

**‘DOMESTIC ABUSE’ -  
LEARNING FROM DOMESTIC  
HOMICIDE REVIEWS/SAFEGUARDING  
ADULTS REVIEWS – ‘Mrs McKenzie’**

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## What is Domestic Abuse?

Under section 9(4) of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) is a review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Act defines domestic abuse as behaviour between two people that are personally connected that consists of physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; psychological, emotional or other abuse. It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

We define people who are 'personally connected' as: intimate partners, ex-partners, family members including siblings or individuals who share parental responsibility for a child. There is no requirement for the victim and perpetrator to live in the same household.

## Professional Curiosity

- Professional curiosity is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value.
- Professional Curiosity can require practitioners to think 'outside the box', beyond their usual professional role, and consider families' circumstances holistically. Curious professionals engage with individuals and families through visits, conversations, observations and asking relevant questions to gather historical and current information.
- It is important to understand the context of language, if someone advises that a partner/ family member is becoming more aggressive – what do they mean by this, is this physical abuse/ verbal or emotional abuse. All of which are definitions of Domestic Abuse, and any interventions need to have this risk in mind and respond appropriately to it.

## Domestic Abuse & Dementia: Cognitive Decline

Even in previously healthy relationships, a person living with dementia can begin to use abusive behaviour. In situations where the perpetrator has dementia, the risk of harm can significantly increase, particularly if the victim-survivor is their primary carer. Providing intimate care means close physical contact, making it harder for victim-survivors to keep themselves safe.

Sometimes signs of domestic abuse are either overlooked, or seen as a one-off incident, rather than a pattern of coercive behaviour. There is also a tendency to treat the abuse as unintentional harm or neglect, thanks to a general assumption that families and partners always

act with compassion towards the older person. Yet the reality is often far from the idealised picture we have of care and support in later life. When an individual is experiencing cognitive decline there is a risk that domestic abuse may not be suspected because of the vulnerability of the perpetrator. Whilst it may feel uncomfortable referring people diagnosed with dementia to agencies stating they are a perpetrator of domestic abuse; it is important to share this information to reduce risks. Multiagency working is key and sharing information to all parties involved is critical in keeping victims safe, this includes domiciliary care providers.

## Responding to Domestic Abuse

- Consideration of Section 42 duty – if the victim has care and support needs as defined in the Care Act 2014 and Domestic Abuse is suspected then a referral should be made to Adult Social Care to raise a Safeguarding Concern. A safeguarding response will then be initiated, and a Multiagency meeting convened where risks should be shared and responded to, it is imperative risks are shared with care providers. Professionals can raise a Safeguarding Concern to Adult Social Care - [Report abuse or neglect of an adult at risk | Kirklees Council](#)
- Carers assessments – when working with people consideration should be made as to who is caring for who, and a carers assessment offered. It may be that both victim and perpetrator care for each other so both should be offered a carers assessment.
- Referral to specialist services – KDASS (Kirklees Domestic Abuse Specialist Services) is the commissioned service for Kirklees who provides high quality specialist support, advice, information and access to safe accommodation to anyone effected by or experiencing domestic abuse.

Multiagency working is the most effective way to approach the issue at both an operational and strategic level – anyone can call a multi-agency meeting to share concerns about a family

## Kirklees Community Partnership Board Response

When someone dies as a result of Domestic Abuse, a domestic homicide review should be carried out to:

- establish what lessons are to be learned from the domestic homicide regarding the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard victims.
- identify clearly what those lessons are both within and between agencies, how and within what timescales they will be acted on, and what is expected to change as a result.

- apply these lessons to service responses including changes to policies and procedures as appropriate.
- prevent domestic violence homicide and improve service responses for all domestic violence victims and their children through improved intra and inter-agency working.

Central to a DHR is improving our understanding of domestic abuse and how our services respond to victims and children. Understanding how disclosures and/or other evidence of domestic abuse were recognised and responded to will support us to improve our co-ordinated multi-agency approach so domestic abuse can be identified and responded to effectively at the earliest opportunity.

## Useful Links

[Kirklees Council - Domestic Abuse](#)

[Kirklees Domestic Abuse Specialist Services \(KDASS\) | Support for individuals experiencing domestic abuse](#)

[Kirklees Domestic Abuse Strategy](#)