



## Domestic abuse scenario - secondary

### DSL Information Sheet

#### Questions for the DSL to facilitate a discussion:

- Is there reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect? In what way?
- How might the school deal with the issue of consent?
- Who needs to be involved in exploring these concerns?

#### Analysis

- You are aware that Ben's parents have separated and that, whilst this was disruptive for Ben at the time, he appears to have become used to the change and the subsequent arrangements. What you do not know from this information is what the current care arrangements are (e.g. is care shared, how often does he see each parent?).
- The behaviour seen today is clearly out of character for Ben as there is no history of violence and aggression to this level - at this stage it is not clear what the other young person said to him, however we do know that Ben does not normally react in this way.
- Ben has told us that he has not seen his mother this morning, but the hypothesis is that the state of the property this morning is likely to reflect whatever happened last night. Is Ben therefore worried about what has happened to his mother? Information from Ben suggests that whilst he was not in the room, he has heard everything that happened, and it is therefore likely that he has created an image of what has gone on from the noises that he heard, however as yet he has had no way of confirming or disproving this.
- At this stage we do not know who Deano is, and whether that is his real name or not. Our working hypothesis is that this is a new relationship, however we do need to ensure that we maintain an open mind and do not exclude other possibilities too early (Deano may be supplying drugs to mother and she may have a drug debt for example, or Deano may be exploiting Ben's mother in some way and this was his retaliation for her not having done what she was told).
- In looking at the recent history, we are aware that something has changed over the last couple of weeks - there has been a marked change in Ben's



presentation, which has led to him become isolated and impacting on his school work. We therefore need to consider the possibility that this is not the first incident that has happened between his mother and Deano.

- At present the information available does not suggest that this is a child protection issue, however it is likely that a referral will be required to Children's Social Care, we do however need to be mindful that this may change dependent on information that comes out during our involvement.

## Action

- Ben should be provided with support and space away from the class to talk about what has happened in the last few weeks. This should also look to identify whether he has any immediate concerns about his mother and what support can be provided to help allay those fears (e.g. can he be allowed to call his mother at home and speak to her to check that she is OK). What can Ben tell us about Deano and his relationship with Ben's mother?
- It will be helpful to speak to staff to look at what the timeline has been for the changes in Ben's behaviour - this will help to provide more solid information about timeframes for our concerns.
- There will need to be a conversation with Ben's mother to talk through what has happened and discuss a referral to Children's Services. We need to bear in mind that when speaking to Ben's mother on the phone, she may be with Deano and therefore may not feel able to talk freely about what has happened. Ideally the discussion with her should be face to face and with her alone if possible - from the school's perspective Deano has no responsibility for Ben and so these are grounds for making sure that you only speak with Ben's mother.
- Through a conversation with Ben's mother we should also attempt to determine whether this is domestic abuse or whether there is something else happening.
- It would be sensible to try to obtain details on Deano from Ben's mother (for example date of birth, any other names and any other children). This could be undertaken by a senior member of staff rather than the teacher.
- Establish what we know about Ben's father - is he local? Does he have regular contact with Ben? Is it an option for him to support Ben in some way? Do we know if Ben has spoken to him about what is happening, and if so what has he done about it? This information will help to identify



whether Ben's father is a protective factor and could, if deemed necessary by the multi-agency response, provide alternative accommodation for Ben as a temporary measure.

- At first reasonable opportunity talk directly to Ben's mother about domestic abuse, making information available about local groups with support and compassion. Again there should be recognition that Deano may be present if this is done over the phone.
- Record the concern with the background and your analysis.
- If mother does not consent to a referral a decision will have to be made about the level of concern and whether what is known means that there is enough concern to dispense with consent.
- Have increased awareness of Ben; provide natural opportunities to talk if he needs to. If he does talk remember: do not interrogate, ask open questions.
- Consider what is happening more widely in the school to raise the profile of domestic abuse? What information is around the school, what aspects of relationships are covered in curriculum, etc.