

OPERATION ENCOMPASS

Supporting children experiencing domestic abuse

A practical handbook for your school

This handbook should be read in conjunction with
the other Operation Encompass Handbooks:



'Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility'

This phrase is at the heart of HM Government's guide is 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'. However, this language allows people to consider that:

'Someone else will act'.

Changing this language to:

'Safeguarding is my responsibility'

clearly lays the responsibility on every individual.¹

Supporting children² who are living with children domestic abuse is the responsibility of us all.

¹ Operation Encompass 2019

² A child is defined in law as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this handbook

In your school there are:

- the children you know are experiencing domestic abuse because of the Operation Encompass contact.
- the children where you suspect that they are experiencing domestic abuse.
- the children who are experiencing domestic abuse and you will never know they are but the damage to them is still there.

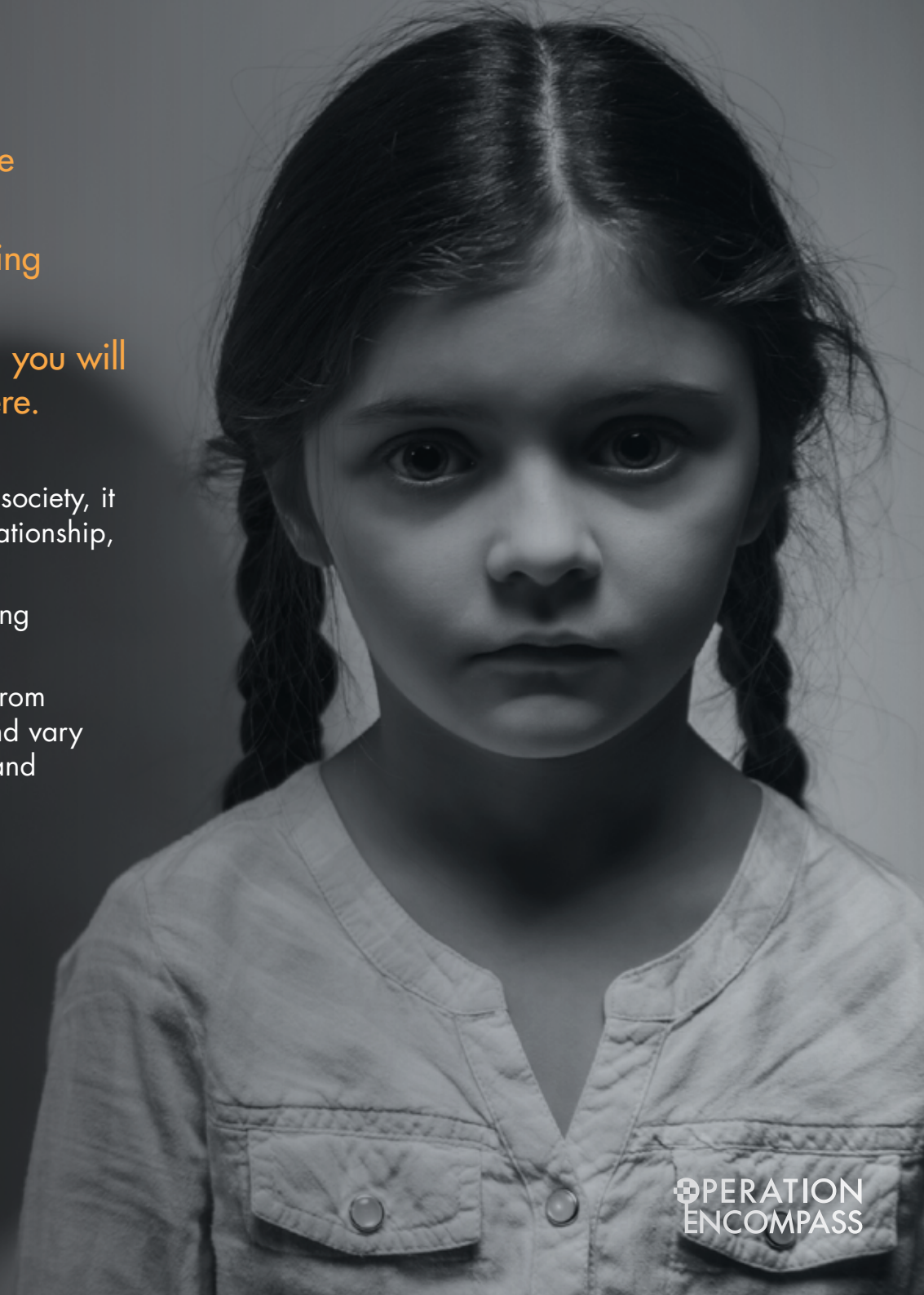
Domestic Abuse is an issue of epic scale and it exists in all strata of society, it occurs in every ethnic group, every age group, every makeup of relationship, in every part of our country and in every continent.

The damage done to a child living with domestic abuse is far reaching and can last throughout their life course.

This damage can be caused at each and every stage of their lives, from conception onwards and, whilst the impact may change, develop and vary dependent upon the individual, the age of the child and the nature and duration of the domestic abuse, the damage is very real.

The implications for children are well researched and serious and can impact upon health, emotional wellbeing, behaviour, academic success, physical development, creating disrupted relationships and disorganised attachments.

Children are often living in a state of heightened anxiety and hyper vigilance within their homes, rather than being a place of safety and security, being a place of stress and trauma leading to feelings of insecurity and danger.



Children experiencing domestic abuse are victims of domestic abuse in their own right³ and therefore must receive support, nurture and understanding from all professionals who come into contact with them.

Staff in schools are well placed to offer early intervention and support due to their safeguarding responsibilities and the pivotal role they play in children's lives.

'Schools are often the service in closest and longest contact with a child living with domestic violence; teachers can play a vital role in helping families access welfare services.'⁴

'Schools and colleges can play a key role in preventing and detecting domestic abuse. They can make a difference by training their staff to spot the signs of domestic abuse in children, parents and colleagues so they know what to do if they have a concern and/or how to handle a disclosure.'⁵

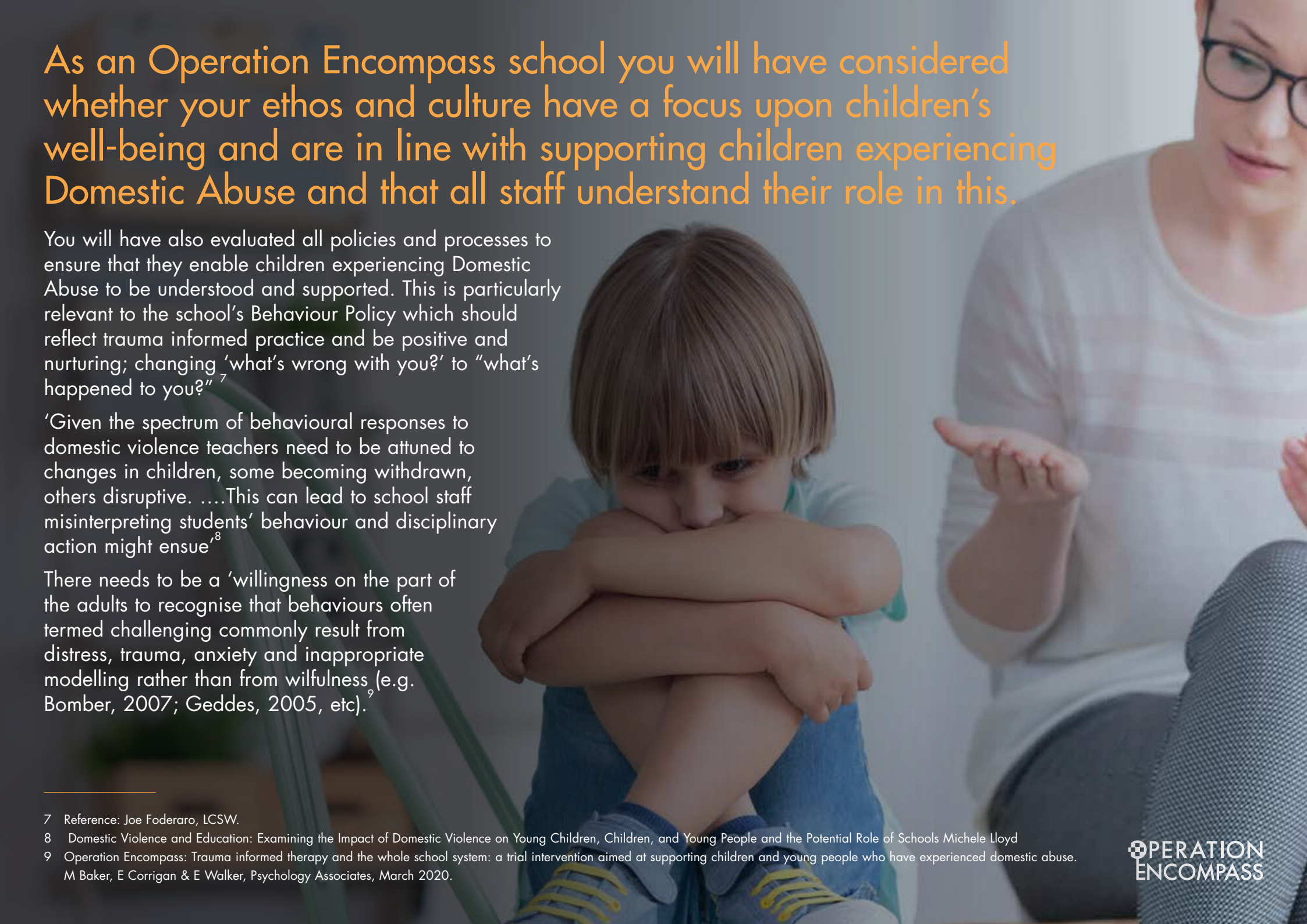
Domestic Abuse is a children's rights issue and this acknowledgement should inform how we support them.⁶

3 New Domestic Abuse Bill

4 Lloyd M (2018) *Domestic Violence and Education: Examining the Impact of Domestic Violence on Young Children, Children, and Young People and the Potential Role of Schools*. *Front. Psychol.* 9:2094. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02094

5 Home Office Domestic Abuse Draft Guidance Framework

6 Operation Encompass based upon Articles in United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)



As an Operation Encompass school you will have considered whether your ethos and culture have a focus upon children's well-being and are in line with supporting children experiencing Domestic Abuse and that all staff understand their role in this.

You will have also evaluated all policies and processes to ensure that they enable children experiencing Domestic Abuse to be understood and supported. This is particularly relevant to the school's Behaviour Policy which should reflect trauma informed practice and be positive and nurturing; changing 'what's wrong with you?' to "what's happened to you?"⁷

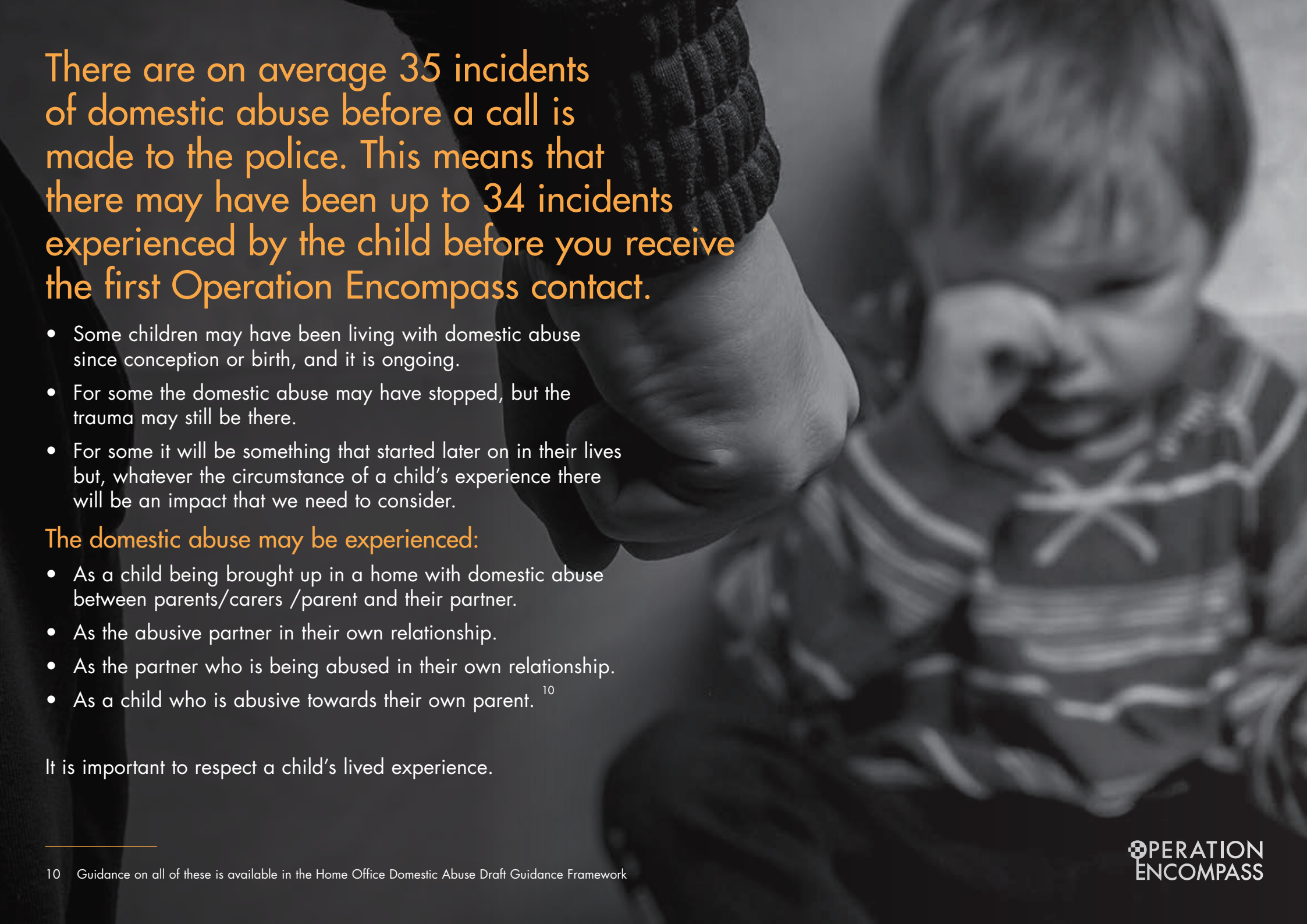
'Given the spectrum of behavioural responses to domestic violence teachers need to be attuned to changes in children, some becoming withdrawn, others disruptive.This can lead to school staff misinterpreting students' behaviour and disciplinary action might ensue'⁸

There needs to be a 'willingness on the part of the adults to recognise that behaviours often termed challenging commonly result from distress, trauma, anxiety and inappropriate modelling rather than from wilfulness (e.g. Bomber, 2007; Geddes, 2005, etc).⁹

⁷ Reference: Joe Foderaro, LCSW.

⁸ Domestic Violence and Education: Examining the Impact of Domestic Violence on Young Children, Children, and Young People and the Potential Role of Schools Michele Lloyd

⁹ Operation Encompass: Trauma informed therapy and the whole school system: a trial intervention aimed at supporting children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse. M Baker, E Corrigan & E Walker, Psychology Associates, March 2020.



There are on average 35 incidents of domestic abuse before a call is made to the police. This means that there may have been up to 34 incidents experienced by the child before you receive the first Operation Encompass contact.

- Some children may have been living with domestic abuse since conception or birth, and it is ongoing.
- For some the domestic abuse may have stopped, but the trauma may still be there.
- For some it will be something that started later on in their lives but, whatever the circumstance of a child's experience there will be an impact that we need to consider.

The domestic abuse may be experienced:

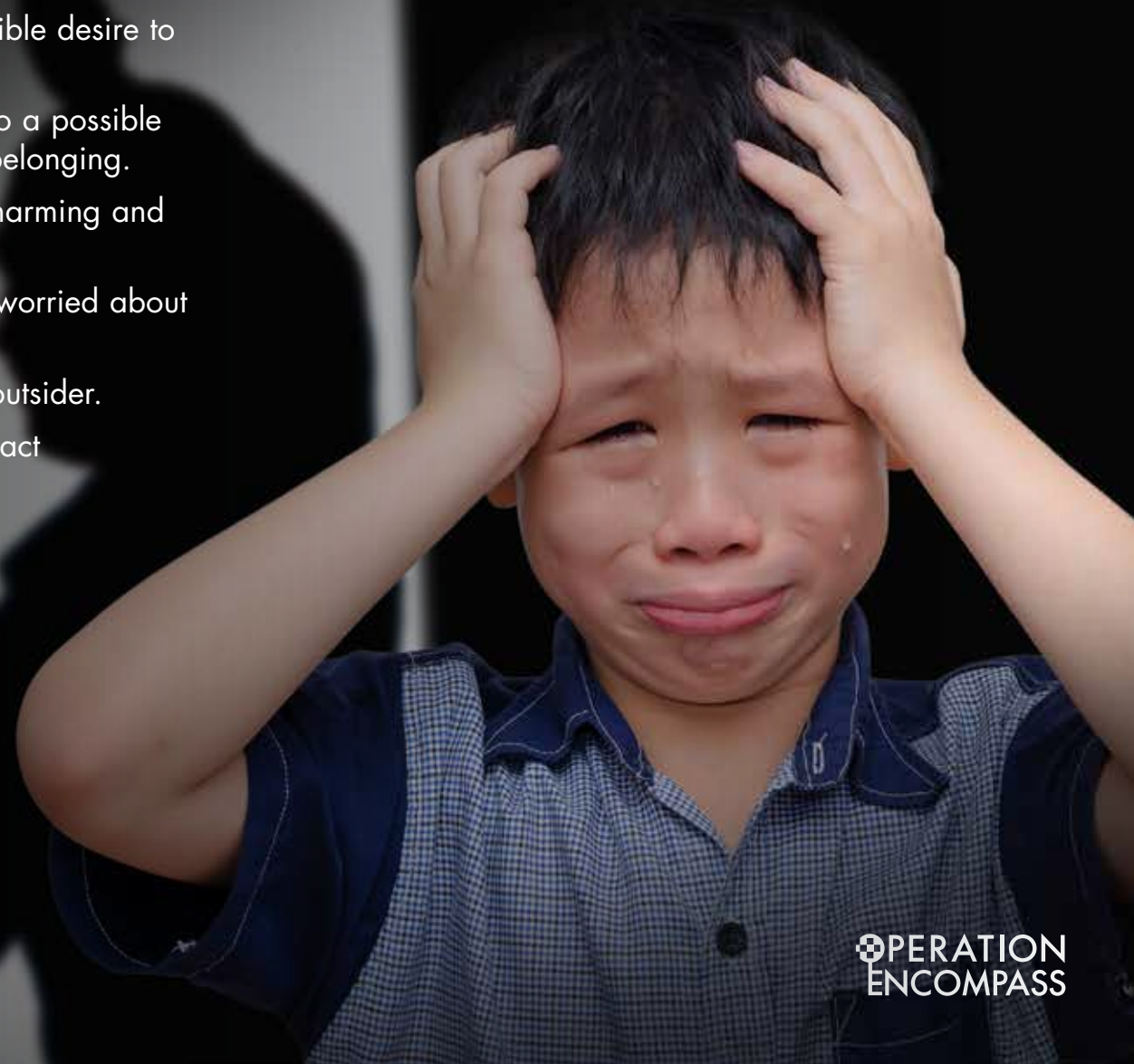
- As a child being brought up in a home with domestic abuse between parents/carers /parent and their partner.
- As the abusive partner in their own relationship.
- As the partner who is being abused in their own relationship.
- As a child who is abusive towards their own parent.¹⁰

It is important to respect a child's lived experience.

¹⁰ Guidance on all of these is available in the Home Office Domestic Abuse Draft Guidance Framework

Some of the risks to children experiencing domestic abuse:

- Being deliberately hurt /abused or murdered by the perpetrator.
- Being hurt because they try to intervene and support the adult victim.
- Going missing to remove themselves from the abuse.
- Vulnerable to being groomed for CSE, due to a possible desire to be loved, to have friends, to belong.
- Vulnerable to being groomed for County Lines, due to a possible desire to be valued, to have friends and a sense of belonging.
- Drug/alcohol misuse to self soothe and escape, self-harming and using food as a control.
- Not wanting to attend school as they feel ashamed, worried about leaving adult victim at home, anxious.
- Finding relationships tricky, being bullied, being an outsider.
- Being excluded because of behaviour due to the impact of domestic abuse which in turn means places children are at a greater risk of being groomed for CSE or County Lines and are left spending more time in the toxic home situation.



The role of schools

The wide ranging and long-lasting impact of experiencing domestic abuse, together with our understanding of the importance of early intervention, means school staff need to have the knowledge, skills, understanding and empathy to support the children in their care.

'Paramount to effectively supporting students is the adoption of a holistic, child-centered approach. If teachers are aware of issues in students' home lives, they will be better informed to provide tailored support to meet the individual needs of students regarding their learning, and social and emotional development.'¹¹

It is acknowledged that school may be the only support these children have as 'many are not known to any other services'¹² and the domestic abuse in their home may well not reach the threshold of intervention by Social Care or other commissioned therapeutic services.

Schools also can support children and families by being alert to the signs that domestic abuse may be occurring in a family: 'Schools and colleges can play a key role in preventing and detecting domestic abuse. They can make a difference by training their staff to spot the signs of domestic abuse in children, parents and colleagues so they know what to do if they have a concern and/or how to handle a disclosure.'¹³

Operation Encompass is not expecting school staff to be therapists or counsellors, we know that there are incredibly simple yet highly effective ways that schools can support children experiencing domestic abuse. This is not necessarily about 'taking a child out of the classroom', it is not necessarily about external counsellors or therapists (which the child may not want, nor be ready for), but rather it is about having a culture and ethos which means that schools, classrooms and the relationships within them are supportive to children, it is about what school staff can do on a daily basis.

11 Domestic Violence and Education: Examining the Impact of Domestic Violence on Young Children, Children, and Young People and the Potential Role of Schools Michele Lloyd

12 Children's Commissioner: Vulnerability Report

13 Home Office Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance 2020

Early intervention is key:

'What happens early, prenatally and in the first couple of years, makes us more likely or less likely to develop future physical and mental health problems. While it's always better to have health-promoting experiences as early as possible, it is never too late to make things better.

There are many opportunities to build resilience, beginning in early childhood and continuing throughout life,¹⁴ by providing supportive relationships in predictable environments, reducing sources of significant stress, and building a toolkit of adaptive skills. The more we build up protection and support for the environment in which children grow up, the smaller the likelihood of future health problems.¹⁵

'The earlier we intervene, the less expensive, less intensive and more effective intervention is likely to be.'¹⁶

14 Resilience is not a constant that is fixed.

15 Harvard University Center on the Developing Child.

16 Dr Nadine Burke Harris 'The Deepest Well'.

What have child victims of domestic abuse asked for?

- Someone to talk to
- Someone who will listen to them (including the police officers who attend the incident)
- Someone who will treat them as an independent person
- To be involved in the decision-making process, feel that they have some control over their lives
- Police Officers to show empathy towards them and to acknowledge them¹⁷

A child who is anxious and dysregulated, a child who is in a persistent state of alarm, is a child who cannot learn.

Children need to experience safe, secure and nurturing relationships within a safe, secure and nurturing environment.

We can do this by:

- Ensuring that all staff including non-teaching staff, Governors, especially a Safeguarding Governor, are educated about domestic abuse and its impact on adult and child victims.
- Demonstrating professional curiosity about the lived experience of the children in your care and show compassion in all interactions, this means that we can place a child's behaviour in a context.
- Ensuring parents know that you have level of understanding of domestic abuse and that you will non judgementally, support them and their family.

*'The single most critical factor in how children weather exposure to domestic violence is the presence of at least one loving and supportive adult in their life. Children without any support, who are isolated or lack nurturing adults in their lives, are more negatively affected by their exposure to domestic abuse.'*¹⁸

¹⁷ Policing Incidents of Domestic Abuse Involving Children: Children's and Police Officers' Experiences DR Anne Marie Millar QUB

¹⁸ Osofsky J.D.

Simple factors to consider about how to support a child¹⁹

- Ensure that children feel safe in school and have a trusted adult to talk to.
- If a child enters school agitated and anxious, they need to engage in activities that will enable them to become calm before we start to consider academic learning.
- Ensure that basic needs are met ('Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs'); they may be tired or hungry (and therefore have great difficulty concentrating in school).
- Using knowledge and understanding of Attachment theory²⁰ can be helpful.
- Consider your body language, facial expressions; meet and greet them with a smile and by their name.
- Let them know that you are pleased to have them in school and that you value them.
- Be fully present with the child and listen to them.
- Consider the tone of voice that you use and the impact that this may have upon a child living with domestic abuse.
- Remember that children experience domestic abuse through all of their senses and that any of their senses can trigger responses and reactions; a tone of voice, the smell of aftershave, perfume or particular food, a banging door etc.
- Respect that children may find any physical contact difficult, even an accidental touch.
- If a child is displaying challenging behaviour, pause and step back for a moment, give yourself time to reflect on what is happening, why it could be happening and how you can best help the child.
- Give children 'ways out' of situations where they have 'backed' themselves into a corner.

(Continued...)

¹⁹ These are illustrative and certainly not exhaustive

²⁰ Bowlby 1958

Simple factors to consider about how to support a child (cont...)

- Have simple routines to the school and class day that are known and understood by the children.
- Use visual timetables.
- Make sure that the expectations and routines for the day are known to the children.
- Prepare children for any changes to the normal day and carefully handle transitions during the day.
- Help children to develop ways to calm themselves such as using mindfulness techniques and rhythmical activities such as djembe drumming or singing.
- Consider homework expectations and whether the child's home is a place where they can undertake homework and how the school can support.
- Ensure that children know they have someone to talk to if the need or want to and that they can identify who that person is that they trust remembering that children need to feel safe to disclose or talk to a member of staff.
- Work alongside the child, being honestly curious about how they are feeling and how you can help them.
- If they are anxious rather than mirroring their emotion, be calm and remain calm, using dysregulation skills to help the child become calm.
- Remember that children cope better if they have a strong attachment to the non-abusive parent, but if that is not the case, they need strong attachments with someone else and that could be a member of staff at your school.

Help children to develop resilience:

(The ability to overcome severe hardships such as those presented by domestic abuse, other ACEs and trauma), this can help to avoid some harmful impacts of trauma; reflect upon what you do as a school to build resilience in all children.

Factors that help build resilience include:

- Positive relationships
- Community support
- Cultural connections
- Personal skills²¹
- Ensure that staff understand that 'their emotional state is the biggest influence on the 'emotional climate' in their setting?'²²

Develop strong communication and trust between family and school:

'The "absolute importance of supporting family" appears particularly clear:...
for the children to be well, the parent has to be well; for the children to be safe, the parent has to be safe'²³

21 PHE Wales Sources of Resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood experiences.

22 Attachment Aware Schools and Settings Audit.

23 Operation Encompass: Trauma informed therapy and the whole school system: a trial intervention aimed at supporting children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse. M Baker, E Corrigan & E Walker, Psychology Associates, March 2020.

Basic principles:

- Every interaction and contact we have in school can be viewed as an intervention and leaves a 'trace' upon a child either negative or positive.
- Ensure that children understand that the abuse is never their fault.
- Every behaviour is a communication.
- Do nothing that retraumatizes the child.

Whatever support is given to the children in your care who are experiencing domestic abuse, whatever actions you take, you must ensure that you do or say nothing that puts that adult or child victims at risk.

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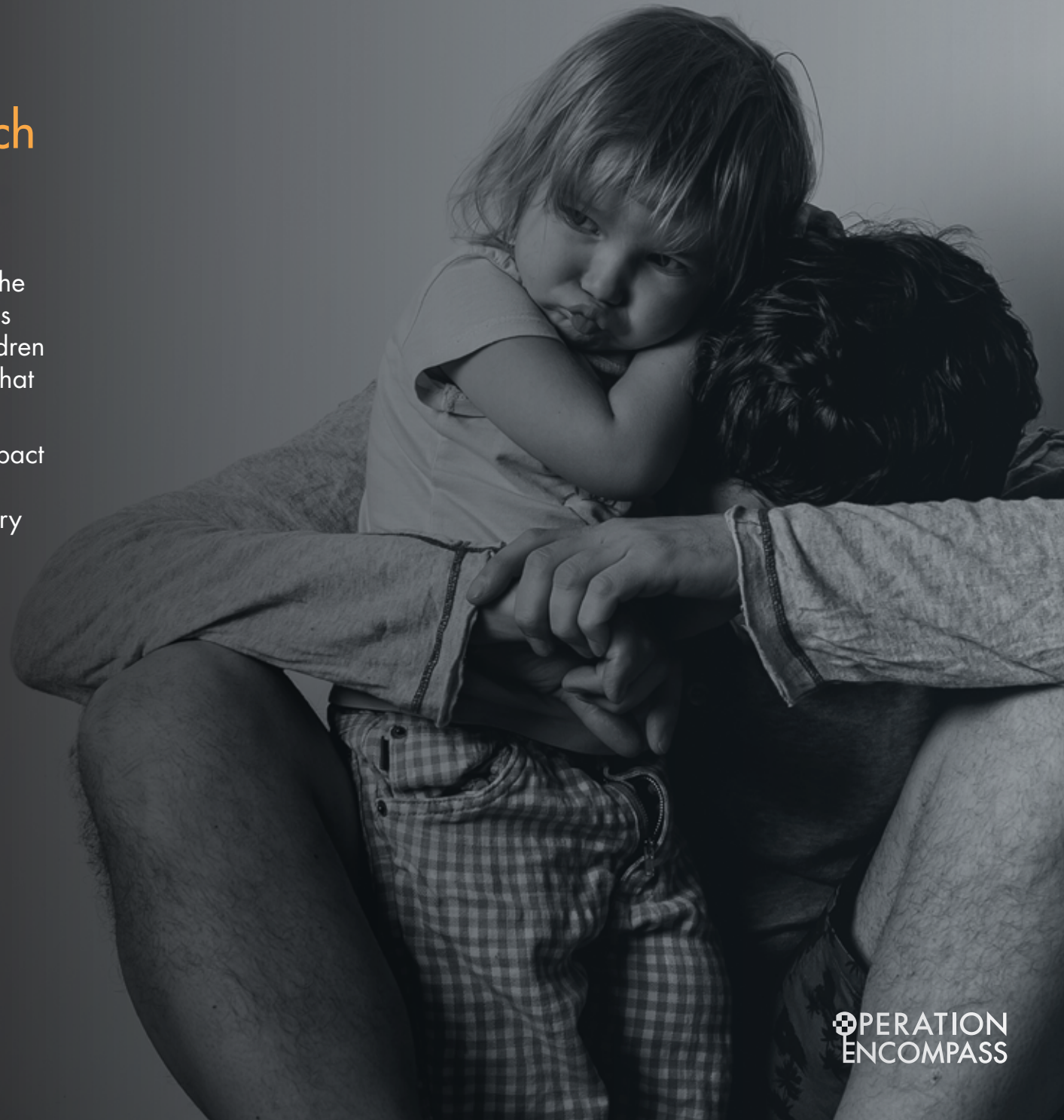
Why should we care so much about domestic abuse?

Apart from the prevalence and reach of domestic abuse, apart from the financial costs, apart from the damage that it does to both child and adult victims ...we should all care because it is not just the children and young people who live with domestic abuse that are damaged.

We cannot and we must not underestimate the impact of domestic abuse on individuals, on families, on communities and on our society as a whole. Its very existence diminishes us all.

We must:

1. Acknowledge the range and magnitude of domestic abuse in our society.
2. Appreciate the damaging impact of domestic abuse on children.
3. Attend to the needs and wishes of children who are victims of domestic abuse.



Examples of support from schools ²⁴

- 1 Operation Encompass contact to school, greeted child as she arrived that morning. A member of staff took her quietly to one side to a room and explained that they knew what had happened that previous night at home. They ensured that she was OK, that she had had breakfast and then talked about how to support her particularly that day as she was due to sit a GCSE examination. They offered her a separate room and any other support they could. She took her examination and the school sent a supporting letter alongside her paper explaining what she had been through the night before. She passed her examination.
- 2 16-year-old living with Domestic Abuse at home. The school had received Operation Encompass contacts and the child was happy to access support from the school. On one occasion she told the school that she was leaving home, she had nowhere to go. The school supported her to move out safely from a very abusive and toxic situation and to remain safe. She would otherwise have been a “missing from home” child.
- 3 Operation Encompass contact; child arrived at school and teacher quietly spoke to them and asked how they were and if there was there anything they could do to help. Child said they had not eaten nor had they slept (which had been apparent to the school). The school fed the child and settled them into the staffroom with some blankets and a pillow and let them sleep. The child woke up later and went on to have a successful day in school.
- 4 A 9-year-old boy walked into his classroom, his teacher quietly took him to one side, explained that he knew what had happened the night before at his home and gently asked if there was anything he or the school could do to help. The teacher describes that the ‘tension visibly dissolved from his body’ and he said to his teacher. “At last, there is someone that I can talk to about all of this.”
- 5 The DSL approached a child after they had received contact from Operation Encompass. The child commented, ‘How do you know?’ The DSL responded by reassuring the child that all the adults who care, all those who work with them in school, care about them and want to make sure they are safe. They reassured the child that the school staff are there if the child needed them. The DSL recounts “it’s a huge relief. There’s this incredible sigh of relief from the child” and we can go on to support them.
- 6 Secondary aged child arrived at school following an Operation Encompass contact. The teacher checked in with the child and asked if there was anything they could do to help. The child explained that they were worried as they had had no tea the night before, no breakfast and had no money for food at lunchtime in school. They were very hungry and were worried what they could do. The school fed the child and gave them money for lunch. The child had a successful day in school and the school was aware that there were now other supportive measures they could take and that the child knew they could talk to the school staff.

²⁴ Schools can submit their own good practice reports here <https://www.operationencompass.org/schools/good-practice-reports>

Resources:

Bright Sky is free app which enables the identification of all of your local domestic abuse services:

<https://www.eida.org.uk/bright-sky-mobile-app>

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu>

Beacon House:

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/?section=welcome-to-beacon-house>

Dr Karen Treisman MBE:

<http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/about-us/>

Oprah Winfrey: "*The Life-changing Story*"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dF20FaQzYUISurviving>

Look at the work of Dr Bruce D. Perry: '*How violence changes the brain in children*' and other videos.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1L08Xpw7lo>

www.operationencompass.org

