



The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
The Home Secretary
The Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
Sent by email

27 May 2020

Dear Home Secretary,

Domestic Abuse Bill: improving support for people who experience domestic abuse and their children

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists very much welcomes the Domestic Abuse Bill. We think it could make a real difference to the lives of people who experience abuse and their children and look forward to helping you deliver that.

As you may know, people with communication needs are at greater risk of domestic abuse.

- Research from Public Health England has shown that disabled people are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled people. This includes those who have communication needs.
- Evidence has shown that people with communication needs are considered the 'perfect targets' for gender-based sexual abuse, as they are less able to tell others about their experiences.

Similarly, the children of people who experience domestic abuse are also at significant risk. Experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse can have deep and lasting impacts on their speech, language and communication skills.

- Research conducted by Refuge has found that pre-school children exposed to domestic violence are likely to be at risk of developing significant speech and language problems.
- Children and young people who have had very negative early experiences often miss out on opportunities to learn positive language and interaction skills.

This can have significant long-term impacts on their educational attainment, physical and mental health and wellbeing, employment prospects, future life chances and ability to form positive relationships. It can also risk involvement in the criminal justice.

Given our expertise in speech, language and communication we believe we have an important role to play in helping you deliver your vision:

- we can help to ensure the accessibility of programmes to support people affected by domestic abuse who have communication needs;
- we can contribute to the safeguarding of vulnerable individuals;
- we can support the identification and appropriate response to children's communication needs
- we can support other professionals to recognise and make adjustments for communication needs

We appreciate the very heavy demands on your officials' time, but would welcome an early opportunity to discuss with them how we can support your work, including how we think the Bill can be strengthened to provide even greater support to people who experience domestic abuse and their children.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Kamini Gadhok MBE
Chief Executive

cc: Victoria Atkins MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Safeguarding)
Nicole Jacobs, designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner