**SAFeh Guidance where Domestic Abuse or Separated Parents are a feature**

**Government Definition of Domestic Abuse 1st April 2013**

‘Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

* psychological
* physical
* sexual
* financial
* emotional

‘Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

‘Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.” \*

This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

Principles

* Domestic abuse must be treated seriously as it is an indicator of the need for child protection. Where domestic abuse is serious, repetitive, or where family members’ safety is in question, a child protection referral and/or a step up SAFeh to social care for a child protection assessment may be required.
* The SAFeh process is voluntary and informed consent from all parties is essential, unless there are safeguarding concerns
* The principles of Information Sharing must be considered. Informed consent is generally required to share information, but consideration of the safety and well- being of people involved is vital.
* Where consent is withheld from sharing information with some family members this must generally be complied with, unless there are safeguarding concerns.
* Where domestic abuse or acrimonious separation is a feature, it may not be appropriate to share SAFeh information with estranged partners, as the safety of young people and their families is paramount. However, where SAFeh information cannot be shared with another parent or carer (due to lack of consent of one parent / carer) it must be considered that any information shared is from one perspective only, and a balanced approach to assessment and action planning must be maintained.
* Every SAFeh process is different, and every family unique

Aims

* For professionals to put the needs and safety of children and young people at the centre of their work
* For families to feel safe throughout assessments and interventions including SAFeh
* For professionals to use their judgement to evaluate risks and protective factors effectively
* For professionals to recognise where only partial information can be obtained this may need to be sufficient in some circumstances
* For professionals to work flexibly and creatively with each family

Guidelines

* Normal SAFeh protocol is to seek views and secure consent from all members of the family
* Where Domestic Abuse and acrimonious separation apply this may be impossible or unsafe
* Professionals must evaluate information sensitively and only share where consent is given, unless there is a risk to the safety of family members.
* Where one parent with parental responsibility has given consent for SAFeh, there is no legal requirement to inform the other parent. There are often benefits to involving both parents but this decision must be led by the consenting parent, as SAFeh is a voluntary process
* Sometimes it may be appropriate to seek information from the alleged perpetrator of DA however consent must be gained from the survivor first
* Consider carefully the issue of involving children directly in a SAFeh where DA is a feature – if the child talks about the SAFeh to the alleged perpetrator of DA could their safety be compromised?
* Only one version of a SAFeh should be developed. Views can be recorded in different colours to recognise disagreement, but it would be unethical to produce differing versions for individual family members
* Think carefully, and plan for safety when considering whether/how to invite survivor and alleged perpetrator, or two separated parents to the same meeting
* Be flexible and creative (e.g. consider using adjoining rooms or separate meetings where parents are unable or unwilling to meet together) but always put safety first
* If in doubt, contact Access and Response Team on 01454 866000 / accessandresponse@southglos.gov.uk