



**Empower  
Kids  
Project**

# EMPOWER KIDS: OUR VISION FOR CHANGE

**Dear Ireland, we have an Emergency.  
We, the children, need help!**

Thousands of children and young people across Ireland are fighting to be heard about how domestic violence impacts them. It's time we stopped to listen.

Find out more about what they experience, in their own words, at **barnardos.ie**

  
**Barnardos**  
Because childhood lasts a lifetime



We need people to understand, become more aware of and consider what it's like for children living with domestic violence and abuse.

“ We want people to know how hard it is to live with domestic violence. ”

— Child, aged 12

### **Zero Tolerance, the third national strategy on domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence.1.1**

‘Enhance the understanding of the general public of all forms of DSGBV’



We need adequate funding for therapeutic support services for all children and young people who need it.

“ I know my mam needed help but so did we. ”

— Child, aged 7

### **3rd National Strategy: 2.2**

‘Ensure availability of accessible quality specialist and community based DSGBV services across the state’



We need all policy, legislation and supports relating to domestic violence and abuse to be informed by children with lived experience.

“ We need to be consulted on all decisions, because it affects us a lot. ”

— Child, aged 9

### **3rd National Strategy: 2.5.6**

‘Develop an engagement model for children and young people’



The Government needs to commit to implementing Operation Encompass as soon as possible.

Operation encompass is a wraparound communication model between schools and An Garda Síochaná, though there are some promising signs, there should be no delay.

“ Gardaí should help children because they can be affected by the shouting. ”

— Child, aged 8

### **3rd National strategy: 2.5.5**

‘We will examine legislative proposals that would underpin Operation Encompass in the Irish systems’

**Our 4 main priority areas for change are** →

# 1. Family Law Courts

“ Unjust decisions in places meant for justice ”

— Child, aged 14

- 1 Children, regardless of their age, deserve to be heard in court and should be included in decisions that impact them, particularly concerning parental access and visitation.

Judges need to listen to children in court and let them speak when they are ready – it should not be frightening.

— Child, aged 10

We welcome that the Voice of the Child working group has been established as recommended by Family Justice strategy and 3rd National Strategy. In line with the recommendations on the 'Review of the Role of Expert Reports in the Family Law Process', we want to effect change in:

**Recommendation 12 & 20:** We recommend that the professional diploma for both the court assessors and the children's court advocate have a module on childhood domestic violence and abuse that is informed by children and young people.

**Recommendation 15 & 16:** We recommend that children and young people are consulted in the development of the voice of the child report template and the children's court advocate pilot.

**Recommendation 9:** We recommend involving children and young people in creating a child-friendly version of the information provided to them about expert reports.

- 2 To ensure that raising awareness and education on childhood domestic violence and abuse remains a priority within the family justice systems.

There should be training for all people who work in the courts.

— Child, aged 16

## Family Justice Strategy: 1.1.3 – Goal 5

We welcome the recent development of a webinar on domestic violence and abuse for the family justice sector that includes the perspective of children and young people. However, we stress the importance of keeping the focus on childhood domestic violence and abuse in long-term training for judges and family justice sector workers.



## 2. An Garda Síochána

“ I would not see the guards as a first option ...they would come quicker but it wouldn't be my first option ”

— Child, aged 13

- 1 **An Garda Síochána should speak with children, if they are willing, when visiting their homes and take their views into consideration when making any decisions or taking any actions.**

Gardaí need to know our rights ... children should be allowed to explain what happened.

— Child, aged 8

- 3 **We recommend that An Garda Síochána collaborate with children/young people to create a video on how to get help and support if they feel unsafe.**

Help children to know they can call guards – teach us.

— Child, aged 8

**Current Policy:** The 2017 AGS Domestic Violence Intervention Policy outlines current procedures to involve 'eyes on the child', children feel this has not had enough impact on their lived experience.

- 2 **Training for An Garda Síochána on childhood domestic violence and abuse – that is informed by the voice of the child.**

### 3rd National Strategy:

1.4 — Enable frontline professionals and support staff to have the necessary analysis, skills, and expertise to identify potential DSGBV risks and make appropriate preventative interventions and referrals.

1.4.3 — The Garda College will develop a plan for delivery of a trauma-informed curriculum to the organisation with involvement from GNPSB.





## 3. Tusla – Social Workers

“ Social Workers – stop rushing ”

– Child, aged 13

- 1 Consult us in matters that affect us and involve us in decision making, especially with plans for access.

Social workers who work with children should have to do training on coercive control and abuse – because it hurts kids so much.

– Child, aged 17

- 2 Coercive control and its impact on children should be considered as a form of abuse and taken into consideration by social workers when determining levels of risk of harm to children.

## 4. Teachers and Education

“ Teachers should always be open to talking to students and not be afraid of upsetting them ”

– Child, aged 10

- 1 Improve the capacity of schools and teachers to recognise, respond, and advocate for children experiencing childhood domestic violence and abuse.

### 3rd National Strategy:

1.4 – Enable frontline professionals and support staff to have the necessary analysis, skills and expertise to identify potential DSGBV risks and make appropriate preventative interventions and referrals.

- 2 We recommend that children and young people co-produce and develop educational and training resources on childhood domestic violence and abuse to assist teachers and principals in this function.



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## #KidsVsDomesticViolence