

RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC ABUSE A CODE OF PRACTICE



COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC
ABUSE, WESTERN REGIONAL NETWORK

UNITED AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE

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DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic Violence refers to the use of physical or emotional force or threat of physical force, including sexual violence, in close adult relationships (National Task Force on Violence against Women, 1997). This includes violence perpetrated by a spouse, partner, son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim. The term 'domestic violence' goes beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse such as the destruction of property, isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support, threats to others including children; stalking, and control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation, the telephone, internet and social media (HSE Policy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender based Violence, 2010). The Domestic Violence Act 2018 has provided for a new criminal offence of coercive control. This is psychological abuse in an intimate relationship that causes fear of violence, or serious alarm or distress that has a substantial adverse impact on a person's day-to-day activities (Domestic Violence Act 2018).

*The term Domestic Violence and Domestic Abuse can be used interchangeably!

A

A COLLECTIVE RESPONSE

Organisations within the Family Resource Centre Programme and other similar community based organisations work from community development principles in developing a collective response to tackle social injustice and inequalities in Irish society. It is long recognised and established that best practice in responding to domestic abuse is adopting integrated, community based approaches. The aim of community based strategies should be to create a collective response around women's safety.

A significant number of men are affected by abuse, however the majority of victims are women, abuse also occurs in same-sex relationships¹. In the vast majority of cases where violence occurs among persons who are known to each other, global research has shown that women are injured and men carry out the assault.



The social stigma and silence that have historically surrounded the physical, sexual and mental abuse of women are effective tools in trapping women in such violent relationships.

1. HSE Policy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender based Violence, 2010 | 2. WHO November 2016 | 3. FRA, 2014 quoted by Women's Aid 2017 | 4. Safe Ireland 2016 | 5. O'Connor, M. & Kelleher Associates, Making the Links, Women's Aid, 1995 | 6. Women's Aid, Ireland, Annual Report, 2012 | 7. Stark and Flitcraft, 1988; Bowker, Arbitell, and McFerron, 1988 | 8. Campbell, Glass, Sharps, Laughon, & Bloom, 2007

POST SEPARATION ABUSE IS A FEATURE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

While it is commonly assumed that leaving an abusive partner will increase a woman's safety, this is not always the case. Post separation abuse includes harassment, financial abuse, physical and sexual assaults; stalking; waiting outside the house; harassing by phone calls and text or social networks; damage to new partner, home and property⁶.

A perpetrator's intention to control, subjugate and isolate his partner may increase when she is seeking autonomy and independence from him. Physical and emotional abuse of children is a common feature of post separation abuse as a tactic of dominance and control of their mother⁷. Estrangement has been identified as an important risk factor for intimate partner homicide, with men murdering their wives/ex-wives most commonly within a year of separation⁸.

NOT DETERMINED BY CLASS OR SOCIAL STATUS

Violence and abuse against women exists in all communities and is not determined by class or social status. However, the Task Force on Violence against Women (1997) recognised that 'the effects of violence can be all the more traumatic for women living in poverty, women with physical or mental disabilities, women from different cultures, Traveller women, undocumented migrants, and LGBTI+ women.' The cumulative effects of living in poverty, isolation and poor environmental conditions in themselves damage women's health. When these difficulties are combined with physical, mental and emotional abuse, the effects are enormous⁹.

This Code of Practice provides a framework of best practice for Family Resource Centres and other similar community based organisations to address the issue of Domestic Abuse.



Their primary role is to support and enable individuals in the community to access relevant services and to promote the development of a community based response.

The Code recognises that women require support and appropriate responses before, during and after she leaves the relationship.



DUTY OF CARE

We recognise that the safety & welfare of women and children must come first regardless of all other considerations. Our response will be consistent with Children First Guidelines.

While this Code is a guide for best practice it **needs to be supported by appropriate Domestic Abuse Awareness training.**

adopts this Code of Practice because;

- > Our aim is to address social injustices and work towards equality for all using community development principles.
- > Violence/ Abuse against women is a crime and a violation of Human Rights. There is no acceptable level of violence or abuse.
- > When abuse against women is disclosed or suspected it should always be taken seriously and responded to appropriately (in accordance with this Code of Practice).
- > We want to break the silence and stigma that has traditionally surrounded the physical, mental and sexual abuse of women.

B

SAFETY & CONFIDENTIALITY IS CENTRAL



Safety and confidentiality of those who disclose will be central to the Organisation's response.

Those experiencing domestic abuse will be supported regardless of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, race, membership of the Traveller community, marital status or family status.

The particular experience of women from the Traveller, Roma, LGBTI+ communities as well as women with disabilities, from other minority ethnic groups, including the undocumented will be acknowledged and named. The Organisation will advocate for the development of responses appropriate to their culture and needs.

The Organisation will provide a safe and supportive environment where the issue of domestic abuse can be discussed and where women who are experiencing abuse can feel safe, if seeking support.

The Organisation will develop and foster an ethos and environment that challenges tolerance of, and collusion with, male violence against women.

Where abuse against women is disclosed or suspected, our response will be supportive, non-judgemental and non-directive.

Respect for the individual and safeguarding of the woman's rights, freedom of choice and privacy will be fundamental to our response.

Our primary concern is for the safety of the woman at risk and her children. Our response will be defined by their needs and wishes and in accordance with the Children First Act 2015, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Department of Health & Children, 1999 and the Child Care Act, 1991.

The Organisation will support the involvement of women who experience abuse in the development of a community response to the issue.

The issue of abuse against women will become an integral part of the work of the Organisation and be incorporated into the Project's work plan. All relevant staff and volunteers will be made aware of the Code & expected to participate in appropriate domestic abuse awareness training.

Accessible posters and information leaflets on supports and services available to women will be clearly visible in the office, meeting rooms and all other public notice boards within the Organisation.

The Organisation will name a key person who will be responsible for compiling and making available the most up to date information on the services that are provided by voluntary and statutory agencies for women who experience abuse.

The Organisation will commit to ongoing training in good practice in relation to domestic abuse and developing an appropriate response to it.

Where abuse against women is disclosed or suspected, our response will be supportive, non-judgemental and non-directive.



THE ORGANISATION IS COMMITTED TO:

Developing firm relations with local, regional and national organisations that provide services and supports for those experiencing domestic abuse.

Networking and developing partnerships with the relevant organisations and agencies to develop a community response to violence and abuse against women.

Encouraging other agencies/organisations that we engage with to support the development of a community response to violence and abuse as the most effective way of addressing the issue.

Communicating our condemnation of abuse against women with the language and images that we use and the messages that the organisation delivers.

Supporting awareness raising campaigns/initiatives which highlight abuse against women locally, regionally and nationally.

Raising the issue of violence and abuse against women in the variety of appropriate fora that we participate in.

IMPLEMENTING THE CODE

The implementation of this Code of Practice will be ratified at management level and monitored by management and staff within the Organisation. The Organisation will take full responsibility for providing the most comprehensive and up to date information on the services and supports that are in place for those at risk of, or experiencing domestic abuse.

ADOPTED BY: _____

AT BOARD MEETING ON: ___ / ___ / ___

SIGNATURE: _____

D ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2018

The Code of Practice was updated and relaunched by the Community Response to Domestic Abuse, Western Regional Network.

2005

The Code was adopted by the Family Support Agency/Family Resource Centre Forum for use by the Family Resource Centres funded by the Family Support Agency.

2004

The Code was adopted by the National Advisory Committee of the Community Development Programme for use by Projects in the Programme.

2002

The Code of Practice on Domestic Violence was developed by the Community Response to Domestic Violence Network* in the West of Ireland. The Code was endorsed by Women's Aid.

**In 2002 membership of the Community Response to Domestic Violence Network in the West of Ireland was comprised of 6 Community Development Projects. A number of Family Resource Centres joined the network in 2004.*

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

- > Ballinrobe FRC
- > Ballyhaunis FRC
- > Castlebar FRC
- > COPE Galway Domestic Abuse Services
- > Domestic Violence Response
- > Gort FRC
- > Galway City Partnership
- > Headford FRC
- > Loughrea FRC
- > Mayo Women's Support Services
- > Westport FCRC



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