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Calderdale Women's Centre

**Domestic Abuse Groupwork Service
2003 – 2006**

External Evaluation Report

**Ruth Deery and Deborah Hughes
External Evaluation Team
March 2006**

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Thanks to Rachel Loise and Glenda Smith of Calderdale Women's Centre for their help, particularly in finding information and material whenever we asked for it, and answering our many questions. Thanks to all the Groupwork Programme participants who wrote down their thoughts over the last three years and whose words give colour to the pages that follow.

Introduction

The Calderdale Women's Centre provides, amongst its range of services¹, extensive domestic violence support services² in close liaison with the West Yorkshire Police and other agencies. From July 2003 to March 2006, Domestic Abuse Groupwork, for women who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse, formed part of this service. This evaluation outlines the history and working of the Domestic Abuse Groupwork Service and its programme, presents a collation of qualitative feedback and comments (from both the women accessing the Groupwork and the workers who facilitated it), and provides quantitative information on the service. The appendices include a range of resources developed and/or used by the Service. All quotations in voice boxes in this report are taken from the women's whole course evaluation sheets.

External evaluation methods

Two external researchers³ have carried out this evaluation during the final weeks of the Domestic Abuse Groupwork Service. The methods used were examination of all relevant documentation, including the original bid documents, all formal and informal reports and evaluations (both participants' and facilitators'), the resources used on the programme, and accounts. We met with the groupwork workers and their line managers to discuss and gain understanding of the service, and one of us attended a groupwork session as participant-observer. Meetings were held with the team to clarify points and issues as needed.

An in-depth reflective discussion of the service and the experience of running it took place with the Domestic Abuse Groupwork Service workers to explore their experience of the Groupwork Service and how they would build on that

¹ CWC services include counselling, Learning and Skills, which runs a variety of basic and intermediate skills courses and workshops, drop-ins, outreach services, a volunteer scheme, as well as its extensive domestic abuse support. All services are supported by a crèche.

² Includes a women's support service, an Asian women's support service, legal casework, linkwork (with police), children's domestic violence service.

³ Dr Ruth Deery can be contacted on r.m.deery@hud.ac.uk and Deborah Hughes can be contacted on deb.hughes@cht.nhs.uk

experience if the opportunity to develop the service further arose. Finally the evaluation team attended the celebration event to mark the end of the current funding stream and the closure of the current service.

Funding and staffing

The Domestic Abuse Groupwork Service (DAG) was funded by the Family Policy Unit of the Home Office under its Family Support Grant Programme. Funding over the three years amounted to £103,380 and was apportioned as follows:

Year One: £33,870
Year Two: £33,540
Year Three: £35,970

Staffing was one whole time post - for the duration of the service this was a job-share with two workers⁴ employed for 18.5 hours each. Other Calderdale Women's Centre workers (*) provided additional support for an outreach groupwork programme in Todmorden (12 miles from Calderdale's main town of Halifax), and a groupwork programme targeted at women from Calderdale's South Asian community. The workers who facilitated the DAG over the three years are Rachel Loise, Helen Avison (until June 2004), Glenda Smith (from July 2004), Narinder Panesar* and Sue Davy-Day*. Sally Douglas, student social worker also helped to facilitate one of the groupwork programmes in Year 2. One DAG worker and a volunteer supported each session until 2005 when the two groupworkers co-facilitated all sessions.



⁴ Official title = "Groupwork Development Worker"

Objectives of the Domestic Abuse Groupwork Service

Year One (July 2003 – March 2004)

- To devise a modular groupwork programme addressing the various key residual issues that, having lived with violence, still have impact and mitigate against positive parenting and relationship building.
- To pilot the groupwork programme.
- To evaluate the pilot of the groupwork programme.

Year Two (April 2004 – March 2005)

- To devise a culturally relevant groupwork programme addressing the impact of domestic violence on positive parenting and relationship building and deliver it to women from minority ethnic communities.
- To deliver two groupwork programmes in outreach venues in the target areas of Calderdale, which address the impact of domestic violence on positive parenting and relationship building.⁵
- To deliver three groupwork programmes in Calderdale Women's Centre, which address the impact of domestic violence on positive parenting and relationship building.

Year Three (April 2005 – March 2006)

- To deliver three groupwork programmes in Calderdale Women's Centre, which address the impact of domestic violence on positive parenting and relationship building.
- To develop and deliver a weekly drop-in groupwork service for women who have been affected by domestic abuse in order to provide information and support on positive parenting and on issues relating to domestic abuse.
- To develop a training resource dealing with named and specific issues which are felt by parent and child, and are often a source of conflict e.g. anger, guilt, shame, loss, blame, safety planning.

⁵ This was the only objective that was not met over the lifetime of the service. Reasons for this are given on pages 8-12.

THE STORY OF THE CALDERDALE WOMEN'S CENTRE DOMESTIC ABUSE GROUPWORK SERVICE

The Groupwork Programme was developed in Year 1 (2003/04) and was consolidated along the lines of that development during Year 2 (2004/05). However from February 2005 (the end of the second year of operation) and throughout Year 3 (2005/06) many changes and developments occurred as the programme matured, and the experience and confidence of the workers led them to adapt the service. Therefore an outline of the service tracing its development is given below to give readers insight into the continual evolution and development of the programme throughout its lifetime.

Year 1 (July 2003 to March 2004)

Setting up the Domestic Abuse Groupwork

The DAG workers made contact with many agencies and individuals during the first year of the groupwork service. In relation to groupwork programme development, a number of Women's Aid and other domestic abuse support groups were contacted or visited, and Leeds Inter Agency Project (LIAP)⁶ was identified as being the most relevant. The LIAP programme and trainers' notes was adapted (with permission) for use. To publicise the groupwork service and establish referral pathways, the DAG workers visited local refuges, Sure Start local programmes, and mother and toddler groups, and also met with and gave short presentations to housing officers, social workers, health visitors, GPs, Barnardo's workers, and Calderdale Teenage Pregnancy Strategy group.

A pilot group was run in an area of high deprivation (subject to regeneration funding), which has a high number of recorded domestic abuse incidents, from September to December 2003. Publicity for the pilot was generated through the DAG worker contacts described in the paragraph above and leaflets and posters. In addition a "taster session" was held prior to the groupwork pilot commencing. 6 women attended the "taster session" and 5 women went on to

⁶ See www.liap.org.uk

attend the 10-session groupwork programme, of whom 3 completed the programme⁷. Women who attended occasionally or once only were always contacted (if possible and safe) by telephone during this and all subsequent programmes and offered alternative forms of support.

Following positive evaluation of the pilot groupwork programme, two further groupwork programmes were delivered from January to March 2004. One ran at the Calderdale Women's Centre (CWC), located in the centre of Calderdale's main town of Halifax. The other programme ran at an outreach venue in Todmorden, 12 miles from Halifax. 10 women were recruited to the CWC groupwork programme and all completed, and 4 were recruited to the Todmorden programme and 3 completed.

The first year therefore saw 19 women begin the 3 groupwork programmes (including the pilot) of whom 17 completed, giving a completion figure of 89%. 48 women were referred to the Groupwork Service during that period, giving an uptake figure of 40%. The majority of referrals were from the CWC Domestic Violence Support Team, but the local refuges, friends, KIDS⁸, and Home Start⁹ referred some of the women.

2 of the 17 women who completed the groupwork programme were from black or minority ethnic (BME) groups. The issue of engaging women from BME groups, particularly Calderdale's Asian community, became a clear objective for Year 2 of the service.

Agencies and groups that the participants in the Year 1 groupwork programmes went on to access were:

- Housing Aid
- KIDS (see footnote 3)

⁷ By "completed" we mean attended the majority of sessions on a regular basis throughout the duration of the programme.

⁸ A CWC service for 5 – 13 year olds affected by domestic abuse.

⁹ A UK wide family support charity.

- Other Calderdale Women's Centre services (Advice & Guidance, Learning and Skills, Domestic Violence Support Service, Drop-in)
- Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Police
- Solicitors

Lessons learned from Year 1

- Groupwork is difficult to establish because of the difficulty of attracting participants due to concerns about confidence and safety in a public group setting.
- The identification of a safe venue with appropriate crèche facilities in outreach settings can be a problem.
- The planned timetable must be flexible to accommodate lateness, low attendance and women in crisis needing immediate support.
- Networking with key workers to build referral pathways takes considerable time but is essential. Offering training in effective referral would be ideal.
- Outreach locations offer easier access but women prefer the greater anonymity and protection offered by central facilities.
- The time and cost of travel is an issue for some women.
- Hearing directly from women about the impact of DA on their lives, provides opportunities for speakers from key agencies to improve their services and staff awareness.
- Groupwork programmes require information resources to be researched, compiled and adapted in response to each group's expressed needs.
- Evaluation form response rates at 3 months are very low, making it hard to explore the medium or longer-term impact of groupwork on women's lives.
- Follow-up of non-attendees is essential and time for this needs to be built into the workers' schedule.

I would wish to continue to work with the centre. I would feel strange not being around the friends I've made here. If I could help out when I could, I'd always put in 100% of an effort to try.

Wish I'd known about these groups a long time ago. I have lived a depressed life for a long time; I need a change.

I enjoyed what I got out of the group which I thought was very helpful.

Frightening at times – to see me – grief on a level I have never experienced – didn't think all the emotions that overwhelmed me would turn into positives and result in me feeling empowered and alive again.

Feel better in myself. Feel like I am getting on top of things and that I am coping with everything. I do know that I don't want [partner] back. Feel like my life is getting better...I don't feel guilty anymore.

I've been very depressed and feel lonely but I do have a lady at church who I can tell everything to which does help.

A great source of help and support.

Year 2: April 2004 to March 2005

A groupwork programme for Asian women and consolidation of the programme at Calderdale Women's Centre

During the second year (2004-2005) the DAG workers continued to make local links and talked to various primary schools, community centres, Sure Start local programmes, parent and toddler groups, housing officers, health visitors, midwives, social workers, youth workers, and Barnardo's workers in order to raise awareness of the DAG programme.

A specific culturally sensitive groupwork programme was devised for Asian women. Initially it was planned to run this programme as an outreach activity at a venue in a mainly Asian area. However the women preferred to attend the CWC for greater anonymity, therefore this groupwork programme was run at the CWC from April to July 2004.

6 women, all of south Asian origin, were referred to the programme, all of whom were referred by the CWC's Asian Women's Support Worker, who also helped to devise this programme as well as produce culturally sensitive resources. The Asian Women's Support Worker also co-facilitated the group with one of the regular DAG workers.

3 of the 6 women referred attended a "taster session", and all 6 attended the programme. 4 women completed the programme, a rate of 67%. Of the 2 women who didn't complete, one moved away and the other did not feel ready for groupwork but was offered individual support.

Considerable effort was put into trying to establish outreach groupwork programmes in three areas of Calderdale (Todmorden, North Halifax and Elland) in order to achieve the Year 2 objectives. Whilst it was originally planned to run two outreach groupwork programmes in Year 2, insufficient referrals were received for these, and discussion with women revealed disquiet about attending such groups in their own communities. However 4 awareness raising sessions were held with different parent/parent and toddler groups,

which promoted the domestic abuse support services available in Calderdale to a total of 19 women.

Three further groupwork programmes were delivered in Year 2, all at Calderdale Women's Centre, from May to July 2004, from September to December 2004 and from January to March 2005. 9 women attended the May to July group with 5 completing. 5 women commenced the September to December group and 3 completed it. 6 women commenced the January to March 2005 group and all 6 completed.

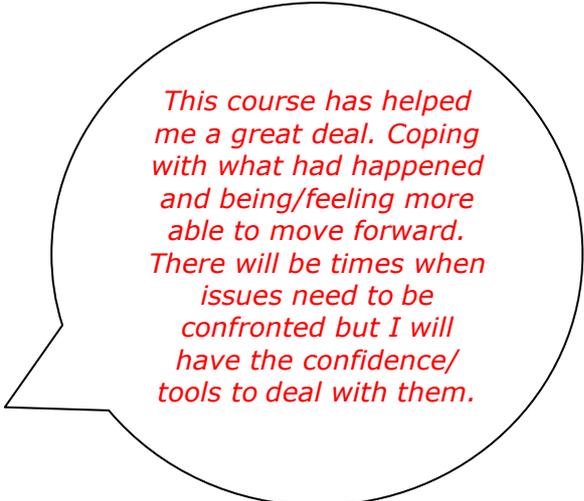
This means a total of 26 women commenced the groupwork programme and 18 completed in Year 2, giving a completion rate of 69%. 9 of the 26 (35%) were from BME groups, 6 of whom attended the specific programme targeted at Asian women. 25 of the 26 women were mothers and 24 had children still living with them. Most of the women were aged between 21 and 35 years.

In addition to the three groupwork programmes above, the DAG workers also established a weekly domestic abuse "drop-in group" for two hours a week in response to requests from women for such a facility. This drop-in was established in February 2005, with the aim that it would be more flexible than structured groupwork service, and meet the needs of those women who were unable to commit to a 10-week programme or who were not ready for groupwork for whatever reason, and act as a stepping-stone into the structured groupwork programme. This open-to-all facility meant women could attend a group when they felt ready without having to wait for the next groupwork programme to start. Some drop-in sessions were themed around a particular topic and/or had outside speakers, but were generally geared towards meeting any need for information or support that arose.

Also during Year 2, the DAG workers continued to compile a library of resources comprising both model Groupwork session plans and information on specific topics women had sought information on. These were updated and added to during Year 3. [See Appendix 3 for examples of these.]

Agencies and groups that the participants in the Year 2 groupwork programmes went on to access were:

- Solicitors
- Other CWC services (counselling, learning and skills, drop-in)
- English language classes
- Leisure Services
- GP
- Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Housing Advice
- Police
- CAFCASS¹⁰
- Moving On Project¹¹
- Family Support worker



This course has helped me a great deal. Coping with what had happened and being/feeling more able to move forward. There will be times when issues need to be confronted but I will have the confidence/tools to deal with them.

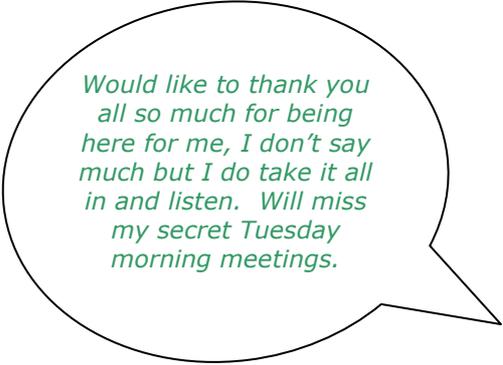
Lessons learned from Year 2

- Women prefer to access groupwork at Calderdale Women's Centre as they feel more safe and anonymous than in facilities closer to home.
- Outreach work is better directed to one-off sessions for workers in other key agencies and pre-existing community groups in order to raise awareness of domestic abuse and promote the support services available.
- Structured groupwork is difficult for women to access if they still live with the perpetrator.
- Women frequently believe they lack the confidence to speak out in a group, and they fear meeting someone they know and their partner finding out. Being accompanied by a trusted person can allay these fears.

¹⁰ Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

¹¹ The Moving On Project was a short-term funded project run by Calderdale Careers Service, which provided individual appointments and support for clients to find about and take up learning, volunteering, or work opportunities.

- Women can have complex needs such as substance misuse or mental illness, which make structured groupwork difficult for them.
- Women do not always want to explore their past experiences but prefer to do confidence building or assertiveness work because they are keen to move on with their lives. Such sessions should be built into a groupwork programme or be available.
- A period of support by the DVST¹² prior to attending groupwork helps women choose to participate in and continue to attend groupwork.
- Continuing support outside the groupwork programme is important for many women.
- Inconsistent attendance means each session is best planned to “stand alone” rather than topics being carried over from one week to the next.
- A weekly reflective review by the groupwork facilitators complements the participants’ evaluations and helps planning and facilitation of future sessions.
- Signposting to key workers and other agencies needs to be planned into the DAG programme.
- Women in crisis seem to benefit more from an information and needs-based responsive opportunity such as a drop-in service. The personal development approach of a groupwork programme may be more relevant to those who have left the relationship and have reached the point of reflection.



Would like to thank you all so much for being here for me, I don't say much but I do take it all in and listen. Will miss my secret Tuesday morning meetings.



Wish it went on longer. I would recommend it to others. It helped me to understand many things and to find a new confidence and acceptance of myself.

¹² DVST = Domestic Violence Support Team at the Calderdale Women's Centre

*Thank you
so much
for so
much!*

*This was a very
good group
therapy and one
that should be
repeated on a
regular basis.
Excellent tuition.*

*I feel they have
put me in the
right direction
and built my
confidence up.
Carry on the
good work.*

*I'd like to thank
everyone for all the
help I've had. I've
had more confidence
since I started
coming. Thank you
very much.*

*Crèche
facilities were
fantastic.
Group workers
have been very
understanding.*

*Well done for
the course. I
wish it had
been longer.*

*Thank you for
your patience
and
understanding.*

*I have really
enjoyed this
course. I
really have
got more
confident.*

Year 3: April 2005 to March 2006

Consolidation, development and evaluation of the Groupwork Programme.

Networking with key agencies and workers continued in order to further increase referrals. This networking was resulting in more partnership working with these agencies e.g. the DAG workers ran a joint project for women and their children with the NSPCC, and Youth Offending Team, Barnardo's and housing association workers accompanied mutual clients to the Groupwork Programme.

One groupwork programme (10 sessions) ran from May to July 2005 at the Calderdale Women's Centre, along the same lines as the programmes run in Years 1 and 2. 7 women started this course and 5 completed it. 3 of these women used the crèche facilities (i.e. had pre-school children)¹³.

The Drop-in commenced in February 2005 and continued to July 2005 as a complementary service to the Groupwork, as described above. 15 drop-in sessions were held between February and July 2005 (see pp. 16-17 for why these came to an end) and were attended by a total of 37 women. These 37 women had a total of 60 attendances with a range of 1 to 10 attendances per woman, and an average of 4 attendances per drop-in. The issues women came to the drop-in for were:

Emotional support	23
Help with children	14
Court issues	5
Solicitors	4
Recent incidents	4
Housing	4
Child contact	3
Safety	3
To support others	2
Health	1
Debt	1

¹³ There are no whole course evaluations for this course because of an over-sight (see pp. 24 – 28).

6 women who attended the drop-in went on to do the Groupwork programme.

Other referrals made were:

- Confidence building course (4 women)
- Housing Advice (9 women)
- DVST keyworker (6 women)
- Counselling (1 woman)
- Solicitors (3 women)
- Benefits advice (2 women)



I'm glad – even though I'm no longer in a violent atmosphere – I can try to help others.

Both workers attended the Freedom Training¹⁴, which led them to change the DAG programme from September 2005. The Programme became an 11-week rolling programme of stand-alone modular sessions, enabling women to join any week instead of having to wait until the start of the next programme. It also means that if a woman misses any session, she could attend the next session on the same topic.

A programme was run on these lines from September to December 2005 and the DAG workers piloted elements of The Freedom Programme. 19 women attended all or part of this adapted programme with 7 completing it (see footnote 6, page 7). There were a total of 110 attendances between the 19 women, giving an average of 5 attendances per woman and of 10 women per session. This was a considerable overall increase in attendance compared with earlier programmes. One woman was from a BME group, 3 were lesbian women, and 11 had children.

The Drop-in (Year 2) therefore became redundant because of the move to stand-alone sessions. However it was recognised that there was still a need for women to be able to see a groupwork worker individually to discuss issues arising for them as a result of groupwork, and also for DAG workers to meet with women to explain the outline and process of groupwork before they joined

¹⁴ www.freedomprogramme.co.uk

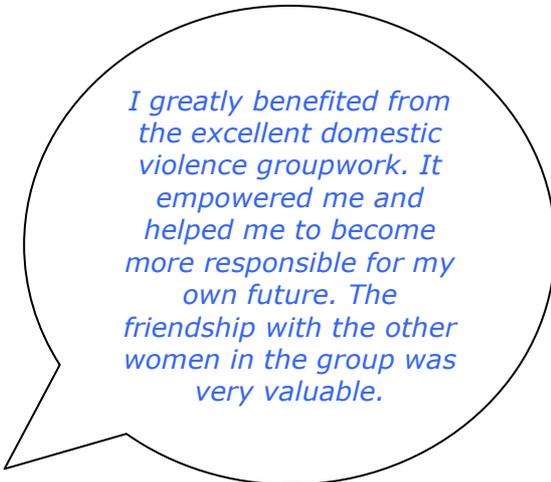
it. Therefore the DAG workers used the time they would have spent at the Drop-in to see women by individual appointment in these respects.

Finally a short programme of 4 stand-alone sessions was held from January to February 2006 as the service came to an end. 11 women attended these 4 sessions and had 19 attendances between them, giving an average attendance per session of 5 women. 2 of women were lesbian and 7 had children. None were from a BME group.

This means a total of 74 women attended the Groupwork programme or the Drop-in during Year 3. There were 129 attendances during the last two programmes alone (September to December 2005 and January to February 2006, 11 weeks and 4 weeks respectively), which was a considerable increase in week-by-week attendance. This suggests that the “stand alone” modular session model was more attractive to women overall and enabled more of them to feel able to attend at least some group sessions.

The DAG workers completed 8 resource packs during Year 3:

1. Am I being abused?
2. Effects of abuse.
3. Coping with loss and grief.
4. Coping with anger.
5. Rights and responsibilities.
6. Coping as parents.
7. Addiction and self-harm.
8. Risk and safety planning



I greatly benefited from the excellent domestic violence groupwork. It empowered me and helped me to become more responsible for my own future. The friendship with the other women in the group was very valuable.

These packs are designed for use during appropriate groupwork sessions, and to be used by other domestic abuse support workers in individual sessions with women.

In addition to these resource packs, the DAG workers also produced a groupwork programme pack for other agencies that are planning or delivering a

similar service and for future use if the DAG service is able to recommence in Calderdale¹⁵. There were also some changes made to the session evaluation and other forms used during Year 3 to capture more in depth responses (see Appendix 2).

This evaluation of the service was undertaken during February and March and a celebration event was held at the end of March 2006 when current funding ended.

Lessons learned from Year 3

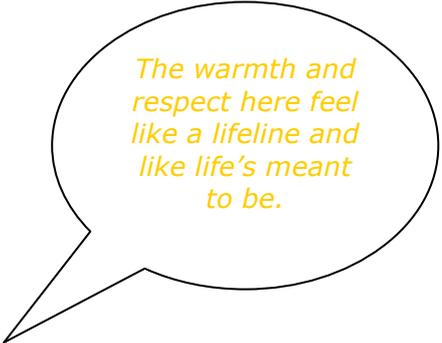
- Effective use of packs by other workers requires some training input if they are to be used to their potential and not simply as handouts.
- Co-facilitation of groups aids management of challenging situations, and enables facilitators to pick up more issues as they arise. Co-facilitation also role models negotiation, respectful relationships and working in partnership.
- Bringing observers (e.g. students on placement) into a group can be difficult. Observers must be prepared to participate fully on a personal level.
- Any volunteers supporting the group need preparation and support if their help and input is to be effective.
- A break in the session is essential and needs to be long enough to enable women to get to know each other and exchange phone numbers etc.
- Groupwork requires considerable preparation time as well as time to debrief and do follow-up support work outside of the actual session. Housekeeping issues such as room preparation and refreshments also requires attention.
- Groupwork attendance by women who are still in abusive relationships can be beneficial to all attendees in terms of increasing understanding and confidence.

¹⁵ Anyone interested in this pack should contact the Domestic Violence Support Team at Calderdale Women's Centre.

- The 12-week Freedom Programme (see footnote 13, page 16) forms an excellent basis for groupwork.
- A rolling programme could incorporate the Freedom Programme together with other sessions that women find helpful such as loss and grief and boundary setting.
- Incorporating children's and parenting issues into each session, rather than addressing these in particular sessions, helps to retain and engage attendees without children, and helps women with children to continually make links between their own and their children's experiences.
- Groupwork raises women's awareness of the impact of domestic abuse more than one-to-one work is usually able to do.



Feel I have had full support, wish I had known about you before, always felt very welcome.



The warmth and respect here feel like a lifeline and like life's meant to be.



Good to talk and meet with other women in the same position.

THE GROUPWORK PROGRAMME

The Groupwork Programme was based, with permission, on one devised by Leeds Inter Agency Project (LIAP). During the development of the Groupwork programme the DAG workers consulted with survivors of domestic abuse, including those from BME communities and agencies who worked around domestic abuse issues. The adapted programme has three strands:

1. To act as a support group through enabling women to share their experiences with each other.
2. To provide structured activities each week to look at different aspects of domestic abuse and its effects on women and children.
3. To bring in speakers from key organisations to inform women about their rights and entitlements and of the procedures and practices of that organisation, so that the women knew what to expect when accessing those services.

All groupwork programmes over the three years were supported by a crèche and all were scheduled during term time only. The Confidentiality Policy, Equal Opportunities Policy and Child Protection Policy of the CWC underpinned the Groupwork Programme.

The aims of the Groupwork Programme were the same for all programmes run over the three years of the service.

Aims of the Groupwork Programme

- To understand the issues facing women experiencing domestic abuse.
- To understand the impact of domestic abuse on women and children.
- To explore domestic abuse issues which have an impact on carer/child relationships.
- To increase self-confidence and be able to make more informed choices and decisions.

Content of the Groupwork Programme

This varied slightly between programmes according to the needs of each group and as lessons were learned from previous programmes run, but generally covered the following in roughly the order below:

- Taster sessions:
Introducing the DAG workers, aims, content and style of course, answering queries.
- Domestic Abuse Groupwork Programme:
Ground rules, confidentiality, evaluation forms (first session all programmes).
Defining domestic abuse, looking at different forms of DA.
Effects of DA on women in the group.
Post-traumatic stress disorder.
Effects of DA on children and children's issues.
How men use children to control women.
Parenting¹⁶
Why women stay, and what makes women leave.
Forced marriages (Asian programme).
Legal issues, family law, civil and criminal laws and remedies regarding DA (including immigration issues on Asian programme).
Blame and anger.
Adult relationships and adult/parent/child positions in relationships.
Personal development strategies, boundary-setting.
Learning opportunities.
Housing issues.
Health issues.
Review, affirmations, what next (personal strategies), celebration.

¹⁶ Effective parenting in relation to DA was woven into the delivery of each session once the programme changed to stand-alone sessions from September 2005 rather than addressed separately.

Participants' expectations of groupwork

Amongst the various pre-course assessment forms were women's statements regarding what they wanted to get from the groupwork programme. These are listed below in no particular order but do show that issues of personal growth and development, a desire to move on, and concerns about children underpin women's decision to participate in groupwork.

- To get support.
- To have someone to talk to.
- To rebuild my confidence.
- To improve my relationship with my children.
- To get advice and support in dealing with my ex-husband and other family members.
- To find help with services/solicitors and housing.
- To help me move on with my life.
- To help me get my self esteem back.
- To get back control of my life.
- To understand that I am not the only person who has suffered and feel not alone.
- To help me cope with situations instead of taking it out on myself.
- Not to be scared.
- To feel stronger and more determined.
- To reach an understanding as to why I've got into this situation.
- To get information.
- To get help with housing.
- To feel safe again.
- To become more settled.
- That it won't happen to me again.
- To get help for my children.
- To help put things in perspective.
- To deal with child contact issues.
- To feel trusting/safe enough to try and enter into another relationship
- To find myself again.
- To be able to stand on my own two feet.
- To get a better understanding of relationships.



The group has really helped me. I am glad the group was set up.



The group workers were excellent. Very good at keeping the group focussed and moving. Very supportive and caring. A good balance of outside speakers – definitely something for everyone.

Speakers and resources

Speakers on the DAG programmes included workers from KIDS, CAFCASS, Careers Service, the CWC Learning and Skills service, Housing Advice, the Asian Women's Service, local refuges¹⁷, the police, solicitors and female sexual health workers¹⁸.

A wide range of the materials used to publicise the Groupwork Programme, to support the content of the sessions and to evaluate the programmes is included in appendices 1-3.

Evolution of the Programme in Year 3

Many changes were made to the Programme during Year 3. Each session was made more stand-alone, and more responsive to issues raised by the attendees. Instead of children's and parenting issues being covered as discreet sessions, these were discussed as integral to the topics covered in each stand-alone session.

The name "Groupwork" was changed to "Group Support" as this was thought to reflect better the aims and objectives of the group and to sound less reminiscent of school and less authoritarian than "groupwork". (However these were late changes in terms of the lifetime of the service, therefore the term "Groupwork" has been used throughout this report.)



¹⁷ In the programme for Asian women, the refuge speaker was from a refuge for Asian women.

¹⁸ Again, the speaker on the Asian women's programme was an Asian health worker.

Groupwork Programme Evaluations.

The external evaluation team has seen all recorded evaluations and comments, and all are overwhelmingly positive about the programme. A possible exception were three women's evaluations that the programme had not helped with regard to their children at all (see tables 2 and 3), but they all added comments that their children were either grown up and not living at home, or that their relationship with their children was alright anyway. The remainder of these women's evaluation were positive.

Analyses of the evaluation forms from all 3 years are presented in Tables 1 to 8 on pages 25 - 28. Evaluations were completed during the final session and so women who were unable to attend this did not complete one. Forms were not mailed due to confidentiality issues.

A total of 39 whole course completion forms were received:

Year 1:	15
Year 2:	16
Year 3:	8

In addition 32 evaluations of the drop-in were completed. 24 of these rated the quality of support received as "very helpful" and 6 rated it as "helpful" with no one rating it as "not very helpful". Comments made about the drop-in were:

"I like this kind of drop-in."

"I found the help offered to be 100%. I was made to feel relaxed and able to talk."

"I found out there were more places I could get support for my children, and I will come back for more support."

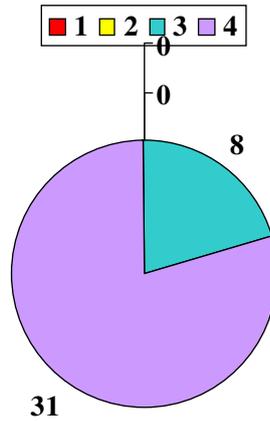
"Very interesting and I am hoping to come on a regular basis."

"I think that on fairly regular visits I will find this a very good form of support."

"I feel better being here today."

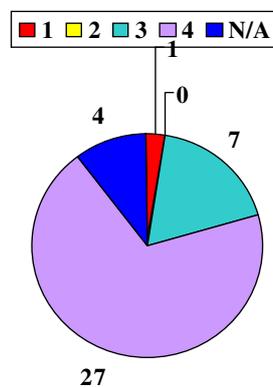
1. Do you think the groupwork helped you to understand more about the issues facing women experiencing domestic abuse?

1. No it didn't help at all
2. I don't know, maybe a little bit.
3. Yes it helped quite a bit.
4. Yes it helped a lot.



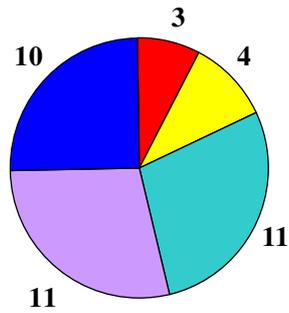
2. Do you think the groupwork helped you understand more about the impact of domestic abuse on children?

1. No it didn't help at all
2. I don't know, maybe a little bit.
3. Yes it helped quite a bit.
4. Yes it helped a lot.



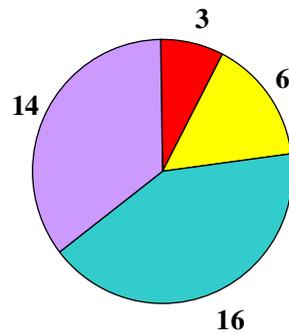
3. Has the groupwork improved your relationship with your children?

1. No it hasn't improved at all.
2. I don't know, maybe it has improved a bit.
3. Yes it has improved quite a bit.
4. Yes it has improved a lot.



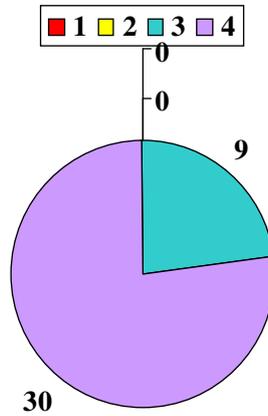
4. How much more confident do you feel since completing the groupwork sessions?

1. No difference to levels of confidence.
2. A little bit more confident.
3. A good bit more confident.
4. Very much more confident.



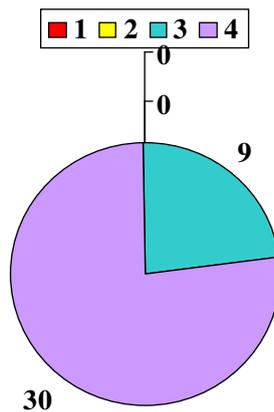
5. Do you feel you would like to attend other courses through CWC as a result of your experience with the groupwork?

1. No, I'll never do something like this again. It was a waste of my time.
2. I might. I need to think about it first.
3. Yes probably.
4. Yes absolutely. I will definitely do another course.



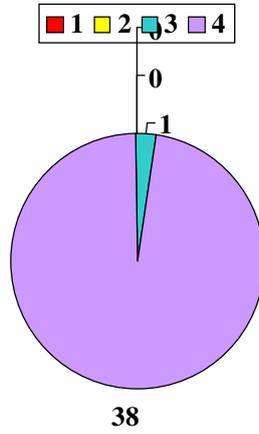
6. Do you feel that the information given was at the right level for you?

1. No, it was all above my head.
2. No, it was much too easy.
3. Most of the time it was about right.
4. Yes, I felt as if the pace and challenge were always right.



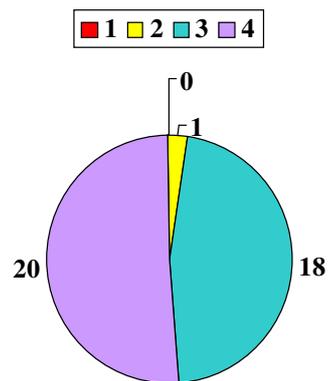
7. Were your group workers well prepared?

1. No, never. It was always shambolic.
2. They were sometimes prepared.
3. They were usually well prepared.
4. They were always well prepared.



8. How would you rate the rooms and facilities at the centre or external venue?

1. Poor.
2. Satisfactory.
3. Good.
4. Excellent.



Conclusions and recommendations

The Domestic Abuse Groupwork Service (DAG) at Calderdale Women's Centre has provided a structured programme to enable women to explore domestic abuse and related issues, for example effects on children and parenting, in a safe supported environment with skilled groupwork facilitators. We have read all documentation relating to all three years that the programme ran (July 2003 to March 2006) and held detailed discussions with the groupwork facilitators and their line managers, as well as attending a groupwork session and the groupwork closure event.

Women's evaluations, reflective written records of sessions done by the facilitators after each session, and the portfolio of group activities all demonstrate the effectiveness and efficacy of this service. The many comments of women, which intersperse this report, are especially testament to the potential of groupwork to help women to integrate their experience of domestic abuse and rebuild their lives. The service clearly has a great deal to offer women who are seeking to understand and move on from their experiences of domestic abuse. As such, groupwork is both complementary and supplementary to individual support, crisis work with women, and groups for children exposed to domestic abuse. Furthermore, the DAG workers have developed knowledge, skills and insight over the three years and are well equipped to run similar services, and to offer training to other workers and agencies seeking to establish similar services.

Whilst the original focus of this service was impact on children and parenting, the history of the service shows that increasing women's understanding of their own experiences must underpin their ability to reflect on and deal with the impact of domestic abuse on their children. The flexibility of the programme enabled children's and parenting issues to permeate the programme and not to be dealt with in isolation. Given the symbiotic nature of women and children's experience of domestic abuse, this groupwork programme importantly was able to mirror this inter-relatedness.

In terms of the quantitative data we have been able to collate, there is also evidence that the workers were increasingly able to recruit and retain women to groupwork. Their ongoing skill development and the flexible and organic nature of the service enabled a series of adaptations to respond to and meet the needs of women. It is apparent that the increasingly sophisticated skill-base that the DAG workers developed enabled them to recognise and respond to the complex needs of women who have experienced abuse, and to develop their service accordingly.

The “Lessons Learned” sections above (see pages 8, 12 and 18) contain many issues that need to be considered when planning domestic abuse groupwork and inform our recommendations below.

Our **recommendations** are:

1. Both local government and health agency agendas currently prioritise domestic abuse on women and children (DoH, 2003; DoH, 2004; LGA, 2005). The Common Assessment Framework (DfES, 2004) has a reduction in the number of children affected by domestic abuse as a key target in its aim to keep children safe.

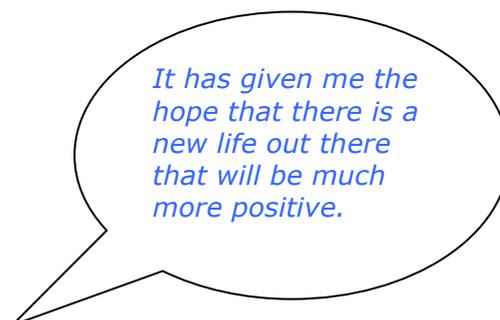
“Supporting the non-violent parent is likely to be the most effective way of promoting the child’s welfare” (DoH, 2000, quoted in LGA, 2005).

The Domestic Abuse Groupwork Service offers the potential to help meet many of the aims and objectives of public policy in this area. Given the current ongoing development of cross agency working with regard to the impact of domestic abuse on women and children, joint funding of the programme could not only help secure its medium to long-term future, but also enhance monitoring and development, raise awareness and engagement in a wider range of workers, and also enable common goals to be established and worked towards. For example, local government (particularly Children’s Services), health

services (particularly maternity and mental health services), probation services and the police all have a common interest in the provision of services that work with women trying to disengage from domestic abuse. **Common commissioning of domestic abuse services that include groupwork would be a beneficial development, particularly at a local level.**

2. Many factors help make groupwork successful and need to be borne in mind when planning and commissioning a groupwork service. The identification of a suitable secure but accessible venue, the provision of a crèche, effective volunteer support, the co-location of a children's support programme, the availability of confidence-building and assertiveness programmes are important issues to address. The training and skill of the facilitators and their ongoing support and development are crucial to the effectiveness of the groupwork sessions and the service as a whole. **Domestic Abuse Groupwork should be located within an adequately resourced, established and skilled domestic abuse support service rather than set up in isolation.**

3. The Calderdale Women's Centre Domestic Abuse Groupwork Service has the potential to train others workers from a variety of agencies and to provide materials and resources for use in other locations. The marketing of those skills and resources could help raise the profile of the CWC Domestic Violence Support Team and secure income. The development of a CWC website would be important in any such development. **The skills and resources that have developed as a result of the DAG service could be marketed and disseminated more widely both locally and nationally.**



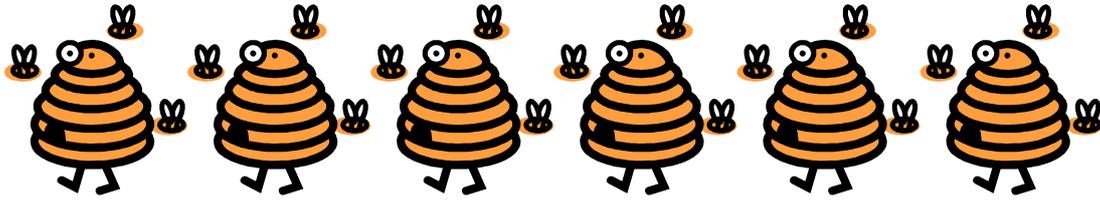
References

- DfES (2004) **Every Child Matters: Change for Children**
Department for Education and Skills
- DoH (2003) **Mainstreaming Gender and Women's Mental Health**
Department of Health
- DoH (2004) **National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services: Maternity Services**
Department of Health
- LGS (2005) **Vision for services for children and young people affected by domestic violence: guidance to local commissioners of children's services**
Local Government Association

Appendix 1

Domestic Abuse Groupwork Publicity (selection)

**CALDERDALE WOMEN'S CENTRE
COMMUNITY OUTREACH SERVICE**



FREE WOMEN ONLY COURSES

At Calderdale Womens' Centre

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN UNDERSTANDING
ISSUES AROUND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND
ABUSE?**

~

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?
UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS?
HOW DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECT CHILDREN & WOMEN?
WHAT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU?
HOW WE CAN BECOME MORE CONFIDENT AND MOVE ON!

**Come for a chat over free coffee & bics
from 10.00 to 11.30 with free creche**

on Tuesday 6th January

to find out if this is for you- or bring a friend!

AT Calderdale Women's Centre

23 Silver Street, Halifax

**GROUP STARTS Tuesday 13th January
FOR 10 WEEKS**

**CALL RACHEL OR HELEN FOR MORE INFORMATION ON
01422 386506**

FREE WOMEN ONLY GROUP WORK

Calderdale Women's Centre

For all women over 16

CRÈCHE AVAILABLE please book

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN SUPPORT AND
UNDERSTANDING ISSUES AROUND DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE AND ABUSE?**

~

**WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?
UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS?
HOW DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECT
CHILDREN & WOMEN?
WHAT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU?
HOW TO BECOME MORE CONFIDENT AND MOVE
ON!**

**11 WEEKS OF GROUP WORK
provided by Calderdale Women's Centre**

**From Tuesday 12th April 2005
10.00 to 12.00**

Call in or phone to book your place

**CALL RACHEL or GLENDA
FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON 01422 386506**

**Calderdale Women's Centre
23 Silver Street, Halifax**

DOMESTIC ABUSE DROP IN

For support + information

Calderdale Women's

Centre

WEDNESDAYS 10.00 TO 12.00

(You are welcome to bring a friend or support worker)

CRECHE AVAILABLE

Topic 10.00 to 11.00

9th March: Coping with stress & Relaxation techniques

16th March: Parenting problems

Easter- no drop in

6th April: CAFCASS and child contact

13th April: Discussion

20th April: Family Law & Solicitors

Appendix 2

Domestic Abuse Groupwork Forms (selection)¹⁹

¹⁹ The Whole Course Evaluation form has been revised and is an adaptation of the forms completed by participants that are analysed on pp. 24 – 28 above.

What do you think?

Calderdale Women's Centre is developing Group Work for women who have or are experiencing Domestic Abuse at different venues across the valley.

Please tick any of the following that you think may be helpful to include in a group work programme and add your suggestions or comments at the end. Thanks for your help.

1. Understanding the physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and financial experiences of Domestic Abuse		12. Understanding support and where to find it	
2. Understanding the stages of an abusive relationship		13. Moving on	
3. Understanding the impact of domestic abuse		14. Understanding different agencies response	
4. Exploring anger and blame		15. Understanding Family Law	
5. Exploring guilt and shame		16. Exploring child contact negotiations	
6. Exploring grief		17. Exploring the impact of domestic abuse on children	
7. Keeping safe		18. Keeping children safe	
8. Understanding change		19. Mother/ child issues as a result of domestic abuse	
9. Exploring recovery processes		20. Responding to children who have lived with domestic abuse	
10. Exploring ways of coping		21. Understanding the roles played by partners	
11. Exploring substance misuse issues: of partners and /or women		22. Supporting partners of men on the perpetrators programme	
Your suggestions or comments:		23. Can we change the system?	

If you are a worker or volunteer please state your agency and area and give other details if you wish.

If you are using a service please state which one and where.

Agency or service:.....Area:.....

Please add the following details if you would like to. All information given is confidential:

Address:

Contact name:

Phone number:

My personal record

Name.....

Week Number.....Date.....

Topic.....

What has the group work been about today?

.....
.....
.....

What has it made me think about?

.....
.....
.....

Describe any action I may need to take as a result of this session:

.....
.....
.....

My thoughts and feelings at the moment are: please write whatever you want and carry on to the back of the page if you wish:

.....
.....
.....

Have my feelings or mood changed since the beginning of this session?
Please describe:

.....
.....
.....

I would like further support/help with (forms, benefits, counselling etc)

.....
.....
.....

CALDERDALE WOMEN`S CENTRE
DOMESTIC ABUSE GROUPWORK
WHOLE COURSE EVALUATION

TITLE OF COURSE:

DATE:

FACILITATOR(S):

YOUR NAME(optional)

Please tick and explain if you can

1. Do you think groupwork helped you understand more about the issues facing women experiencing domestic abuse?

1. *No it didn't help at all because.....*
2. *I don't know, maybe a little bit because.....*
3. *Yes, it helped quite a bit because.....*
4. *Yes it helped a lot because.....*

2. Do you think the groupwork helped you understand more about the impact of domestic abuse on children?

1. *No it didn't help at all because.....*
2. *I don't know, maybe a little bit because.....*
3. *Yes, it helped quite a bit because.....*
4. *Yes it helped a lot because.....*

3. Has the groupwork improved your relationship with your child/ren

1. *.No it hasn't improved at all because.....*
2. *I don't know, maybe it has improved a little bit because.....*
3. *Yes, it has improved quite a bit because.....*
4. *Yes, it has improved a lot because.....*

4. How much more confident do you feel since completing the groupwork sessions?

1. *No difference to levels of confidence because.....*
2. *A little bit more confident because.....*
3. *A good bit more confident because.....*
4. *Very much more confident because.....*

5. Do you feel you would like to attend other courses through CWC as a result of your experience with groupwork?

1. *No, I'll never do something like this again. It was a waste of my time because.....*
 2. *I might. I need to think about it first because.....*
 3. *Yes, probably because.....*
 4. *Yes, I will definitely do another course because.....*
6. Do you feel that the information given was at the right level for you?
1. *No, it was all above my head because.....*
 2. *No, it was much too easy because.....*
 3. *Most of the time it was about right because.....*
 4. *Yes, I felt as if the pace and challenge were always right*
7. Were your group workers well prepared?
1. *No, never. It was always shambolic*
 2. *They were sometimes prepared*
 3. *They were usually well prepared*
 4. *They were always well prepared*
8. How would you rate the rooms and facilities at the centre or external venue?
1. *Poor*
 2. *Satisfactory*
 3. *Good*
 4. *Excellent*

9. We would welcome any other views or comments you would like to make

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, it will help us in the future with all the work that we do with women.

We would be grateful if you could complete the following survey in order to help us assess and improve our outreach services:

Organisation:.....Name:.....Date:.....

1. How clear were the initial discussions about your participation in the group work programme?

Very clear Reasonably clear not very clear not at all clear

2. How clear were the final arrangements?

Very clear Reasonably clear not very clear not at all clear

3. How clear were you and other workers about the content and purpose of the Group-Work?

Very clear Reasonably clear not very clear not at all clear

4. Did you actively seek to promote this opportunity?

Yes/ No

How?.....

5. Were links between CWC workers and key contacts encouraged?

Yes / No

How?.....

6. What efforts have been made to sustain the support opportunities created by your involvement with the Group- work?

.....
.....
.....

7. Have you any comments you would like to make on your answers, or other issues you would like to raise? (Please use reverse side if necessary)

.....
.....
.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey

Appendix 3

Domestic Abuse Groupwork Materials and Resources (selection)

PANIC ATTACKS

For many thousands of years a panic attack was very useful for survival. It has become known as the fight or flight response. In ancient times threats were more straightforward, but we now live in a very complex society and within relationships which are often very dangerous or threatening. **One in Four** women will experience domestic abuse at some time in their lives.

The human mind has learnt to trigger a panic attack fast and unconsciously- it feels like it comes from no-where.

What happens:

The body changes rapidly to survive this unconscious threat. Adrenalin is released, blood pressure increases, breathing speeds up, preparing you for muscular effort. Your legs, arms, hands may shake. You may sweat. Blood is pumped from the stomach and you may feel like being sick or going to the toilet.

Once you have experienced a dangerous event, or lived with frequent or ongoing danger like in a domestic abuse relationship, your body learns to do this automatically if triggered- in the same way as you may have memories following a scent or photograph.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Remember panic attacks never killed anyone. It will pass.

- Hold your breath for as long as you can for the next few breaths
 - Breathe out through your nose slowly to the count of seven and hold, breathe in through your nose to the count of seven so your breath goes deep into your abdomen. Hold, and again.
 - Breathe slowly in and out of a paper bag if you have one.
 - Close your eyes if it helps to concentrate on your breathing
- Or: Focus on something nearby and describe it to yourself.
- Take vigorous exercise on the spot if you feel able to, while breathing in and out of your nose.

Try to build a routine based on the
AWARE plan.

- Accept:** Try not to fight it. It won't kill you. It will pass. This is the time to do your special breathing.
- Watch:** Watch your anxiety. It is neither good nor bad- you are more than your anxiety.
- Act:** Act normal. Try to continue doing what you intended using the special breathing. Staying in the situation helps de-condition the panic response.
- Repeat:** Repeat the steps. Continue accepting, watching and acting normal.
- Expect:** Expect the best> what you fear may never happen. You will surprise yourself by the effective way you handle situations when using the AWARE technique.

Other things you can do long term:

- Take time to relax each day. Even 5 minutes will help.
- Share your experiences of threat or danger with other people who experience panic attacks.
- Try to share without emotion, and your triggers will grow less in time.
- Regular exercise like brisk walking will decrease the chance of panic attacks.
- Do the breathing exercise at least every day even when you are feeling OK.
- Scale your anxious or panicky feelings from one to ten- you will learn to notice when you begin to feel anxious, and do your breathing.
- Record you scales and panic attacks to see how you are doing.
- Focus on the present and near future.

Getting rid of anxiety is not possible, but getting rid of panic attacks **is**.

Change

I walk down a street and there's a deep hole in the pavement. I fall in. It takes forever to get out. It's not my fault.

I walk down the same street. I fall in the hole again. It still takes a long time to get out. It's my fault.

I walk down the same street. I fall in the hole again. It's becoming a habit. It is my fault. I get out immediately.

I walk down the same street and see the deep hole in the pavement. I walk round it.

I walk down a different street.

What do your children witness/experience?

List compiled from the shared experience of women participating in domestic abuse group work

Aware of uncomfortable atmosphere
Witness daddy being physically and verbally abusive to mummy
Witness mummy being anxious and unhappy
See mummy with bruises
Become involved - telling parents to stop arguing, trying to stop fights
Confused by witnessing conflicting behaviour of parents – e.g. dad strategically placing mum so kids could see him kissing her, after he'd been abusive to her
Witnessing that what their parents say, doesn't match with what they do – in other words parents lie, but the children are still told it's wrong to lie – more confusion
Being asked not to say anything about what they saw by mummy, i.e. asked to lie
Having to be locked in the bedroom with mum for safety
Being encouraged to hold black and white thinking by daddy e.g. – 'if you love daddy you won't love mummy' - adds to confusion, as does telling the children that mummy's new boyfriend is not your daddy and he will make you and mummy unhappy
Don't know if they are coming or going, mum says no, father deliberately says yes
Friends and family stop visiting
Children stop inviting friends as they know their home is 'different' – feelings of shame and embarrassment
Having to ask permission to do other things at home that other children would take for granted
Anger at mummy – for throwing daddy out
Fearful of mummy - if she threw daddy out will she throw me out – can over compensate by being very good and very willing to please; can extend beyond the family with dire consequences!
Having to go to bed with air of uncertainty, worried about parents
Witnessing mummy and daddy having separate bedrooms
Arriving at school late because dad prevented mum getting out of bed
Having to be silent at meal times – because father likes his quiet time in kitchen
Mother not being able to cuddle them freely – because of disapproval from partner/father
Dad waving a knife at mum in a temper
Arguments and name calling
Bad language, particularly derogatory gender specific language e.g. slag, whore, lazy cow
Hearing dad say they are not his kids/that mum sleeps around
Getting children to call mum names
Dad saying mum is useless/stupid
Watching dad get drunk and stoned and staggering around
Watching mum cry
Getting children to hit or kick mum
Having a go at mother in front of child and when other people are around, mother feels she has to hold back to keep her dignity
Hearing shouting, especially when in bed
Watching mum beg for father to stop hurting her
Criticising mum in front of children

Belief Exercise

Think of something you would like to believe about yourself that would be a useful resource. Something that would help you achieve your goal or goals.

Eg: I'm becoming more confident

- more open to change
- more responsible for my life
- more in control of my life
- more positive
- more likeable
- more friendly towards other people
- more calm and relaxed
- more energised and enthusiastic
- more focused on my future

Check:

is it positive/ dynamic eg becoming...?

how will this belief affect your goals and relationships?

List actions which would be an example of your belief in practice.

Choose the best one.

Imagine it as a movie- it can be someone else.

Become the main player/ character. See it, feel it, hear the sounds- feel the atmosphere.

Say your belief to yourself as this is going on.

Decide when and where you will put this belief into action- commit yourself.

DEALING WITH THE ANGER HABIT

Chronic or on-going anger

- consumes huge amounts of mental and physical energy,
- takes from our enjoyment of life,
- interferes with constructive and useful thinking,
- threatens our relationship and career prospects,
- undermines our self-esteem and, in extremes,
- can so obsess us that it crowds most other thoughts from our minds.

Is anger the only way you *currently* have of protecting yourself from others who might otherwise control or overwhelm you? And what's a better way to deal with them? Get it really clear in your mind that you no longer want such a pay-off. Or, that you now have better ways of attaining it.

Not all anger is unhealthy. It can sometimes be our final defense against allowing other people to dominate or manipulate us. And it can motivate us to take action against injustice. Anger is *healthy* when it is not on-going but it is usefully channeled into appropriate action.

Some experts believe it is better to express anger rather than bottle it up. Other experts say that expressing anger only makes things worse as it exacerbates the difficult situation and can have unpleasant consequences for your relationships. There is, however, a third option- not to get angry in the first place.

SAFETY PLANNING

What can be done in advance to help in an emergency?

- Put together a list of phone numbers. Include friends or relatives you can trust, local police, Women's Aid (even well known numbers can be forgotten in a panic). Keep this with you or somewhere you can easily get hold of it.
- See if there's someone nearby who knows about the violence or who you can tell about it. Ask if they would ring the police if they hear things go off.
- Try and save some money for bus/train/cab fares.
- Get an extra set of keys for the house/car.
- Keep keys, money, documents and clothes for you and the children packed and ready in a bag that you can quickly get and take away.
- Think about where you would go (have a couple of options). How would you get there?
- Talk to the children if you feel it is safe, so that they understand and can help/cooperate in an emergency. Teach them how to dial 999- even if the phone is left off the hook the police can trace it.

What can you do to protect yourself in an emergency?

- Try to move to a low risk place. Avoid places with sharp instruments such as the kitchen/bathroom/garage. Avoid places you can get trapped in-try to stay near a door you can get out of.
- Find somewhere you can quickly and easily use a phone. (Neighbour, relative, other contacts?)
- Ring 999 yourself or if necessary, get one of the children to do it.
- Trust your own judgment. If you're frightened don't hesitate to find a way to get help or get out.
- If you have a car always make sure there is sufficient petrol in it to get you to safety in an emergency.
-

Things to remember if you plan in advance to leave.

- Leave when he is not around
- Take all your children with you.
- Take your legal and financial papers, marriage and birth certificates, court orders, national health cards, passports, driving license, benefit books, cheque books, credit cards etc...
- Take clothing for at least several days.
- Take any medicine you or the children might need.
- Take personal possessions which have sentimental value-photographs/jewellery for example.
- Take favorite toys for the children.

About denial and addictions

Denial Ain't a River in Egypt.

This is about addiction in its widest sense. Recognising you are in an abusive relationship is the first step. Learning about what is abusive behaviour, and how it affects you and your children can be done safely in a group, or you can explore this in counselling or with a support worker. Sometimes using a self help book can provide a structure to help you. The following is a summary from a website (details at the bottom of the page).

Denial is the PRIMARY psychological symptom of addiction. It is automatic and unconscious. Addicts are often the last to recognize their disease. Many addicts continue to act out their addictions while their world collapses around them- blaming everything but the addiction for their problems.

We cannot work on a problem unless we accept it exists.

If we work through our denial and accept our powerlessness over addictions and the chaos and unmanageability they bring into our lives, we become empowered to lead a safe and healthy life.

Active addiction is characterized by a struggle to control use.

There are many types of denial:

- Projection:- I don't have a problem, you have a problem
- Rationalization:- I drink/ need you - because of my job/ past /life /parents /love
- Intellectualization:-I think about things too much/ I analyse why I need
- Minimisation:- It's not that bad- It's not all the time.
- Suppression:-forcing down memories of our/ partners behaviour, or the consequences of our addictive /using behaviour.
- Withdrawing:- not facing the problems
- Geographic:- If I/we move to another place I/we will feel better

From <http://www.recovery-man.com/denial.htm>