

Domestic Abuse Bill

**Report Stage debate:
domestic abuse & speech,
language and communication
needs**

17 March 2021



Lord Ramsbotham



- ‘The ability to communicate is a vital life skill, and early speech and language training an important factor in every child’s health and development....
- ‘...those victims of domestic abuse who also face communication barriers are arguably among the most vulnerable, given the added difficulties that they face in asking for help.
- ‘I appeal to them to listen to the expertise of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, I CAN, the leading children’s communication charity, and the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers, all of which support the amendment.’

Baroness Andrews



- 'children and adults with speech and language difficulties are at greater risk of abuse than others and are therefore among the most vulnerable victims of domestic abuse.
- 'they face not only physical abuse but collateral dangers such as other mental health issues, substance misuse, literacy difficulties, learning disabilities, brain injury, neurodiversity, cognitive issues and, for many, rough sleeping and homelessness.
- 'To make the Government's task easier, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists has done the hard work. [They] have suggested a few specific ways of strengthening the guidance, and we are all grateful to them for their thoughtful and expert help throughout this Bill.'

Lord Shinkwin 1/2



- 'for those with communication needs, it is absolutely vital that the services provided include...speech and language therapy services.
- 'Let us imagine how much being unable to communicate would compound our sense of vulnerability, anxiety and distress, not to mention the real danger in which we as a victim might still be.

Lord Shinkwin 2/2



- ‘How warmly an assurance on that point from the Minister would be welcomed by me and other noble Lords, by the excellent Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists—of which I am proud to be a vice-president—and, of course, by victims of domestic abuse with communication needs, on whose behalf, as someone who himself has communication needs, I wholeheartedly support these amendments.’

Baroness Whitaker 1/2



- 'speech and language therapists, as is mentioned in the useful briefing from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, report that various domestic abuse assessments, often verbally communicated, have not always been understood by people with communication needs, because of the level of understanding, retention and processing required, and often also because of their state of mind, exacerbated by stress brought on by abuse.
- 'It is difficult for people who are accustomed to communicating with ease to understand the real impediments to understanding experienced by some of those with communication needs.

Baroness Whitaker 2/2



- ‘The consequence, of course, is that assessments will not reflect the problem, appropriate support will not be forthcoming, and any rehabilitation or prevention programme will fail. What a waste of time and resources. Sadly, it is not uncommon for people with learning disabilities, including children, to be abused, and they are at greater risk of an inadequate professional response if we cannot ensure an effective way to communicate with them.’

Baroness Finlay 1/2



- 'Communication is far more than expressing words. There is non-verbal communication, and there are language difficulties, word-finding difficulties and a wide range of developmental factors, particularly in children and young people, that need highly specialised speech and language therapy support. Going without such support will further damage the person's life chances and increase their risk of abuse.
- 'One speech and language therapy service alone reports that 58% of the children and young people on its caseload have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse.

Baroness Finlay 2/2



- 'A speech and language therapist working in a secure children's home reports a high prevalence of communication needs among children and young people who have experienced significant levels of abuse themselves.
- Take Faisal's experience. Taken into care as a young teenager after years of observing domestic abuse between his parents, at 15 Faisal had language disorders associated with learning difficulties and attachment difficulties. Joint working by the social worker and the speech and language therapist has been essential to improve his life chances.'

Lord Paddick - for the Lib Dems



- ‘the Minister spoke about the extensive engagement undertaken on the statutory guidance, including a specific working group focusing on disability, including learning disabilities.
- ‘While that is welcome, I did not hear any commitment to address the specific issues raised in this amendment— when children witness domestic abuse, it can lead to communication difficulties and the support required by those with speech, language and communication needs to help them to express the impact that domestic abuse has had on them.’

Lord Kennedy of Southwark – for Labour



- ‘The speech, language and communication needs of victims of domestic abuse have to be properly addressed.
- ‘If we are to have effective domestic abuse support for disabled people, it must be barrier-free and truly accessible.
- ‘the ability to communicate is a vital skill.
- ‘Those with communication difficulties are particularly vulnerable, which is why we need to ensure that local authorities, the police and all other agencies are able to address and ensure that they have provisions in place to make sure that people can make their points effectively and be understood, having their concerns met and needs addressed.’

Lord Parkinson – for Govt 1/4



- ‘people with speech, language and communication needs can be especially at risk of harm and, of course, domestic abuse, as well as facing additional barriers in accessing services.
- ‘this is not a niche issue, nor should it be treated as such, especially in the context of domestic abuse.
- ‘we will revise the guidance to make further express reference to speech, language and communication needs, in relation to not just those with special educational needs but the links between domestic abuse and those with communication needs, specifically children and young people.

Lord Parkinson – for Govt 2/4



- ‘We recognise the impact that domestic abuse can have on the development of children’s speech and communication.
- ‘We know that children can express themselves in a variety of ways, and it is important that we are all mindful of that — especially in the context of domestic abuse.
- For instance, children may display behaviour that might seem ‘aggressive to mainstream professionals when, really, their communication needs are not being tailored appropriately.
- ‘We are very clear that it is important that we give children and young people the right support as and when they need it because of their vulnerabilities.’

Lord Parkinson – for Govt 3/4



- ‘The guidance also details how perpetrators can exploit these communication needs and requirements. Whether it is through a perpetrator insisting that they are the only person to interpret, preventing access to an external interpreter or removing the victim’s hearing aids, these are horrific tactics, which we know are used to perpetuate abuse, and they will be covered in the guidance.
- ‘The Government continue to prioritise improving speech and language outcomes, based on early identification and targeted support. I have previously referred to Public Health England’s excellent guidance, drafted in conjunction with the Department for Education.

Lord Parkinson – for Govt 4/4



- ‘we recognise that speech, language and communication needs are extremely important, which is why they will be expressly covered in guidance.
- ‘There is a wealth of guidance already available, and we intend to augment this with the statutory guidance to be issued under Clause 73.
- ‘The forthcoming domestic abuse strategy will afford a further opportunity for us to ensure that we are adopting a whole-system approach when tackling this crime and these unique needs.’

RCSLT reflections



- The commitment from the Government to revise the draft statutory guidance is very welcome.
- We need to wait and see the detail of how the Government proposes to do that.
- However, any revisions to include specific references to speech, language and communication needs should make a real difference to people's lives.
- That difference will be maximised if:
 - the references are made in relation to the victims of domestic abuse, children and young people who witness domestic abuse and the perpetrators of domestic abuse; and
 - the role that speech and language therapists can play is also explicitly referenced.

Thank you!



- Thank you to the peers who raised these issues at Second Reading, Committee, and Report.

- You can access the debates:
 - **Second Reading**
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-01-05/debates/1384371F-73F4-40BC-A44A-B0358CF839B6/DomesticAbuseBill>
 - **Committee Stage**
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-01-27/debates/33525572-1CFA-44DC-BAF2-A644FBB81EB4/DomesticAbuseBill>
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-02-01/debates/3D604C08-7BD7-46DF-A1F6-71B8A7DB91B5/DomesticAbuseBill>
 - **Report Stage**
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-03-17/debates/8FC29754-12FB-4EEC-BC70-678CA00B9DD3/DomesticAbuseBill>

Thank you!



- Thank you I CAN & the Association of YOT Managers for supporting our Report Stage briefing.
- Read it on this link: <https://bit.ly/2N3LzgW>



Domestic Abuse Bill

Report Stage briefing – March 2021

Amendment 92

Executive summary

The Government's comments during Committee Stage on the importance of speech, language and communication needs, how they can act as a barrier to accessing support, and its commitment to consider how the issues can be properly addressed in guidance are very welcome.

Amendment 92 provides an opportunity for the Government to set out how it proposes to do that, both in the draft statutory guidance to the Bill (the *Draft Statutory Guidance Framework* published in July 2020), the separate guidance for local authorities relating to the exercise of their functions under Part 4 of the Act that will be published in due course and any other guidance it issues on domestic abuse.

References to speech, language and communication needs and the role of speech and language therapists in supporting people experiencing domestic abuse, their children and

Thank you!



- Finally a HUGE thank you to RCSLT members:
 - for supporting this piece of work
 - for providing the Policy and Public Affairs Team with information for our briefings and helping develop our policy asks
 - for giving so generously of your time, experience and expertise
 - for already starting conversations with local domestic abuse services on how you can contribute to and support their work.

- We encourage other speech and language therapists to use our briefings – and the comments made in the parliamentary debates – to start those conversations themselves.