

DERBYSHIRE DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEWS SUMMARY OF LEARNING 2014 - 2018

A 'Domestic Homicide Review' (DHR) is a review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by a relative, someone they had been in an intimate personal relationship with or who was a member of the same household. DHRs are held to identify any lessons to be learnt from the death. Between 2014 and 2018 there have been six DHRs within Derbyshire.

This summary is designed to promote awareness of the latest learning to come out of both national and Derbyshire domestic homicide reviews. It covers five main areas of learning:

1. **Professional curiosity**
2. **Data collection and risk assessments**
3. **Importance of using historical information**
4. **Information sharing**
5. **Training & awareness, including:**
 - Domestic abuse awareness training
 - Coercion and control
 - 'toxic trio'
 - Hidden men

Please ensure that you read this document and pass the information on to your colleagues. Follow the hyperlinks for more information.

1. Professional curiosity

This is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening within a family or relationship, rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. Sometimes known as 'respectful uncertainty'.

Curious professionals will spend time engaging with individuals and families, observing body language and verbal interactions and considering the implications. Do not presume you know what is happening – ask questions and seek clarity if you are not certain. If the victim is not alone, you might observe the following:

- the victim waits for their partner to speak first or glances at them each time they speak, checking their reaction
- the victim smooths over any conflict
- the suspected perpetrator speaks for the victim most of the time
- the suspected perpetrator sends clear signals to the victim, by eye/body movement, facial expression or verbally, to warn them
- the suspected perpetrator has a range of complaints about the victim, which they do not defend

If any of these signals are present, you should find a way of seeing the suspected victim alone. Victims of domestic abuse are often too afraid or uncomfortable to raise the issue of abuse themselves. Give them permission to disclose by asking exploratory and probing questions sensitively, but directly. For example:

- How are things at home? Do you feel safe there?
- Do you ever feel frightened by your partner or other people at home?

2. Data collection and risk assessments

If domestic abuse is disclosed, you should 'risk assess' the individual using the 'Derbyshire Risk Assessment DASH' and refer to the Derbyshire domestic abuse services if there is standard or medium risk, or Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) if high risk. You can find the relevant forms [here](#). If you need advice please call the helpline number: 08000 198 668.

Consider risks for children and any vulnerable adults within the household and refer to Safeguarding, where appropriate.

When risk assessing, look at patterns of behaviour, to see the cumulative picture, rather than only focusing on the presenting problem as a 'one off' incident.....this is the best indicator of future risk.

Recognise the risk increases dramatically where the "toxic trio" (mental health issues, substance misuse and domestic abuse) are present within a relationship or family situation. (See training section)

All agencies should ensure they keep accurate and up to date records. Make sure your systems are flagged and tagged to show victims and perpetrators who have been to MARAC. Ensure you know how to access archived data and use it to inform practice, where appropriate.

Ensure you capture the lived experience of any children within the family. You should speak to the children separately where possible, to enable them to disclose.

To seek advice, or to access specialist domestic abuse services contact the **The Derbyshire Domestic Abuse Support Line:**

08000 198 668

IN AN EMERGENCY CALL 999

3. Importance of using historical information

It's important to use historical information alongside current issues to inform risk assessments, analysis and action plans. Knowledge of the family history can highlight key areas of risk and vulnerability.

Look for patterns of behaviour – are there signs of escalation or increasing severity? If so, consider referral to MARAC. If your agency does not hold full information on the victim or the family, liaise with other agencies, so that together, you can arrive at a full assessment of the risks.

4. Information sharing

The DHR learning highlights the need for us to get better at sharing information between agencies at an earlier stage. This will allow us all to have a better shared understanding of the risk, including patterns of abuse and any signs of increased severity, and frequency, of domestic abuse incidents.

We should also have a broader view as to who we share information with. Think about which organisations have contact with the victim and what they might know which could help, both in terms of identifying risk and in any support they can offer.

5. Training and awareness raising

Domestic abuse awareness training

We need to ensure staff understand what domestic abuse is, the signs and behaviours and how to get support in Derbyshire.

Many organisations run their own training, but multi-agency training is also available. Make sure you and your colleagues know what to look out for and where to access support.

The DHRs also highlighted the need to understand the impact of coercion and control, the 'toxic trio' and hidden men.

Coercion and control

Many of the cases seen in DHRs nationally and locally involved coercion and control. Often victims don't realise they are experiencing domestic abuse because it isn't physical or sexual in nature. Professionals can also miss the signs and behaviours if they are not aware.

Controlling behaviour is defined as; 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. ”

Example behaviours a perpetrator may exhibit include:

- Isolating the victim from family and friends
- Taking control of their everyday life – e.g. controlling what someone wears, what they eat, where and when they sleep, where they can go, what they are allowed to do etc.
- Threatening to hurt or kill the victim, their children or family pets if they don't comply.
- Enforcing rules and activities which humiliate, degrade or dehumanise the victim.
- Controlling access to, and/or monitoring mobile phones, social media, email etc.
- Depriving someone of access to support services and medical services.
- Threatening to withhold medication or personal care.
- Controlling them with drugs and/or alcohol.
- Controlling access to finances, work opportunities, transport etc.

It's important to note that controlling and coercive behaviour is now defined in law and is a criminal offence which can carry a maximum prison sentence of up to five years.

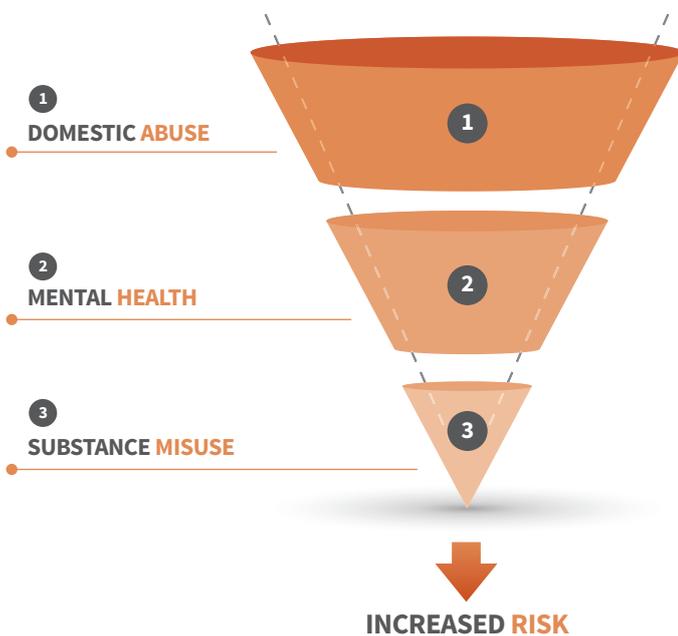
Also be aware that perpetrators are often very adept at coercion and control. They may seek to manipulate and control professionals, including you. It's important to remain neutral and not endorse their behaviour through your language and actions, as you may inadvertently reinforce the control the victim is experiencing.

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'toxic trio'



This phrase originates from serious case reviews undertaken by Safeguarding Children Boards and is concerned with three parental risk factors – substance misuse (drugs & alcohol), mental health and domestic abuse. When these three factors are present within a child's lived experience the risk to them increases dramatically, much more than three times the amount, more like 33 times! It is sometimes referred to as the 'Significant Three'.

Please be aware that the 'toxic trio' still applies, where no children are involved. The risk to any victim of domestic abuse is much higher if the 'toxic trio' is present. These findings are shown in both our national and local learning from DHRs.

If all three are present in any case, take it seriously and think about how it is impacting on the victim / family and how it increases the risk.

Ensure you reflect this in your professional judgement, when completing risk assessments.

Hidden men

Another phrase derived from learning within serious case reviews, 'hidden men' refers to those individuals who are involved in the wider family circle.

These 'hidden men' could be absent fathers, step parents, grandparents, uncles or friends who are in the child's life.

We need to be aware of them for two main reasons:

- They could be a protective factor which we have not taken into account either because we weren't aware of them or their potential to be a supportive factor.
- They may increase the risk to the victim and any children within the situation.

Whilst thinking about 'hidden men' is useful, it is also important to consider any other individual on the periphery of the situation who may either increase the risk or be a protective father.

Also be aware that the hidden people who offer support, could in turn be at risk from the domestic abuse situation and may require a risk assessment, if they become involved in the situation.

Accessing further training

It's important that you make yourself aware of your own organisation's mandatory and ongoing training on domestic abuse.

It is suggested that all staff complete a basic domestic abuse awareness course and MARAC training to learn about risk assessment.

Certain staff groups may also benefit from completing more in depth training on coercion and control, 'toxic trio' and hidden men.

You can find further domestic abuse training via:

- **Safer Derbyshire – Domestic Abuse Awareness & MARAC training**
<https://www.saferderbyshire.gov.uk/training-and-resources/courses-and-bookings/domestic-abuse-training/domestic-abuse-training.aspx>
- **Derbyshire Safeguarding Adults Board**
<https://www.derbyshiresab.org.uk/professionals/training-courses.aspx>
- **Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Board**
<https://www.derbyshirescb.org.uk/training-and-resources/training-and-resources.aspx>
- **Derby City Safeguarding Adults Board**
<https://www.derby.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/safeguarding-adults-at-risk/safeguarding-adults-training/>
- **Derby City Safeguarding Children Board**
<https://www.derbyscb.org.uk/training/>

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