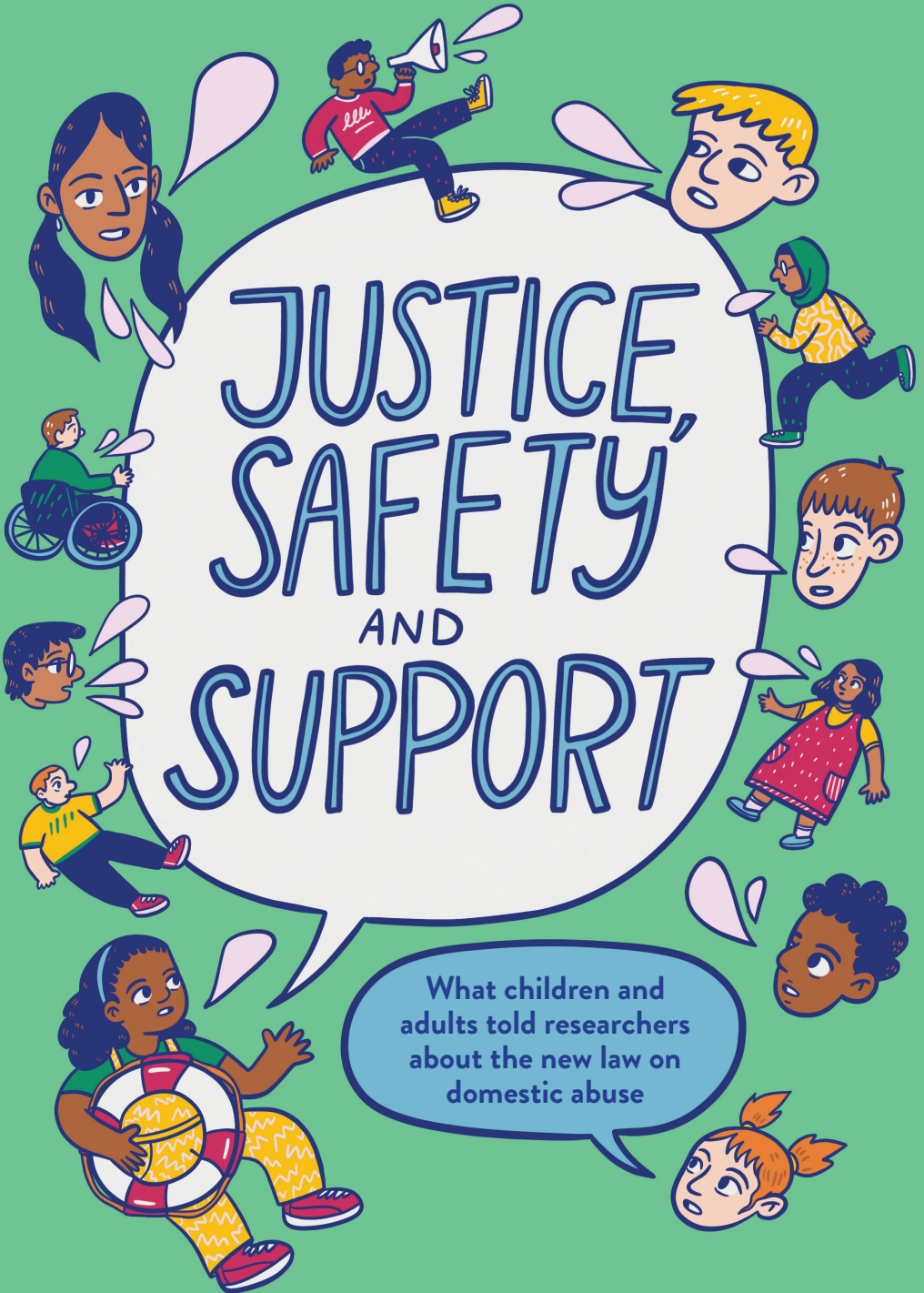




# JUSTICE, SAFETY AND SUPPORT

What children and  
adults told researchers  
about the new law on  
domestic abuse





**Thank you to 22 children, young people and adults who generously shared their stories and experiences in this research.**

This report was co-designed with 8 children and young people from Glasgow East Women's Aid (GEWA) and in consultation with the Scottish Women's Aid Survivors Reference Group, none of whom were participants in the research project. They helped design the leaflet and summarise important research findings.

The Scottish Government funded this research with victims and witnesses on their experiences of court since the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 was introduced.

## Introduction from the research team

This report is about a law called the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. A team of researchers wanted to find out if this law has helped children and adults who have experienced domestic abuse when they go to court. They interviewed 22 children and adults across Scotland to find out how speaking to the police and going to court had been for them. This report shares what those children and adults said.

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## The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018

The new law has done lots of good for children and adults who have experienced domestic abuse. People are talking about domestic abuse in a way that's not just about physical violence any more: it covers all the ways someone can make you feel sad and scared, sometimes over a long period of time. But, there are lots of things about it that aren't working as well as they should be, including for children. Children's experiences of domestic abuse need to be taken as seriously as adults' but people in this research felt the law still doesn't properly recognise how it affects children.



When the act talks about domestic abuse it means when a person hurts or scares their partner or ex-partner





# WHAT CHILDREN AND ADULTS SAID

Here's what children and adults told researchers about their experiences of court after domestic abuse, since Scotland started using this new law:



## How people treat you matters

Children and adults met lots of different people before, during, and after court like police officers, procurator fiscals (PFs), and sheriffs. When it felt like these people had spent time thinking and learning about this law it helped children and adults feel safer, understood and listened to.

**“But there was one [police officer] that did my statements ... I couldn't fault her at all. Like, she was brilliant. Like, I still phone her now sometimes if I've got problems.”**

*– 20 year old, female*

## Reporting is a scary time and people need help to feel safe



Lots of things about reporting to the police, and the decisions that were taken, made children and adults feel unsafe. People in this research said that it's scary to talk about the things that have happened. If they don't feel believed they doubt they will be kept safe.

**“I felt there was something I'd done wrong because I was in contact with the police and I was going to court. Like, there's a, sort of, daunting feeling there.”** – 17 year old, male

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## Knowing what is happening is really important

Information about what is going on and what might happen helps people feel safer, but children and adults didn't always get lots of information about what was happening. This left them feeling ignored or forgotten about.



**“There was no communication between me and the police. I had to constantly be phoning them to chase stuff up.”** – 21 year old, female



## Everyone should have someone they trust to support them through the court process

It helps when there is someone around to provide support, who spends time listening and tells other people what children or adults want to happen.

**“I think I should have got longer with [my advocacy worker] than what I did. But in the short time that I had, it was really beneficial.”**

*– 14 year old, female*

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## People need to be able to get on with their lives

It’s hard to have court dates that change, and they changed lots of times. It can take months or years for it to end. It’s really hard to move on when this is happening.



**“I think it would have been better if it was not four or five different court dates.”** – 13 year old, female



## Going to court didn't make children and adults feel empowered

Children and adults said they felt like an afterthought at court. Abuse happened to them but it felt like court wasn't about them – someone else decides what parts of their experience get spoken about at court. They said it doesn't feel like what they want or need matters and not being listened to makes them not want to talk.

*“When I first found out about court, I think I just went like, Oh no! I think it was just a worry. What's going to happen or how's it going to happen? Who's going to be there? Things like that.” – 20 year old, female*

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## It is important that people feel safe and that things are fair

Children and adults in this research explained that it doesn't always feel like people understand how bad the abuse was or the impact it had.

*“Courts' decisions need to think about the victim's safety after the courts have finished.” – Adult*





**“I think it’s had a massive  
impact on everyone.”**

*- Adult*



## **It’s not just individuals who are impacted by abuse – it’s the whole family**

It doesn’t feel like this is always understood. It can affect every part of children and their family’s lives: feelings, home, school life, relationships. It’s not just one adult hurting another person, it’s about one adult hurting a whole family.

# WHAT WE NEED

Here's what adults, children and young people in this research say needs to change



People working in justice (police, PFs, lawyers, sheriffs) need to take time to understand what has happened to us and our families



We should have support for as long as we need



Going to court should feel safe and comfortable



We should have someone trusted we can talk to



We should be given lots of time and support to prepare for court



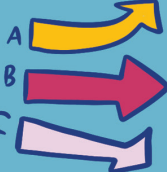
Children's experiences should be taken as seriously as adults' experiences

We should be able to tell our story once, in a safe and comfortable place, and then move on



We should be safe and be able to get on with our lives

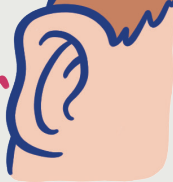
We need to know what is happening and why, and to have a say in decisions



People working in justice (police, PFs, lawyers, sheriffs) need to better understand domestic abuse



People working in justice (police, PFs, lawyers, sheriffs) should listen to, believe and respect us



We want to feel like someone in the justice system is on our side



We should feel a sense of safety and fairness once court is finished



We should be involved in making changes to the justice system



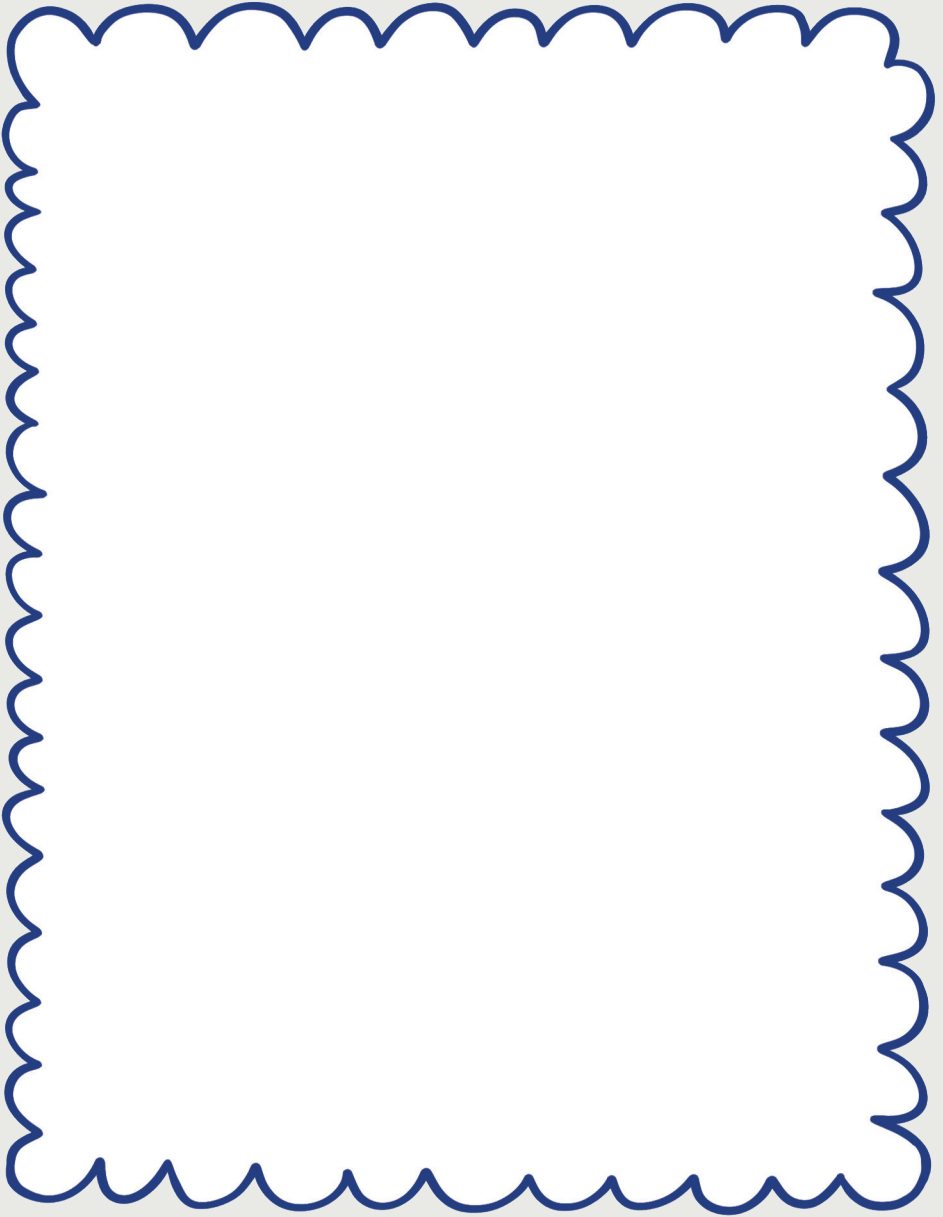
# MY OWN SPACE



You can use these pages to write or draw whatever you want.







If reading this booklet makes you want to ask questions or speak to someone, you could share this with a trusted adult. There are also some useful numbers on the back page.

We want to know that people will listen to what children and adults have said, and that work will be done to improve things for people who have experienced domestic abuse.

The law has lots of good things about it, but at the moment, it's not being used to help people as much as it could be.



“It’ll be hard, but you will get through it. You just need to put up a brave face, but it’s okay to show emotion and know that you can get through it.”

– 14 year old, female



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# USEFUL LINKS

## Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline

0800 027 1234 | Open 24/7

Chat on website: [www.sdafmh.org.uk](http://www.sdafmh.org.uk)

## ChildLine

0800 111 | Open 24/7

Chat on website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

## Scottish Women's Rights Centre

[www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk)

Open Wednesday 10am - 1pm,  
Thursday 1:30pm - 4:30pm

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### PROJECT PARTNERS



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