

Domestic Violence and Conflict Management Policy

Coleraine Area Child Contact Centre inc. Ballycastle

Definition of domestic violence

Domestic violence is best described as the use of physical and/or emotional abuse or violence, including undermining of self-confidence, sexual violence or the threat of violence, by a person who is or has been in a close relationship to achieve and ensure power and control over another person or persons.

Domestic violence can go beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse, the destruction of a spouse's or partner's property, their isolation from friends, family or other potential sources of support, threats to others including children, control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone, and stalking.

It can also include violence perpetrated by a son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim. It can also include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by, children. The wide adverse effects of living with domestic violence for children must be recognised as a child protection issue. Domestic violence is not a "once-off" occurrence but is frequent and persistent aimed at instilling fear into, and compliance from, the victim.

Coleraine Area Child Contact Centre believes that everyone has the right to live safely and without the fear of violence and cruelty. We recognise that domestic violence is unacceptable and that it occurs throughout society, irrespective of class, culture, gender, income, race, religion or sexuality. Its effects are far-reaching and can impact on others, notably the children. We recognise that every child has the right to grow and develop in an environment free of domestic violence, whether directly as a victim or witness of violence in its own home or in the community.

Coleraine Area Child Contact Centre accepts that some families using its Centre will have experienced varying levels of domestic violence and we will ensure that they will receive sensitive and appropriate services. We also accept that the Centre needs to be organised and run in a way which allows these families, other Centre users and volunteers / staff to be safe. In order to meet these requirements we will ensure that:

1. The Centre's referral form will ask one or more questions about domestic violence.
2. No family will be accepted until a referral form has been completed in full and received by the Co-ordinator.
3. Any information concerning domestic violence or the abuse of drugs / alcohol will be treated seriously.
4. Use of the Centre will be denied to individuals or families where the co-ordinator feels their presence is likely to present a threat to the well-being of other Centre users and volunteers / staff.
5. Once a family has been accepted the co-ordinator will consider their needs and develop a means by which they can be met. These will include the following:
 - Parents being invited to visit the Centre separately in advance of contact commencing.
 - Parents being given clear instructions in writing about which entrances to use and what times to arrive.

- Where appropriate resident parents being asked to explore the possibility of someone other than themselves or their new partner bringing the child(ren) to the Centre.
 - The contact waiting room doors being kept closed and precautions taken to ensure parents do not visit the refreshment area or toilets at the same time.
 - Asking one parent to wait at the end of contact until the other has left the Centre and the area immediately around it.
 - Ensuring that addresses, telephone numbers and other sensitive information always remain strictly confidential.
6. Any distress to children or adults brought about by bullying or pressure to disclose information will be dealt with promptly and firmly.
 7. If an individual or family's behaviour is threatening, causes distress or is disruptive they will be asked to leave.
 8. If an individual or family refuses to leave the police will be called.

Essential requirements for volunteers and staff in relation to managing domestic violence and conflict

1. There will be a minimum of three volunteers/staff on duty at all times and this number will increase depending upon the number of families using the Centre and rooms to be covered.
2. Volunteers/staff will be made aware of the particular needs of each family attending the Centre.
3. All volunteers/staff will receive training in the areas of domestic violence, child protection and conflict management.
4. Volunteers/staff will have immediate access to a telephone when the Centre is open.
5. The Centre will have an agreed procedure to follow in the event of an incident or an emergency. All volunteers/staff will be made aware of this.
6. The Centre will have a recognised and easily accessible system for offering support to volunteers/staff who have become involved in stressful or violent incidents.

Additional requirements

1. Referrers and families using the Centre will be made aware of its policy in relation to domestic violence.
2. Any individual or agency wishing to challenge how the Centre is implementing its policy in relation to domestic violence should be referred to the Centre's complaints procedure.
3. The Centre's policy in relation to domestic violence will be reviewed and if necessary updated annually.

Dealing with domestic violence victims/abusers in the Child Contact Centre.

“Wherever possible separate entrances and exits should be available and if necessary used to move adults and children into and out of contact sessions. If this is not possible and where domestic violence is an issue, a safe waiting area must be available and every effort made for staggered arrival and departure times”.

(NACCC National Standards)

Clients that have experienced domestic violence must be treated sensitively. You will need to take extra care - especially with the abused (usually the woman). Domestic violence is abusive or controlling behaviour, which is used most frequently by men to maintain power over ‘their’ women. However, such violence can also be directed towards the children, other family members, and friends of the woman herself. This behaviour also occurs in a small number of cases by women against men. The abused have a right to live free from violence - they will be feeling humiliated, frightened, ashamed, alone, confused and probably blaming themselves. It has taken immense courage for this woman to leave an abusive relationship, which can be painful and distressing. There is confusion about what love for her partner means, hope, that the situation will change, shame, about what has happened to them which they will see as their fault and finally the fear that the threats to kill her or her family will become a reality. This woman will be scared to be in the same building as her abuser - so do not let him manipulate the situation so that he has contact with her. She must be protected at all times.

Action to be Taken when Conflict Arises

- Make sure all the children are safe and out of the way.
 - Move those involved to a quiet area if possible.
 - Never back them into a corner, either physically or psychologically.

 - Remain polite and respectful and never lose your temper.
 - Keep the tone of your voice down and lower than the person who is angry.
 - Never tell them to ‘calm down’.
1. If an individual or family's behaviour is threatening, causes distress or is disruptive they will be asked to leave.
 2. If an individual or family refuses to leave the police will be called.