



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Critically Analysing Common Statements Re: Domestic Abuse

May 2025

gov.wales



Critically Analysing Common Statements



Domestic Abuse

Dialogue surrounding domestic abuse can be challenging, and quite often problematic statements or 'myths' persist. No Cafcass Cymru practitioner or system is immune to these prevailing myths, but we can actively challenge ourselves and others when we identify their occurrence, and the potential harmful impact they cause to victim-survivors.

Below we have presented some common statements which have been critically analysed to challenge perceptions of abuse and offer more trauma informed perspectives.

“She is choosing him over her children.”

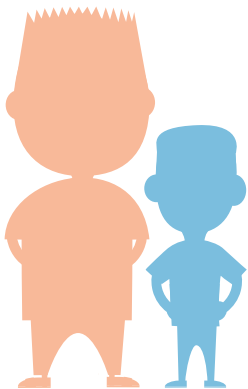
or

“She is failing to protect her child(ren) from her (ex) partner’s violence.”

- Victim-survivors of coercive control have limited space for action, and therefore choice.
- There may be genuine fears or concerns of escalated violence towards them and/or their children if they make choices that are not in the perpetrator’s favour.
- There may also be economic dependence which limits their opportunities outside of the relationship. Even when economic dependence is no longer there (i.e. the victim-survivor may have their own sources of income), the use of economic and legal abuse can continue to disrupt the lives of adult and child victim-survivors.
- For some there may be a strong social or cultural element that prevents them from being able to choose to leave. In these instances, the victim-survivor might not only lose their partner/parent of their children but also the support and acceptance of their wider family, community or networks. So-called honour-based abuse may become another risk factor of harm including:
 - ‘honour’ killings,
 - other physical (including sexual) violence in the name of ‘honour’,
 - threats to send the children away to family abroad,
 - forced marriage,
 - child marriage,
 - virginity testing,
 - female genital mutilation.
- Some may also believe that the trauma of leaving, going to refuge or moving away and starting over will cause more emotional harm to the children or fear that they will lose custody of their children if they take these steps.

Practice Questions

- Am I fully considering the potential dangers and practical barriers the victim-survivor and children might face if they attempt to leave?
- Have I considered the victim-survivor's perspective on safety and what they might perceive as the least harmful option for them and their children?
- How can I shift my perspective from judgment to empathy and understanding regarding the victim-survivor's choices?
- What additional resources or services can I connect the victim-survivor with to help them feel more supported and less isolated?
- If the perpetrator was taken out of the equation, what might the other person's parenting look like?
- What steps has the perpetrator taken to acknowledge and change their behaviours?
- What protective measures are being taken, within the space that is available to the victim-survivor within the context of the abuse?
- In what ways has the victim-survivor's ability to parent been undermined or limited by the perpetrator's actions or behaviour?
- Is the victim-survivor convinced that the protective measures we consider to be the most optimum (i.e. moving to a new area, engaging with statutory services) are truly so? Could reluctance be related to the justified fear of further, more serious harm? How do we address this?



“The couple has a history of domestic abuse.”

- Focusing on the relationship rather than the choices and behaviours of the parents distracts us from identifying the actions that are the source of the domestic abuse, adult and child risk, and general safety concerns.
- This statement is neutral (no one is held to account) and on its own may not be an objective, assessment-based statement which identifies who is/was the primary instigator and driver of the family dysfunction.
- We must also note that in cases of post separation abuse, abuse that occurred during the relationship should not be considered historic or separate but instead a continuation of a pattern of abuse in line with our understanding of coercive and controlling behaviour.

Practice Questions

- How can you begin to map a history of the relationship in relation to abusive behaviours or actions?
- What are the patterns of abuse involved in this case?
- What statements can we use instead to avoid mutualisation or neutralisation of domestic abuse?

“She always picks the same type of partner.”

- Repeat violent victimisation is an established risk for people within the UK¹. In the case of domestic abuse, women are more likely to be repeatedly victimised² either by the same or multiple partners.
- When we frame our thinking through the perspective of someone ‘picking’ this type of partner, we automatically sway our minds towards assuming that they are actively choosing to be treated in this way and fall into the trap of victim blaming.
- You cannot choose to be abused, and people do not enter a relationship assuming that they will be abused by their partner. Perpetrators of domestic abuse will recognise and exploit vulnerabilities to exert power and control over their partner.

Practice Questions

- How can I hold the actions/behaviours of the perpetrator central to my assessment of this case?
- How can the victim-survivor be supported to break free of a cycle of abuse? If it is not my role to provide this support, how can I work in partnership with organisations who can?
- How can I apply an intersectional lens to this case? What economic, social, racial, health, cultural, structural, or institutional factors may be affecting this person’s life choices?

¹ [Improving victimisation estimates derived from the Crime Survey for England and Wales – Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

² [Repeat Violent Victimization: A Rapid Evidence Review \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

“The child(ren) were not present when x y z occurred.”

- This is an incident led approach to domestic abuse and doesn't consider that the child(ren) could be living in environments where control and abuse are a continuous reality. This also applies in cases of abuse where parents have separated.
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises that children living in environments where domestic abuse occurs are also victim-survivors of abuse.
- Perpetrators can use children to their advantage when attempting to maintain control; either by harming them directly, to cause further emotional harm to the other parent, or by using children as 'accomplices' to abusive behaviours.
- It may be that in family units with multiple children (whether biological or not), only one or some of the children are directly abused. Even in cases where one or more child is 'favoured' by a perpetrator, they would still be classed as victim-survivors.³
- Favouring one child over others can be an abusive tactic which affects the whole family. We should also be mindful not to scale which child(ren) are affected to the greater degree; the trauma of abuse is a subjective experience, and we should assume that an unsafe environment for one child will be unsafe for them all where domestic abuse is concerned.
- Living in oppressive environments is traumatic. Children will still see and feel the aftermath of significant incidents of abuse whether they are the direct victim or not, including the effects of the abuse on the functioning and parenting capacity of their protective parent.
- This statement also feeds into the myth of the child witness to domestic abuse; children are victim-survivors in addition to being potential witnesses.

Practice Questions

- How do(es) the child(ren) describe incidents? How do they feel about them, or respond to them?
- How do(es) the child(ren) describe their parents as individuals?
- How do(es) the child(ren) describe their home environment(s) and experience of living there?
- What actions does the protective parent take to try to protect the child(ren) from abuse, within the space available for action in a potentially abusive environment?
- How does the perpetrating parent/carer describe the impact of incidents of violence on the children? Do they recognise potential wider harm despite the child(ren) not being the direct target?
- What evidence is there of the ecological impacts of abuse on the child(ren) in the case?

3 [When Coercive Control Continues to Harm Children: Post-Separation Fathering, Stalking and Domestic Violence – Katz – 2020 – Child Abuse Review – Wiley Online Library](#)

“Why has the abuse only been disclosed at the point of family court intervention?”

“Claims of abuse have been exaggerated to cut the other parent out of the child(ren’s) life”.

- The statements above form judgements about the motivations of parents in disclosing domestic abuse to a family court setting.
- We must ensure that any statement we make is based on an assessment of the facts available to us and the probability of such statements being true.
- Assessing the likelihood that abuse has occurred is essential to analyse risk of harm to the children.
- Survivors of abuse have multiple reasons as to why they may not have disclosed abuse earlier, which have been discussed throughout the practice guidance.
- Perpetrators can also disclose that they are the victims of abuse, to control the narrative presented to the court.
- In instances where a Cafcass Cymru practitioner is unclear as to who the perpetrator is, a Safe and Together perpetrator mapping exercise should be undertaken. You should undertake this with an open, non-judgemental, and investigative mindset.
- We can evaluate the realities and impact of abuse to understand the victim-survivors’ perspectives by applying a trauma informed, domestic abuse lens to our assessments. There are also perpetrators and victim-survivors of abuse who will understate the level of abuse is occurring.
- Abuse can be missed, minimised or misunderstood by professionals across sectors, this does not mean that it has not occurred or that it has not been disclosed or described before a family court case begins.

Practice Questions

- How can I ensure my assessment is free from bias?
- Am I considering the role of institutional barriers in the victim’s decision-making process?
- How can I balance the need to protect children with the need to believe and support victim-survivors of abuse?
- What additional steps can I take to verify the claims of abuse without dismissing the victim-survivor’s experiences?
- What biases might I hold that lead me to question the validity of the abuse claims?
- What factors may have influenced someone’s inability to disclose abuse sooner?