

Social Work Online Team Training (SWOTT) toolkit

Us Too: Domestic abuse, sexual violence & women with learning disabilities and autistic women

INFORMATION SHEET

Encouraging Positive Relationships & Service Culture

Area	Guidance	Key Actions
Relationships	Learning about and developing positive intimate relationships is a basic human right and makes abuse far less likely.	Encourage, support, and enable positive relationships for people who use your services. Use resources like Supported Loving Network .
Service Culture	Have an open service culture —no 'secrets' or taboos. Acknowledge that domestic abuse (DA) happens often, and people with learning disabilities and autism are at particular risk .	Talk about DA. Raise awareness across staff, service users, families, and other agencies.
Suspensions	The history of abuse scandals shows that people often wait for final, incontrovertible evidence that never comes.	Encourage the reporting of suspicions and act on them promptly. Don't wait.

Building External Partnerships

- Build relationships with local Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (DA/SV) services.
- They are usually delighted to hear from you and are aware of the high risk for people with learning disabilities/autism.
- Be a resource to each other.
- Support them on accessibility issues.
- Help them make a case for more tailored work and reasonable adjustments for people with learning disabilities and autistic people.

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Relationships with Individuals & Taking Responsibility

Action Point	Details
Asking Questions	Don't be afraid to ask direct questions about relationships if you have suspicions. A simple, regular question like “ How are things at home? ” can prompt disclosures.
Trust & Time	Build trust so people feel able to talk freely. Be available and make time ; disclosures demand patience and may not fit your shift pattern.
Power Dynamics	Be constantly vigilant about power dynamics and learned compliance . Discuss the power relationships within your team and with individuals to foster empowerment .
Personal Responsibility	Know where to get help and where to signpost (helplines, etc.). Act on disclosures and suspicions and follow through. If necessary, whistleblow and escalate through management, CQC, Ofsted, or the Safeguarding Board.
Service Resources	Have an Abuse Champion (someone with further training and specialist relationships). Provide safe and comfortable places to talk . Encourage the use of personal alarms/apps .
Core Principles	Support people to have control in their lives. Explain choices and respect those choices (if they have capacity) or act in their best interests . Always be person-centred .

Recognizing and Responding to Abuse - ZERO TOLERANCE

An acceptance of apparently low-level abuse will create a damaging culture and complicity. All abuse must be recognised and addressed.

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Recognizing Signs of Abuse

Being alert to abuse means:

- Analyzing what you see and hear in the context of DA/SV and judging if it is acceptable conduct.
- Taking seriously what you are told and acting promptly.
- Exploring the issues behind frequent requests for help or other presenting problems.
- Being alert to non-verbal communication or challenging behaviour which could indicate abuse is being hidden.

Note: The abused person may not understand that they are being abused or the significance of what they are telling you. Disclosures can happen many years after the abuse, for example, once the perpetrator is no longer in contact.

When Someone Discloses to You

Action	Purpose
Stay Calm	Try not to react in a shocked, appalled, or hesitant way that causes anxiety.
Affirm the Person	Tell them: They did a good/right thing in telling you; You are treating the information seriously; It was not their fault.
Listen Carefully	Be empathetic and listen very carefully .
Inform Next Steps	Explain that you must tell your manager and that safeguarding (if not you) and the police may be involved .
Medical Evidence	Be aware of the possibility that medical evidence might be needed.

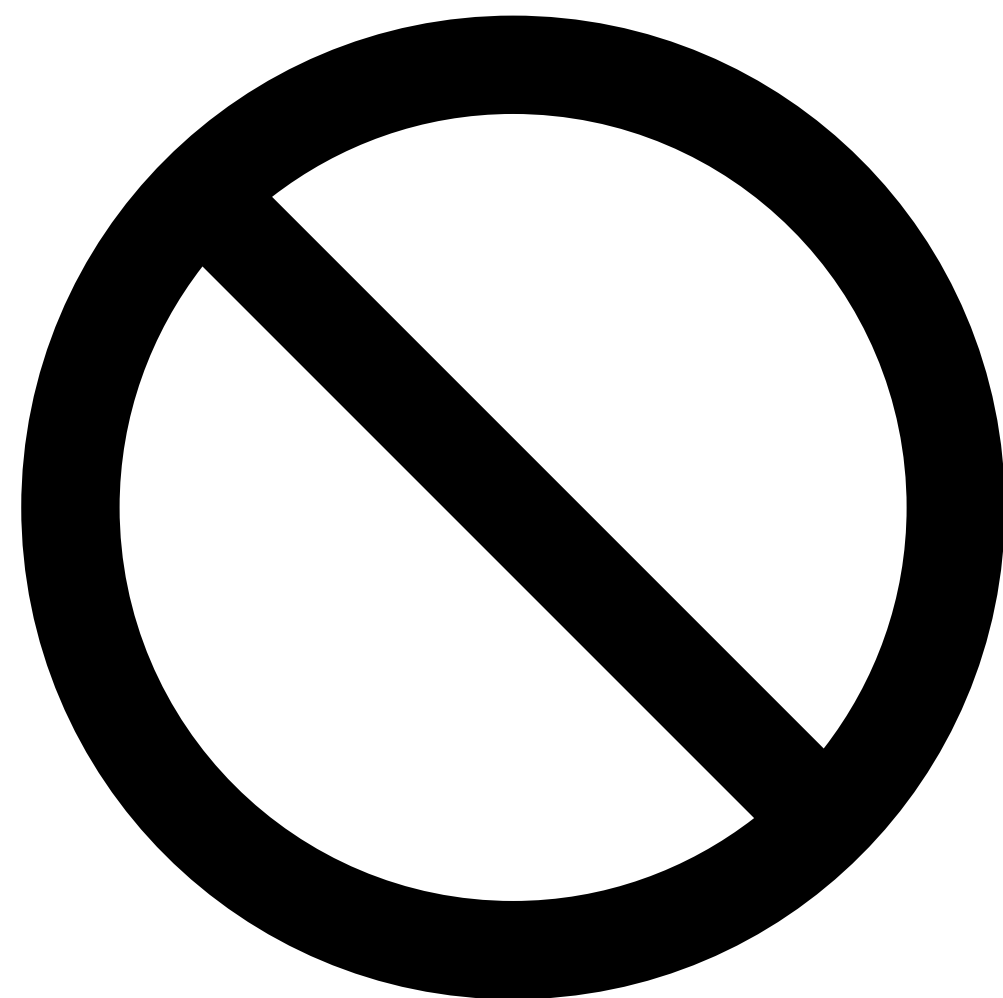
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DO NOT

- **Promise to keep secrets** (you can never keep this kind of information confidential).
- **Press the person for more details** if you are not in a safeguarding role (leave this to safeguarding or the police).
- **Make promises you cannot keep** (e.g., "I will never let this happen to you again").
- **Contact the alleged abuser.**
- Be **judgmental** (e.g., "Why didn't you run away?").
- **Stop someone** when they are telling you what happened, as they may never tell you again.



You MUST Record and Report



- **Tell your manager** regardless of what the person says (or another appropriate person if you are unhappy reporting to your manager).
- **Note what the person actually said** using their **own words and phrases**.
- Describe the **circumstances** of the disclosure (setting, date, time, who else was there).
- When appropriate, use a **body map** to indicate cuts/bruises, noting the colour of any bruising.
- Ensure the information is **factual**. If you include your opinion or third-party information, separate it clearly.
- Use a **pen/biro with black ink** and keep your writing clear.
- **Sign and date the report**, noting the time and location. (Be aware this report may be needed for legal action.)
- **Discuss** the next steps **with your manager**.



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