

# Reaction or Response

**Is your service part of the solution...  
...or is it sometimes part of the problem?**

The way services are planned, structured and delivered ultimately impact either positively or negatively on the user groups they are geared towards serving. Our experience has shown that many children within our society are struggling to cope with and survive living with Domestic Abuse - often further burdened by services which not only fail to meet their needs but would appear in many instances to greatly compromise them

Delivering a truly equitable service requires planners and providers to consider in depth how we can ensure that Children experiencing Domestic Abuse within South Ayrshire have access to enabling services that provide them with an underpinning set of values for adulthood - **Respect**.

By working together we can challenge outdated work practices and ensure that we maximize the potential of this free yet valuable commodity. Rules, boundaries and guidelines are an essential part of everyday society - but we need to consider the ways we enforce them are never at the expense of a child's self esteem.

**Self-esteem is a powerful human need.  
It is a basic human need that makes an essential  
contribution to the life process, it is indispensable  
to normal & healthy development:  
it has survival value."**

Dr. Nathaniel Branden

Language is fundamental to the building of relationships and inappropriate use of language, especially when supporting young survivors of Domestic Abuse can never be justified. Yet everyday, adults supporting children misuse words. Predictably, they can have a huge impact on how the child relates to the speaker and to adults in general. Our social responsibility to protect, guide & educate children does not afford us the right to insult them when society's attempts to protect, guide & educate them have failed.

Though often well intentioned, and driven by sound and reasoned principles we have to acknowledge that we call upon our learned language like a magic wand. However, the children we support often view that magic wand as a weapon. And if we stop and think about the words we use, whether well intentioned or not, we can recognise that, even in a support related context we label & condemn, we patronise and we wound.

**All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights**

Article 1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## **Some of the negative things children have said...**

'the teachers are always on my back about something....some of them yell nearly as loud as my dad does'

'I don't want to go to the nursery any more 'cos the teacher keeps asking me things'

'I wish I still had my own teacher...she didn't shout...even at the boys when they was really being bad'

'I wish I lived in the jungle where you don't get schools...that would be good 'cos I could just play 'cos I'm good at playing but not at sums'

'The panel people are scarey...they're even scarier than the police'

## Children - Equality & Respect

Language Checklist - At times we are ALL guilty of using negative phraseology when talking to children & young people & we should consider the power of our words e.g.

the trouble with you is...  
you just don't try.....  
you're lazy / being silly / selfish.....  
this is just not good enough.....  
I'm not listening to this anymore.....  
other children don't do that.....  
you only care about yourself.....  
your wasting everyone's time.....  
you should know better.....  
you're making your mother ill.....  
what are you hoping to achieve?.....  
you're heading for trouble.....  
you're the only one that can fix this problem....  
you're behaving like a child.....

Not only should we avoid using words as weapons, we also need to find ways to safely challenge service providers who appear to disregard the need to demonstrate respectful service delivery. In the context of any healthy adult/child relationship it would be safe to assume that part of the adult role would contain - by varying degrees - support related action. In fact, it would be hard to imagine an instance where such a requirement failed to exist. Professionally, as in education, health or welfare - or personally, as in a parental or societal role the need exists for adults to create a support orientated framework for children to develop into adulthood. However recognising such a framework exists is only a beginning.

**When interacting with children or young people do you ever -**

label them or patronise them

use negative comparisons to make a point?

use gender stereotypical language

adopt guilt inducing tactics?

Do you ever openly show respect to them or apologise to them? (as you would to another adult)

**Language is the key to building relationships.....** the language we use when talking to Children can have a huge impact on how they relate to us as individuals & to other adults. Our use of inappropriate language in the context of supposedly supporting the needs Children or Young People can never be justified. As the "adult" in the room, our need to get "our" point across should not be at the expense of a Child's self worth.

Acts of communication, driven by sound & reasoned motives borne out of positive principles can result in well intentioned adults calling upon language like a magic wand. However, children often view our words as weapons. Often the words we use - whether well intentioned or not - label & condemn, patronise & wound. Traumatic life experiences aren't the only factor in determining effects on a child's mental health - the way we support Children & Young People through their experiences of Domestic Abuse also plays a substantial role in the consequential future outcome. Recognising diversity of need is the first step to delivering an equitable service that caters for the complex and diverse needs young survivors of Domestic Abuse display.

**We may think we're being supportive but has the child actually heard us say:**

I care about you  
I have faith in you  
I'm here to listen  
I want to help  
I can see you're trying really hard  
I have every faith in you  
Thank you  
You've been doing really well  
Look at the progress you've made  
It's OK to make mistakes...we all do  
I trust you to...  
Sometimes I need to ask for help  
Being young isn't easy  
You can feel proud of yourself because...  
I need your help  
I don't understand  
Well done...  
I'd like to know what you think about...  
Sometimes it's hard to talk about things  
You don't have to be perfect all the time

**Some positive things children have said to us...**

'My new teacher is the best in the whole world'

'I'm glad we live here now...I like houses with only a wee bit shouting'

'I wish we could stay here forever or till after Christmas'

'My new nursery does gooder things than my other nursery'

### An Encouraging Adult

allows time  
values creative ideas  
encourages play  
uses open ended questions  
sees learning in mistakes  
is available for help  
deals as an equal  
speculates along with  
follows child's interests  
accepts child's decisions  
focuses on child's thinking  
defers judgement  
stresses independence  
optimistic about outcomes  
actively listens  
shows real interest  
assumes it can be done  
shares the risks  
challenges the child to try ideas

**Is Available**

### An Inhibiting Adult

is inattentive  
is authoritarian.  
is pessimistic  
promotes dependence  
is critical  
is disapproving  
acts as superior  
makes fun of  
predetermines response  
rejects new ideas  
imposes decisions  
limits time  
maintains fixed routines  
devalues suggestions  
domineers  
interrupts  
is impatient  
cross examines  
gives no feedback

**Lacks Interest**

(From Fisher; R. (1980) Teaching Children To Think)