

# Hear My Voice

A response to Children being recognised as  
Victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse

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This document was originally created prior to the  
Domestic Abuse Act 2021, updated in February 2024.



**There are many positive aspects to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 but one which should have heralded truly ground breaking changes was that children were recognised as victims of domestic violence and abuse in their own right.**

This should have been ground breaking and change making, however can only be recognised as such if we can all demonstrate the ways in which this recognition has transformed and improved the day to day lives of children and the support that is available for them.

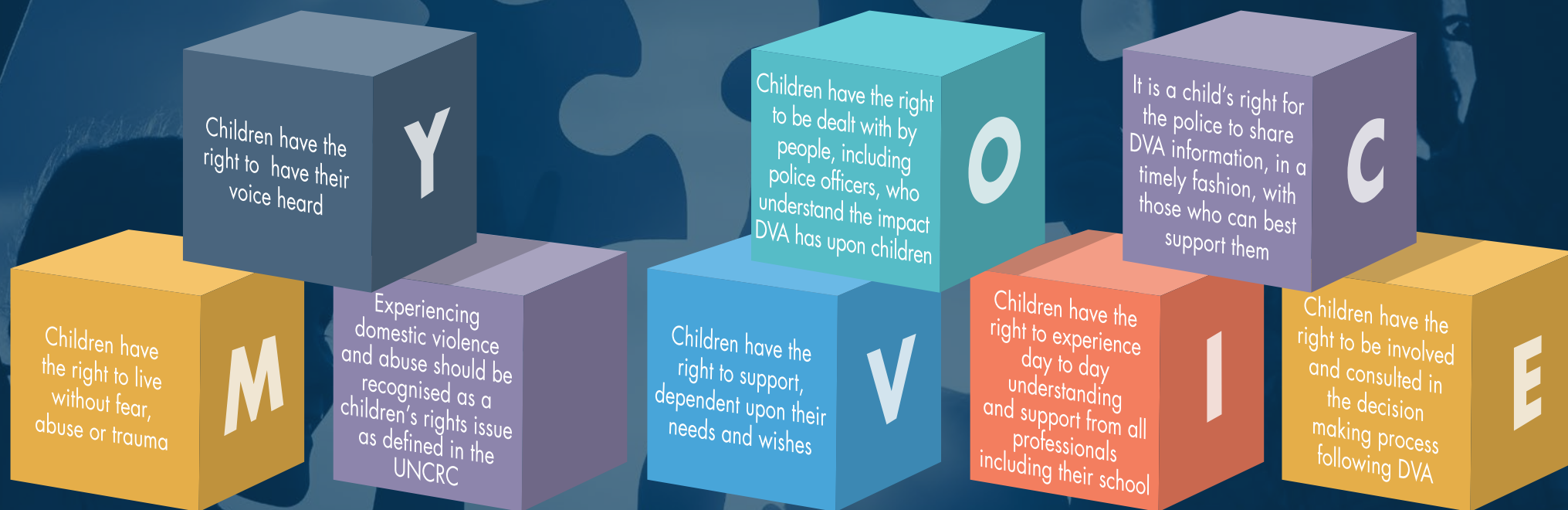
*The key overarching principle is the fundamental requirement for us to listen to the voice of children throughout the life course of the domestic violence and abuse and beyond, recognising that the damage created by the domestic violence and abuse continues long after the abuse has ceased. Children's voices must be heard at every stage; by the police who attend the home, by schools who support the child, by other agencies who may be supporting the child and the family and by the courts, especially when they are deciding upon contact arrangements. Children must know that their views, fears, concerns and opinions will be heard and responded to.*

Every child has the right to thrive and grow experiencing safe, secure and nurturing relationships within safe, secure and nurturing environments.

Operation Encompass has provided a response to the recognition of children as victims as outlined in the Act.

# The Child's Victim Support Code

This code sets out the key rights and minimum level of support that children experiencing domestic violence and abuse should expect from all professionals. Professionals includes, but is not limited to, police, health, education, local authorities, domestic violence and abuse support services and the judiciary.



## What is currently in place:

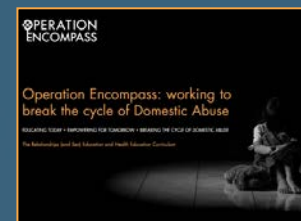
**The existence and reach of Operation Encompass** supports the recognition of children as victims of domestic violence and abuse. The timely sharing of information between the police and schools concerning all domestic violence and abuse incidents enables immediate support to be provided to children by staff in school. Operation Encompass is an exemplar of early intervention and information sharing to support and safeguard children.

**Operation Encompass free National Online Training** - together with the additional resources created by Operation Encompass, ensure that teachers, school staff and Governors have a basic knowledge and understanding of domestic violence and abuse, its impact upon children and how they can best support the children in their care. The training, Operation Encompass website resources and handbooks are free and available for all to use.

### **The National Operation Encompass Teachers' Helpline**

The Helpline provides advice and guidance for educational professionals about Operation Encompass.

Access to Educational or Clinical Psychologists can enable staff in educational settings to discuss how best to support individual children who are experiencing domestic abuse, or to discuss whole school policies for supporting children.



**The three Operation Encompass supportive handbooks** have been created to support schools to understand domestic violence and abuse, its impact upon children and the steps that they can take to support these children. They cover:

1. Recognising children experiencing domestic violence and abuse as a vulnerable group within school.
2. How school staff can support children experiencing domestic violence and abuse on a day-to-day basis.
3. Teaching about domestic violence and abuse in the Relationships (and Sex) Education and Health Education Curriculum.

### **Further free resources provided by Operation Encompass:**

Videos explaining about age-appropriate ways to support children experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

Book Reviews to support Relationships (and Sex) Education and Health Education Curriculum.

When this document was first created in 2020, these were the actions that we were calling for. Sadly there is still much to do and few of these actions have been achieved by the Government and other agencies working in this field.

**Publicise that children are now recognised as victims of domestic violence and abuse in their own right and why this has been enshrined in law.**

Ensure that living with domestic violence and abuse is also acknowledged as a children's rights issue (UNCRC).

**Increase public understanding** and community awareness of impact of domestic violence and abuse on children through media campaigns, discussion groups, conferences and community events. This should lead to greater understanding which in turn will lead to greater support and recognition of signs of domestic violence and abuse.

**Remove all references in all government documents to 'the adult victim and their child'** and replace with 'the adult and child victims'. Ensure that all external agencies the government supports, funds and work with do the same.

**Remove all references to children 'witnessing'** domestic violence and abuse and replace with children 'experiencing' domestic violence and abuse. Ensure that all agencies the government supports, funds and work with do the same.

**Develop collaborative working across agencies and Government departments** which uses and builds upon each partner agency's skills and knowledge for the benefit of all children experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

**Undertake a scoping exercise** of England and Wales to determine the size of the issue i.e., the number of children living with domestic violence and abuse and the range of impacts for a child living with domestic violence and abuse including understanding the possibility of intergenerational transmission of trauma from domestic violence and abuse.

**Office of National Statistics to collect information about the numbers of children involved in domestic abuse incidents attended by police.** This would enable the government to have a more accurate picture of the size of the issue and would put children on a par with the counting of adult victims which currently takes place. Statistical evidence on children to form part of the national domestic abuse reports and HMICFRS inspections.

(Continued...)

# Operation Encompass is calling for the following actions (continued):

**Ensure that all adults and professionals** who work with or support children and families understand the impact of domestic violence and abuse **on all children**, are aware of protective factors such as relationships, nurture, safety, security, trauma informed care and practice and can identify locally and nationally available resources to provide support, including recognising behaviour as a communication, rather than responding in a punitive manner. An understanding of the need to support the family so that they, in turn, can support the child, is of paramount importance.

**Schools to consider the safeguarding implications of excluding any child who is experiencing domestic violence and abuse in the home and to recognise these children as a vulnerable group within the school.**

**Develop robust, research based safeguarding training** which begins in the initial training phase and then continues through the professional life course for **police, school staff, health staff** (Midwife, Health Visitor and School Nurse) and **the judiciary** (judges and family court solicitors). This compulsory training should build upon previous training and be undertaken on an at least biennial basis and should ensure that all these professionals will be able to clearly articulate why children are now recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right, the impact that this abuse has upon children and how they can support these children.

**Develop robust inspection of police, health and schools** which focuses upon both the organisational and personal response to children experiencing domestic violence and abuse. In terms of schools this should also include the inspection of the implementation, from early years onward, of the domestic violence and abuse aspect of the Relationships (and Sex) Education and Health Education curriculum. Police inspections should examine how the force safeguard children experiencing domestic violence and abuse and how the force can demonstrate an embedded child centred approach to domestic violence and abuse incidents which has included training staff in listening to and talking with children.

**Examine and evaluate the quality** of information collected by police from children at the time of domestic violence and abuse incidents.

**Challenge the assumption that children can only receive targeted or specialist support once the DVA has ceased.**

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# Continuum of Support

This describes a graduated response of provision



## Operation Encompass is calling for the following actions (continued):

**Undertake specific research** considering domestic abuse in the armed forces and those who have left the armed forces, focussing upon prevalence, longevity, severity, numbers of children involved and particular issues that will impact these children (frequent moving of house and therefore school, parental PTSD, lack of local family support).

**Undertake research considering what works best in terms of perpetrator programmes** and put in place the most effective interventions across whole country.

**Evaluate the impact of current child focussed and family focussed interventions** before committing funds to greater and wider implementation and endorsement of these interventions.

**Ensure that all police forces, schools, school nurses and health (Health Visitors and Midwives) are mandated to be part of Operation Encompass** ensuring that they recognise and address the negative impact of domestic violence and abuse starting with the unborn child and understand their role in protecting and supporting these children.

**Create a Domestic Abuse Young People's Board** (similar to the CAFFCASS Young People's Board model) to enable the government to hear the voice of children, including what they want and need from the adults who are there to support them.

**Create a National Police Chief's Council portfolio holder for Operation Encompass** with an equivalent portfolio holder on the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. These will give children a national voice and will allow national discussions and peer to peer challenge and support around the successful implementation of Operation Encompass. [This is now in place.](#)

**Ensure a free nursery place is offered for all appropriately aged children experiencing domestic violence and abuse.**

**School Designated Safeguarding Leads** (or equivalent) invited to attend MARACs which are related to a child or children in the school.

**Ensure that all children experiencing domestic violence and abuse have the right to a prioritised Speech and Language assessment and then prioritised support by Speech and Language Therapy** if there is a diagnosis of a communication or speech and language difficulty or delay.

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# Operation Encompass is calling for the following actions (continued):

**Create legislation to support 'Special Orphans'** i.e. those children 'orphaned' by a domestic homicide. Legislation is put in place (similar to that in Italy, Argentina, Peru and Uruguay) which would include but not be limited to:

- Funding for scholarships / university places
- State appointed free legal specialist advocate
- Funding for medical and psychological care
- Right to receive their inheritance
- Right to change their surname
- Right to inherit property and state pension funds from their murdered parent
- Financial support for families caring for the orphans
- Remove Parental Responsibility

(We clearly define a domestic homicide as the killing of a person by a spouse, ex-spouse, partner, ex-partner, or anyone with whom the adult victim has cohabited).

**Research the impact on orphans created by domestic homicide** and evaluation of any support services that they can access.

Longitudinal study of children orphaned by Domestic Homicide and evaluation of any support that they have received.

Discover whether there are particular issues which relate to being orphaned by domestic homicide and therefore that specialist support should be provided to all such orphans.





# OPERATION ENCOMPASS

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[www.operationencompass.org](http://www.operationencompass.org)