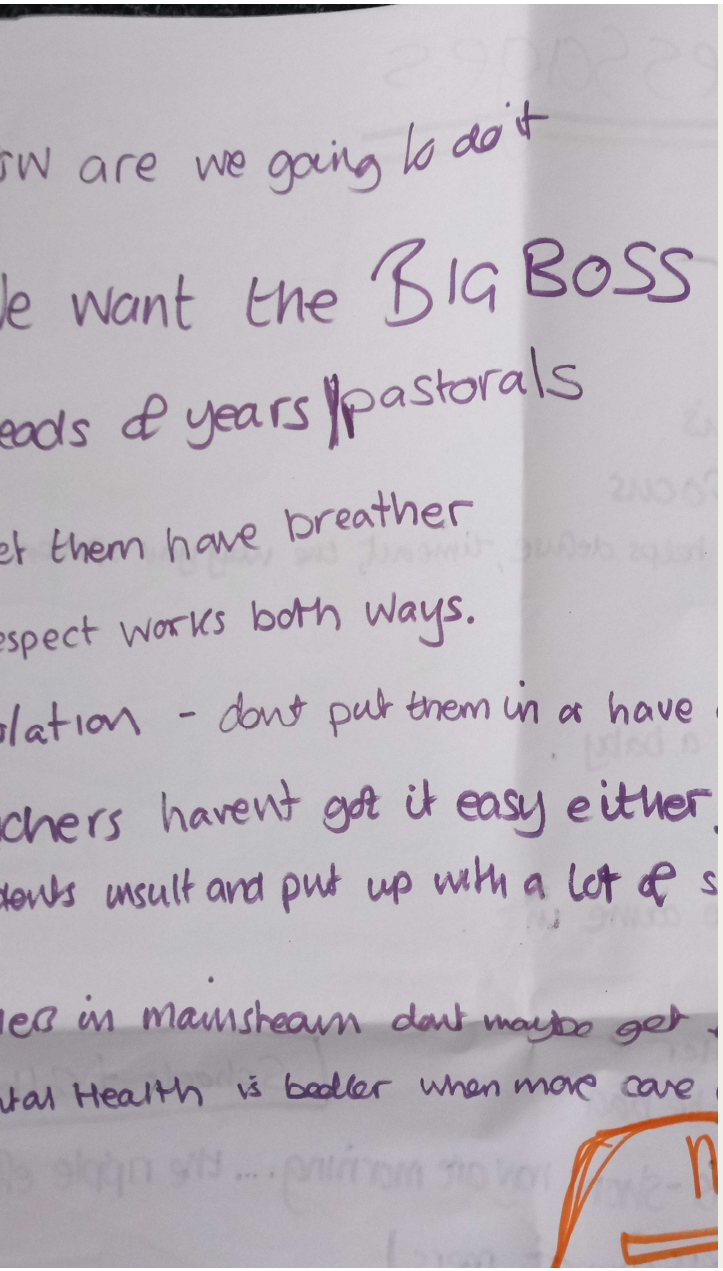
In 2022, the College of Policing published the policing-specific DARA.

While the DASH and DARA should identify children within a household or family and prompt professionals to take safeguarding actions, the tools do not reflect children's lived experiences day to day

Of the 107,674 cases discussed at a MARAC in England and Wales in year ending March 2024, 134,222 children and young people were living in those households, subject to high-risk domestic abuse.

Despite the high prevalence of domestic abuse within social work caseloads, just 2.9% of referrals came from children's social care, 0.6% from the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and just 0.2% from education settings.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel found that there are challenges with information sharing in Marac regarding children, with failures in connecting the risk to the child with the risk to adult victims.



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.

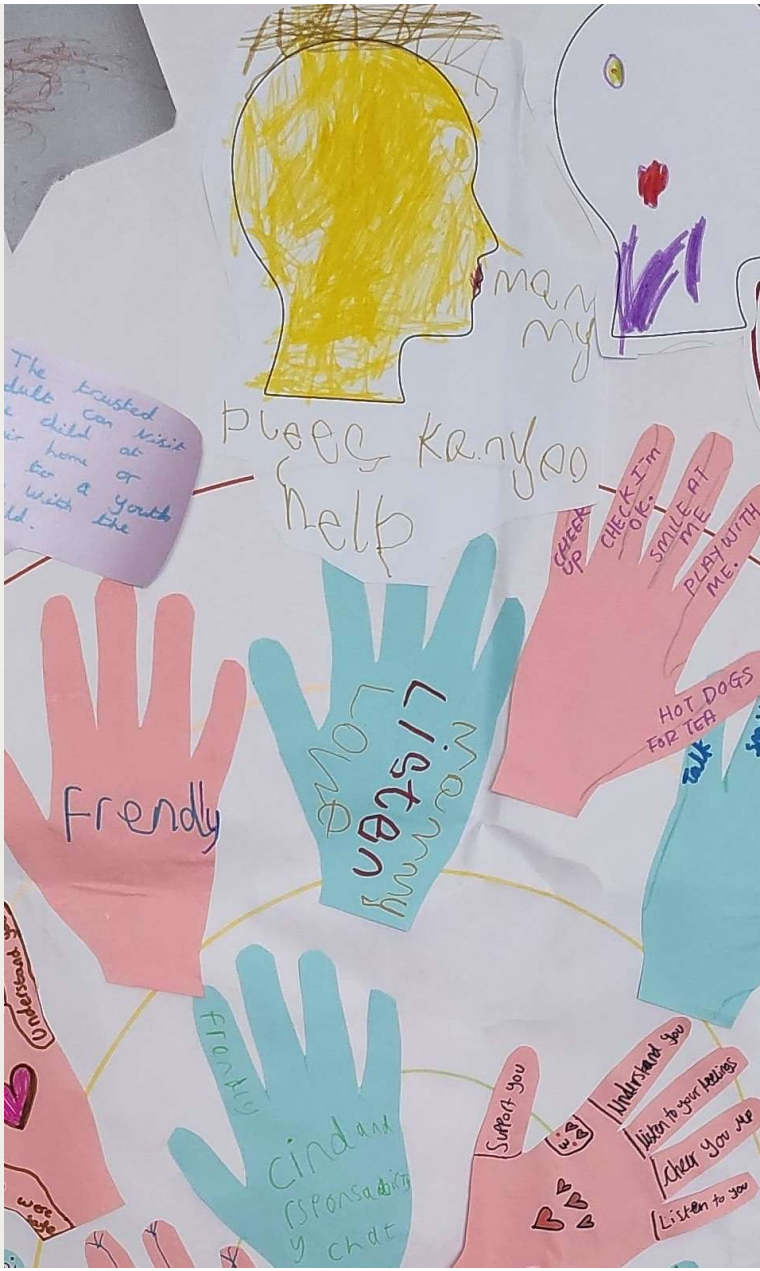
Holistic funding.

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



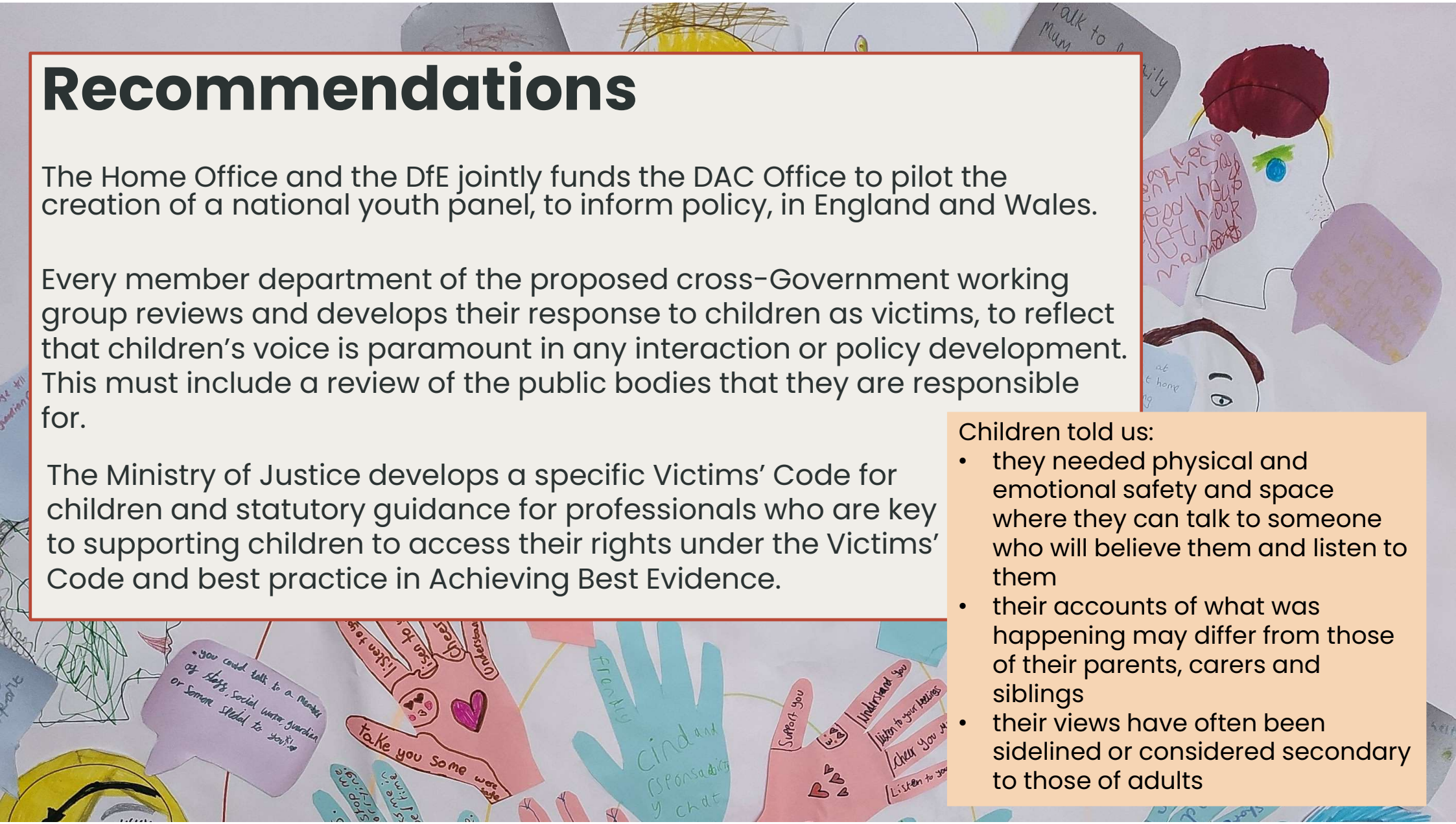
1: Centring Children's Voices

Recommendations

The Home Office and the DfE jointly funds the DAC Office to pilot the creation of a national youth panel, to inform policy, in England and Wales.

Every member department of the proposed cross-Government working group reviews and develops their response to children as victims, to reflect that children's voice is paramount in any interaction or policy development. This must include a review of the public bodies that they are responsible for.

The Ministry of Justice develops a specific Victims' Code for children and statutory guidance for professionals who are key to supporting children to access their rights under the Victims' Code and best practice in Achieving Best Evidence.



Children told us:

- they needed physical and emotional safety and space where they can talk to someone who will believe them and listen to them
- their accounts of what was happening may differ from those of their parents, carers and siblings
- their views have often been sidelined or considered secondary to those of adults

What this means for you

Theme 1: Centring children's voices

Children subject to domestic abuse, and their non-abusive parents or caregivers, must be listened to and involved in decision making about their own lives, at every level, by every agency.

Commissioners must consider how the experiences of children subject to domestic abuse can safely and meaningfully inform the shaping and delivery of services that are commissioned to support them. Commissioners could refer to existing best practice models, such as the CAFADA toolkit and Everyday Heroes' Participation Toolkit in Scotland.

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

2: Stronger cross-departmental working and strategic leadership

Recommendations

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 DfE develops updated RSE guidance.

The Department for Education makes implementing both the 'Minimum Expectations' and the 'Go Further' sections of the Family Hubs Service Expectations document in responding to domestic abuse mandatory and holds Family Hubs to account in the implementation of these.

CQC, HMICFRS and HMIP carry out bi-annual joint thematic inspections of local areas focused on domestic abuse.

Children told us:

- We should take their messages to those at the very top of government: "We want the BIG BOSS!"
- Those in charge did not fully appreciate the impact that domestic abuse can have on children's lives.
- All children needed to have basic information about domestic abuse.

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 2: Stronger cross-departmental working and strategic leadership

Domestic abuse is a **shared strategy** with a public health lens, across the CSP, LSCP, Safeguarding Adult Board, Local Family Justice Boards, and ICB, to ensure that there are shared objectives and a holistic whole-family strategy and approach across an area. This includes **pooling resources to fund shared posts for the development of a strategy and implementation**. This would be done by the **various boards sharing data on prevalence and demographics** as well as themes from Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews, serious case reviews, and other death reviews to inform strategy and needs assessments.

Where areas already have CSP led strategies, they should be refreshed and reviewed in partnership with the LSCP and Safeguarding Adult Board to ensure that children are represented equally to adults. As part of this arrangement, there should be agreed information sharing protocols put in place that each are held accountable for.

Local Safeguarding Children's Partnerships must give dedicated attention and resource to child victims of domestic abuse. This must include the oversight of multiagency domestic abuse and children and young people training, the collation and sharing of data, service information, referral pathways and strategies on how to support children subject to domestic abuse.

3: Holistic funding

Recommendations

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 Department for Work and Pensions creates flexibility in funding to allow local areas to use Reducing Parental Conflict funding as needed for domestic abuse services, as well as any RPC programme that is needed.

The Home Office and Safer Streets Mission Board fund the scoping, development and roll out of gender-specific and masculinity aware interventions for male child victims of domestic abuse.



Children told us:

- The Government could help by understanding what services help children affected by domestic abuse and ensuring that these are available.

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

***Theme 3*: *Holistic Funding*.**

Commissioners should create **joint strategic commissioning groups** to develop the Coordinated Community Response and respond to identified need through the Duty to Collaborate and the resulting **Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.**

Commissioners across all agencies in all areas collaborate on **understanding the prevalence and needs of children subject to domestic abuse**, including those with no recourse to public funds, and pool funding to commission specialist, independent community-based services, including 'by and for' services, to support them.

4: Data and evidence

Recommendations

The ONS commits to rolling out the Child Abuse Prevalence Survey, with specific questions on childhood exposure to and experience of domestic abuse.

The DfE amends the Child in Need categories to ensure that children who are victims of domestic abuse are categorised as so, and not just as experiencing 'neglect', to understand the prevalence of child victims and to ensure that their needs are properly identified.

The Department for Education commits to analysing outcomes for children and young people on a Child in Need Plan, to understand the impacts the plans are making by area, and reasons for case closure.

The Ministry of Justice commissions research that undertakes a systematic review of domestic abuse cases in public law proceedings. This research should mirror the Harm Report and consist of a literature review, consultation and published findings.

Children told us:

- The Government could make things better for children by ensuring that availability of support services is consistent across the country, quick for children who need them, and suitable for children with differing needs.

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 4: Data and Evidence

As part of their duties within the Duty to Collaborate, safeguarding partners, with the inclusion of education, must include **annual data on children subject to domestic abuse** in their area, to ensure that Joint Strategic Needs Assessments are as accurate as possible.

All services that are commissioned for any type of work with children and young people should **build safeguarding case numbers and nature of referrals into contract management with a specific domestic abuse flag**. This non-identifiable information should be **shared with the LSCP** so that analysis can be carried out to inform local assessments of need. This should be developed in line with government guidance and a shared linguistic framework to avoid confusion and discrepancy.

Local areas must report on early help data, and the number of children subject to domestic abuse accessing, or turned away from Early Help services, as part of the requirement to submit data as part of Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.

5: Specialist training for frontline professionals

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.

Social Work England commits to a rigorous inspection of Social Work degrees and the domestic abuse content in degree programmes and ensures that those delivering this curriculum are themselves trained in domestic abuse. The inspection criteria should be developed in close collaboration with the specialist domestic abuse sector and the DAC.

Social Work England reviews the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours standards through a domestic abuse-informed lens to ensure that course providers understand what must be done to achieve the standards.

The Department for Education mandates specific curriculum and assessment criteria about domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, through the 2025 Early Careers Framework and develops practice directions to accompany this.

Children told us:

- The Government could help by educating adults about the impact of domestic abuse upon children.
- They wanted workers to recognise that they as adults have more power, which can be unfair to children

What this means for you

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.

What this means for you

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

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 5: 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.

6: Safeguarding

Recommendations

The DfE makes education settings the fourth statutory safeguarding partner through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

The Department for Education publishes guidance setting out the expected response that child victims of domestic abuse will receive as part of the new Child Protection and Family Help offer.

The Home Office conducts a full review of risk identification tools and Marac, through a whole-systems lens, including the extent to which the needs and risk to child victims are considered and have a voice in decisions that affect them. This must extend to research into, and the development of, child-specific tools and guidance to assess both risk and need alongside each other, with age-appropriate variations to cover all babies, children and young people.

Children told us that:

- The Government could help by placing a greater role on schools to support children affected by domestic abuse.
- They wanted workers who are experienced, understand domestic abuse, and who are kind and respectful to children.

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 6: Safeguarding

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.

Social care and Reducing Parental Conflict teams should have **mandatory screening tools** to identify domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviours **before any assessment of parental conflict**. The sequencing of tools is crucial for safeguarding as any assessment of conflict where domestic abuse is present is likely to be inaccurate and misleading in determining risks. This can cause escalation and serious harm to adult and child victims

Local areas must develop robust and comprehensive referral pathways and information sharing processes, with specialist domestic abuse services, to ensure a whole family approach is available to any child referred to Early Help in the context of domestic abuse

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 6: Safeguarding

Where children are identified as victims in their own right, information must be shared in a timely and relevant way with a view to supporting child victims and the non-abusive parent as early as possible, including referrals for advocacy and specialist support. **Communication between agencies and services should not be confined to formal meetings.**

There must be strong strategic and operational multi-agency working, governance and information sharing between Marac, MATAC, MAPPA and MASH, where these exist.

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. Each agency should record their own domestic abuse flags and case management for MARAC.**

What this means for you

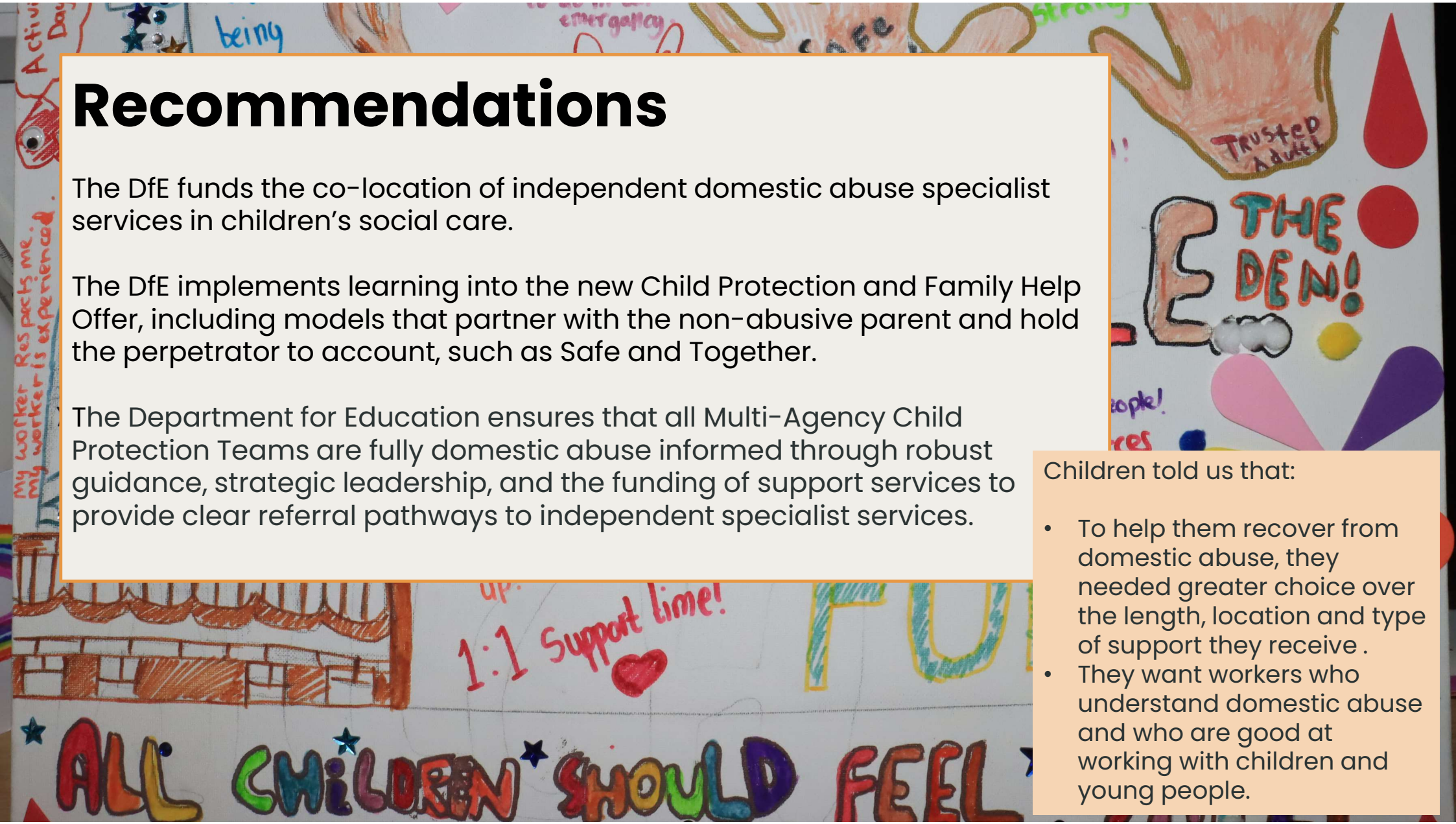
domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 6: Safeguarding

Local authorities must ensure that their **websites contain information on domestic abuse** that is accessible and user friendly for children who have experienced domestic abuse, including **helpline advice and support services in the local area,** with access to online chat capabilities and mobile interfaces on all sites. Sites should also have quick exit functions.

Local areas must **develop policies and procedures to minimise escalating risk to children and adults subject to abuse**. Areas must ensure that their staff understand the risks associated with sharing information about a child to a parent that has been identified as abusive and know when to and how to withhold information.

7: Ensuring practice is informed by specialists



Recommendations

The DfE funds the co-location of independent domestic abuse specialist services in children's social care.

The DfE implements learning into the new Child Protection and Family Help Offer, including models that partner with the non-abusive parent and hold the perpetrator to account, such as Safe and Together.

The Department for Education ensures that all Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams are fully domestic abuse informed through robust guidance, strategic leadership, and the funding of support services to provide clear referral pathways to independent specialist services.

Children told us that:

- To help them recover from domestic abuse, they needed greater choice over the length, location and type of support they receive .
- They want workers who understand domestic abuse and who are good at working with children and young people.

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 7: Ensuring Practice is informed by specialists.

Independent specialist services (commissioned and non-commissioned) that work with child victims of domestic abuse **should be able to access local training and guidance** on child protection, adult safeguarding, the Mental Capacity Act, the Care Act, and other relevant information, in order to ensure their responses are informed within wider frameworks, and they are upskilled to be able to bid for local funding.

Universal access points for families **should display signposting information to specialist domestic abuse services.**

Commissioners should ensure that services they commission can take **self-referrals and be as accessible and flexible in their referral pathways as possible.**

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 7: Ensuring Practice is informed by specialists.

Universal access points should receive **training and support to carry out routine enquiry** as part of their basic safeguarding duties. **Practical tools, resources and forms should be amended to prompt and then record that routine enquiry has happened.**

There should be **robust information sharing agreements in place between all commissioning bodies under the Duty to Collaborate.**

Children's social care should fund **independent domestic abuse specialists to be co-located** in children's social care, to provide guidance and advocacy support on cases where there are barriers for victims in engaging. This must be resourced at **full cost recovery** to meet demand.

Every child and their non-abusive parent subject to domestic abuse should be offered a range of independent, specialist support. This should continue if they are stepped down from children's social care or subject to no further action and met with an early help referral and support if appropriate and wanted, to avoid a repeat referral to children's social care.

What this means for you

Theme 7: Ensuring Practice is informed by specialists.

Local strategic leads and commissioners must recognise the value of the independent specialist sectors by:

- Treating them as subject experts and **using their expertise to inform work on children affected by domestic abuse, as well as more universal prevention activity**. This includes ensuring that any local and regional guidance produced that may relate to children as victims of domestic abuse reflects the Domestic Abuse Act.

- Appropriately **building in full cost recovery to cover their time and expenses required to fully engage in local and regional consultations and strategy development** in an institutional advocacy role. This goes beyond formal meetings and is relevant to preparation and action time required.

What this means for you

domestic abuse commissioner

Theme 7: Ensuring Practice is informed by specialists.

- Allowing **reasonable timeframes for local and regional consultations and strategy** development so that the independent specialist sectors are able to give each item the full attention it needs. Local and regional public bodies should coordinate their requests for information and consultation so that the specialist sectors are not put under undue pressure and time and financial constraints.

- Consider how to **support the independent domestic abuse sector with recruitment, retention, and capacity building, in recognition of the integral part it plays in the multi-agency response**. Local and regional processes must support the sector to thrive and not compound the multiple pressures they face.

Q&A

Which of the Commissioner's practice recommendations are relevant to your role or setting? What are the tangible actions you can be doing or starting a conversation about where you are?

Please share reflections, existing good practice and ideas on how responses can be improved for babies, children and young people.

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