**Relate response to HM Government Transforming the Response to Domestic Abuse consultation**

**NB: We have not answered all of the consultation questions, but have focused on those areas most relevant to Relate’s expertise.**

1. **Do you agree with the proposed approach to the statutory definition?**

Relate agrees with the proposed approach to the statutory definition of domestic abuse. Broadening the understanding of what constitutes abuse will mean that the many different ways in which people can be abused can be considered and addressed, and Relate welcomes the recognition that abuse can take place in a wide range of domestic settings, and take different forms.

1. Will the new definition change what your organisation does?

[No response]

1. **How can we ensure that the definition is embedded in frontline practice?**

Providing training, guidance and tailored resources for frontline professionals will be important to ensure that the new definition is understood, acted upon and embedded within practice.

1. What impact do you think the changes to the age limit in the 2012 domestic abuse definition have had?

[No response]

1. We are proposing to maintain the current age limit of 16 years in the statutory definition – do you agree with this approach?

[No response]

1. **In addition to the changes being made to how relationship education will be taught in schools, what else can be done to help children and young people learn about positive relationships and educate them about abuse?**

In addition to including core content on healthy and unhealthy relationships (including recognising positive, healthy and respectful relationships, and identifying when people are unkind, disrespectful or controlling; what it means to be a friend; challenging bullying and resisting peer pressure; boundaries and consent; self-respect and respect for others) in the forthcoming mandatory relationships education/RSE subject curriculum, we would highlight that it is important that the government ensures the new mandatory subjects are given adequate curriculum time, and supported by specific training. Relationships and Sex Education, in our view, should be an identifiable part of planned, timetabled PSHE education. Relate has long highlighted that the ideal place for RE/RSE is within PSHE, which should be made statutory to ensure it is not reduced purely to ‘drop down’ or off-timetable days. Good quality RE/RSE should be delivered as part of a wider curriculum promoting health, resilience, confidence, respect, and personal safety, both online and offline.

The impact and effectiveness of RSE and PSHE in educating children and young people about healthy and unhealthy relationships and preventing relationship abuse will also depend on the confidence and competence of teachers: effective delivery requires staff who are specifically trained in RE/RSE and PSHE. Yet Sex Education Forum surveys have found just three per cent of teachers say RSE was covered adequately within teacher training, and seven out of ten say they need more training to teach the subject properly (<http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/media/28306/SRE-the-evidence-March-2015.pdf>). We would therefore urge the Government to commit a quantifiable resource to training, including delivered by organisations with expertise in relationships and relationships education, so that every primary and secondary school in England can access basic training in good practice RSE and PSHE. Expert and appropriate external Third Sector organisations such as Relate are also well-placed to be invited in to assist schools and supplement RE/RSE in schools to enhance and supplement the RE/RSE schools programmes. The Department for Education should develop standards for those delivering RSE and set an expectation that schools recognise that developing relational capability is an important function of education and a child’s future.

We would also highlight the important role of school-based counselling for children and young people who may experience unhealthy and/or abusive relationships – at home or with peers – for supporting children and young people to understand and be better equipped to deal with abuse. Relate’s experience delivering Relationships Education programmes in schools is that teaching about healthy/unhealthy relationships, positive versus negative methods of conflict resolution, etc. can itself actually trigger emotional responses (for instance, children/young people reflecting on their family situations, or relationships with peers) that may require counselling support. All secondary schools in Wales and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland provide access to school-based counselling services, and there is a statutory duty in Wales for authorities to provide access to school-based counselling services. In order to ensure availability of support for all who may need it, we urge the Government to follow Wales and Northern Ireland’s example and make access to counselling compulsory in all schools in England.

Finally, a broader public health/public awareness campaign to promote the importance of healthy relationships (as we set out in our response to Question 9) could also increase children’s and young people’s understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships and educate them about abuse.

1. Which statutory agencies or groups do you think the UK government should focus its efforts on in order to improve the identification of domestic abuse?

[No response]

1. **In addition to improving training programmes and introducing guidance, what more can the government do to improve statutory agencies’ understanding of domestic abuse?**

Relate also believes that wider training for frontline professionals to not only improve their understanding of and ability to identify domestic abuse, but to increase their confidence to talk to clients/service users about their relationships more generally can play an important role in reducing professionals’ nervousness about addressing relationships and supporting more conversations about healthy and unhealthy relationships – which may support a culture change that enables greater disclosure of abuse and earlier intervention to prevent abuse. An RCT evaluation of an early intervention relationships support training programme, for example, has shown training had a large and positive impact on how practitioners handled conversations with clients about their relationships in that they used techniques such as active listening and summarising, as well as an impact on practitioner confidence, with those in the intervention group being more than twice as likely to feel confident in knowing where and how to refer parents on.[[1]](#endnote-1) The research highlighted significant differences between professionals’ discussions with service users about relationships before and after the training, and the training equipped practitioners with more appropriate techniques. The effect held even after accounting for practitioners’ number of years’ experience and confidence prior to training.

Frontline practitioners delivering public services (across a spectrum from universal services to specialist professionals) who are likely to come into contact with relationship issues, such as GPs, health visitors, housing officers, social workers, CAMHS professionals, Troubled Families keyworkers, etc. could be given training about relationship health and relationship support to help them to identify signs of unhealthy relationships, talk appropriately and with confidence to service users about their relationships, promote healthy relationships, sign-post or refer to relevant support services to improve relationship health, as well as screen for and be better able to respond to domestic violence and abuse.

1. **What further support can we provide to the public (employers, friends, family, community figures) so they can identify abuse and refer victims to help effectively?**

A public health campaign, building on the Government’s ‘Disrespect NoBody’ campaign aimed at teenage relationship abuse, and broadening out to focus on improving understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships more generally and promoting the importance of healthy relationships, could help to increase identification of and appropriate responses to domestic abuse by the public. Building and sustaining healthy relationships is still widely held to be largely a private matter in the UK today, with people expected to address any issues themselves without accessing help,[[2]](#endnote-2) and stigma persists around disclosing relationship difficulties[[3]](#endnote-3) and is often held to signify failure.[[4]](#endnote-4) This stigma can prevent people from seeking support earlier – or at all.

Learning about relationships and developing relational skills must be an open-ended process. A strong and healthy society built upon strong and healthy relationships requires sustained development of ‘relational capability’ – people’s ability to form and maintain positive and nurturing relationships. Research has also indicated the need for a public education campaign to draw attention to the fact that all relationships run into difficulties and to highlight the strategies couples can learn to negotiate a path through them.[[5]](#endnote-5)

We believe there is a compelling case for a targeted programme of work to generate a social movement for relationships – drawing on the lessons of successful campaigns like ‘Time to Change’ this would be enabled by the third sector and supported by government, but ultimately owned by a wide-range of grassroots activists. The aim would be to normalise talking about relationship health and to de-stigmatise help-seeking.

1. **We are in the process of identifying priority areas for central government funding on domestic abuse. Which of the following areas do you think the UK government should prioritise?**

* Therapeutic support services, including counselling, for victims of domestic abuse to recover from their experience
* Perpetrator programmes to change offenders’ behaviour, stop re-offending, and halt cycles of abuse

1. What more can the government do to encourage and support effective multi-agency working, in order to provide victims with full support and protection?

[No response]

1. What more can the government do to better support victims who face multiple barriers to accessing support?

[No response]

1. How can we work better with female offenders and vulnerable women at risk of offending to identify their domestic abuse earlier?

[No response]

1. How can we make greater use of women-specific services to deliver interventions in safe, women-only environments?

[No response]

1. In addition to reviewing who may be eligible for the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession, what other considerations could the government make in respect of protecting domestic abuse victims with no recourse to public funds?

[No response]

1. Do you agree that the proposed Domestic Abuse Protection Notice issued by the police should operate in broadly the same way as the existing notice (except that it would also be able to be issued in cases of abuse which do not involve violence or the threat of violence)?

[No response]

1. Which of the following individuals/organisations should be able to apply for a Domestic Abuse Protection Order?

[No response]

1. Which persons or bodies should be specified by regulations as ‘relevant third parties’ who can apply for a Domestic Abuse Protection Order on a victim’s behalf?

[No response]

1. We propose that there should be multiple routes via which an application for a Domestic Abuse Protection Order can be made, including:
   * at a magistrates’ court by the police following the issue of a Domestic Abuse Protection Notice or at any other time
   * as a standalone application by, for example, the victim or a person or organisation on the victim’s behalf to a family court
   * by a party during the course of any family, civil or criminal proceedings

Do you agree?

[No response]

1. Do you agree that family, civil, and criminal courts should be able to make a Domestic Abuse Protection Order of their own volition during the course of any proceedings?

[No response]

1. Do you agree that courts should be able to impose positive requirements as well as prohibitions as part of the conditions attached to the proposed order?

[No response]

1. Do you agree that courts should be able to require individuals subject to a Domestic Abuse Protection Order to notify personal details to the police?

[No response]

1. If so, what personal details should the courts be able to require individuals to provide to the police?

[No response]

1. Do you agree that breach of the proposed order should be a criminal offence?

[No response]

1. If you do agree that breach of the proposed order should be a criminal offence, should it be possible for breach to alternatively be punished as a contempt of court?

[No response]

1. Do you agree that courts should be given an express power to impose electronic monitoring as a condition of a Domestic Abuse Protection Order?

[No response]

1. Which particular statutory safeguards relating to the use of electronic monitoring with Domestic Abuse Protection Orders should be put in place?

[No response]

1. How much easier do you think it will be for domestic abuse victims to register to vote anonymously, once the changes summarised above happen?

[No response]

1. What further support could survivors receive to prove their safety would be at risk if their name and address appeared on the electoral register? Please put forward one suggestion.

[No response]

1. Do you have any further comments or suggestions on how to make it easier for domestic abuse survivors to anonymously register to vote?

[No response]

1. Aside from anonymous registration, how else can we keep victims’ addresses safe?

[No response]

1. **Before reading this consultation, were you aware of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare’s Law)?**

Yes

1. Do you agree the guidance underpinning the DVDS should be placed on a statutory footing?

[No response]

1. How do you think we can best promote awareness of the Domestic Violence Disclosure scheme amongst the public?

[No response]

1. What practical barriers do domestic abuse victims face in escaping or recovering from economic abuse and how could these be overcome?

[No response]

1. What more can we do to tackle domestic abuse which is perpetrated online, or through control of technology?

[No response]

1. How can we continue to encourage and support improvements in the policing response to domestic abuse across all forces and improve outcomes for victims?

[No response]

1. Do you think creating a legislative assumption that all domestic abuse victims are to be treated as eligible for assistance on the grounds of fear and distress (if the victim wants such assistance), will support more victims to give evidence?

[No response]

1. Is there more this government could do to explain the range and remit of existing measures for victims to help support them in the criminal justice process?

[No response]

1. Do you know of instances in criminal proceedings when an application to prevent cross-examination of a victim by an unrepresented defendant has been denied in a domestic abuse case? Where possible, please provide evidence or details of the experience to support your answer.

[No response]

1. Do you think extending the prohibition on cross-examination in criminal proceedings would support more domestic abuse victims to give evidence?

[No response]

1. Do you have suggestions for how we can better support prosecutions through to conclusion, including providing better support for witnesses who currently disengage from the process? Where possible, please provide evidence or details of the experience to support your answer.

[No response]

1. What more can police, witness care units and the Crown Prosecution Service do to support victims through the justice process from the point of report onwards? Where possible, please provide evidence or details of the experience to support your answer.

[No response]

1. Are there other aspects of the criminal court treatment of vulnerable people which the family court could learn from?

[No response]

1. Do you think there is further action the government could take to strengthen the effectiveness of the controlling or coercive behaviour offence?

[No response]

1. Do you think the current approach of using sentencing guidelines, as per guidelines issued in February 2018 is effective in ensuring sentences imposed reflect the seriousness of domestic abuse when it involves children?

[No response]

1. Is a statutory aggravating factor needed in order for the court to reflect the seriousness of offences involving domestic abuse and children in sentencing?

[No response]

1. Please share any other views on how to ensure domestic abuse and its impact on children are taken into account in sentencing?

[No response]

1. Do you agree that taking extraterritorial jurisdiction over these offences is sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the Convention?

[No response]

1. If not, what additional offences do you think we should take extraterritorial jurisdiction over and why?

[No response]

1. Do you agree that relying on the civil law remedy in the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 is sufficient to satisfy the sexual harassment requirements of the Convention?

[No response]

1. If not, what do you think is necessary to satisfy those requirements?

[No response]

1. Do you agree we should explore (with the Crown Prosecution Service) further controlled and monitored use of conditional cautions with rehabilitation programmes than is currently permitted for lower-level, normally first time domestic abuse incidents?
   * If yes, please explain your answer, suggesting what procedures should be in place to ensure a conditional caution would only be given in appropriate cases with appropriate conditions attached
   * If no, please explain your answer

[No response]

1. Do you have any additional evidence on current conditional caution practice which we should consider in relation to this issue?

[No response]

1. What changes to current policies or procedures would help police and other agencies to better manage serial and repeat abusers, in particular those who are not subject to a sentence of the court. This can include how best to:
   * risk assess an abuser and plan for risk reduction
   * engage an abuser in order to encourage compliance with control measures

[No response]

1. What more could be done to work with perpetrators in prisons, particularly offenders who receive a sentence of less than 12 months and do not have sufficient time to complete a domestic abuse programme in custody? We are interested to hear of particular examples of practice which have been successful.
2. [No response]
3. **What more could be done to work with perpetrators in the community (convicted or non-convicted) to change their behaviour? We are interested to hear of particular examples of practice which have been successful.**

Relate believes that considerably more work with perpetrators to change behaviour could – and should – be done. At present, provision of high-quality, safe, and effective perpetrator programmes for abusive men who have not been convicted is patchy. Relate currently provides perpetrator programmes as part of a menu of specialist relationship support services, including ‘Choose2Change’, the only fully Respect-accredited programmes in Wales, and we believe we have a much greater role to play in delivering specialist therapeutic programmes to change abusers’ behaviour.

‘Choose2Change’ is a service to increase the safety of victims of domestic abuse through working with the perpetrator. The service can work with perpertators in both one-to-one setting and a group setting, depending on the individuals and their location. It is an intervention that includes assessment for suitability, a structured motivational programme and goal setting and is delivered over a minimum period of six months. Support sessions are also provided for the partner or ex-partner to ensure a safety plan is implemented and there is a good understanding of the programme itself.

The Relate Choose2Change programme was included in the perpetrator programmes evaluated by the five-year landmark study Project Mirabal (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/criva/projectmirabal/>). This evaluation found considerable results in terms of the reduction in physical and sexual violence (30% of women reported being made to “do something sexual” they did not want to do in the three months before the programme started – which was reduced to zero a year after starting the programme; women’s reporting of having a weapon used against them reduced from 29% to zero; the proportion of women who reported being slapped, punched or having something thrown at them reduced from 87% to 7%; the proportion of women who reported being physically injured fell from 61% before the programme to 2% after; and the extent to which children saw/overheard violence dropped from 80% pre-programme to 8% post). Over half of the women reported feeling ‘very safe’ after the programme, compared to less than 1 in 10 before the programme, and those feeling ‘not safe at all’ reduced from 32% to 6%.

In addition to these significant reductions in physical abuse and improved feelings of safety, the evaluation showed improvements on five other measures of success (respectful relationships; expanded space for action; decreased isolation; enhanced parenting and understanding the impact of domestic violence) – though not to the extent that was seen for the physical/sexual violence. (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/criva/ProjectMirabalfinalreport.pdf>)

**The client testimony below demonstrates the value of this programme:**

My name is Gareth [name has been changed] and I have attended Relate’s Choose2Change for the last 18 months. I think the best way to describe my situation is to give you a brief account of my life and what changes have happened to me over the last 18 months. When I first joined C2C I didn’t think I had a problem, I had been through many years thinking that the whole world had a problem and that my anger and my poor relationships were not down to me. I worked in senior management within the printing industry, Money was good but family life was poor, I was very bullish, I now consider the old me a very arrogant person. I spent long periods of time away from my family and when I came home I was a monster, spent no time with them, drank a lot and argued a lot with my partner – so what changed?

I had separated from my wife twice in three years, both incidents of separation followed very volatile arguments where physical domestic violence was used, both incidents went through the courts, social services were involved also as I have two daughters, and still I didn’t think I had a problem. During the second incident I was living for a short while with my best friend and his wife, his wife sat me down one night, she said to me that she thought I had a problem and that maybe I should seek help on the C2C course. It took someone who I was not close to open my eyes a little, enough to attend.

I can remember attending the first meeting and leaving almost shell shocked, I was at the start of my journey towards realisation of my actions and how I harmed others. I was still full of negativity, in fact I was hostile to a whole host of people who were involved in what I perceived to be the breakup of my marriage. I suppose that first meeting I expected a back-slapping exercise, expected to sit down and taught how to control my anger, how to get what I wanted out of relationships – I was so Very Wrong.

As I stated, I was at the beginning of my journey, lots of the men on the course had been through what I had been through, but were far more advanced on their own journey. The back-slapping exercise never happened, instead I was confronted, challenged, I have to admit the first session for me was not a great experience but it intrigued me, was I in the right? Should I look at myself? Do they have a point?

Over the several months that followed I started putting myself in other people’s shoes, started to look at things from another’s point of view. This is something I had never done before, it was ‘my way or the highway’ I like to look back now and think of this as a Eureka Moment, I had been living a lie for so many years, I had destroyed my marriage, I had destroyed many friendships, I had put my blood relatives to the brink of disowning me, my work colleagues hated me, and I thought there was no problem? My life was in tatters, I had taken redundancy from work, I had no family, I had little friends but I had started to realise that the reason was – ME!!

Over these months my relationship with my Partner Sharon improved immensely, I found that I was able to communicate better, I was able to listen and to acknowledge other people’s thoughts. At C2C we are always taught that we cannot change other people, we can only change ourselves. It does take two people to fight and argue, if anyone spoke to my wife she would admit that she had been involved and sometimes at fault in a lot of our arguments, the thing is that I am so much bigger than my wife and am capable of inflicting a lot more anger than she is capable of. Because of the change in me we did find that it altered the way we dealt with things, communication was key and we sit down and talk about issues in an adult manner. I eventually moved back in and have been home now for over a year. I spend much more quality time with my family and I would say that we are now very happy. In truth it is lovely!

I am now completing the end of my journey with C2C but I do not want to leave, this has nothing to do with me not feeling like I can manage without C2C support. I now see myself as through my journey and able to help and assist the course leaders challenging new members to the group in the hope that they can see the light as I did. C2C has changed my life completely, I am almost on a personal vendetta to end Domestic Violence in the UK. My thoughts now are that if we can get to men who are showing signs of DV early then we can work with them and hopefully remove the police and court requirements. Having spent time on courses run by probation this really has a lot more to offer, WE CHOOSE to be there and this is the difference.

**The Relate Choose2Change programme is accredited by**[Respect](http://respect.uk.net/)**.**

In addition to increasing the availability of such programmes, Relate believes the government should ensure that any community-based work with perpetrators meets the highest standards and places victims’ safety at the centre. Thus, Relate’s work with perpetrators, such as the aforementioned ‘Choose2Change’ programme, is RESPECT-accredited. The current variability in perpetrator programmes poses great risks to victims, and in order to ensure safety, it is absolutely vital that perpetrator programmes conform as a minimum to the RESPECT quality standards. Relate would support a requirement that all perpetrator programmes commissioned must meet the RESPECT Standard.

We would also highlight the potential role for training for professionals to not only identify domestic abuse, but also to help perpetrators to engage with perpetrator programmes. Relate’s specialist Domestic Abuse Service, Choose2Change has developed Early Engagement & Motivation Sessions training, in response to what is often a frustrating process for clients and professionals whereby clients are referred for specialist support in the absence of any commitment or motivation to engage resulting in no positive outcomes for families or professionals. This period of ‘waiting for non-starter interventions’ is a significantly risky time – professionals and victims feel assured that the specialist service will reduce, or at least manage the risk and so other efforts are often suspended. Ultimately in more than half of these cases the referrer is informed that due to a ‘lack of engagement’ no intervention will take place. As a solution, this training programme was developed to support frontline staff working in a range of statutory and non-statutory services to appropriately engage with perpetrators in a way that enables them to make informed, defensible decisions to either refer for behaviour change focused work or focus resources on management of risk likely to include restrictions and monitoring. It is designed to be flexible to the needs of each client so although there are up to 6 clear sessions not all clients will need to attend all sessions - the training for professionals includes guidance about how and when to ‘deselect’ someone or recognising that the client is ‘treatment ready’.

1. Please select which of the following you believe should be priorities for improving data collection.

[No response]

1. Do you agree with the proposed model for a Domestic Abuse Commissioner outlined above?

[No response]

1. Of the proposed powers and resources, which do you consider to be the most important for a Domestic Abuse Commissioner?

[No response]

1. Question for public bodies only: What would be the practical implications of complying with the proposed Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s powers?

[No response]

1. One proposal is that the Domestic Abuse Commissioner could routinely collate, quality assure and share lessons learnt from DHRs. What more could be done to increase awareness of the learning from DHRs?

[No response]

1. How can areas best hold their own local agencies to account in terms of monitoring delivery against DHR action plans?

[No response]

1. **How can the government better share and promote effective practice on domestic abuse across all public services both in regard to commissioning and delivery of services?**

The government can improve the promotion of and dissemination of effective practice on domestic abuse by developing a coordinated national approach to overcome the patchiness and variability of localism. The Bill does not make any substantial commitment to funding long-term and sustainable support services for victims and perpetrators. What is needed is a national approach to ensure national coverage of support services.

1. What role should local areas play in sharing good practice?

[No response]

1. Colemam, L., Houlston, C., Casey, P. & Bryson-Purdon Social Research (2013) A Randomised Control Trial of a Relationship Support Training Programme for Frontline Practitioners Working with Families. London: OnePlusOne [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Chang, Y-S. & Barrett, H., (2009) Couple relationships: A review of the nature and effectiveness of support services, London: Family and Parenting Institute [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Walker, J., Barrett, H., Wilson, G. & Chang, Y-S. (2010) Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Chang, Y-S. & Barrett, H. (2009) Couple relationships: A review of the nature and effectiveness of support services, London: Family and Parenting Institute [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Walker, J., Barrett, H., Wilson, G. & Chang, Y-S. (2010) Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families [↑](#endnote-ref-5)