

St Mary's Contact Centre - Domestic Abuse & Coercion Policy

St Mary's Contact Centre believes that everyone has the right to live safely and without the fear of violence and abuse. 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.

According to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, 'Abusive behaviour' is defined in the act as any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional or other abuse

St Mary's 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 treatment. 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 if domestic violence is a feature of the case, currently and/or historically.
2. No family will be accepted until a referral form has been completed in full and received by the Coordinator.
3. Any information concerning domestic violence will be treated seriously.
4. Use of the Centre will be denied to individuals or families where the coordinator feels their presence is likely to present a threat to the well-being of other Centre users and volunteers / staff. We will use the NACCC Supervised –v- Supported Checklist in helping us make decisions about which cases are acceptable in a supported centre.
5. Once a family has been accepted the coordinator will consider their safety needs and develop a plan 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.

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- 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.

Controlling or Coercive Behaviour

1. Controlling and Coercive behaviour is classified as an offence and is constituted by behaviour on the part of the perpetrator which takes place "repeatedly or continuously". The victim and alleged perpetrator must be "personally connected" at the time the behaviour takes place. The behaviour must have had a "serious effect" on the victim, meaning that it has caused the victim to fear violence will be used against them on "at least two occasions", or it has had a "substantial adverse effect on the victims' day to day activities". The alleged perpetrator must have known that their behaviour would have a serious effect on the victim, or the behaviour must have been such that he or she "ought to have known" it would have that effect.
2. Controlling or coercive behaviour should be dealt with as part of the Child Contact Centres safeguarding and public protection procedures.
3. All Paid and Unpaid staff must have regular training in this area and covered the topic in their induction.
4. The types of behaviour associated with coercion or control may or may not constitute a criminal offence in their own right. It is important to remember that the presence of controlling or coercive behaviour does not mean that no other offence has been committed or cannot be charged. However, the perpetrator may limit space for action and exhibit a story of ownership and entitlement over the victim. Such behaviours might include:
 - a. isolating a person from their friends and family.
 - b. depriving them of their basic needs.
 - c. monitoring their time.
 - d. monitoring a person via online communication tools or using spyware.
 - e. taking control over aspects of their everyday life, such as where they can go, who they can see, what to wear and when they can sleep.
 - f. depriving them of access to support services, such as specialist support or medical services.
 - g. repeatedly putting them down such as telling them they are worthless.
 - h. enforcing rules and activity which humiliate, degrade, or dehumanise the victim.
 - i. forcing the victim to take part in criminal activity such as shoplifting, neglect or abuse of children to encourage self-blame and prevent disclosure to authorities.
 - j. financial abuse including control of finances, such as only allowing a person a punitive allowance.
 - k. threats to hurt or kill.
 - l. threats to a child.
 - m. threats to reveal or publish private information (e.g., threatening too 'out' someone).
 - n. assault.
 - o. criminal damage (such as destruction of household goods).
 - p. rape.
 - q. preventing a person from having access to transport or from working.

This is not an exhaustive list

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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 are made aware of the particular needs of each family attending the Centre.
3. All volunteers/staff receive training in the areas of domestic violence, child protection and conflict management.
4. Volunteers/staff have immediate access to a telephone when the Centre is open.
5. The Centre has 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 has 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. The Centre's policy in relation to domestic violence will be reviewed and if necessary updated annually.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually.

Name	Signature	Date
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