



Leeds Safeguarding  
Children Partnership

# Interpersonal Violence and Abuse (IPVA) in Young People's Relationships

## Practice Guidance

Version	1
Initial date of this document:	28.07.17
Date Document Amended	
Document Review Date	
JFDI Level	Level 1, all other Partner Agencies and Clusters



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## 1. Introduction

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### What is this guidance?

This guidance relates to situations where a young person under the age of 18 is being harmed or is causing harm in their own intimate relationships.

### Why do we need this guidance?

In 2013 the government definition of domestic violence changed to include young people aged 16 and 17. Extending the definition increased awareness that young people in this age group experience domestic violence and abuse, and encouraged more young people to come forward and access support. Recent statistics on the prevalence of domestic violence show that victims of domestic violence are more likely to be aged 16 to 24 years<sup>1</sup>. Despite the high prevalence of abuse in this age group referrals into support services have been found to be low<sup>2</sup>.

When talking about young people involved in abusive relationships, the term used is 'Interpersonal Violence and Abuse' (IPVA).

### What is the purpose of this guidance?

This guidance has been developed to help practitioners:

- Identify when a young person is involved in, or at risk of IPVA.
- Understand the issues that affect young people involved in, or at risk of IPVA.
- Increase their knowledge in assessing additional risks & vulnerabilities young people face.
- Gain insight into key differences for young people involved in abusive relationships.
- Identify strengths and protective factors with the young person.
- Be aware of the effectiveness of multi-agency working and the need to share information in order to support young people effectively, and know what to do next.

### Who is this guidance aimed at?

This guidance is aimed at practitioners and managers who may encounter situations where a young person under the age of 18 has been harmed or is causing harm through interpersonal violence and abuse.

All children and young people under the age of 18 experiencing violence or abuse are likely to be at risk of significant harm, practitioners should follow their agencies usual safeguarding procedures if they have any concerns.

For further information with regards to this guidance please contact [lscp.info@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:lscp.info@leeds.gov.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> Office of National Statistics (2018) Domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018

<sup>2</sup> SafeLives (2017) Safe Young Lives: Young people and domestic abuse

## 2. Interpersonal Violence and abuse in young people's relationships

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The government definition of domestic violence is:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

**Controlling behaviour** is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

**Coercive behaviour** is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

In Leeds violence from a partner to someone under 16 is also considered to be domestic violence, and from someone under 16 to a partner or parent.

Data from the Crime Survey shows that in the year ending March 2018, 7.9% of women and 6.0% of men aged 16-19 had experienced domestic violence in the last year. Women aged 20-24 were significantly more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than women in any other age group.

A study conducted by the NSPCC<sup>3</sup> of 13 to 17 year olds suggests that for a large number of young people abuse can begin earlier on in adolescents. The study found that 25% of girls and 18% of boys reported having experienced some form of physical violence from an intimate partner. Girls were more likely than boys to have older partners which puts them at even greater risk from a young age. Young people who are abusive in their own intimate relationships are more likely to have experienced difficulties in their childhood, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

Research indicates that young people are more dismissive of IPV than adults and often see it as 'part and parcel' of having a partner. Young people are also more likely to confide in their friends rather than family or practitioners. This raises a number of concerns:

- The young person may confide in a friend and not receive appropriate advice
- The young person may be minimising their situation
- Incidents are not reported to the Police
- Young people aren't recognising abuse

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<sup>3</sup> Barter, C., McCarry, M., Berridge, D., and Evans, K. (2009) Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships. NSPCC

In 2016 there were 18,785 incidents of domestic abuse reported to the Police in Leeds, only 179 of these involved 16 and 17 year olds.<sup>4</sup>

IPVA can affect any young people regardless of age, gender identification, sexual orientation, race, religion or disability. However some young people are more vulnerable to IPVA victimisation and instigation including those who:

- have a history of running away from home or care
- are in care or are care leavers
- have disengaged from education, employment or training
- are sexually exploited
- are users of drugs and alcohol
- have a history of domestic abuse in their families
- are involved in gangs, offending or anti-social behaviour
- were neglected in childhood or received punitive parenting
- are young parents or pregnant young people.

### **3. Examples of IPVA in young people's relationships**

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The following section provides examples for practitioners of IPVA in young people's relationships.

**Emotional abuse and control:** This can include verbal abuse, being made to feel bad or worthless, jealousy, being threatened, stopping a partner from seeing friends or family, telling a partner what they can or can't do, wanting to know where someone is all of the time, cheating on you or accusing you of cheating on them, removing keys or phone from a partner, locking them in.

**Physical abuse:** Physical abuse is the most recognisable form of abuse. It includes pushing, slapping, shoving, strangling, burning, pinching, hair pulling, head butting which can result in a black eye, cut lip, bruising or broken bones. In the most extreme cases it can result in death.

**Sexual abuse:** Unwanted and / or forced sexual activity e.g. rape, touching, kissing

**Abuse through new technologies:** This means abuse and control via any form of electronic communication, and includes all the ways in which people communicate through these devices. An evidence synthesis by Stonard et al (2014) has found that the percentage of young people reporting to have experienced some form of abuse from a partner through new technologies ranged from 12 to 56% across all studies<sup>5</sup>. It has also been highlighted that control of the victim's phone and social media can often be a monitoring tool for the abusive partner.

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<sup>4</sup> One minute guide. Domestic abuse in young people's relationships. No. 164, July 2017  
<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/164%20-%20Domestic%20abuse%20in%20young%20peoples%20relationships.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Stonard, K., Bowen, E., Lawrence, T. and Price, S.A. (2014) The relevance of technology to the nature, prevalence and impact of adolescent dating violence and abuse: A research synthesis. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 19 (4), pp.390-417.

Online abuse and control are closely linked to offline control. Examples of online control includes access to passwords, stalking on social media, sexting, unwanted sharing of sexual images, looking through private messages, demanding passwords, sending constant messages and phone calls.

**Reciprocal violence:** A number of young girls find it difficult to recognise domestic abuse as they will say they give “as good as I get”. It has been found that it is rare for the girl to be the young person causing harm, and they will ‘fight back’ as self-defence. Young boys who report reciprocal violence report their abuse was to a greater extent than what was inflicted from their girlfriends, and often the girlfriends were acting in self-defence.<sup>6</sup>

Practitioners need to recognise emotional and behavioural changes in young people that may indicate IPVA such as:

- becoming more self-critical – e.g. having no self-belief in how they look, dress or act;
- giving up their own opinions – thinking their partner is always right
- problems eating or sleeping or having headaches
- seeming to be scared of their partner’s reactions
- becoming more isolated - seeing less of their families and friends and stopping going to school or college
- physical signs of harm such as bruising and scratches.

Practitioners should look out for signs of coercive control, for post-relationship violence and for child sexual exploitation.

Practitioners should avoid making the assumption that age automatically makes a young person more resilient and less likely to suffer harm. They should also be aware that boys and not just girls are at risk of IVPA.

#### **4. Assessing abuse, risk and vulnerabilities**

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##### **Young people being harmed**

Young people are more likely to disclose IPVA where they have a trusting and open relationship with a worker. Conversations with young people should therefore be meaningful, and check in’s about their relationships should form part of each contact with the young person.

Where IPVA is disclosed or a practitioner identifies it is happening, it should be discussed with the young person away from the person causing harm.

If it appears that a young person is being harmed in this way, the practitioner should discuss the concerns with their agency safeguarding lead, and with the MARAC Coordinator. A recommendation may be to refer the case to the Daily Domestic Violence Meeting (MARAC).

Where the young person under the age of 18 is identified at risk of significant harm, a contact should be made to Duty and Advice Team. The team will provide advice on the next course of action and decide whether an assessment is required for the young person.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.safelives.co.uk](http://www.safelives.co.uk)

If there is a risk of significant harm a decision will be made on the type of response that is required which may include a Family Group Conference, Child in Need plan or Child Protection Plan. Where the young person being harmed wishes to have the support of their extended family or community a Family Group Conference should be discussed/considered.

A best practice response for a young person being harmed is likely to reflect an integrated approach which combines child safeguarding and high risk domestic abuse expertise. This should be tailored to the young person's needs and they should be involved in the process as much as possible. The MARAC should support the existing plan in place.

In addition, practitioners could develop safety plans with young people to inform their overall plan (Early Help plan, Child in Need plan, Child Protection plan, Children looked after care plan or Pathway plan). Safety plans focus on risks the young person is facing, their physical and emotional needs and equipping them to make choices that may keep them from serious harm.

Practitioners can also consider using the young people's version of the DASH risk identification checklist. Guidance along with the checklist can be found [here](#)

If the DASH highlights concerns that the young person is involved in an abusive relationship, discuss your concerns with your safeguarding lead, and the MARAC Coordinator. Contact details can be found in the appendix. A recommendation may be to refer the case to the Daily Domestic Violence Meeting (MARAC). Further details can be found [here](#).

Practitioners should also consider whether the young person is experiencing additional vulnerabilities and risks such as child sexual exploitation, substance misuse issues, mental and physical health problems and social deprivation.

## **Safety Planning**

The purpose of a Safety Plan is to keep a young person safe. All young people who are experiencing or have experienced abuse in their relationships should have a Safety Plan even if the abuse has stopped. Safety planning involves looking at the risks the young person is facing, their physical and emotional needs, and equipping them to make choices that may keep them safe from harm. It is essential that this planning is done together with the young person.

The most risky times for victims are often when a relationship ends. In order to safeguard the young person, ending a relationship should ideally be led by the young person and supported by a professional. Practitioners can develop safety plans with young people to inform their overall plan (Early Help plan, Child in Need plan, Child Protection plan, Children looked after care plan, Pathway plan or MARAC plan). Safety plans should focus on risks the young person is facing, their physical and emotional needs and equipping them to make choices that may keep them from serious harm. Example safety plans to use with young people can be found in the appendix.

Themes arising from recent safeguarding reviews show that other factors that can increase risk include pregnancy/having a baby, **further visible injuries**, greater evidence of coercive control, males in crisis e.g. breakdown of support networks, mental health and increased substance misuse.

Important things to consider when completing a Safety Plan with a young person include:

- **Do you know where they live?** Don't assume they live with their parents. They may be staying with friends or living in temporary accommodation. Identify a safe place they can go to in an emergency
- **Does the young person have a positive relationship with family and peers?** If not supporting rebuilding these relationships can be an important part of a young person's Safety Plan.
- **Does the young person have a child?**
- **Does the young person have a mobile phone?** If a mobile phone is given to a victim as part of a safety plan then the phone number must be registered with the police
- **Does the young person have money, medication that they need to take, keys or spare clothes?**
- **Does the young person have any identification?**
- **Does the young person attend school or college?** If so they can provide important support for the Safety Plan and should be communicated with.

### Young people causing harm

The experience of domestic violence for some young people includes causing harm to those closest to them including partners, parents, siblings and other family members.<sup>7</sup>

The term 'young person causing harm' is used instead of 'perpetrator' as labelling young people as perpetrators can prove to be a barrier to engagement.

SafeLives insights data shows that the criminal justice response is often the only answer for young people demonstrating abuse towards their partners. Young people causing harm will often lack an understanding of healthy relationships, or need help to control behaviour that they know is wrong. It is just as important to change the attitude and response of these young people as it is holding them accountable for their behaviour. A young person causing harm has the capacity to change.

Young people who go on to form abusive relationships are more likely to have been exposed to some form of abuse in their childhood. They tend to have multiple problems such as poor school attendance, homelessness, drug or alcohol use, and offending behaviour. These young people also tend to find it difficult to make trusting, positive relationships.

Research has shown that the brain doesn't stop developing until the mid-20s. Studies have found that during the teenage years, the frontal lobe (which is associated with rational thinking) experiences an excess production of grey matter which in turn affects decision making, the ability to organise, self-control, emotional and impulse regulation and risk taking behaviour. These changes will impact a young person's own behaviour and response to the behaviour of others.

Practitioners should consider if the behaviours of the young person or their personal circumstances potentially mean that they require an Early Help Assessment or if they are deemed to be at risk of significant harm, and they need to contact Duty and Advice. The most meaningful engagement will come from a professional that the young person has a trusting relationship with.

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<sup>7</sup> SafeLives (2018) Safe Young Lives: Young people and domestic abuse

If a young person causing harm is displaying harmful sexual behaviours, contact should be made with Duty and Advice Team.

It is important that any young person causing harm is provided with support around healthy relationships. Evidence shows that the best outcomes for these young people include a [‘Think Family Work Family’](#) approach whereby the wider family issues can also be identified and addressed, which will make the young person causing harm more likely to sustain changes in their behaviour.

## 5. Key messages for practitioners

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- Practitioners should be open to the idea that IPVA can affect any young person regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, religion or disability.
- Practitioners should not assume that disabled young people are not engaging in intimate relationships.
- Practitioners should also not assume that boys cannot be the victims of IPVA.
- Practitioners should be aware that young people from the LGBT community will have additional barriers to asking for support, such as fear of being ‘outed’.
- Young people will be more likely to confide in a professional that they have a positive and trusting relationship with. If the professional believes the young person may be involved in IPVA (as young person causing harm or victim) the young person will feel more comfortable if the professional begins the conversation.
- Always believe the young person who is disclosing IPVA, and don’t minimise the situation purely because of the young person’s age or length of relationship.
- Young people may not be aware that they’re in an abusive relationship. Be prepared to spend time with the young person exploring what a healthy relationship looks like, and compare this to their current relationship.
- Parents and carers are the main protectors of young people, and if appropriate, can provide useful insight into the young person’s situation. Parents or carers may also have their own concerns and be in a position to support conversations with the young person and offer practical safety and support. Practitioners should always have a conversation with the young person in regards to sharing information.



## **Useful Resources**

Young people's version of the DASH risk identification checklist

<http://www.safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-identifying-risk-victims-face>

Young people's version of a Safety Plan

<https://www.atl.org.uk/Images/guidance-and-safety-plan-for-young-people-nov-13.pdf>