

Eyes on - Enhancing our Practice

‘Aloud’

Views and voices from babies (mothers spoke on their behalf), children and young people about help and support in Domestic Abuse situations

Adults and children wanted to give feedback and have their voices heard. They provide a ‘snapshot’ that re-iterate central messages, some that are already known:

The challenges:

- ❖ How hard it is to come forward.
- ❖ Not knowing what help is on offer.
- ❖ Fear and mistrust of social services.
- ❖ Some women have anxieties that involvement with services will lead them to being separated from their children.
- ❖ The fear of having children taken off you and breaking the mother child bond keeps people in abusive relationships.
- ❖ For all, whether single or being part of a family, moving forward positively is the measure of the quality of support and help.
- ❖ Importance of having a connection with ‘your professional’.
- ❖ Difficulties faced by non-British nationals in accessing services and support.

“I was warned they would only take my child away from me. But now things having changed for me. I know people I could ask for help”.

“Painful, I wanted to forget but I had to repeat”.

“It’s frustrating and upsetting since its emotional thing I have to repeat over and over. Wish I could just print a book and pass it on to all who need to know”

Common themes:

- The **tenuous link to help**, often marked by chance and good fortune.
- **Repetition of information** to different services which was very widespread and an area to improve on.
- The **importance of communication** came through very strongly.
- For **children and young people** – the changing/evolving relationship with their Dad.
- The need for **effective help and support** to pay attention to the individual and to involve the individual.

“I feel about the Health Visitor that I am not just a number”

Key areas for improvement:

- ❖ **Communication** with families, and between services – cutting out repetition of ‘your story’.
- ❖ **Accessibility of information** – knowing what support is available and where/who to get it from.
- ❖ **Trust in services** - People fear services that want to help them and are afraid of having their children removed from their care. This results in people remaining in abusive relationships.

Themes in common with other audits in Oxfordshire

- Regular and effective communication could be stronger
- Holding partners and agencies to account is in our interest to ensure good outcomes for children and families.

Learning points for managers

- **Supervision:** Ensure that staff are receiving quality supervision and cases are regularly reviewed.
- **Check:** that there is good communication and information sharing.
- Be prepared to **challenge, persist and escalate** on behalf of team when quality of response from partner agencies is insufficient.

Action points for practitioners

- **Ask yourself**, how does this mother/child/young person communicate? **What do I need to do to help them communicate well?**
- Ensure there is **effective communication and information sharing between services** to alleviate the need for families to have to constantly repeat their situation.
- Ensure you have an up to date knowledge of **Domestic Abuse procedures and support agencies.**
- Ensure you have **identified the key worker or agency** working with the child and family and have on-going communication.
- Embrace the crucial role of **click and connect** between staff and person.
- Remember the **importance of play based activities and support** for children and young people.

Key messages for inter-agency learning

- **Promote training** for practitioners to gain an understanding of domestic abuse and the impact on the child.
- **The importance of good, effective communication between services.**

Take the time to reflect.....

Consider families and individuals **different communication needs and styles.**

“It’s boring, it makes me sad and tired” [saying the same thing over and over again].

“It’s easier to tell people when they don’t try and get it out of me. Therefore it’s easier to talk to family and sometimes professionals when I’m just playing”.

Reminder to practitioners

- **Information, tools and links to support those working with victims of Domestic abuse** <http://www.oscb.org.uk/themes-tools/domestic-abuse/>
- **OSCB online training** – the OSCB offers a variety of face-to-face and online courses to suit most safeguarding needs. If there is a course you feel we should be running, tell us! <http://www.oscb.org.uk/training/>

Context

'Aloud' was commissioned on behalf of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board as part of a Domestic Abuse audit (July 2016). The focus of this work was to find out the views and voices of babies (mothers speaking on their behalf), children and young people's experiences of help and support in domestic abuse situations.

The participants were selected from a sample of children and young people who had experienced Domestic Abuse. Three of the young people were also a perpetrator of Domestic Abuse. The audit cases were selected for the audit using a method, which using Children's Social Care data recording system, identified all cases fitting the described criteria for the domestic Abuse Safeguarding Audit, then a random selection was made from these to make sure there was a mix of ages, of boys and girls and children from different ethnic backgrounds and children who have used different services. However, one young person was interviewed as a substitute for another young person.

Structured interviews happened in June and July 2016.

The interviewer had no prior knowledge of their circumstances or cases and was non-judgmental in order to invite honest responses.

Question areas covered:

- Who helped?
- What was good about professionals help and support?
- What made a difference and what was the best bit of help?
- Can you think of anything to change?
- Were there any missed chances to help you?
- Did you have to repeat information to different professionals?
- Did professionals work together?
- Open question to capture anything else important to say.

Twenty one voices were represented within the findings:

- 12 children and young people and 8 mothers (one mother spoke for her two children).
- 6 from the OSCB audit plus a one line response.
- 12 from Refuge and 2 further young adults.
- 13 female, 8 male.
- Special needs and disability are represented.
- Living in different parts of Oxfordshire.
- Various methods took place; mainly one to one interviews, one group of 4 mothers speaking for their under 3's, and one children's group.
- A total of 21 hours of listening took place.