



Leeds  
Safeguarding  
Children Board

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

**Practice Guidance**

*DRAFT*

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## Contents

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1. Introduction
2. What is domestic abuse
3. Examples of IPVA in young people's relationships
4. Background information
5. Key messages for professionals
6. Assessing abuse, risk and vulnerabilities
7. What to do next
8. Safety planning
9. Young people causing harm
10. Contact details

## 1. Introduction

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**What is this Guidance?** This guidance is in relation to situations where a young person under 18 years of age has been harmed through interpersonal domestic abuse from a partner (boyfriend or girlfriend) or is causing harm to a partner.

Throughout this guidance the terms used will be; IPVA (interpersonal violence and abuse), young person causing harm and young person suffering abuse.

It is important to remember that all children and young people under 18 years of age are protected by child protection legislation. The most important message for all professionals is that any person under 18 who is experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse from a boyfriend or girlfriend is likely be at risk of harm, and professionals need to follow their agencies safeguarding procedures if they believe the IPVA is placing the young person at risk of harm.

### **Why do we need this guidance?**

The domestic violence definition was altered in 2013 to include 16 & 17 year olds in the hope that this would encourage young people to come forward to report abuse. National research shows that the most at risk age group for domestic abuse are 16-24 years old. Locally, April 2016 to March 2017 saw 179 cases of IPVA reported to the Police where the victim was 16 or 17 years old. In comparison, there were 8,346\* domestics reported to the Police that involved 16 years and over. This would appear to indicate that young people are not reporting abuse to the Police. Safelives research also indicates that underreporting is a national issue amongst young people.

**What is the purpose of this guidance?** The purpose of this guidance is:

- To support practitioners to identify when a young person is involved in, or at risk of IPVA.
- To understand the issues that affect young people involved in, or at risk of IPVA.
- To increase knowledge to be able to assess the additional risks & vulnerabilities young people face.
- To gain an insight into key differences for young people involved in abusive relationships.
- To support practitioners to identify strengths and protective factors with the young person.
- To help practitioners 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 for practitioners and managers who may encounter situations where a young person under 18 years of age has been harmed through interpersonal domestic abuse from a partner (boyfriend or girlfriend).

**The key contact for comments about this guidance is:** [lscb@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:lscb@leeds.gov.uk)

## **2. What is domestic abuse?**

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The government definition of domestic violence and abuse changed in 2013 to include young people aged 16 and 17 years old. 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. The Government definition 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. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:*

- *psychological*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial*
- *emotional”*

*Home Office 2013*

**Controlling behaviour** includes 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.

The risk may not seem obvious or immediate, and there is a need to look at the patterns & the bigger picture.

**Abuse through new technologies** includes stalking on social media, sexting, unwanted sharing of sexual images, looking through private messages, demanding passwords, sending constant messages and making constant phone calls. Between 50-70% of young people report some form of IPVA in this manner (Stonard et al, 2015)

Whilst supporting young people, it will be useful to have a conversation about online safety. Leeds Safeguarding Children Board have produced multi-agency E safety guidance which can be viewed [here](#)

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

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**Emotional abuse and control;** 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.

**Physical abuse;** Physical abuse is the most recognisable form of abuse. It can range from a slap or a shove to a black eye, cut lip, broken bone. In the most extreme cases it can result in death.

**Sexual abuse;** Unwanted and / or forced sexual activity.

**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. Online abuse and control are closely linked to offline control. Examples of online control: 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.

- 1 in 4 teenage girls have reported some physical abuse from a partner ([www.respectnotfear.co.uk](http://www.respectnotfear.co.uk)).
- 1 in 3 teenage girls in an intimate relationship has experienced sexual assault from a Partner ([www.respectnotfear.co.uk](http://www.respectnotfear.co.uk)).
- Between 50-70% of young people report some form of IPVA via new technologies, this includes stalking, sharing of sexual images (Stonard et al, 2015). Around half of teenagers reported some form of emotional IPVA. On average, one fifth of all teenagers report physical IPVA and between 12-19% of girls and 6% of boys report unwanted sexual intercourse (Stonard et al, 2014).

**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". Studies show 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 (www.safelives.co.uk)

#### **4. Background information**

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In Leeds, there were 189 incidents of IPVA involving 16 & 17 year olds reported to the Police in April 2016 - March 2017.

Research indicates that young people are more dismissive of IPVA than adults, and can 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 professionals. 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

Young people more vulnerable to IPVA victimisation and instigation include the following groups;

- A history of running away from home
- In care and care leavers
- Disengaged from education
- Sexually exploited young people
- Users of drugs or alcohol
- Familial history of domestic abuse
- Young people who were neglected in childhood or received punitive parenting
- Young parents or pregnant young people

Young girls from disadvantaged groups as listed above report a higher level of physical violence. Examples include being head butted; earrings ripped out and punch to the face.

#### **5. Key messages for professionals**

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Professionals should be open to the idea that IPVA can affect any young person regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, religion or disability.

- Professionals should not assume that disabled young people are not engaging in intimate relationships.

- Professionals should also not assume that boys cannot be the victims of IPVA.
- Professionals 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. Professionals should always have a conversation with the young person in regards to sharing information.

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

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Because of, and in spite of, their challenging behaviours, vulnerable young people must feel that someone is 'there for them' and that they are heard and understood.

Professionals need to recognise young people aged 16-17 years are still vulnerable and that appropriate Children and Families' Service safeguarding procedures need to be followed.

Professionals should avoid making the assumption that age automatically makes a young person more resilient and less likely to suffer harm.

Be aware of 'silent' ways of communication which indicates emotional and behavioural changes in young people. Examples of signs which may indicate IPVA for young people would include:

- Becoming a lot more critical of themselves, thinking they're stupid or fat as examples
- Giving up their own opinions, and always thinking their partner is right.
- Problems eating or sleeping, headaches.
- They seem scared of their partner's reactions
- They don't seem to see as much of their friends and family as before
- They stop going to school / not wanting to go to college because they're partner is worried about who they'll be talking to
- Physical signs of harm such as bruising, scratches, reddening

A young person will be unlikely to disclose IPVA to a professional if they don't have a relationship. Conversations with young people should therefore be meaningful, and check in's with young people about their relationships should form part of each contact with a young person.

If you have concerns, have a conversation with the young person. This should be alone or away from the alleged instigator as discussing concerns in front of the alleged instigator may put the young person at additional risk of harm.

Seek consent from the young person to speak to their parents or caregivers, and discuss your concerns with other professionals involved with the young person.

Explain exactly what your concerns are in language the young person is able to understand, and also explain what the next steps are, and what will happen to their information.

## **7. What to do next**

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If there is immediate danger contact 999.

Whenever a person under the age of 18 is identified as being at risk of significant harm, a contact should be made to the Duty & Advice Team. More details can be found [here](#). Duty and Advice will consider the information provided and advice on the next course of action, this may be to instigate an [Early Help Assessment](#) or a referral to Children and Families Social Work Services (CFSWS) for assessment.

Always remember to seek advice from your agency Safeguarding Lead if you're concerned about a young person.

In deciding whether a contact is warranted, professionals should exercise their judgment based on what they know about the young person and their situation and in discussion with their own agencies Safeguarding Lead.

Specialist trained domestic violence practitioners could 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 contact details. A recommendation may be to refer the case to the Daily Domestic Violence Meeting. Further details can be found [here](#).

## **8. Safety planning**

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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.

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. Specialist trained domestic violence 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 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. 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.
- 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 mobile phone?
- Does the young person have money?
- Does the young person attend school or college? If so they can provide important support for the Safety Plan and should be communicated with.

## 9. Young Person causing harm

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It is important that professionals recognise that the 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. Young people causing harm 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. Therefore careful consideration must be given in regards to labelling these young people as 'perpetrators' as this can prove to be a barrier to engagement. The preferred term would be 'young person causing harm'.

The teenage brain is complex, and doesn't stop developing until the mid-20s. The prefrontal cortex is still developing, and teenagers might rely on a part of the brain called the amygdala to make decisions and solve problems more than adults do. The amygdala is associated with emotions, impulses, aggression and instinctive behaviour.

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, contact with Duty and Advice. The most meaningful engagement will come from a professional that the young person has a trusting relationship with.

It is important that young people who are being abusive are 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.

## 10. Contact details

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- In emergencies the police should be contacted on 999
- MARAC coordinator: leedsmarac@westyorkshire.pnn.police.uk
- Duty and Advice team: 0113 376 0336 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).  
0113 376 0469 (Out of office hours)

Enquiries which require you to contact Duty & Advice immediately:

- When it is felt a child or young person is at immediate risk of harm
- When a child protection investigation is needed (because of physical sexual and emotional abuse or chronic neglect)
- When a child or young person needs an immediate mental health assessment

Enquiries which can wait until the next working day:

- When a professional or practitioner would like to make contact with Children's Social Work Service to have a conversation about a concern they have for a child that might lead to a referral – but the child or young person is not at immediate risk of harm
- When a professional or practitioner would like to pass on a message to a social worker or other social work practitioner
- Any issues around contact arrangements between children and their parents
- Where one parent has been taken to hospital but the other parent or family members are caring appropriately for the child

Useful websites:

[Leeds Domestic Violence](#)  
[Disrespect NoBody](#)  
[Safelives](#)