Home Office

# Duty on police forces in England and Wales to notify education establishments of domestic abuse incidents: Operation Encompass

## Statutory guidance for policing

November 2025

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# Ministerial Foreword

Each and every child deserves the best possible start in life. They deserve to be and feel safe, and to be supported and seen by the adults around them – at home, at school and in their communities.

For far too many children in the UK, home is not always a place of safety. The true number of children affected by domestic abuse remains unknown – but what we do know is the devastating and long-lasting impact on children that domestic abuse leaves behind.

In 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act marked a significant shift. It recognised what survivors and professionals have long known – that children who see, hear or experience domestic abuse are victims in their own right. But recognition alone is not enough. This government is taking strides to turn that recognition into meaningful, practical action.

Fifteen years ago, David and Elisabeth Carney-Haworth OBE established Operation Encompass, drawing on their experience as a police officer and head teacher. The innovative information-sharing system provides a vital link between policing and education, ensuring that educational settings are notified when a child is a victim of domestic abuse, and can provide timely support. Thanks to their dedication, all 43 police forces in England and Wales operate the scheme voluntarily.

Now, we are building on their work as we take the next step in commencing Operation Encompass as a statutory duty on police forces, embedding the scheme in legislation as a core part of our safeguarding and domestic abuse response.

This statutory guidance sets out how the duty should be implemented, and how agencies can work together to recognise children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right.

I am grateful to David and Elisabeth for their unwavering commitment and vision in establishing Operation Encompass, laying the foundation for this statutory duty. I am also grateful to the police officers, educators and safeguarding professionals who protect and support children every day.

Together, we can build a system that centres the voice of children and protects them from harm, ensuring they have access to the right help at the right time, irrespective of who they are or where they live.

**Jess Phillips**, Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls

# Introduction

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognised children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right if they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse. The response to domestic abuse must recognise the impact that domestic abuse has on children and should be informed by the voice and needs of children, ensuring that children affected by domestic abuse are supported. Everyone has a role to play in safeguarding and protecting children who are victims of domestic abuse. Successful outcomes for children affected by domestic abuse depend on strong multi-agency working and partnership across the whole system of help, support and protection. Effective support requires police and educational settings to work together.

This guidance is issued alongside commencement of the duty on police forces in England and Wales to notify any relevant educational establishment, where they have attended a domestic abuse incident in a child's home. This is known as the Operation Encompass Scheme. The duty is set out in Section 49A of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, as outlined in Section 20 of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024.

**Words used in this guidance**

All references to a 'child', 'children' and 'pupil' through this document should be taken in relation to children from reception (typically aged 4/5) up to the age of 17.

'Educational settings', 'education' and 'relevant educational establishment' refer to registered primary and secondary schools, including independent schools, private schools, alternative provision settings (e.g., Pupil Referral Units), as well as further education colleges and 16-19 academies.

As education is devolved, 'existing statutory guidance' refers to the relevant existing statutory guidance in England and Wales. In England, this includes Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children. In Wales, this includes Keeping Learners Safe in Wales. This duty does not replace duties and responsibilities as set out in existing statutory guidance.

Where the words 'must' and 'must not' are used, they represent a statutory requirement. Where the word 'should' is used, it represents something police in England and Wales should do that is not a mandatory requirement.

# About this guidance

## What is this guidance and who is it for?

- **This guidance is statutory.** It supports police forces to implement the information-sharing duty, known as Operation Encompass, as outlined in Section 49A of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The guidance is intended to recognise and respond to children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right.

- This guidance does not replace existing statutory guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children in England, and Keeping Learners Safe in Wales.

- This guidance outlines the principles of the information-sharing duty and the Operation Encompass scheme. It supports police forces in England and Wales with best practice guidance on the implementation of the Operation Encompass scheme and supports them on their existing duties in protecting children. This guidance works alongside police operational processes, which will vary by force.

## What does this guidance cover?

This statutory guidance covers:

- the legislative requirements that apply to police forces in England and Wales;

- Operation Encompass notifications, including recommended practice and available training;

- wider context on identifying children affected by domestic abuse through a strengthened police response; and

- a toolkit of resources on Operation Encompass.

## What does this guidance not cover?

This guidance does not cover:

- making formal safeguarding referrals to local authority children's social care, and it does not replace duties and responsibilities as set out in existing statutory guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children in England, and Keeping Learners Safe in Wales.

- wider police and system responses to children affected by domestic abuse.

## Safeguarding referrals

- **An Operation Encompass notification does not replace a safeguarding referral.**

- In England, as outlined in the multi-agency statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children, local authority children's social care has the responsibility for clarifying the process for referrals in their area.

- In Wales, the process for completing a child protection referral is outlined in the Wales Safeguarding Procedure.

- **Anyone who has concerns about a child's welfare should make a referral to local authority children's social care.** They should do so immediately if there is a concern that the child is suffering significant harm or is likely to do so.

- Forces and educational settings should have an open communication process to determine where a safeguarding referral should be made in accordance with local thresholds. If an officer makes a referral alongside issuing an Operation Encompass notification, they should tell the child's educational setting.

# Section 1: Children affected by domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is one of the most prevalent forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). In the year ending March 2025, an estimated 3.8 million people aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the last year.[1] According to the 2023 Crime Survey for England and Wales, in nearly one third (32.4%) of cases where adults aged 16 to 59 reported experiencing partner abuse, there was at least one child under the age of 16 living in the household at the time of the most recent incident.[2,3]

The hidden nature of domestic abuse and unreported incidents can lead to children's experiences remaining hidden. As such, the true scale of children affected by domestic abuse is higher than suggested. All children affected by domestic abuse, whether or not the perpetrator is living in the home, should be able to access support and be recognised as victims in their own right.

## The impact of domestic abuse

The impact on children living with domestic abuse is profound and long-lasting. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales's 'Victims in their own right?' report (2025)[4] and wider research indicate that exposure to domestic abuse can significantly affect a child's physical and emotional wellbeing, mental health, behaviour and social development, ability to form healthy relationships and secure attachments, and likelihood of being re-victimised later in life.

Children can experience domestic abuse in a variety of ways. They might be the subject of controlling and coercive behaviour, hear or see the abuse, witness its effects, or become aware of the abuse via other means. Regardless of how children experience domestic abuse, they will be impacted. This includes the impact of damaging family dynamics emerging as a result of the abuse.

## The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Babies, children and young people are recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right under Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 if they see, hear or experience

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[1] Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

[2] *Respondents to the CSEW who reported being victims of partner abuse in the last year and living in a household with at least one child under the age of 16 were asked to specify whether any children in the household saw or heard what happened during the most recent incident in which they were threatened or physically abused.*

[3] Partner abuse in detail - Office for National Statistics

[4] Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 'Victims in their own right? Babies, children and young people's experiences of domestic abuse' (https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/reports/)

the effects of domestic abuse and are related to either the victim or perpetrator of the abuse, or either the victim or perpetrator of the abuse has parental responsibility for that child.

**Defining domestic abuse**

Domestic abuse involves someone carrying out threatening behaviour, violence or abuse towards someone they're 'personally connected' to (for example, someone they are or have been in an intimate personal relationship with or married to). It doesn't just mean physical abuse; it can involve psychological, physical, sexual and/or financial abuse. A range of criminal offences can take place, including controlling or coercive behaviour, stalking, criminal damage, physical assault, sexual assault, rape, and murder. For the purposes of this document, 'honour'-based abuse is in scope where the abuse meets the statutory definition of domestic abuse.

Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines that a child is a victim of domestic abuse if a child (a) sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, domestic abuse and (b) is related to the perpetrator or victim of domestic abuse. A child is related to a person if (a) the person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child or (b) the child and the person are relatives.

This legislative context is essential to recognise children's experiences and the impact of domestic abuse. It means that children and their voices must be at the heart of the response to domestic abuse. Under the legislation, agencies and organisations must recognise children as victims in their own right and support them accordingly. This includes commissioning local services that are tailored to the specific needs of children, and delivering a joined-up, multi-agency response to babies, children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

# Section 2: The duty (Operation Encompass)

## The Operation Encompass scheme

Operation Encompass is an information-sharing scheme between the police and relevant educational settings. The scheme enables territorial police forces in England and Wales to notify educational settings and, where relevant, local authorities about domestic abuse incidents they attend, including those attended via Rapid Video Response. Incidents are subject to an Operation Encompass notification where a child under 18 is a victim of domestic abuse. This includes children who are physically present at the incident, children who are not physically present during the incident, and situations where the child might reside in another household temporarily or permanently. The aim is to support educational settings to provide timely, informed support to children affected by domestic abuse in the environment where they spend most of their time, in line with their existing duties and responsibilities as set out in existing statutory guidance.

Operation Encompass started in 2010 as a voluntary scheme established by David and Elisabeth Carney-Haworth OBE. To date, the scheme has operated in all 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales on a voluntary basis and has supported thousands of children. The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 placed the information-sharing scheme on legislative footing, making it a statutory duty for police forces to notify educational settings after they attend domestic abuse incidents.

Educational settings are often the only consistent support available to some children. Many children affected by domestic abuse are not known to any other services, and the domestic abuse they experience may not reach the threshold for intervention by social care. Operation Encompass does not apply a threshold of harm and ensures every child affected by domestic abuse benefits from a level of protection and support.

## The duty

### Section 49A

- Section 20 of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 introduced a new provision into Part 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (‘the Act’) Section 49A of the Act, titled ‘Arrangements to notify schools’, places a statutory duty on all 43 territorial police forces across England and Wales to implement the Operation Encompass information-sharing scheme.

- **Under this duty, forces have a legal duty to notify a child’s educational establishment if they have reasonable grounds to believe that a child may be a victim of domestic abuse**. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises all children as victims in their own right. This includes situations where the child sees, hears,

witnesses or otherwise experiences the effects of domestic abuse. **This includes all children connected to the household**, including where children are not physically present during the incident and situations where they might reside in another household temporarily or permanently.

- **The duty applies to all children in education** from reception (typically aged 4/5) up to the age of 17, and who are enrolled in registered primary and secondary schools, including independent schools, private schools, alternative provision settings (e.g., Pupil Referral Units), as well as further education colleges or 16 to 19 academies in England or Wales.

- **Where a child is home educated or missing education, notifications should be made to the relevant local authority.** See the 'Home educated children and children missing education' section of this guidance for further information.

- **The duty does not replace formal safeguarding referral processes or existing statutory guidance.**

- **The duty solely applies to domestic abuse incidents.**

## What does the duty not cover?

- **Early years settings:** The duty does not currently extend to early years settings or to infants who are not yet in an educational setting, even when the setting is part of a wider educational setting, for example a nursery in a primary school. Police forces are able to notify early years settings in their Operation Encompass process: there is just no legal requirement to do so.

- **Educational settings not covered by the duty:** The notification scheme's scope is limited to registered educational settings in England and Wales. This means that unregistered educational settings,[5] overseas schools and higher education institutions (e.g., universities and other institutions for over 18 education) are not covered under the duty.

- **Young people aged 18 and over:** Though the duty does not extend to individuals aged 18 and over, many individuals aged 18 and over will still attend educational settings such as secondary schools (e.g., sixth form), as well as further education colleges or 16 to 19 academies. Police forces are able to notify these educational settings in their Operation Encompass process: there is just no legal requirement to do so.

- **Civilian police forces:** The duty only applies to the 43 civilian territorial police forces in England and Wales. However, Service Police are voluntarily implementing

[5] **Unregistered educational settings are illegal.** Where a child is attending an unregistered educational setting, the notification should be made to the local authority to both notify them of the incident and to alert them to the unregistered educational setting.

Operation Encompass across Ministry of Defence (MoD) schools overseas, recognising it as best practice and aligning with the MoD's domestic abuse action plan. MoD school locations are listed on GOV.UK.

## Roles and responsibilities

Effective implementation of the Operation Encompass scheme is dependent on strong multi-agency collaboration, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for key professionals across police forces.

### Policing

#### *Frontline officer*

- All frontline officers within a force should be aware that Operation Encompass notifications do not replace usual safeguarding procedures and safeguarding referrals.

- All frontline officers within a force should be fully trained in Operation Encompass. This includes its purpose, when to apply it, and how to apply it effectively. Training is available through the Operation Encompass charity.

- Frontline officers attending domestic abuse incidents, including via Rapid Video Response, should make every reasonable effort to identify all children connected to the household. This includes children who are not immediately visible (e.g., asleep or hiding), children who live there permanently or temporarily, visiting children, and children who are not present at the incident.

- Officers should conduct a check on the welfare of any children present at the scene to ensure their safety, in line with their force's processes. This should include speaking directly with the child, whether in-person or via Rapid Video Response. Officers should gather key information from the child (where appropriate), parent, caregiver or guardian at an incident, such as the child or young person's name, date of birth, and their educational setting.

- Officers must make an Operation Encompass notification for all children connected to the household. This includes children who are physically present at the incident, children who are not physically present during the incident, and situations where children might reside in another household temporarily or permanently.

- The notification should be made before the start of the next school day. In exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible to make a notification before the start of the next school day. In this case, the notification should be made as soon as possible.

#### *Operation Encompass lead*

- The Operation Encompass lead ensures consistent and effective implementation across the police force. They serve as the main contact, working with educational

settings, safeguarding leads, and internal teams to embed the scheme into daily safeguarding practices.

- Notifications must only be shared with the trained Key Adults in an educational setting, which specifically include the Designated Safeguarding Lead, sometimes known as the Designated Safeguarding Person, and their Deputy.

- The Chief Constable is responsible for the effective delivery of Operation Encompass. This includes ensuring a system of governance is in place which is responsible for implementation of the duty. The Chief Constable is also responsible for the provision of appropriate professional development of staff in order to implement the duty.

- A designated police lead is appointed to oversee implementation, align delivery with Home Office guidance, and ensure timely communication with educational settings before the start of the school day. This includes overseeing that notifications are made following a Rapid Video Response to an incident.

## Education

Education policy and safeguarding policy are devolved to the Welsh Government.

### *Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)*

- A DSL is responsible for leading on all safeguarding and child protection matters within an educational setting. They are likely to be the Key Adult for Operation Encompass notifications and are responsible for making safeguarding referrals to appropriate agencies, maintaining up-to-date safeguarding policies and training, overseeing record-keeping, and liaising with families where appropriate.

- DSLs may wish to use a central safeguarding inbox to ensure they have oversight over all Operation Encompass notifications.

- Additional training for Key Adults on the Operation Encompass scheme is available through the Operation Encompass charity.

- Duties and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children are outlined in existing statutory guidance, which includes Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance in England, and Keeping Learners Safe in Wales.

## Local authorities

- **An Operation Encompass notification does not replace making a safeguarding referral to children's social care.** Where police officers have concerns about a child's welfare, they should make a referral. A referral should be made immediately if there is a concern that a child is suffering significant harm or is likely to do so.

- Local authorities should always be notified and involved where there is no relevant educational setting to notify. This could include cases where a child is educated other than in an educational setting (e.g., home educated) or missing education.
- Local authorities may also be notified where police forces' process is to issue notifications to both educational settings and local authorities.
- Please see further information under the 'Notifying local authorities' section of this guidance.

# Making Operation Encompass notifications

## When to make an Operation Encompass notification?

A notification must be made if **any** of the following apply:

- A child has been directly involved in an incident of domestic abuse;
- A child has witnessed an incident of domestic abuse, or was present in the home;
- A Child Concern Notification (CCN) has been created by police for domestic abuse;
- A child resides at the address where the incident occurred, even if not present at the time;
- A child is away from the address where the incident occurred, including in cases where the child might be temporarily or permanently residing elsewhere.

### The process

The process of making an Operation Encompass notification involves a telephone call, email or notification made via another electronic method to an educational setting's Key Adult, usually the Designated Safeguarding Lead, before the start of the next school day following the incident. Each police force will have its designated process and systems for making notifications.

### Identifying a child's educational setting

- Police officers can identify the relevant educational setting through the child or the non-abusive parent/caregiver at the scene or, where this is not possible, through the local authority.
- Police officers should consult with their force's Operation Encompass lead for information on their local process and systems.

### Timeliness

- **Timeliness is key to making an effective Operation Encompass notification**. A notification is most effective if made before the start of the next school day. In

exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible to make a notification before the start of the next school day. In this case, the notification should be made as soon as possible.

- **Timely information-sharing enables educational settings to provide support as soon as they are made aware of a child's experiences.** This can help educational settings to respond early to signs of trauma, distress, or changes in behaviour, maintain routine and stability by minimising disruption to learning, and monitor safeguarding concerns.

- **Some police forces may also issue a notification to the local authority where a child resides as part of their process.** Officers should follow their force's due process. The duty places a requirement on police forces to issue Operation Encompass notifications to educational settings. If an additional notification to the local authority is part of the force's process, **it should be done in addition to and alongside notifications to educational settings, not instead of and should not impact the timeliness in notifying the educational setting.**

- Officers should consider making further referrals to specialist domestic abuse services where appropriate.

- Where a child is educated other than in an educational setting (e.g., home educated) or missing education, local authorities should always be notified before the start of the next 'school day'.

### What information should a notification include?

- The notification should include:

    - The **name, date of birth and protected characteristics (e.g., disability, race, religion etc.) of any child from that educational setting** who is related to any adult involved in the incident, whether the adult is the alleged perpetrator or non-abusive relative;

    - The **relationship of the child to the victim and to the perpetrator**;

    - The **police reference number**;

    - The **location, time and date** of the incident;

    - **If the child was present**, and if so, where they were. Notifications should be shared even if the child was not present at this particular incident;

    - **The voice of the child**, such as what they are saying and how they are behaving. This involves actively listening to children and considering their opinion and views, whilst recognising that each child will have their own experience of domestic abuse. Officers should be particularly mindful that

children may be care experienced or have protected characteristics, such as a disability. See section 3 for resources on capturing the voice of the child;

- If the child was spoken to, what they said, how they were acting, and whether this conversation was in the presence of another adult or the police officer only; and
- The **context and the circumstances** of the incident, including context on whether an arrest was made, whether the incident was attended in person or via Rapid Video Response, and, where possible, information on previous domestic abuse incidents. Police officers can search for previous reports on incidents attended for this detail.

- **Each child's experience and needs vary.** In cases involving siblings or multiple children who attend the same educational setting, police may choose to issue a separate notification for each child, or issue one notification, which should still include the voice of each child. This should be in line with their force's process. Where a force's process is to issue one notification for multiple children, the force should ensure the format of their notification allows for the voice and experience of each child to be captured separately. It is not sufficient for the notification to group together the experience of multiple children.
- Officers should consider what the educational setting needs to know about the child's lived experience and the specific incident they are responding to.
- Police forces should provide educational settings with a direct email and telephone number so that they can contact the police if they need to change contact details or request further information about an incident.
- In cases where 'honour' based abuse or harmful practices have been disclosed, engagement between statutory services and wider family members can increase risk. Careful consideration and discretion should be used about information sharing and confidentiality to prevent escalation and harm.

### What information should a notification not include?

- Under the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992, **anonymity for victims of sexual offences must be preserved**.
- Officers must be mindful of the content of their notification should there be any sexual offences disclosed within the domestic abuse incident. This must not be disclosed in the notification.

### Ensuring children are heard

- Frontline officers should not base their assessment of the risk of harm to a child solely on the identified risk level of the adults involved, whether that is the abusive or non-abusive parent or guardian.

- For children who do not speak English or Welsh as a first language, who are non-verbal or have impaired hearing, officers should refer to the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, whereby victims have the right to understand and be understood, including, where necessary, access to interpretation and translation services.[6]

## Notifying local authorities

- Some police forces may also issue a notification to the local authority where a child resides as part of their process. Officers should follow their force's due process.

- The duty places a requirement on police forces to issue Operation Encompass notifications to educational settings. If an additional notification to the local authority is part of the force's process, **it should be done in addition to and alongside notifications to educational settings, not instead of.**

- Children's social care referral processes should still be followed as usual, following local protocols.

- As detailed in the 'Home educated children and children missing education' section below, where a child is not enrolled in an educational setting or is educated other than in an educational setting (e.g., home education), local authorities should always be notified.

**Operation Encompass notifications facilitate sharing between policing and educational settings and do not replace the usual referral processes to children's social care.** Children's safeguarding and social care referral process should still be followed as usual, following local protocols.

Where police officers have concerns about a child's welfare, they should consider whether a referral needs to be made. They should make a referral immediately if there is a concern that a child is suffering significant harm or is likely to do so.[7]

## Data protection

- Operation Encompass involves the sharing of personal and sensitive information about children and families. It is vital that all participants comply with data protection legislation.

- Police forces and educational settings are responsible for deciding how and where information about incidents and notifications are made. They must ensure it remains confidential, is held securely, and adheres to the requirements of the Data Protect Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

[6] Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victim's Code), Right 1

[7] Working Together to Safeguard Children, page 57, para 150.

## Children using harm

- In some cases, Operation Encompass notifications may relate to incidents where a child is identified as the individual using abusive behaviour.[8] This includes situations involving child to parent/caregiver abuse or teenage relationship abuse and cases where the domestic abuse incident involves another child.

- It is important to consider the impact on other children, whether they are in the same household or living elsewhere (e.g., siblings living apart, children who are care experienced, etc.). **A notification must be made for all children who are victims of domestic abuse.** A notification should also be considered where children have been impacted by the abusive behaviour of a child aged under 16, where this does not fall under the statutory definition of domestic abuse but is contextually similar.

- Police officers can also choose to inform the educational setting where a child is identified as using harm. Where a child using harm has been identified but no crime has been raised, the notification can still be made. This does not require proof of harm or a formal disclosure. It is sufficient for the officer to have seen or heard enough to form a professional judgement.

- Where police officers have concerns about a child's welfare, whether it is the child using harm, or another child experiencing that abuse, they should consider whether a referral to children's social care services needs to be made. **A referral should be made immediately if there is a concern that a child is suffering significant harm or is likely to do so.**

## Weekends and school breaks

- In the case of weekends and school breaks, notifications should be made before the start of the next school day following the incident.

- In the case of summer breaks, the same timeframe to make a notification as soon as possible still applies. Educational settings will access notifications ahead of when children return. **Police forces should also consider making a notification to a local authority to ensure that social care services are aware.**

## Home educated children and children missing education

- Children who are educated other than in an educational setting (e.g., home educated) or children missing education may face additional barriers to accessing support. Without regular interaction with education professionals, who are often well placed to identify and respond to safeguarding concerns, some children may be particularly vulnerable.

[8] See page 6 for definition of domestic abuse

- In these instances, the local authority is responsible. Notifications should be made in the earliest reasonable opportunity, before the start of the next 'school day'.

- Notifications may be to an identified local authority officer or team responsible for education other than in an educational setting such as home education, or for children missing education. Police forces should ensure that local agreements are in place which make clear who notifications should be sent to within the local authority.

## Notifications across local authorities

- In some situations, a police officer might attend a domestic abuse incident in a local area that differs from the local area where a child attends an educational setting.

- In this case, the notification must still be sent to the educational setting attended by a child.

- Police forces should also consider making a notification to both the local authority where the incident took place and the local authority where the child resides to ensure that social care services are aware.

## Recording data

- It is good practice for police forces to collect data on the scheme, including the number of notifications sent and the number of children involved in these notifications.

- Capturing notification data helps build a clearer picture of the volume of children affected by domestic abuse supported via Operation Encompass. It ensures that the voice of the child is heard and considered at the time of the domestic abuse incident. It also helps professionals understand the true scale of domestic abuse and respond appropriately to children's needs.

- Recording data can also help identify areas with greater levels of need. This can support local services, including domestic abuse services, to target support more effectively.

- It is good practice to use a system that confirms when the notification has been accessed by the educational setting and records the time at which it was read.

# Section 3: Additional resources and toolkit

## Operation Encompass Charity: resources

The Operation Encompass charity website holds a range of resources for police forces, including free training on the scheme. Though the duty and this statutory guidance is for police forces, the website also shares additional resources and training for educational settings which they may find useful.

While the links and resources available on the Operation Encompass charity may support implementation and wider understanding, they are not directly linked to the government's statutory duty regarding Operation Encompass or this statutory guidance. Any use of these resources should be considered supplementary and not as a substitute for official guidance or policy. Resources are available in English and in Welsh.

- Operation Encompass Charity resources for police forces
- Operation Encompass Charity resources for educational settings
- Operation Encompass Pathways Police training
- School training

## Specialist domestic abuse support services

- Specialist support services can provide vital support to children. Police forces should consider making referrals to appropriate specialist support services for children affected by domestic abuse, recognising their distinct needs. The availability and nature of these services vary by local area. Local areas will be familiar with the support services available in their area, and police forces should be aware of what services are available to victims in their force's area.

- Officers should ensure that the child's details are included in any referrals made to specialist domestic abuse support services referrals made for the adult. Additionally, referrals for children should include the correct contact details for a safe (non-abusive) adult, or the child themselves where appropriate, so that support services can contact them to offer support.

## Recording evidence from children

When a child shares information about a domestic abuse incident, staff should approach the situation with empathy, professionalism, and a trauma-informed approach. This applies to all staff who might engage with the child, such as the frontline police officer and staff in

educational settings. The following should be considered when supporting the child and recording any information they disclose:

- **Recognise how the child might be feeling**. Avoid making assumptions based on their visible behaviour. Children who appear calm may still be experiencing distress. There is no one way of reacting to being exposed to domestic abuse and each child is different.

- **Support without judgement.** Use trauma-informed language and maintain a patient, calm, supportive approach. Interviewing techniques to build trust and understanding might include asking open-ended questions, using reflective listening, and offering affirmations to validate their feelings.

- **Consider the child's wishes and feelings.** Adapt your approach to suit the child's developmental stage, age, and communication style. Use language they understand and give them space to express themselves in their own way.

- **Trust your professional judgement.** If something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts. Raise any concerns with the educational setting's Designated Safeguarding Lead.

- **Record carefully and accurately.** Record the child's words verbatim where possible and avoid paraphrasing or interpreting what they are saying. Note the context of the disclosure (e.g., time, setting, emotional state). Keep records factual, clear, and free from personal opinion or assumptions. In educational settings, staff should follow existing confidentiality processes.

- For children who do not speak English or Welsh as a first language, who are non-verbal or have impaired hearing, officers should refer to the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, whereby victims have the right to understand and be understood, including, where necessary, access to interpretation and translation services.[9]

- The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme has published guidance for police on the voice of the child.

- The NSPCC has a wide range of resources to support professionals to capture the voice of the child. Resources are available in English and Welsh.

## The Operation Encompass evaluation and Frontline Officer Response review

Under the 2020 to 2023 Shared Outcomes Fund, the Home Office commissioned the following independent research projects:

[9] Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victim's Code), Right 1

- a process evaluation of Operation Encompass. This aimed to explore how Operation Encompass and its pilot expansion to early years settings were implemented in practice. It included interviews with stakeholders in the police, local authority services and educational settings, and analysis of Operation Encompass notification data; and

- A mixed methods review into how frontline police officers respond to children being present at domestic abuse incidents. The research aimed to better understand current practice, processes, attitudes and behaviours among responding officers when attending to these incidents. This is separate project to the Operation Encompass evaluation, relating to the policing response overall, rather than Operation Encompass specifically.

The findings of both the evaluation and review informed the development of this guidance.