

Practice briefing for professionals working with young people

Working with young parents

Domestic abuse in pregnancy is associated with numerous poor health outcomes for the mother and the child. These can include an increased risk of miscarriage, prematurity, low birth weight, stillbirth and mental health problems. Risks of poor health outcomes for women and babies are increased further because women who experience abuse face barriers to accessing regular antenatal care.¹

Young parents not only face adapting their lives to include their child, they can also face stigma from society. Particularly, young mothers are more likely to experience isolation and stress which in turn could impact on their confidence and ability to recognise that they are in a cycle of abuse. They may also be reluctant to report abuse for fear of being labelled a bad mother, or fear that their child may be taken into care.



Abuse during pregnancy can lead to health issues for the expectant mother, the unborn child and siblings.

- 52% of children who witness intimate partner violence, are more likely to have behavioural issues with half of the children displaying marked behavioural problems
- 39% experience difficulties adjusting to school
- 60% said that they felt responsible for what was happening at home²

What could increase a young parent's risk of intimate partner abuse?

Ask yourself:

- Is this an unplanned pregnancy?
- Has the young person avoided meeting you since becoming pregnant?
- Are they a looked after child?
- Is there any history of sexual exploitation or substance use/ misuse?
- Are they or their partner involved in gang culture?
- Do they have any other vulnerabilities, such as a disability, mental health issues or addiction?
- Do they have support from family, friends or other professionals?

Studies often find that domestic abuse starts or worsens during pregnancy and the postnatal period.

Professionals need to be mindful of this when working with young parents in particular.

Source: Department of Health (2005)

¹ NCT. NCT Policy Briefing: domestic abuse during pregnancy and the postnatal period HI1. London: NCT; 2008.

² Caada (2014), In Plain Sight: Effective help for children exposed to domestic abuse: 2nd national policy report. Bristol: Caada.

Engaging young parents experiencing intimate partner abuse

Do

- Use plain language and explain all terms clearly. Do not make assumptions that they know how systems and procedures work.
- Explain the risk that they face, and the risk to their unborn child if they stay in the abusive relationship
- Be led by the young parents' wishes and consider sending reminders for meetings to improve engagement
- Consider making your appointments as accessible as possible by arranging them at a convenient location and time for the parent. Think about joining them after another scheduled appointment i.e. near the midwives' office, at their home or where is most convenient for them.

Don't

- Assume that the experience of abuse is less harmful if it is perpetrated or experienced by a young person
- Forget that your parent is a young person under 18 and that they are also a child
- Let their defensiveness and/ or refusal to see what is happening be a reason for you to disengage

Domestic abuse resources

SafeLives has developed a young people's Dash risk checklist and a young people's safety plan, in partnership with young people from IKWRO, Leap Confronting Conflict and Barnardo's. Practitioners can use these tools to assess risk and to support and advise young people on how to keep safe. The checklist and guidance is available to download on safelives.org.uk/practice-support

Safety planning

The SafeLives young people safety plan can be accessed on safelives.org.uk/practice-support

Additional resources and signposting young people

Bubbalicious bubbalicious.co.uk

Family Lives familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/parenting/where-can-young-parents-go-for-support/

Gingerbread gingerbread.org.uk/content/681/Teenage-parents-benefits-finder

Shelter

england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/young_people_leaving_home_and_finding_a_place/young_parents

NCT nct.org.uk/professional/access-and-diversity/supporting-young-parents

BGfL services.bgfl.org/myportal/custom/files_uploaded/uploaded_resources/942/familynurse.pdf