



# Brighter Worlds

Talking to children  
about Adverse  
Childhood  
Experiences (ACEs)

Did you know that **one in seven children and young people under the age of 18** will have lived with domestic violence at some point in their childhood?

## About Brighter Worlds

**This Brighter Worlds booklet and the accompanying animation have been launched to raise awareness of the impact of domestic abuse and other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) amongst primary school children.**

It aims to give children an understanding of a range of home and environmental experiences and how these can affect their wellbeing and emotional resilience.

The animation will encourage conversations and help children to develop understanding and empathy, as well as experience the benefits of peer support from an early age.

It will enable children exposed to ACEs, or who are currently experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse, to know that school is a safe space and will identify a trusted adult whom they can approach for ongoing support.

The project aims to develop ACEs champions within schools and is designed to be a self-sufficient training and resource tool for schools to use on an ongoing basis with new cohorts of children.

Each animation is divided into different scenarios to encourage children to think and be aware of a range of different ACEs.

## Domestic violence and abuse: new definition

The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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.

The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional
- Controlling behaviour

## What is coercive control?

Coercive control is when a person with whom you are personally connected, repeatedly behaves in a way that makes you feel controlled, dependent, isolated or scared.

The following types of behaviour are common examples of coercive control:

- Isolating you from your friends and family
- Controlling how much money you have and how you spend it
- Monitoring your activities and your movements
- Repeatedly putting you down, calling you names or telling you that you are worthless
- Threatening to harm or kill you or your child
- Threatening to publish information about you or to report you to the police or the authorities
- Damaging your property or household goods
- Forcing you to take part in criminal activity or child abuse



## Statistics

**62%**  
Nearly 2 in 3 children  
exposed to domestic  
violence were also  
directly harmed

**160,000**  
children

in the UK living in homes with domestic abuse where there's a high risk of murder or serious harm. Thousands more live with less serious domestic abuse every day. (Safelives)



Children suffer multiple  
**physical and mental health**  
consequences because of  
living with domestic  
violence (Safelives)

**61%**  
ACES  
of all adults have reported  
experiencing one Ace with  
**16% suffering four or more.**  
Decreasing these would cut rates  
of **substance abuse, self-harm**  
and **suicide.**

## Teachers: How to use this resource

Watch the animation with children in your class and ask the questions in each segment as detailed overleaf.

The animation is about healthy relationships and this spans many areas, as well as domestic abuse. It features other types of ACEs and highlights different relationships dynamics and their positive and negative impact on children. Topics that may come up during discussion may include:

- **Bullying**
- **Racism**
- **Different types of relationships**



## How to deal with disclosure

When delivering the animation please be aware that children may disclose domestic abuse within the classroom setting.

You must consider how you will handle the disclosure based on your setting and the number of children present. We would suggest taking the child to a safe, confidential space where they can talk freely. Encourage but try not to lead the conversation.

Please be aware of the following points:

- **Listen** carefully and show empathy
  - **Do not** ask leading questions
  - **Remind** them that they are not responsible for what is happening
  - **Reassure** them that they will be taken seriously
  - **Do not** confront the alleged abuser
  - **Explain** what will happen and what you are going to do now
  - **Report** what the child has told you as soon as possible following your internal safeguarding procedures
  - **Teachers** should consider that children may have direct experience of the issues raised and should plan accordingly considering their language and delivery
- **Two members of staff** should be present and staff should discuss attendance with the schools designated safeguarding lead in case children are present where there are known safeguarding concerns as this discussion/content could possibly be traumatising or re-traumatising
  - **Create** a safe, non-judgmental learning environment by setting ground rules around how children will behave towards each other as it is vital that children can discuss issues in a safe climate of trust, support and cooperation
  - **Give** children the opportunity to ask questions anonymously
  - **Give** children the opportunity not to participate if they wish to remain quiet and consider speaking to the child separately to check they are okay
  - **Give** factual age-appropriate answers to questions
  - **Remind** children that this is a safe space to discuss but remember to follow your school's safeguarding policies and procedures with any concerns
  - **Staff** can seek support for themselves from resources listed on page 11

## Closing the session

End the session by doing a relaxation exercise – shake from your ankles, up legs, thighs, bottom, tummy, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, head. End with a big sigh of breath out through your mouth.  
Teacher leads and joins in.



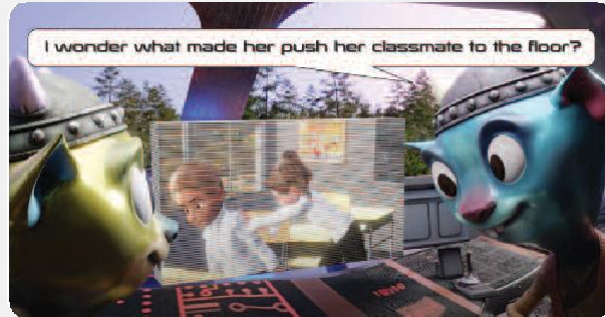
## Key Stage One Animation

**Scenario 1** - He looks upset I wonder why?



- What do you think might be happening at home or school?
- What could help him?
- What makes you upset?

**Scenario 2** - I wonder what made her push her classmate to the floor?



- Why do you think she is angry?
- What could be happening?
- Do you feel like this sometimes?

**Scenario 3** - I wonder why she doesn't join in?



- What do you think might be happening at home or school?
- What could help her?
- What makes you upset?

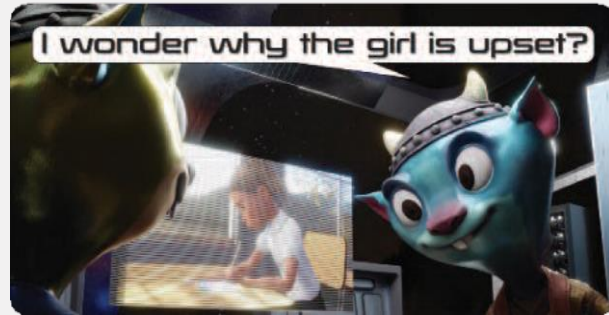
**Scenario 4** - I wonder what would help these children feel better?



- What do you think might be happening to make these children sad?
- What could help them?
- Do you ever feel like this?

## Key Stage Two Animation

**Scenario 1** - I wonder why the girl is upset?



- What do you think might be happening at home or school?
- What could help her?
- What makes you upset?

**Scenario 2** - I wonder why they are sitting by themselves?



- What might make him feel like he wants to be alone?
- What could help him?
- Do you ever want to be alone?

**Scenario 3** - I wonder how they feel when they hear their parents shout?



- Why do you think her parents might be shouting?
- What could help her?
- Do you get scared by shouting?

**Scenario 4** - I wonder what would help this girl feel better?



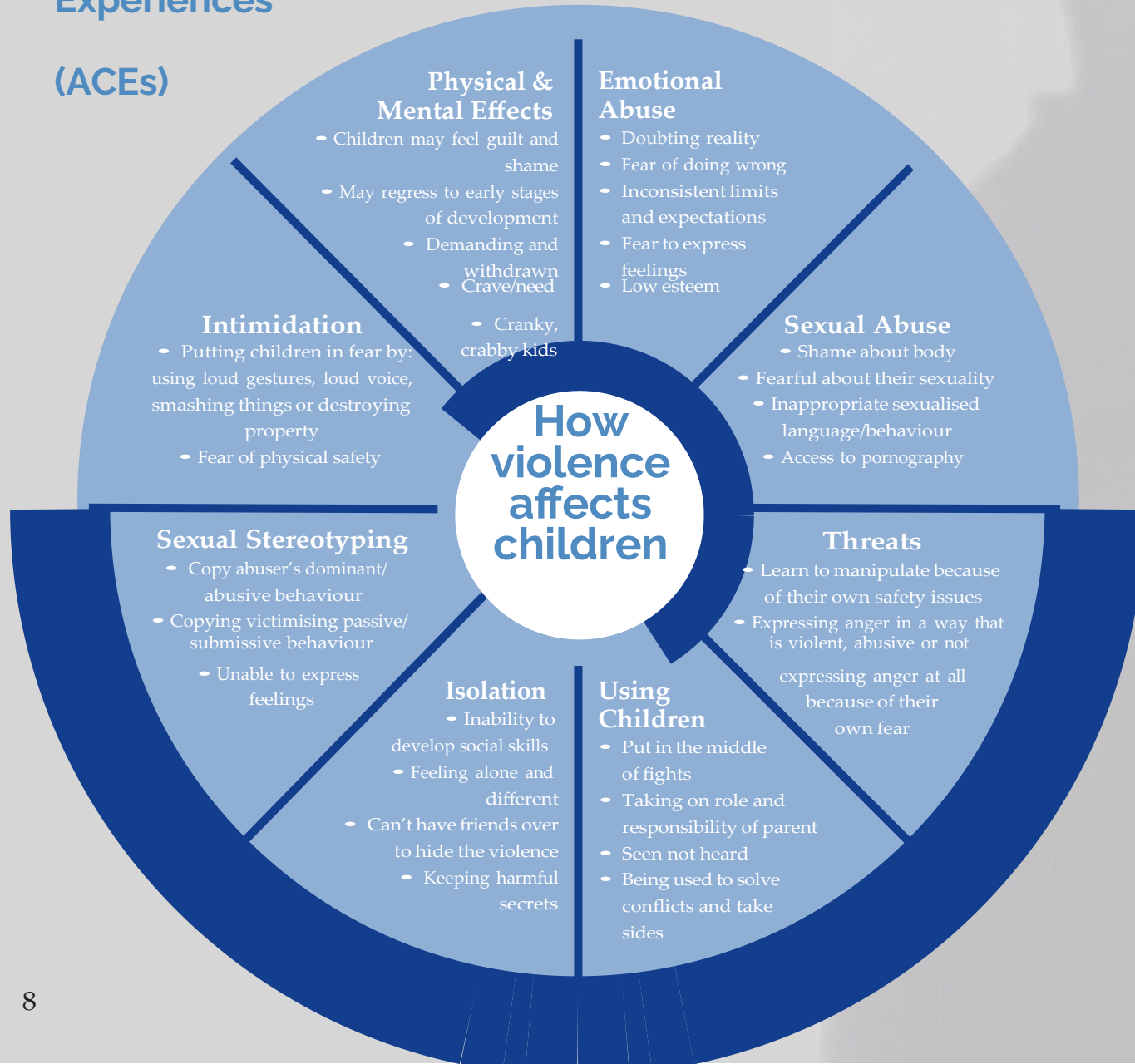
- Do you ever feel like this?





## The potential effect of exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences

(ACEs)



## Roles that children can assume:

**The Lost child** - Ignored and lonely this

child does not get their needs met by their care givers and will often self soothe. They will go under the radar as they will be a quiet child often well behaved.

**The Hero** - This child will be self-sufficient and take on too much responsibility at a young age.

**The Referee** - Will try to break up fights and keep the peace between their parents.

**The Confidante** - The child will often be the listening ear for the abused parent being given too much responsibility at a young age for them to be able cope with. May also be used by the abuser to report back on the non abusive parent.

**The Problem child** - Will act up at school and in other areas of their life becoming disruptive and labelled as a problem causing them to adopt this as their normal.

**The Mascot** - Uses humour to try and diffuse situations.

## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

These can be one off events or prolonged

exposure to difficult experiences during childhood. Examples:

- Domestic abuse
- Mental illness
- Substance abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Bereavement

Exposure to ACEs can have long term effects on:

- Mental Health
- Physical Health
- Education attainment
- Increased use of substances
- Increase in self harming behaviours

Stress from adverse childhood experiences such as domestic abuse can affect how the body reacts to stress in the longer term often causing depression and anxiety and affecting brain development.

Psychological trauma occurs when the body is unable to regulate the response to stress and people become in a constant state of high alert causing lasting harm to the brain's stress responses.

Working to prevent adverse childhood experiences can improve future mental and physical health thereby lowering the risk of future illness. This can also lower the prevalence of future risk taking behaviour such as substance abuse issues and self harm.

## Trauma

There are three main types of trauma:

**Acute** - Usually following a single traumatic event

**Chronic** - Following ongoing and prolonged incidents such as domestic abuse

**Complex** - Due to varying and multiple events

## Responses to Trauma

Emotional responses include:

- Fear
- Anger
- Denial
- Numbness
- Hopelessness
- Sadness

Physical reactions include:

- High alertness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Headaches

## Staff names who can support you with any disclosures and onward referrals

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## Schools safeguarding protocol.



## Contact details

**KIDAS** information  
[www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk/](http://www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk/)

**Family Matters**  
 admin@familymattersuk.org  
 01474 536661

**EH Front Door**  
[www./webapps.kent.gov.uk/ChildrensPortal](http://www./webapps.kent.gov.uk/ChildrensPortal).  
 03000 41 11 11  
 Out of hours (urgent calls only) 03000 41 91 91

**Education Safeguarding Service**  
[https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/Tw\\_PCBLBlfV4G9mt63Bag?domain=theeducationpeople.org/](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/Tw_PCBLBlfV4G9mt63Bag?domain=theeducationpeople.org/)

**Domestic Abuse Support Services**  
[www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk/](http://www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk/)

**District Conversations** – for signposting advice for families not meeting Front Door Threshold.  
<https://www.kelsi.org.uk/special-education-needs/integrated-childrens-services/early-help-contacts>

**Safety Pin**  
[www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/young-people/youth-hubs](http://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/young-people/youth-hubs)

**Area Support Directory of Services**  
**West Kent**  
<https://sway.office.com/I4t0J7C1qwDTK7hO?ref=email>  
**East Kent**  
<https://sway.office.com/rSCRGNpXaj8Wp7gz?ref=Link>  
**North Kent**  
<https://sway.office.com/MXF8V05SCGn9xG4C?ref=Link>  
**South Kent**  
<https://sway.office.com/u9qx8IKdjzcXBm1F?ref=email>

**KSCMP**  
[www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/young-people/youth-hubs](http://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/young-people/youth-hubs)

## National Organisations

**Freephone, 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline**  
 0808 2000 247

**Men's Advice Line**  
 0808 801 0327  
 Advice and support for men experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

**National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline**  
 0800 999 5428  
 Emotional and practical support for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse.

We understand how difficult it is for children to talk about domestic abuse. Whether it's happening now or happened in the past, Childline can be contacted 24/7.

**Calls to Childline on 0800 1111 are free and confidential or visit [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)**



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For further information on the work of West Kent LCPG's, please contact Amtul Uzma, Area Partnership Manager West [amtul.uzma@kent.gov.uk](mailto:amtul.uzma@kent.gov.uk) or 07834 417 485

