

Audit on the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Pathway for Young People (DAPYP) 2020

This audit topic was selected by PAQA because young people experience the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group, and the data suggests the levels of high severity abuse may be highest for the youngest age group. It is essential that professionals can identify domestic abuse in young people’s relationships, and intervene safely and effectively at the earliest opportunity. The DAPYP is for young people using and/or experiencing domestic abuse within their own intimate relationships. The aim was to see how well services were working together to support young people in these circumstances.

About the Audit

The objectives of the audit were to:

1. Assess how well the DAPYP was understood and used by professionals
2. See how well services were working together to support young people in these circumstances

Audit Methodology

- Two case studies were reviewed in detail: including a peer review of records, and interviews with the young people
- Consultation with Oxfordshire professionals

Key Messages

- **The importance of rapport, trust, and honesty when working with young people** and domestic abuse was highlighted. Supportive, non-judgemental relationships with young people are particularly important for meaningful engagement and take time to nurture.
- **The “trusted professional”**. The idea of a young person choosing a trusted professional to confide in was a key theme in the previous audit. This was a repeat message: young people will identify an adult or adults they feel they can trust and open up with. This means it is essential that whoever that adult might be they should be skilled and equipped with knowledge of how to support and safeguard the young person in question.
- **Normalisation of abuse by young people**. This normalisation was evident in the young people’s experiences of domestic abuse in their family or peer setting, as well as their own difficulties in recognising abuse due to messaging from media. Healthy relationships work is key.

Key Messages

- **Gaps in provision, including prevention**
The peer audit panel felt strongly that “layers of intervention were required” to properly embed the messages about healthy relationships and how to seek help. They felt that this looked like:
 - High quality, open access, universal youth provision where people are trained to work with young people in this way and understand these behaviours
 - Schools and colleges where there is consistent messaging from all education staff
 - More focus on addressing needs of those young people causing harm
 - Further support and interventions, particularly group work programmes
- **The role of parents**. Whilst parents can be critically important in supporting young people to recognise abusive behaviours and seek help, often parental support alone will not be enough to safeguard a young person in an abusive intimate relationship. By its very nature domestic abuse isolates people from their sources of support. Professional involvement is therefore essential. Parents can sometimes also contribute to the normalisation of domestic abuse.
- **Domestic abuse alongside other safeguarding issues**. The multiplicity of issues running alongside meant domestic abuse was often one small part of a very complex bigger picture making it hard for professionals to untangle and address the domestic abuse specifically.
- **Tech-based or digital abuse**. The specific nature of abuse for young people and the significance of digital abuse was a strong factor in both cases – the opportunities to control a young person, to take on their online persona and to cut them off from other friends or humiliate them are huge. Much of young people’s social lives are lived online (and this was to an even greater extent during lockdown).

Examples of good practice

The following are examples ...

- Professionals taking the time to build rapport with a young person; connecting with them and exploring healthy relationships at their own pace using a range of resources, which enables young people to then identify abuse once a trusting, supportive, and non-judgemental relationship has been established.
- Repeated interventions around healthy relationships, which have different impacts on young people when they're experiencing them at different developmental stages. Services you can re-REFER to are essential.

Identified barriers

The following were noted:

- **Language matters.** The importance of language used was emphasised. Young people often don't recognise domestic abuse and more considered use of language may be helpful in opening up conversations which enable abuse to be identified. Young people shared that it is important to identify behaviours and name them as domestic abuse, whilst at the same time recognising that initially this language would have been a barrier to discussing the abuse with an adult. Calling it domestic abuse from the outset may interrupt a safe and trusting relationship with professionals; instead, we can mirror their language (potentially 'toxic' or talk about healthy and unhealthy initially) and call it by its name once rapport is established and the young person is ready to recognise it as such.
- **Lack of young people recognising abuse:** It was agreed that a young person's lack of acknowledgement or understanding of the abuse was even more reason for the Pathway to be initiated.
- **Awareness** - Professionals may not consider referral to Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services as a route to support for those aged 16+, rather these services are considered to be for adults. It was agreed that this should be made clearer for professionals looking to support young person in an abusive relationship.
- **Assumptions** - Parental support may be assumed as sufficient to safeguard a young person subjected to domestic abuse in an intimate relationship – evidence shows that more support is needed. Isolating victims from their sources of support is at the core of domestic abuse, and for young people this will often involve being isolated from their parents.
- **Thresholds** - Statutory thresholds may sometimes be too high for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse within their own intimate relationships.

Summary

This audit was an incredibly useful process which will be a rich source of information for training, resources, and services. There were some barriers to properly understanding the prevalence of need and the responses of professionals. However, it is clear that many agencies including those that took part in this Peer Review Audit are working very hard to support young people in abusive relationships. There is much work to be done, particularly within educational settings. There is also a need for further support for young people affected by domestic abuse. The recommendation to develop new multi-agency training is already underway and expected to be rolled out before the end of 2020-21.

Audit Recommendations

1. Updated multi-agency Domestic Abuse and Young People training to be developed and delivered, based on the learning from this and previous audits.