



Kirklees **Safeguarding Children** Partnership



# Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (APVA) Good Practice Guidance

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## Introduction

This guidance has drawn heavily from the 2015 Home Office issued *Information Guide: adolescent to parent violence and abuse (APVA)* It is intended to enhance practitioners understanding of APVA and support practice intervention as well as raise awareness of the local processes and support available. It has been produced in response to findings from a Local Lessons Review recently published (LLR3) which identified a lack of understanding of APVA.

## What is adolescent to parent violence and abuse?

The cross-Government definition of domestic violence and abuse is *any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse.* While this definition applies to those aged 16 or above, APVA can equally involve children under 16, and the advice in this document reflects this.

**There is currently no legal definition of adolescent to parent violence and abuse. However, it is increasingly recognised as a form of domestic violence and abuse and, depending on the age of the child, it may fall under the government's official definition of domestic violence and abuse**

In 2014, Kirklees adopted a local definition as follows: *A pattern of behaviour where teenagers, young girls or boys use physical, psychological, emotional and financial abuse over time to the extent that parents/carers live in fear of their child.*

It is important to recognise that APVA is likely to involve a *pattern of behaviour*. This can include physical violence from an adolescent towards a parent and a number of different types of abusive behaviours, including damage to property, emotional abuse, and economic/financial abuse.

Violence and abuse can occur together or separately. Abusive behaviours can encompass, but are not limited to, humiliating language and threats, belittling a parent, damage to property and stealing from a parent and heightened sexualised behaviours.

Patterns of coercive control are often seen in cases of APVA, but some families might experience episodes of explosive physical violence from their adolescent with fewer controlling, abusive behaviours.

Although practitioners may be required to respond to a single incident of APVA, it is important to gain an understanding of the pattern of behaviour behind an incident and the history of the relationship between the young person and the parent. This pattern of behaviour creates an environment where a parent lives in fear of their child and often curtails their own behaviour in order to avoid conflict, contain or minimise violence and / or abuse.

## Prevalence of adolescent to parent violence and abuse

APVA is not specifically flagged on police or health and social care databases and so it is difficult to count the number of reported cases on a national level.

Adolescents reported to the police for violence against their parents were overwhelmingly male (87.3 per cent) and parent victims reporting the violence were overwhelmingly female (77.5 per cent). This tallies with previous international research suggesting that adolescent to parent violence and abuse is predominantly a son-mother phenomenon, although it is important to recognise the possible reporting bias relating to gender and social norms.

**Recent Met Police figures show reports of child-to-parent violence offences grew from 920 in 2012 to 1801 in 2016, which is 95% increase.**

## Key Principles

- Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse is a safeguarding issue and requires a multi-agency safeguarding response
- Assumptions should not be made that the parent is responsible for their child's behaviour (i.e. due to their parenting style)
- It is important that the young person takes responsibility for their behaviour
- Unnecessary criminalisation of the young person should be avoided, though it may be necessary for the police to be involved to maintain safety.
- Parents may be reluctant to disclose for fear of the response, they may not want their child to get into trouble, be judged as a poor parent or have their child taken into care
- There is no single explanation for APVA and the pathways appear to be complex
- APVA affects all levels of society
- Safety planning is a key component of any response to APVA
- Opportunities for both parents and children to talk about their experiences should be created
- APVA is a whole family issue

**The restoration of healthy, respectful family relationships should be the ultimate goal.**

## Key Elements of a Good Assessment of Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse

### ***Environmental factors:***

- Do parents and young person have a consistent routine?
- Are there general difficulties with communication between young person and parent/s?
- For young people with additional needs or disabilities, do the parents have a good understanding of these and how they impact on the young person? Has earlier work been undertaken regarding any communication difficulties?
- Is there a history of domestic abuse within the family unit? Has the young person witnessed domestic abuse?
- Is the young person in an abusive intimate relationship?
- Is there a need for adult services' involvement in the family?
- Is the young person being coerced into abusive behaviours?
- Is the young person displaying heightened sexualised behaviours?
- Is the young person associating with peer groups who are involved in offending or older peers?
- Are Children's Services currently involved with the family?
- Should a risk assessment be conducted on the siblings to see if they are at risk of violence and/or contributing to the violence?
- Is the young person isolated from people and services that could support them?
- Is there a risk that the young person is being bullied?
- Are there BAME issues that need to be considered or that may affect a victim's disclosure?

## Key Elements of a Good Assessment of Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse 2

### ***Emotional self-regulation***

- Does the young person have difficulties in forming relationships?
- Does the young person have mental health issues, self-harm or suicidal tendencies?
- Is the young person disengaged from education?
- Is the young person misusing substances?
- Does the young person display an obsessive use of violent games or pornography?
- Does the young person have poor coping skills or engage in risk taking behaviours?
- Does the young person identify their behaviour as abuse?
- Does the young person have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition/ a learning disability / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?
- Does the young person have difficulties with communication?
- Is the young person able to regulate their emotions and/ or behaviour when in different settings e.g. in school?
- What techniques do school use to assist the young person with their emotional regulation and / or communication?

## Reporting / Disclosing APVA

It is important to recognise that incidents of APVA reported to the police are likely to represent only a small percentage of actual incidents and actual levels are likely to be much higher. All forms of domestic violence and abuse are under-reported and parents are, understandably, particularly reluctant to disclose or report violence or abuse from their child. This is especially true when the child has a disability.

Research has shown that GP's were a common first port-of-call for parents looking for help, it is important therefore that GP's are given up-to-date

**Parents may not recognise their experiences as domestic violence and abuse, different language maybe needed in order to enable an open discussion. Practitioners should consider using questions such as "Does your child ever frighten you?" "What happens when your child is angry?"**

local information about options for responding to APVA.

Parents report feelings of isolation, guilt and shame surrounding their child's violence or abuse towards them, and fear that their parenting skills may be questioned and that they will be blamed or disbelieved by those to whom they disclose the violence and/or abuse. Many parents worry that their victimisation will not be taken seriously or, if they are taken seriously, that they will be held to account and that their child may be taken away from them and/or criminalised.

There are, however, situations where a criminal justice response may be appropriate in the interests of safety, and the parent(s) may support the removal of their child or even ask for it. It is worth noting that appropriate housing is not always available. In instances when

this occurs, it is important that agencies ensure that adequate safeguarding is in place and that the right safety plans are put in place.

Adolescents may also choose not to disclose due to guilt or fear of the social care and justice system. Young people may not understand the impact of their actions and be concerned about the consequences so they may not seek help, allowing the situation to escalate to crisis.

## Explanations of APVA

There is no single explanation for APVA and the pathways appear to be complex. Some families experiencing APVA have a history of domestic violence and abuse. In other cases the violence and abuse is contextualised with other behavioural problems, substance abuse, mental health problems, learning difficulties, or self-harm. In some cases there are no apparent explanations for the violence or abuse and some parents find it difficult to understand why one child is aggressive towards them when their other children do not display such behaviour.

APVA also appears to affect all levels of society. Although many parents reporting this form of violence and abuse to the police are not in full-time employment and some are struggling with financial and housing problems; others are in professional jobs earning high incomes. It may be the case that adolescent to parent violence or abuse is more likely to be identified in families who are already in contact with support services or the criminal justice system; and/or that such families find it more acceptable to report the problem and ask for help.

## Questions and Issues for Children's Social Care to consider

- Immediate safety: Are all family members safe in the current situation? How can their safety be maintained? Is there current domestic violence and abuse from an adult in the house? Are there other issues that must take priority to maintain safety?
- What is it that the parent(s) are describing? Do you need to see the family home to get a full picture of the damage or threat?
- Young people may minimise, blame or simply deny abuse when interviewed. A pattern of manipulative and controlling behaviour is a feature of APVA and this must be taken into account in assessing the situation. They may counter-charge parents with assault and may have physical injuries to support their case. What is the whole picture here?
- What is it that the parent(s) want? What are they actually asking for? What help have they already sought or received?
- If the family is requesting removal of the young person it is likely they are experiencing high levels of threat and risk. Can they be helped to find a respite solution within the wider family, or is care the only option?
- If there is a history of domestic violence and abuse between the young person's parents, professionals should be alert to a possible long-term pattern of coercive control over the parent that was abused. Invite the view of the victim in the first instance and think carefully about the suitability of potential placements within the family.
- Are the parents / young people motivated and willing to undertake the Step-Up Programme? What can be offered to parents if the young person refuses to engage?
- What involvement has schools had, do they have a plan to manage behaviour / support communication in place? Is it effective?
- There may have been many years and incidences of abuse and violence before help is sought. Contacting Children's Social Care will be seen by many parents as a last resort. It is therefore imperative that a professional, empathetic and supportive response is given.



## Safety Planning

Safety planning is a practical process that practitioners can use with anyone affected by domestic violence and abuse. It should be a core element of working in partnership with victims and other agencies, taking into account the outcomes of risk assessment and risk management. Safety planning involves more than assessing potential future risk; it can help create psychological safety, space to recover and freedom from fear. Other members of the household's responses to questions about what they do when there is violence or abuse should be considered in safety planning.

Risk assessments can assist safety planning and should aim to:

- help to understand the parent's fear and experiences as well as the fears of the young person;
- use and build on existing positive coping strategies;
- provide a safe physical space to recover;
- link to the relevant assessment framework being used by the agency and provide a holistic approach to safety and well-being;
- be part of a continuous process and ensure that safety planning links into the overall plan for the victim and is not completed as an isolated process;
- ensure safety plans are tailored to the individual. A 'one size fits all' approach is ineffective and potentially dangerous.

## Adopted Children

Many adoptive families are known to encounter issues because of the child's previous experience of trauma. A recent study found that violence and abuse was an issue in as many as 30% of adoptive families, and that in 3% of adoptive families this was serious enough to lead to adoption breakdown.

## Advice for Parents Experiencing APVA 1

If you are experiencing violence or abuse from your teen, it may be hard to admit that there is a problem, but if your teenager is being abusive or violent towards you, then this is domestic abuse (see Appendix 1—Abuse Wheel for a greater understanding of how this abuse may present in your home). You deserve to feel safe in your own home and family life.

**Look after yourself** - This is vital to cope with the anger and aggression from your teen. You probably feel exhausted, demoralised and are likely to be making huge efforts to get a tiny amount of control.

**This is not your fault** - No parent can avoid making mistakes, life itself is an imperfect process full of disappointments, and difficulties and children need to be able to cope with these.

**Choose your battles** - You can't tackle everything at once, put some issues on the back-burner to be dealt with later.

**Try not to take it personally** - If your child is struggling, it's often because of a range of issues that may have been beyond your control. Once you are aware of them, you can give the support and help to address their fears and worries.

**Separate the behaviour from your teen** – You can still love your teen but not like their behaviour.

**Use language that separates the behaviour from your teen** - Use 'I statements' that really do make a difference: for example "I feel hurt when I'm called names because I don't feel loved and respected". Repeating this, and being consistent in using it, works. Avoid using language that blames and is negative.

**Ignoring the behaviour won't make it go away** – If it is not addressed, the violence or abuse could increase and become a life-long pattern; help them break the pattern.

**Keep yourself safe** – This is so important and ensure you and other members of the family are safe. If you can spot the signs of the conflict turning into violence, have a safety plan for those times. Try to go to a place of safety while you decide what to do next. Call the police if you need to.

**Calling the police** - You may feel reluctant to call in the police as you may not want your child to get into serious trouble or for other reasons. The police have been working with many families on adolescent to parent violence and abuse and understand the impact. If you are in fear for your safety or you are feeling threatened it is ok to call the police to help diffuse the situation and for you to feel safe.

**Communication aids** - Can be helpful if the young person has a disability that impacts on their communication

## Advice for Parents Experiencing APVA 2

**Redress the balance** - Often the only attention you will be giving your teen is in response to negative behaviour. If you feel able to, find moments where you can show your appreciation when they are doing well.

**Be aware of your own responses and reactions to conflict** - You might be inflaming the situation without meaning to, for example, by shouting or responding back with aggression. Keep yourself calm. Leave the room for a while if you need to.

**Acknowledge their feelings** - “I know you’re really angry”, recognises the fact without criticism. “What would help you now”, offers support but does not have to be agreed to, as does, “I’ll see what I can do and we’ll talk about it later”. A gentle look, a kind touch can convey this without hostility and before trying to talk about what is wrong.

**Try to find the root of the anger** - School pressures, bullying, friendships, mental health, family breakdown, illness can all be trigger factors that add to a child’s stress levels. They are not excuses but may be reasons for it. Talking through the pressures, listening to your teen attentively, without judging, interrupting or directing them can help them to offload their feelings and release the pressure constructively.

**Help them develop self-strategies** – Helping your teen to understand the triggers and what to do when they are angry is crucial to help them overcome this. When things are calm, have a chat and find out what they think would work for them. It may be a case of trial and error but it is good to help them manage their emotions and find a different outlet for their angry feelings. They might want to use calming down strategies for their anger or an alternative option is meditation to help them quieten down their mind. Let them know that you are there for them.

**Give them space** - Recognise that your teen is taking anger out on you and may not know how else to deal with difficult feelings. Once they have calmed down, you may be able to talk to them about what has happened and suggest they let you find them some help. This is especially important for young people with autism, sensory overload and disruption to routine can be a trigger

**Don’t fight fire with fire** - Never use violence with your teen. If you are hitting your teenager in response, then you are giving them the message that it is OK to use violence to solve disagreements.

**Get support for yourself** - Know what support you need, speak to friends and relatives to get the best fit that you can.

**Seek support from school** - Is the aggressive behaviour displayed there too? The pastoral team may be able to support with strategies used in school which will also give a clear consistent message to the young person.



### About the programme:

The programme uses a cognitive behavioural, skills based approach to help teens stop the use of violent and abusive behaviours and teaches non-violent, respectful ways of communicating and resolving conflict with family members. It can be delivered on a one to one basis, by key workers as part of their ongoing work with young people and their families or in a family learning group work setting where parents and their children come together in groups of up to ten families.

Step-Up uses a Restorative Practice model of accountability, competency development and family safety to restore family relationships. Restorative inquiry is used to help the young person recognise the effects of their actions on others, cultivate empathy and take steps to repair harm done.

The group work programme is delivered over 12 weeks. Each session lasts 2 ½ hours, starting with a family meal, and separate activities for boys, girls and parents as well as fun filled whole family activities to end the session on a high note.

For families who are unable to access groups for a variety of reasons, the programme can be delivered on a 1:1 basis in the home or other suitable venue. The advantage of a 1:1 approach is that the programme can be delivered flexibly to suit the needs of the young person or parent.

### Who can I refer?

A young person over the age of **11 years** who has been assessed (Early Help, CIN, S47) as being abusive towards their parent or carer and where there is no current domestic abuse between adults in the family home

A family where there is an allocated worker who can reinforce messages from the programme and complement this through direct work.

A family where the parent and young person have completed and signed the referral form and are willing to engage in the programme

### We expect that...

Key workers/social workers keep in touch with group facilitators throughout the programme to monitor progress and alert them to any significant events or information prior to each session

Key workers/social workers attend at least one session with their client

Key workers/social workers keep the family on their caseload until the programme is complete

### You can expect that...

Facilitators will be allocated to a specific family in the group. They will conduct home visits and prepare the family for the programme.

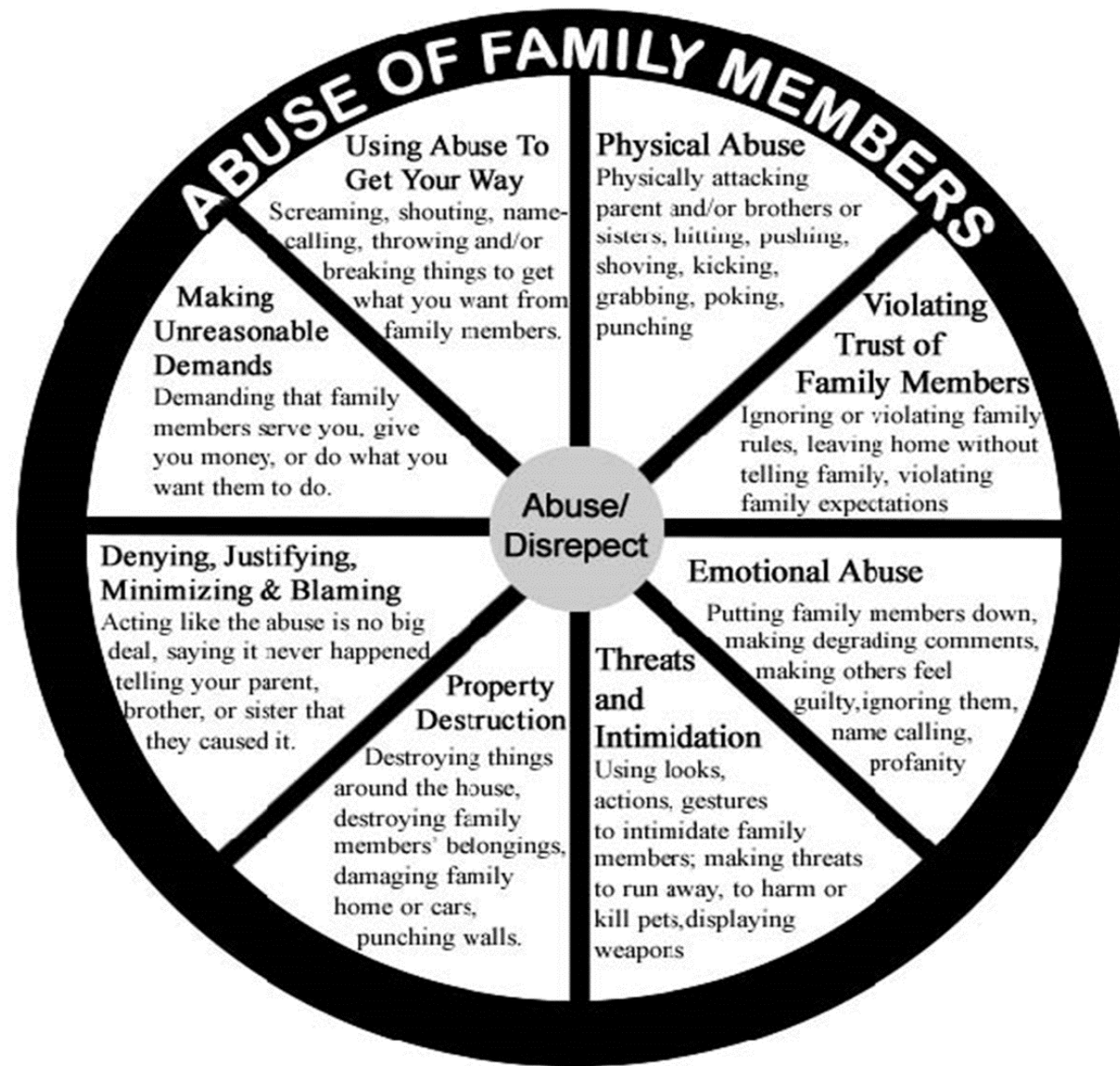
Facilitators will share **appropriate** information from the sessions with key workers/social workers, particularly if there are any issues of concern.

Facilitators will encourage the families to attend the sessions and support them throughout.

### Referral Pathways

For further information or to discuss a family's suitability for the programme, contact Stronger Families Consultant for the Step Up programme – Sam Scaddan [sam.scaddan@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:sam.scaddan@kirklees.gov.uk) prior to the referral.

## Appendix 1— Abuse Wheel



## Bibliography

Home Office (2015) Information guide: adolescent to parent violence and abuse (APVA) accessed here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/420963/APVA.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/420963/APVA.pdf)

Teen Violence at home Family Lives accessed here: <https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/teenagers/behaviour/teen-violence-at-home/>

## Local Contacts

### **Children's Social Care—Front Door**

For Professionals (24 hours) 01484 414960

For members of the public (Office hours only) 01484 456848, outside of office hours contact the relevant emergency service

### **Early Support**

01484 456823

### **Step Up Programme**

Sam.Scadden@kiirklees.gov.uk

### **P-Can (Parents of Children with Additional Needs)**

Www.pcankirklees.org

07754 102336

### **Whole Autism Family**

<http://thewholeautismfamily.co.uk/about.html>

### **Contact a family** (online support for families with disabled children)

<https://contact.org.uk/>