

Domestic Violence Good Practice Indicators

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**Developed from a project supported by
The Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

**FROM GOOD INTENTIONS
TO GOOD PRACTICE:
A MAPPING STUDY OF SERVICES WORKING
WITH FAMILIES WHERE THERE IS
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

This booklet describes an extensive, but straightforward, framework for good practice in working on domestic violence.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE GOOD PRACTICE INDICATORS

Domestic violence is now a major issue of concern within social policy and among members of the public in the UK. In recent years, much attention has been focussed on the issue within both the statutory and voluntary sectors and by local and central government. This increase in attention and interest has been welcomed by practitioners and activists in the field and by survivors of domestic violence.

However, good practice 'indicators' or 'benchmarks' to help professionals, and the agencies in which they work, to deal with domestic violence on a practical, everyday basis have developed in a piecemeal way.

In response to this lack, a *framework of domestic violence good practice indicators* has been developed, based on work across the UK. The framework is outlined in this booklet, and applies across all relevant agencies. It represents best practice in domestic violence work currently, and aims to provide senior managers, policy-makers and practitioners with a clear set of achievable indicators, developed by nationally acknowledged experts in the field.

A UK-wide study, **From Good Intentions to Good Practice: a Mapping Study of Services Working with Families Where There Is Domestic Violence***, was carried out in 1999, to establish the range and extent of domestic violence service provision across the country. The study was supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation**.

A team of domestic violence specialists was especially established to conduct this mapping study, which involved collaborative research between the Centre for the Study of Safety and Well-being at the University of Warwick, the Domestic Violence Research Group at the University of Bristol, and the International Centre for the Study of Violence and Abuse at the University of Sunderland. The project was a uniquely wide-ranging collaboration conducted in partnership with:

- The Women's Aid Federation of England (and Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland Women's Aid)
- Barnardo's
- The Children's Society
- NCH Action for Children
- NSPCC

- The Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (University of North London)

The framework of domestic violence good practice indicators was developed from this study.

- The framework includes eight overall indicators - or dimensions - of good practice which together form a comprehensive whole and should be considered jointly.
- Each of these eight broad good practice indicators includes a series of sub- indicators to assist in the development of the best possible practical responses both to those who experience domestic violence and those who perpetrate it, and also to aid prevention, educational and awareness-raising work.
- This framework of good practice has strategic value in terms of the management and development of domestic violence services and so will be of use to policy- makers.
- Each indicator also includes direct operational issues of use to practitioners and activists in the field. The final indicator, for example, relates to specific individual or groupwork with women who have experienced domestic violence and their children - how to do it. In relation to work with perpetrators, RESPECT, the network representing practitioners who work with violent men, has produced guidelines to good practice in this area of work which are available from:

DVIP,
PO Box 2838,
London
W6 9ZE.

* details of the full report, *From Good Intentions to Good Practice*, by Catherine Humphreys, Marianne Hester, Gill Hague, Audrey Mullender, Hilary Abrahams and Pam Lowe, are included at the end of this leaflet.

** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy makers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this document are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

THE GOOD PRACTICE INDICATORS

Good Practice Indicator 1:	<i>The Use of Definitions of Domestic Violence</i>
Good Practice Indicator 2:	<i>The Use of Monitoring Processes and Screening</i>
Good Practice Indicator 3:	<i>Good Practice Guidelines and Domestic Violence policies</i>
Good Practice Indicator 4:	<i>Safety Planning</i>
Good Practice Indicator 5:	<i>Training</i>
Good Practice Indicator 6:	<i>Evaluation</i>
Good Practice Indicator 7:	<i>Multi-Agency Integration and Co-ordination</i>
Good Practice Indicator 8:	<i>Working with Women and Children</i>

Good Practice Indicator 1: Definitions – setting the parameters

The negotiation and adoption of a definition of domestic violence by an agency is an important step and provides an indication that the organisation concerned is able to make a clear statement about it. Without such a definition, other steps, such as monitoring and screening for domestic violence, are unlikely to occur. What a domestic violence definition should contain is, however, a complex issue. Sub-indicators of good practice in this respect include:

Definitions which are inclusive and acknowledge diversity

Definitions need to include different types of abuse (e.g. physical, emotional, sexual etc) and to recognise diversity of experience. The best definitions recognise the wide-ranging effects of domestic violence and the fact that it may have impacts on children in the family.

Including gender (and power/control issues)

Many agencies -use a gendered definition to indicate that the overwhelming majority of domestic violence is committed by men against women (although women occasionally abuse men and violence may also occur in lesbian and gay relationships). Other definitions start with a gender-neutral general statement and follow this with a clause detailing further aspects of domestic violence including the gender issue and the fact that this type of abuse is principally experienced by women. Some characterise domestic violence as the misuse of power and the exercising of control by one partner (usually a man) over the other (usually a woman) in an intimate relationship.

Good Practice Indicator 2: Monitoring and Screening – knowing the extent of the problem

Domestic violence screening and monitoring involve the systematic collection and regular collation of data from service users in order to assess the extent of the problem. Screening may also raise awareness among both staff and service users, and indicates that domestic violence is taken seriously by the agency concerned. Sub-indicators of good practice include:

Systematic screening using a protocol of questions

How and when to ask about domestic violence is a difficult and emotive issue which may feel intrusive. However, carefully developed and sensitive procedural guidelines, routinely used by all staff, are of help. Systematic routine screening is vital (but universal screening is a complex issue and needs to be developed with care).

Guidance, supervision and training

Screening includes routinely asking difficult questions. Vitality, staff need to be properly and sensitively trained, and to be adequately supported by managers supervisors to do this work. Screening may need to be followed by action (e.g. onward referral, liaison with refuges, direct service provision) which may have implications for both staff training and the availability of services.

Using mechanisms for recording

Monitoring often results in an under-estimate of the incidence of domestic violence due to the difficulties involved in disclosure. However it is vital that all agencies monitor for domestic violence and co-ordinate monitoring strategies so that a statistical picture can be built up, both within individual agencies and across a locality.

Good Practice Indicator 3: Policies and Guidelines – guiding the work to be done

Many agencies in both the statutory and voluntary sectors have now developed specific domestic violence policies and good practice guidelines. Such guidelines are important to inform and standardise good practice. Sub-indicators of good practice include:

Safety and confidentiality

Policies and guidelines need to be directly based on the principle of improving the safety of women and children experiencing violence. Confidentiality is a complex issue but, in general, women experiencing violence should be kept informed by agencies and their permission should be sought for onward referral.

The centrality of women's refuge, support and advocacy services within the wider policy/strategy

There is a risk that the continued development of mainstream domestic violence policies may push independent women's and children's provision to one side. Good practice is indicated by policies that ensure that the refuge movement and related women's support and advocacy projects retain a central role.

Attention to diversity, equality and consultation with survivors

Issues of equality and diversity need to be specifically included in policies, together with relevant equality training. It is vital that service users are consulted in a meaningful way in the drawing up, implementing and reviewing of the policy.

Working together within a wider strategy across a locality

In some areas, a wider domestic violence strategy has been developed across agencies, or corporately across a local authority. Policies and guidelines developed by individual agencies need to feed into the wider strategy, where one exists.

The development of a broad range of policies and guidelines and clarity in the referral system

Policies and guidelines need to apply to different user groups, e.g. vulnerable adults, violent perpetrators, and children and families (including sensitive, non-punitive guidelines which differentiate policies for children in need and domestic violence policies on child protection). Issues covered may include staff safety procedures, information for service users and detailed practical guidelines for front line workers.

Good practice is indicated where attention has been paid to the broad scope of policy development and where there is clarity about referral and procedures.

Building on policies which have already been well developed in other areas

There is no need to re-invent the wheel. Learning from other areas can avoid a 'talking shop' outcome in which lengthy discussion about policy takes precedence over the development of increased service provision.

Policies embedded within the organisation

Policies remain empty rhetoric unless appropriate training and supervision are provided to integrate the policy into agency practice.

Detailed guidelines

Improved service provision is often defeated by the lack of detailed thinking by managers about the barriers to good practice. While there is sometimes the problem that too much procedure can constrain professional discretion, careful practical detail and concrete, but sensitively framed, guidance notes are often features of a well thought out policy.

Good Practice Indicator 4: Safety Measures and Safety-oriented practice – safety from violence, the underlying principle

Safety-oriented practice is crucial in any circumstances where domestic violence may be an issue. Sub-indicators include:

Safety planning and staff training in safety work

Safety planning, and training on how to do it, is a key practical strategy. Such planning needs to be done jointly with women or children, and to be practical, down-to-earth and detailed (including, for example, safe personal contacts or places to go in an emergency, locks, provision for pets, availability of refuges etc.). It also includes making sure that children (while knowing how to summon help if it is safe to do so) know that it is neither safe nor their responsibility to intervene.

Including a range of measures

At an organisational level, safety planning needs to include a range of measures including safe premises and access, information for service users, and confidentiality, including not passing on information about abused women and children to others, particularly violent partners or their associates.

Supporting mothers as a response to child protection

Supporting the safety of non-abusing mothers is a positive response to child protection and domestic violence (see the 1999 Department of Health guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children*).

Worker safety

Protecting workers is important, using measures such as mobile phones, working in pairs and applying risk assessment procedures.

Good Practice Indicator 5: Training – raising awareness, exploring values, developing skills

A key plank for ensuring the effectiveness of domestic violence intervention lies in the development of training to raise awareness and to equip workers with the necessary skills. Many agencies now provide such domestic violence training. Good practice demands a well-developed training strategy, integrated across organisations where possible, and recognising the role of refuges, women's support groups and advocacy services. Sub-indicators of good practice include:

Training large numbers of employees

Increasingly, agencies train large numbers of staff (frequently using 'training the trainer' techniques) in order to move towards the mainstreaming of domestic violence responses and in recognition that significant numbers of employees will be in contact with domestic violence survivors or perpetrators.

Training beyond initial awareness-raising leading to a range of specialist courses

After initial domestic violence awareness and training on implementing policies, agencies may need specialist courses which enable staff to develop deeper and more specialised knowledge. Examples include domestic violence and the law, child protection, issues for disabled women and children, and so on.

A rolling programme of domestic violence training

A rolling programme which recognises turn-over of staff, and the need for follow-up, indicates a well-developed training strategy. Just one isolated one-day or two-day course can achieve little.

The integration of the training strategy into operational planning for domestic violence services

The training strategy needs to be well integrated into domestic violence operational planning, for example as an integral part of the implementation of domestic violence policies or the operation of specialised services.

A strategy for financing and providing ongoing training

The development of a strategy for proper resourcing and funding and for providing a programme of training (rather than a one-off initiative) is clearly a priority if this work is to continue in agencies.

Quality of training, equality issues and service-users' voices

A good training curriculum includes attention to equality issues, the inclusion of definitions, understandings and awareness-raising about domestic violence, and the involvement at some level of women survivors of violence, who may be able to advise on content, to design materials or to deliver some of the training.

Who provides the training?

Training can be provided in a variety of ways, for example, by full-time trainers, by Women's Aid or local women's outreach and support services, through conferences, or by internal trainers. This is a difficult issue now that training is becoming so widespread. It was commonly provided by Women's Aid in the past, but they may not be able to meet a very large demand. Specialist manuals and training programmes are of some help. However, the expertise of specialist workers providing front line services to women and children needs to continue to be acknowledged as an important part of training provision within this expanding area. Above all, trainers need specialised knowledge, a gendered approach and the ability to challenge commonly held myths and assumptions.

Good Practice Indicator 6: Evaluation – ensuring effective responses

No innovative project can 'spread the word' with confidence about its work unless it has been properly and independently evaluated. Different considerations apply to evaluating work with survivors and with perpetrators. In all fields, evaluation is regarded as good practice but, in the case of perpetrators programmes, there are additional reasons why it is of central importance. If programmes are less than effective and abused women are given false hope, real threats to their safety, and to the safety of their children, may result. Evaluation can help to guard against this, although it remains a very inexact science. Sub-indicators include:

Independent evaluation

Where evaluations are conducted by practitioners themselves, they typically carry less weight than those conducted by evaluators external to the project. However, a knowledge of evaluation techniques is not likely to be sufficient in such complex situations involving violence and intimate personal issues. It is vital that evaluations are based on an adequate understanding and knowledge of domestic violence, informed by the important international literature which exists on the subject.

Building in the voices of survivors

It is important that survivors' views are sought about services for women and children, including finding out if they have been helped to feel safe and have been assisted by services offered. For perpetrators programmes, it remains the survivors' rather than the perpetrators' voices which are most essential to hear. Partner report has been shown to be the most reliable measure of success and an essential component of such evaluations.

Follow up

It is helpful to evaluate whether increased safety and decreased abuse endure over time in order to guard against the common situation in which services result in a short-term effect only. This is particularly important in the case of perpetrators programmes.

Feedback

The purpose of evaluation is not only to measure outcomes ('what works') but also to identify areas of practice where change is needed. It is important to feed back from evaluation into policy and practice.

Good Practice Indicator 7: Multi-Agency Co-ordination – working together

A good practice indicator is multi-agency co-ordination. This does not mean just the setting up of inter-agency domestic violence forums. Rather it refers to the co-ordination or even, in some instances, the integration of service provision so that agencies work to the same brief and adopt a consistent approach. The setting up of inter-agency forums is a tool with which to work towards this 'end', rather than being the 'end' in itself. The sub-indicators are similar to those for Good Practice Indicator 3:

Consistency of service within and across agencies

Consistency between and across agencies is vital, so that an integrated approach is achieved, rather than a fragmented one.

Confidentiality, permission and agreement

Attention to issues of confidentiality and to obtaining permission and agreement from abused women is of importance within multi-agency co-ordination and joint working, where this involves work on individual cases.

The full and active involvement of women's refuge, outreach and support services

Concrete policies need to be in place to preserve the central and key position of these services within inter-agency work.

Equality issues and consultation with abused women and their children

Similarly, attention to equality issues and to effective mechanisms for consulting with, and responding to the expressed views of, service users are important factors within inter-agency co-ordination.

Clarity of response

Clarity about decisions made, actions to be taken, lines of accountability, and so on, are essential to avoid multi-agency 'fudging' of responses.

Avoiding the talking shop or smoke screen outcome

Practical strategies need to be employed to ensure that inter-agency work does not become a smoke screen or talking shop in which nothing concrete changes or improves.

Monitoring of effectiveness and evaluation of inter-agency co-ordination

Monitoring and evaluation of multi-agency work, as for single agency responses, is of importance in order to judge effectiveness in terms of service users' views, improved provision, consistency of response, and enhanced safety for abused women and children.

Improved resourcing

An essential factor is adequate, secure resourcing by central and local government and by other agencies to facilitate both multi-agency collaboration and also service provision and development, for example, capacity-building for the refuge movement and the diverse services which it provides.

Good Practice Indicator 8: Good Practice with Women and Children – how to do it

The previous good practice indicators relate to both strategic and operational issues within agencies. However, there are clear good practice standards to be applied in the conduct of individual and groupwork with abused women and children. This non-exhaustive list of sub-indicators for good practice with abused women and children includes:

Attention to the voices and expressed needs of women using the service

Attention to children's specific needs

The empowerment of abused women and children

Attention to equalities issues and anti-discriminatory practice

Attempts to mainstream the service

Monitoring and evaluation

Specifically, good practice sub-indicators include:

The adoption of a believing, sensitive approach

The provision and delivery of effective services, promptly and non-judgementally

Improvements in safety for women and children experiencing abuse to be the underlying priority

The development of specific and diverse services in relation to minority ethnic and other communities (for example, for disabled women and children)

Together, these factors form a coherent operational approach to how to work with domestic survivors and their children.

The framework as a whole provides an overall, co-ordinated programme

However, the field remains one in which resources are scarce, as noted above under Good Practice Indicator 7. Adequate resourcing, provided in a co-ordinated and dependable fashion (especially to refuge, outreach and support services), is an essential component in moving domestic violence policy and practice forward.

The full report, *From Good Intentions to Good Practice*, by Catherine Humphreys, Marianne Hester, Gill Hague, Audrey Mullender, Hilary Abrahams and Pam Lowe is available from: The Policy Press, priced £ 13.95 (Tel: 0117-954-6800).

It describes the study from which the framework of good practice was derived and provides further information on each of the good practice indicators. The study mapped domestic violence services provided by all social services departments, women's refuge and advocacy services, major children's charities and perpetrators programmes in the UK.