POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Objectives
By the end of this activity, participants should be able to:

- Describe potential indicators of domestic abuse they may encounter in their work
- Recognise when to consider the possibility of domestic abuse being present

Materials
- None

Equipment
A4 paper and pens/pencils for pairs or small groups

Suggested timing
- 30 to 40 minutes
1. Introduce the session by inviting participants to say what they recognise as potential indicators of domestic abuse. Take a few examples then move on to the next step.

2. Invite pairs or small groups to identify one or both of the following, and to jot down their responses:
   - Possible indicators of domestic abuse they might come across in the context of their work with women
   - Possible effects of domestic abuse they might come across in the context of their work with children and young people

3. Encourage groups to be wide ranging in the areas they consider (physical, emotional, financial, behavioural, sexual signs) and to think particularly about their own work context. Ask them to include any additional indicators for marginalised groups of women.

There are examples of both possible indicators of domestic abuse and of possible effects of domestic abuse on children and young people, in the Challenging Domestic Abuse Handouts. These include the following:

**Health**
- Mental health difficulties
- Stillbirth
- High contact with A & E
- Presenting to GP on numerous occasions with stress/vague aches and pains
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- A range of injuries

*continues overleaf...*
Housing
• Arrears
• Neighbour complaints
• Signs of stress in an interview situation
• History of numerous tenancies
• Damage to property

Social Work
• Children's behavioural problems
• Signs of stress and anxiety
• Existence of child abuse
• Lack of access to finances
• Children's Panel referrals
• Non-attendance at school
• Child neglect

Legal
• Difficulty in giving accurate, coherent information
• Children breaking the law
• Signs of assault but unwilling to give details
• Difficulty with child contact and residence issues
• Withdrawing statements
• Letters to lawyers saying, 'All's well'

General
• Missed appointments
• Difficulty in making decisions
• Difficulty in communicating
• Partner in attendance answering for her
• Self-blame
4. Have a feedback session which includes the following points:

- The extent to which participants see indicators of domestic abuse in their work and what these are.
- Hidden signs of domestic abuse.
- The consequences of working with women and children who are experiencing some of the emotional effects of domestic abuse, e.g. anger. Anger often puts people off, with the result that they view the woman as being unreasonable. Angry behaviour may invite a defensive response.
- What they would do if they suspected domestic abuse.
- The limitations of having a list of indicators (people not being asked questions because they don’t fit in with the expected picture or the possibility of jumping to conclusions about the presence of abuse).

In reality, we cannot rely on signs and indicators; what is important is that participants are aware of and sensitive to the possibility of domestic abuse. The most reliable indicator is a woman or child saying they are experiencing domestic abuse. A key issue for participants is how to create the right conditions for disclosure and give appropriate support afterwards.