Network Event summary: Why supporting families affected by domestic abuse should be on every employer's agenda

This is a summary of our in-person Network Event on 4 June 2025, hosted at Northumbria University in Newcastle.

One in five children in the UK experience domestic abuse. There are two main societal institutions that are well-placed to support children experiencing abuse: schools, where children spend more time than anywhere else; and employers of their parents, as children are more likely to thrive if parents have a stable job, income, and other support around them. Over 30 million people in the UK are in employment, and work may be the only safe place for parents experiencing domestic abuse to access support.

***"I wondered if this was normal and that all houses were like this"* – child victim of domestic abuse**

Amelia Barlow, Senior Policy Advisor at the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office

Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines a child victim as any child who "sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, domestic abuse". Despite this legislation that recognises children as victims in their own right, there are significant variations in how this is implemented locally, and how children are supported. A recent report from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales revealed that funding for children's services is in a critical state, with many services risking a complete or partial withdrawal of funds over the next few years. Regular domestic abuse services have also had to cut their children's services owing to funding constraints, and 27% have had to turn away referrals.

Domestic abuse can have long-lasting traumatic impacts on children's physical, mental, and emotional health. These effects are further compounded by socioeconomic disadvantage and other forms of social marginalisation. Frontline professionals working with children need specialist training on how to safeguard and support children affected by domestic abuse. Children interviewed for the DAC report made clear that they want to be asked about their needs and listened to.

Insights for employers:

- Consider the impact on children/other dependants of employees who experience abuse. Include information about the impact of domestic abuse on babies, children and young people and signpost to specialist services in your internal resources for employees impacted by domestic abuse. Access the NSPCC helpline here.

***"Family Court has been a part of my life for half of the years I've been alive"* - child victim of domestic abuse**

Dr Emma Katz, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Durham University

In her research on the impact of coercive and controlling behaviour on mothers and children, Dr Katz found that perpetrators attempt to dominate their families, and create overarching conditions of entrapment and constraint. This left both mothers and children living in fear of retaliation for "wrong" behaviour, walking on eggshells and moderating their speech and behaviour. The isolation of mothers from friends and family directly isolates children too, who may not be able to see their extended families, attend birthday parties, or have their friends visit. Perpetrators often also incite abuse of the other parent from the children. While this research was conducted about mothers, the findings are likely to apply to all non-abusive parents.

Insights for employers:

- Post-separation abuse can last for years. This can heavily impact employees' mental wellbeing, where their children may be scared and traumatised, and have court-mandated contact with the perpetrator. Employers can provide support by understanding the broad and long-term impact of domestic abuse. Read EIDA's guidance about the long-term impacts of domestic abuse here.

Kieran McGrane, CEO of Pele Trust

The Pele Trust is a multi-academy trust covering 14 schools in the Northeast of England, employing 900 staff and teaching 6000 pupils. They carry out annual safeguarding reviews of each school, and their employees have identified domestic abuse as a key risk to pupils. Children need to be safe and happy to achieve academically. Domestic abuse can affect their physical and mental health, attendance, performance, concentration and attention, behaviour and relationships. The Pele Trust participates in OperationEncompass, an early safeguarding partnership that supports child victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

Signs a child may be experiencing abuse may include an overeagerness to please teachers, attendance issues, arriving at school very early, not participating in any social events or extracurricular activities, sudden drops in performance, or other sudden changes in behaviour (including withdrawal from friends).

Insights for employers:

- Employers in the education sector must ensure that their own employees impacted by domestic abuse are supported in the workplace, with their own domestic abuse policy or written guidance, training and support.
- Employers in the education sector must ensure that all staff are trained to spot the signs of domestic abuse among pupils and know how to respond. This includes creating a culture where employees are empowered to think "what if I'm right?" instead of fearing "what if I'm wrong?" when they suspect a child may be at risk.
- Employers should encourage and support employees who are parents to work together with schools to support children impacted by abuse. This can be parents sharing with the school what may trigger their child's trauma, such as raised voices.

"My plea to you is to do everything you can to fix this system. It's too late for me, but it's not too late for the next generation." - **child victim of domestic abuse**

Jane van Zyl, CEO of Working Families

Working Families is a charity and an EIDA member that helps employers to create, build, and sustain family friendly workplaces. They run a legal advice line for people with caring responsibilities facing employment rights challenges, which has an 90% success rate of enabling employees to continue in their jobs. Given that we spend more time at work than anywhere else, there is a strong rationale for helping employers build family friendly workplaces that bring out the best in their employees. Having at least one parent in stable employment is also crucial for the wellbeing of children.

Working Families has recently launched a Family Friendly Workplaces Certification, which includes questions around support for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse. There is a usually £295 plus VAT fee for a report and half hour support session. However, this is free of charge until the end of August 2025 when using this code: **EIDANETWORK2025**

Insights for employers:

- Workplace flexibility can make a big difference to an employee affected by domestic abuse and other life challenges. Importantly, this goes beyond working from home – employers and employees should work together to adapt to the needs of both the individual and the job.
- There is tremendous power in senior leaders talking about personal challenges they have faced, including domestic abuse. This normalises difficult conversations and helps create a culture of openness and trust. Watch our interview on the role of business leadership with senior leader at National Grid, Cordi O'Hara here.
- Line managers should be given specialist training in people management, including handling domestic abuse cases. Access EIDA's domestic abuse guide for managers here.

Brooke Fenwick, Team Manager, For Baby's Sake Trust

Domestic abuse often starts or escalates during pregnancy and after childbirth, and can severely impact a child's health, development, and wellbeing. The For Baby's Sake Trust is dedicated to addressing and preventing harm from domestic abuse, working with families to protect babies and young children. Their programme begins at week 28 of pregnancy and continues until the child is two years old. This covers the crucial first years of a baby's life which form the basis for their future development. Each parent referred to For Baby's Sake works with a dedicated practitioner, dealing with the entire cycle and history of domestic abuse, identifying and directly addressing the trauma or traumas that lie at the heart of the problem.

Insights for employers:

- Incorporate wellbeing conversations, including asking whether an employee is safe at home, into parental leave conversations, pregnancy risk assessments and return to work conversations. Protecting Every Future is a free guidance document on this.

Andrew Lane, EIDA Ambassador

Andrew is a victim-survivor of an abusive relationship. His abuse lasted for many years, and the post-separation abuse he and his children experienced – including seven years of Family Court proceedings - was equally challenging for him as a parent. As the "safe parent", his children relied solely upon him and suffered severe separation anxiety, which triggered jealousy from abusive parent. Keeping his children safe and trying to prevent them from witnessing the abuse was an added stressor, especially as Andrew became a single parent after the separation.

The demands of court proceedings, social services, counselling for the children and Cafcass meetings was very difficult to combine with his full-time job and the children's regular activities. However, Andrew received great support from his employer, who provided a safety net of practical support, including diary-clearing, counselling at work, time off for appointments, career coaching and colleagues who listened each morning. Andrew had ongoing discussions with his employer and his childrens' school as the effects of the abuse were felt for many years.

Insights for employers:

- Children of today are the employees of tomorrow. Consider the impact of domestic abuse on the children of your employees. Flexibility is key. Read Andrew's "Six things I wish every employer knew about domestic abuse" blog here.
- Trauma-informed workplace coaching can be life-changing for employees who have experienced abuse, and who are on their personal and professional recovery journey. Read this guest blog on trauma-informed career coaching by Dr Genevieve Groom.
- Consider what support you can provide for employees who may face additional marginalisation on the basis of ethnicity, language barriers, sexual orientation etc., and what barriers to disclosure these individuals may face. You can find specialist support services in EIDA's Support Service Directory.
- Be domestic abuse curious. Employees may not be aware that they are experiencing abuse, and many who know try to hide it out of shame and embarrassment. Check in with employees regularly and let them know that domestic abuse is taken seriously in your workplace.

EIDA Ambassador, David Challen, has released his memoir *The Unthinkable* about his childhood experience of growing up in an abusive household. David campaigned tirelessly to free his mother, Sally Challen, who was convicted of murdering his father after enduring 40 years of domestic abuse and coercive control. You can read David's story here.

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