

## Domestic Violence and the Law: Working with Perpetrators

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In the last decade there has been a steady increase in services available to support perpetrators of domestic abuse. Probation services have introduced the IDAP (Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme) for perpetrators serving a custodial sentence, and many local councils have commissioned programmes to be run in their area for those not eligible to access the probation's service. For many working in the field of family law it is now becoming common practice to refer perpetrators to these programmes, although it has become evident that many solicitors do not know what such a programme entails.

Many solicitors now recommend a perpetrator access a perpetrator programme to show a willingness to change their behaviour; this has often proven favourable when applying for child contact in divorce proceedings. Although perpetrator programmes are beneficial in this manner, their primary aim is to reduce risk and minimise abuse. The issue, therefore, lies where perpetrators do not acknowledge their behaviour as abusive, and solely access a programme on the basis that it will strengthen their legal argument. Those who blame their partner's behaviour, stress or substance misuse may not benefit from a programme in the way a perpetrator who acknowledges their abusive behaviour will. If this is the case it would be recommended to signpost them to a service such as Respect, [www.respectphoneline.org.uk](http://www.respectphoneline.org.uk) where a worker could assist them in acknowledging their behaviour.

As a solicitor advising men and women in accessing perpetrator programmes it is useful for the solicitor to understand what such a programme entails. A majority of perpetrator programmes use cognitive behavioural therapy to alter the thought process and address dysfunctional emotions through a goal oriented systemic process. Most accredited programmes will run for around 30 weeks, though some run for up to 52, and will take place once a week for around 2 hours. Programmes will look at all forms of abusive behaviour, physical, emotional, psychological, financial and sexual. They will encourage perpetrators to acknowledge their own abusive behaviour and teach coping mechanisms and tools to reduce the risk of them using abusive behaviour in the future.

All perpetrators accessing programmes are assessed for suitability. Due to the length and high cost of the programme, perpetrators must show a willingness to change their behaviour. This assessment is generally made through a series of 1-2-1 sessions prior to the commencement of the programme. Due to the frequency of perpetrators dropping out of the programme once child contact has been granted, most programmes will not accept referrals for perpetrators where there is an ongoing court case.

A further issue is the limited number of perpetrator programmes which run across the UK. Most large cities now have a service dedicated to working with abusive men; however for some there may be a requirement to travel to another county. Not only does this make it costly to travel to, many services will charge an increased rate (to either the perpetrator, social services or the local authority) for clients living out of the local area. This often acts as a deterrent to many perpetrators wishing to access support.

There is a further barrier for females and men in same sex relationships who perpetrate domestic abuse. A majority of perpetrator programmes are geared towards working with heterosexual men, and cannot offer support for female perpetrators or males that perpetrate abuse against male victims. Although there has been an increase in services working with these client groups they are unfortunately still few and far between.

Many perpetrator programmes running in the UK also offer parallel support for the victim of domestic abuse. The aim of this is to increase the safety of the victim, ensure the perpetrator is engaging whilst accessing the programme and to offer ongoing practical and emotional support.

Some UK domestic violence services also offer ongoing 1-2-1 support for perpetrators of domestic abuse. This work often follows the same structure, acknowledging the 5 main types of abuse, and looks at coping strategies. 1-2-1 work allows sessions to be more personalised and caters more to the specific needs of the client. However, there is evidence to show that 1-2-1 work is not as effective as group work when reducing the abusive behaviour of a perpetrator.

Although only a brief introduction, it gives an insight in to the vast field of domestic abuse and lays a foundation for what will be discussed in this series of articles focusing on domestic violence and the law. For more information please visit [martintrainingandconsultancy.co.uk](http://martintrainingandconsultancy.co.uk) or contact Luke Martin by e-mail [martintandc@gmail.com](mailto:martintandc@gmail.com).