



MWIA CASE STUDIES

CHILDREN AT SERIOUS RISK OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Case 15: Tom & Sarah

Objectives

- To safeguard children and consider the impact domestic violence has on them

Narrative Case

Tom and Sarah separated a year ago because of Tom's violence and abuse, which culminated in an incident where he was violent in front of their children Jack (age 9) and Sam (age 7). Tom had not seen the children since. He was desperate to resume contact and applied for an order to do so through the family court. The court instructed him to attend a Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programme (DVPP) for risk assessment and to complete the group work programme. The programme was required to provide an initial assessment and then report on Tom's progress half way through and at the end of the programme.

During the programme, Tom started a new relationship with Julie. He gave her contact details to the DVPP workers as required. The Independent Support Service (ISS) then contacted Julie, who said she did not need any support and that Tom had not been violent to her. She said that Tom had admitted his past violence towards Sarah and she was pleased to know he was attending the DVPP. If Tom was ever violent or abusive, she knew she could call the ISS. Just knowing this - and knowing that Tom knew it - made her feel safer.

The DVPP's half way report was largely positive. Tom had remained non-violent and had not attempted to contact Sarah or the children, despite desperately wanting to. However, he needed to work more on his empathy for Sarah and workers thought that he still underestimated the likely effect upon the children of witnessing violence. In the court proceedings Tom admitted he had been violent and abusive to Sarah and took responsibility for it. Sarah had also been in regular contact with the ISS and was pleased with how Tom appeared to be changing. However, she was still

worried about the impacts of contact on the children and wasn't sure she could trust him. Tom was granted supervised contact at this point.

Tom continued to engage with the programme and appeared profoundly affected by the sessions relating to children and the impact of his behaviour towards Sarah. In the week before his first supervised session he discussed with the group how he would handle the situation - particularly how he might deal with his children's anger towards him or answer difficult questions about his past violence. The next week he reported how useful this had been as Jack had directly challenged him, asking 'Why did you hit Mum?'. If he had not been prepared he would not have known what to do. He said he would probably have tried to avoid the question or would have played down how serious it was. Instead, he was able to fully admit what he did, explain it was wrong, say how much he regretted it and give the children a heartfelt apology.

By the time of the final court hearing Tom and Sarah had not seen each other for almost 2 years. Sarah approached Tom through her lawyer and asked to speak with him. He was able to tell her what he had learned on the programme, saying that he was totally responsible for the violence, that she was not to blame and that he deeply regretted the harm he had caused to her and the children. Sarah felt safe enough to tell him how angry, afraid and hurt she had been. She felt more confident that Tom was in the right place to be a decent father - and also knew who to contact with any future concerns. At the final hearing Tom was granted unsupervised contact which has been reliable, safe and positive to date.

Learning Points

1. Perpetrators are often not aware of the impact of domestic violence on their children. Children who have witnessed violence are more likely to become perpetrators themselves in their future relationships.
2. Providing new partners and ex- partners of perpetrators with support gives them reassurance and confidence that they and their children will be safe. The relationship between fathers and their children is often underestimated when couples separate. Wherever possible this relationship must be maintained as long as suitable safeguards are in place.