



RCSLT welcomes Domestic Abuse Bill receiving Royal Assent

Policy statement - 29 April 2021

Today (Thursday, 29 April), the Domestic Abuse Bill has received Royal Assent. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) welcomes the passage of this landmark piece of legislation.

Domestic Abuse Act and people with speech, language and communication needs

The Domestic Abuse Act has the potential to significantly improve the lives of people experiencing domestic abuse, including children. It is a particularly important piece of legislation for people with speech, language and communication needs (communication needs):

- people with such needs are more likely to experience domestic abuse;
- communication needs can act as a barrier to reporting abuse and accessing services and support;
- witnessing domestic abuse can have a significant negative impact on the development of children's speech, language and communication;
- some perpetrators of domestic abuse can have communication needs, which can be unidentified and unsupported; and
- speech and language therapists have a crucial role to play in supporting victims of domestic abuse and their children and the professionals working with and supporting them.

Welcome commitments from Government

The RCSLT pays tribute and expresses our gratitude to those parliamentarians, including Lord Ramsbotham, Lord Shinkwin, Baroness Andrews, Baroness Finlay of Llandaff, Baroness Whitaker and Geraint Davies MP, who highlighted these issues during the Bill's passage through Parliament.

Thanks to their tireless advocacy, the Government made some very welcome commitments during Report Stage in the House of Lords, notably to amend the draft statutory guidance to include a specific reference to speech, language and communication needs.

This is very welcome. So is the Government's recognition that:

- people with communication needs can be especially at risk of harm and domestic abuse, as well as facing additional barriers in accessing services;
- communication needs are not a niche issue, nor should they be treated as such, especially in the context of domestic abuse;
- domestic abuse can impact on the development of children's speech and communication; and
- the forthcoming domestic abuse strategy will afford a further opportunity for the Government to ensure that it is adopting a whole-system approach when tackling domestic abuse and these unique needs.

More needs to be done

To maximise the impact of support for people experiencing domestic abuse, including children, it is essential that:

- the references in the statutory guidance to speech, language and communication needs are made in relation not just to children and young people's language development, but also in relation to the victims of domestic abuse and the perpetrators of it; and
- the role that speech and language therapists can play in supporting those people and the professionals working them is also explicitly referenced in the statutory guidance.

Beyond the statutory guidance, speech, language and communication needs and the role of speech and language therapy should also be highlighted in:

- the forthcoming national domestic abuse strategy;
- local domestic abuse strategies; and
- the national statement of expectations, which is due to be published later this year.

We look forward to working with the Government and partner organisations on the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act. We stand ready to do all we can to improve the lives of all people, adults and children and young people, experiencing domestic abuse.

Final thanks

The RCSLT is grateful to partner organisations for their support during the passage of the Bill.

We are grateful to Hestia for supporting amendments on these issues at Committee Stage in the House of Lords. We are also grateful to I CAN, the children's communication charity, and the Association of Youth Offending Teams Managers for their support of amendments at Report Stage.

Our final thanks are to those speech and language therapists who gave so willingly and generously of their experience and expertise to support our work on the Bill. We are very grateful to them.

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