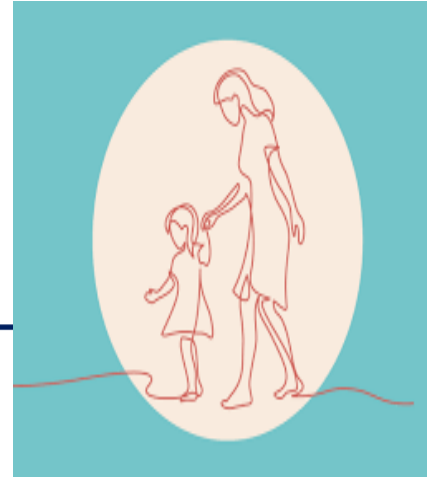


New Partners - Practitioner Briefing

Welcome to this briefing to help practitioners and their managers understand the possible impact of a new partner on children and young people. The messages in this Briefing are just as important for those working in adult services (where service users could be parents or carers).



Within the families you are working with a new relationship can be a major change of circumstances and the inevitable impact on children within the household needs careful consideration. In relation to this briefing, partner means a significant person with whom the parent is having/intending to develop an intimate relationship, which is committed and serious. It is important that parents are aware and understand that when they are embarking on a new relationship this may impact upon their children and that as a practitioner you will need to assess and ask questions about the impact this new relationship may have on their children and themselves as a parent.

Good practice would be to have open and honest conversations with the parent before they embark on a new relationship as it may assist in understanding how they perceive themselves and their expectations of a relationship, as well as their ability to form and maintain stable relationships. Unstable relationships would include multiple relationship breakdowns, or a history characterised by repeated infidelity, high levels of conflict and/or domestic abuse (DA - as perpetrator or victim). It is important to explore with the parent any patterns that emerge, for example, if their history indicates they are the perpetrator of DA, or indicates they may be vulnerable to DA, or not discriminating in their choice of partners. The analysis needs to consider how any relationship strengths or problems impact on each child in the family. Where DA is a concern, practitioners should refer to [additional guidance](#) and consider the safety of the children. Exploration of the parent's relationship history needs to be tailored to the structure of the family, sensitive to their particular circumstances and responsive to their account of their relationship history. Your assessment should include the following:

- The parent's account and perception of their previous relationships (strengths and difficulties) and reasons for these relationships ending
- Any information about the parent's previous relationships, including any evidence of domestic abuse (such as information from other agencies, police call-outs)
- How the parental relationship history impacts on each child in the family (be specific and consider positive and adverse effects)
- Parental insight into any difficulties they have experienced in relation to intimate relationships and insight into the impact previous relationships, and at what stage of their life this was?
- Any information indicating DA in a previous relationship should be raised and explored if the parent does not refer to it
- How long their previous relationships lasted, and the parent's view of why they ended, and how/if affected them and the children
- What the parent feels they have learned from their past relationships?

Getting the basics right - Family-related questions should be embedded in processes at first contact and subsequently, such as:

- Who else lives in your house?
- Who helps and supports you as a parent?
- Who else is important in your life?
- Is there a child in the family (including stepchildren, children of partners or extended family)?
- Are there any significant potential changes to your families' lives?

Assessment is an important part of the process for practitioners to help the family understand their situation, their needs/risks and strengths. It is important to identify information that other agencies may hold on a family and that assessments are coordinated or combined where appropriate. Any assessment of a new partner must include their family history, previous relationships, education, employment, personal attributes etc. and will also need to focus on the new relationship, here are some questions to consider:

- How they met, and how the relationship developed?
- How often will the new partner be in the family home?
- Will the new partner be involved in any decision-making around the day to day care of the child(ren)?
- Will the new partner be financially supporting the household? Who manages the family income and how decisions will be made about what the money is spent on?
- How they would approach differences of approach in their parenting styles?
- How their relationship would cope with stress and family life and how supportive they think their new partner will be?
- Where a new partner has child(ren) will they join the household or be regular visitors and the impact of this?
- The new partner's previous relationships, is there any relevant info that needs to be established about those relationships?
- The impact on the child(ren) as the relationship develops, and how they see the quality of the relationship between the child(ren) and new partner?
- How will the views/feelings of the child(ren) be heard and explored about the new partner? How will the child(ren) be supported to develop their relationship with the new partner?
- Will there be a move to another property?
- The parent's account of the kinds of things they disagree about and what usually happens when they disagree?

Safeguarding checks should be undertaken on **ANY** new partner, ideally with their consent with Police, Health, Probation, etc. It might also be appropriate to advise the parent that they can also request a check via '[Clare's law](#)'. It allows individuals to ask the police to check whether a new or existing partner has a violent past (the 'right to ask'). If police checks show that a person may be at risk of DA from their partner, the police will consider disclosing the information. The aim of the scheme is to give people an opportunity to make enquiries about an individual who they are in a relationship with, or who is in a relationship with someone they know, and there is a concern that the individual may be abusive towards their partner. If police checks show that the individual has a record of offences relating to abuse or there is other information to indicate the person you know is at risk, the police will consider sharing this information with the person(s) best placed to protect the potential victim.

Learning from Reviews - [Hertfordshire Serious Case Review Child N March 2022](#) Key lessons;

- The importance of accessing and analysing historical info about families. Records about Mother's history of previous relationships was missing from assessments. Both would have supported a fuller multi-agency risk assessment.
- The potential risks from Mother's new partner were not understood. These were in relation to alleged harmful sexual behaviours and concerns about how his 3 unmanaged neurological conditions manifested. More detail and analysis of these static risk factors was needed.

Relying on **self-reporting**, particularly from a parent with a previous history of DA and who is in a new relationship, runs the risk that an incomplete picture will emerge. Effective safeguarding practice requires all practitioners to consider their knowledge of DA, the predisposing factors and most importantly, the impact on children.

Please access the [Pan Bedfordshire Child Protection Procedures](#) and register for updates.