

**Barnardo's Scotland briefing  
Scottish Government Debate: Making Scotland Equally Safe**

**Key points:**

- It is vital that we **consider children and young people** throughout the delivery of the Equally Safe strategy.
- All children and young people, of all ages, **must have access to high quality education** around health and wellbeing, including healthy relationships and gender equality.
- The relative absence of Child Sexual Abuse, including Child Sexual Exploitation, from the Equally Safe delivery plan is a **missed opportunity to drive progress** in tackling these forms of gender based violence.
- The **Safe and Together model** provides a framework for intervening with perpetrators of domestic abuse, to most effectively reduce harm to children.

Large numbers of children and young people in Scotland are affected by gender based violence: [Radford et al. \(2011\)](#) found that approximately 1 in 5 UK children are affected by domestic abuse; [Scottish Government](#) reports that the median age of victims of 'other sexual crimes' is 15. Barnardo's Scotland provides support to children and young people affected by a variety of forms of gender based violence – including through specialist services for young people affected by Child Sexual Exploitation and for adults and children affected by domestic abuse. We also provide interventions with young fathers perpetrating domestic abuse and with young people displaying harmful sexual behaviour.

**Children and Young People's understanding of Healthy Relationships**

The Equally Safe [Delivery Plan](#) recognises children and young people's understanding of healthy and positive relationships as crucial (under priority area 1). However, there are ongoing concerns about whether all young people have access to high quality education in this area. The National Review of PSE is an action in this part of the Delivery Plan, and must ensure that:

- Children of all ages, in settings from nursery into primary and secondary school, have access to high quality education on health and wellbeing, including on healthy relationships and gender equality;
- Lessons are embedded in safe and inclusive environments for children, such as through whole-schools approaches;
- Health and wellbeing has parity of esteem with literacy and numeracy in practice – including through effective scrutiny.

## **Child Sexual Abuse, including Child Sexual Exploitation (CSA, CSE)**

The [Equally Safe strategy](#) states explicitly that violence against women and girls encompasses Child Sexual Abuse, including Child Sexual Exploitation. However the Delivery Plan does not include these forms of gender based violence in its descriptions of the continuum of violence against women and girls. The Delivery Plan contains only a single mention of CSA or CSE, and neither CSA nor CSE feature explicitly in the national indicators. We are concerned that the relative absence of CSA and CSE from the Delivery Plan is a missed opportunity to drive forward progress in tackling these issues.

Barnardo's Scotland has long argued that we need to know the scale and nature of CSE in Scotland. A 2012 Scottish Government commissioned [literature review](#) concluded that "there is a lack of robust evidence regarding the numbers of children and young people who experience sexual exploitation in Scotland". The 2017 NSPCC report [The Right to Recover](#) noted "the major gap in population prevalence data for CSA at national and local area levels in Scotland". There is an urgent need for robust, Scottish specific data on the prevalence of CSA, including CSE, so that we can effectively monitor progress in tackling these forms of gender based violence.

## **Children are simultaneous victims of domestic abuse with the non-abusing parent**

The ways in which a perpetrator of domestic abuse coercively controls their partner/ex-partner can have devastating impacts on children and young people. [Children](#) who have lived with domestic abuse have described it as a climate of fear. We welcome the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill and strongly support amendments recently supported by the Justice Committee at Stage 2 to widen the aggravator relating to children and to make non-harassment orders available to children.

We welcome the Delivery Plan action to establish a [Safe and Together](#) institute. Barnardo's Scotland is committed to the Safe and Together model of domestic abuse informed child welfare, which provides a framework for partnering with the non-abusing parent while intervening with the perpetrator of domestic abuse, to most effectively reduce harm to children. We are disappointed that the Delivery Plan does not consider the need for a range of interventions with perpetrators, including tailored interventions with young people. We would welcome greater engagement across Government Directorates in the delivery of Equally Safe; for example we note that domestic abuse is not a strand in the Child Protection Improvement Programme, despite the significant impact on children and young people.

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