



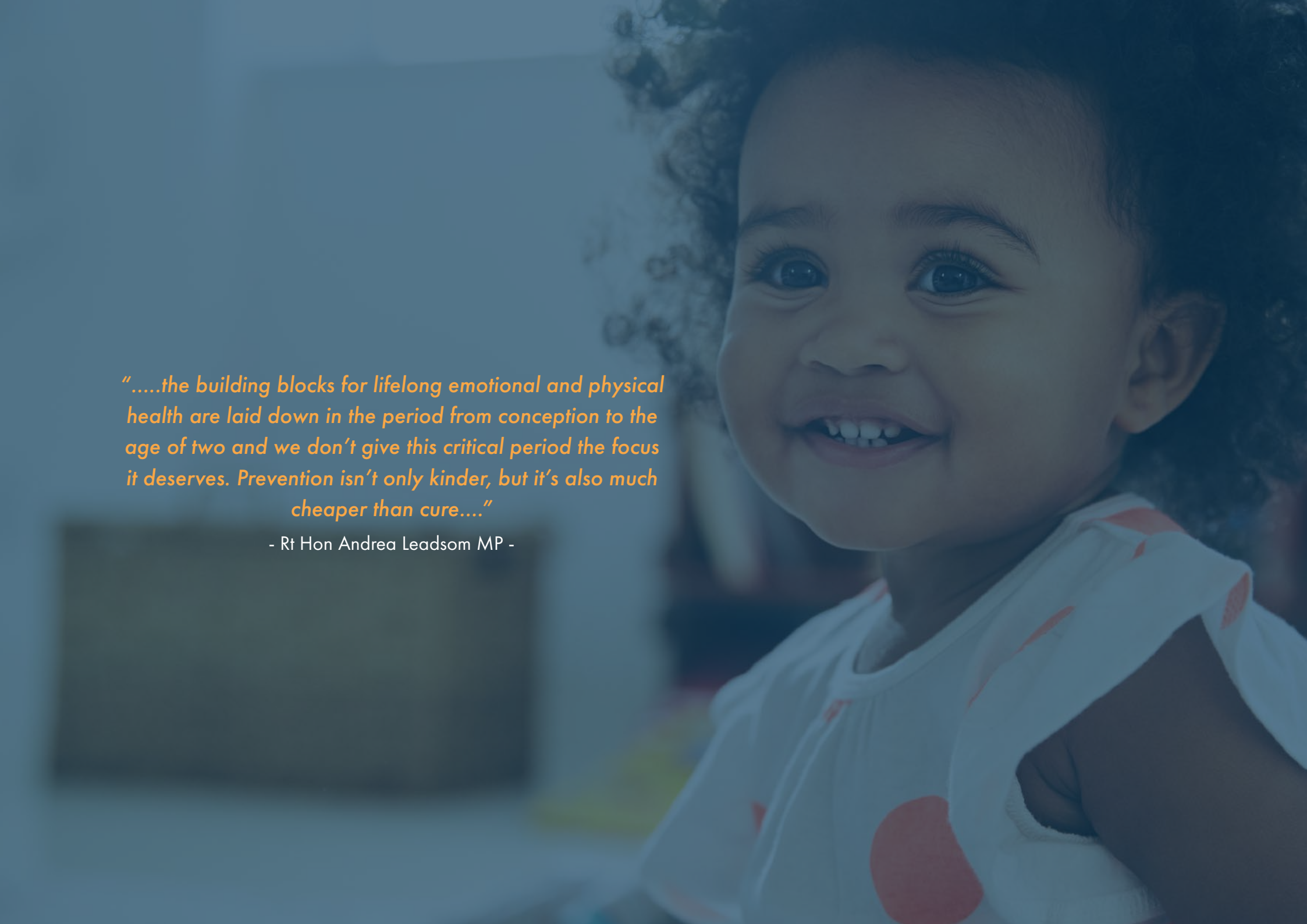
Operation Encompass and Early Years Information Sharing: the next step in supporting children experiencing domestic abuse

Police and Early Years' Settings

"Operation Encompass is an innovative scheme that recognises the important principle that children who experience the devastating effects of domestic abuse are victims in their own right. The scheme has enabled vital information-sharing between police and schools to support children for over 10 years and I am so pleased that the expansion of the scheme into early years sharing information directly will ensure that the youngest children are also safeguarded."

Rachel Maclean MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Safeguarding)

Updated February 2024



".....the building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health are laid down in the period from conception to the age of two and we don't give this critical period the focus it deserves. Prevention isn't only kinder, but it's also much cheaper than cure...."

- Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP -

Many police forces have, through Operation Encompass, developed an understanding of the incredibly important information that they hold about children experiencing domestic abuse and the responsibility upon them to share this information with those who can make a difference to these children. They are now ready to share information about the very youngest and most vulnerable of our children who are not yet attending school.

Operation Encompass is keen to ensure that all children experiencing domestic abuse are supported and have been working to ensure that this is in place across all forces.



Children are victims of domestic abuse in their own right

Through Operation Encompass, information is currently shared by the police with schools and colleges regarding children up to the age of 18 years.

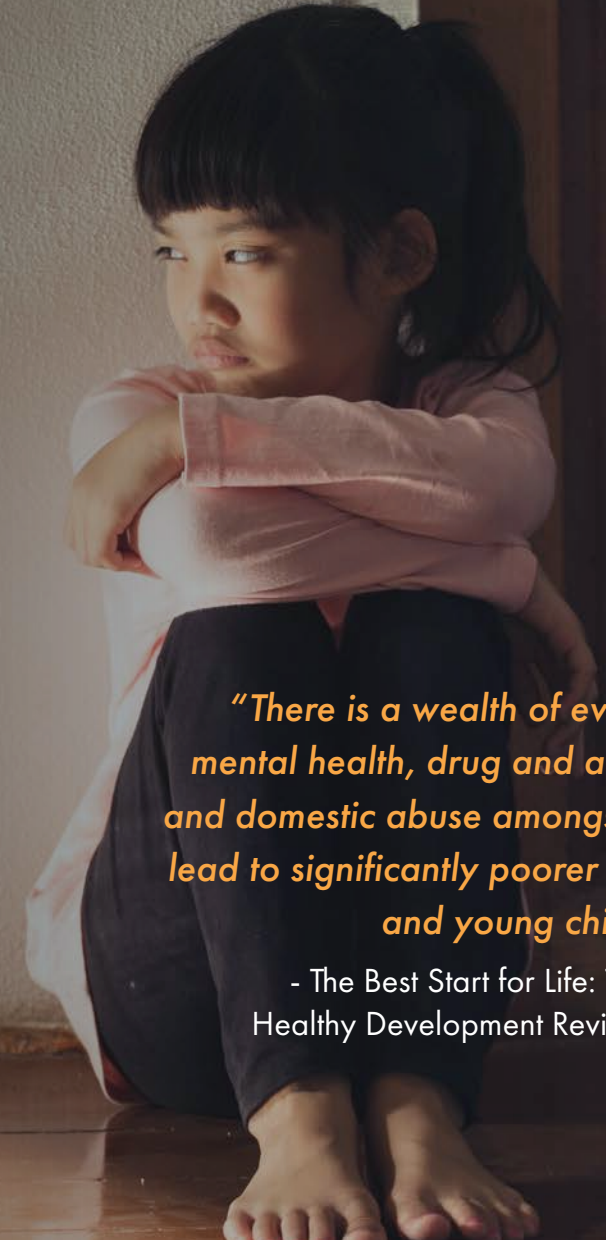
This is now being extended to sharing information from 28 weeks of pregnancy through to early years children aged 0-5 years.

This means that ALL children will be able to be supported through Operation Encompass from 28 weeks of pregnancy through to 18 years of age.

This information sharing should follow the same principles as current Operation Encompass notifications:

- ALL domestic Abuse incidents.
- Delivered as soon as possible on the next day (school/college notifications are prior to the start of the school day e.g. 8.30am at the latest).
- Context of the domestic abuse incident shared including the Voice of the Child.

The successful simplicity of the current information sharing process - police (who are the holders of the information) sharing information about children experiencing Domestic Abuse directly with Key Adults in schools (the receivers of the information) - should be maintained for the sharing of Early Years' information.



“There is a wealth of evidence that poor mental health, drug and alcohol dependency and domestic abuse amongst parents and carers lead to significantly poorer outcomes for babies and young children.”

- The Best Start for Life: The Early Years
Healthy Development Review Report 2021 -

Why information sharing is so important

We are mindful that, as research has clearly demonstrated that Domestic Abuse can have an even more devastating effect upon very young children, there is a requirement to identify the most effective, secure, sustainable, simple yet safe way in which all police forces could share this information with the right people to make a difference.

Identifying who this 'right person' might be and how that process should work has been fundamental to our thought process.

- Children aged 0 to 5 years of age may be attending a wide range of settings (play group, pre-school, child minder, private nursery).
- They may attend at more than one of these settings and their pattern of attendance may vary widely.
- These children may not be attending any setting outside their home.

This is why notifications must also go to the Health Visitor as well as the Key Adult in an Early Years' setting, where attendance at such a setting is known.

For example, in the Devon and Cornwall Police force area the number of Early Years' settings (excluding child minders and play groups) was over 2,000.¹

Having consulted a number of police forces it is clear that trying to contact so many different settings would overwhelm police systems. Furthermore it would not capture the support we want for **all** these children; many, some of the most vulnerable, would still be missed.

"the best interventions and support arises from the timeliness (of the information sharing) -the earlier the better"

- Police/Health participant in Early Years Pilot -

¹ Source: Devon and Cornwall Police 2019

The Early Years' Key Adult Must:

- Adhere to all requirements of school Key Adults.
- Be the DSL for the setting.
- Provide the Police with a secure email, or other electronic method of receiving the notification that can only be accessed by the DSL, or their Deputy, if this is the method the police choose to use.
- The police may, for operational, security and capacity reasons, take the decision to share the Early Years' information with the Local Authority Early Years' Services who will in turn share information with the setting.
- Assure the police that the content of the notifications will be securely stored in line with all other CP information.
- Undertake the [National free Online Operation Encompass Training](#).
- Do nothing that places the adult or child victims at risk.

The Health Visitor Role

The role of the Health Visitor² has been identified as pivotal within the information sharing process relating to our youngest children:

- The Health Visitor is allocated at 28 weeks of pregnancy through to 5 years of age.
- Every Health Visitor is trained in safeguarding and child protection to the same level as a Designated Safeguarding Lead/professional in a school, this means the police can have confidence that the information they are sharing will be treated in the correct manner. An important aspect of their role profile is the safeguarding and protection of children.
- Every Early Years' setting has a named Health Visitor.
- Health Visitors have access to secure electronic information sharing systems.
- When the child reaches 5 years of age the Health Visitor will transfer responsibility to a School Nurse who is well placed to continue to support the child within the school setting, where Operation Encompass will be working in its original format.
- Midwives share information regarding domestic abuse, as part of the hand over to Health Visitors.

"These children can be exposed to a cocktail of secondary risks - lack of food in the house, cramped living conditions or neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse and parental mental health problems.

At a time of unprecedented pressure on the services which are there to protect children, it is more important than ever that every tool is used to identify and help those who are most at risk."³

² Health Visitor: Usually a trained Nurse or Midwife

³ Children's Commissioner

Why also use the Health Visitor Route for Operation Encompass Early Years' Notifications: Extracts from "Why Health Visitors Matter"

The pandemic led to many families continuing to struggle with the impacts of the isolation and stress that they experienced at this time. Domestic abuse and incidents of neglect and child maltreatment increased, especially for our youngest children. More young children are falling behind in their development, yet fewer are engaging with services such as early education and childcare.

Health visitors are skilled professionals with the expertise to work with families.

In the UK, we are lucky to have specialist community public health nurses - health visitors - with the expertise to provide care to families in the earliest years of their child's life. Health visitors are trained and skilled in reaching out to families; searching for and understanding their health and care needs; offering support and intervention, and brokering engagement with other services.

Children aged two and under are the most vulnerable of all our children. They are also the least likely to have engagement with public services. 35% of all serious incident notifications involve serious harm to babies, yet up to 50% of babies who experience non-accidental injuries are not known to children's social care before the incident. Children under two are not at school and many are not in early education or childcare. Even before the pandemic, less than 40% of children aged two and under were in formal childcare (and only 11% of those under one). This means that (aside from GPs) health visitors are often the only professionals who have contact with young children and their families. Without effective health visiting services, many vulnerable children are at risk of falling through the gaps.



First 1001 Days Movement

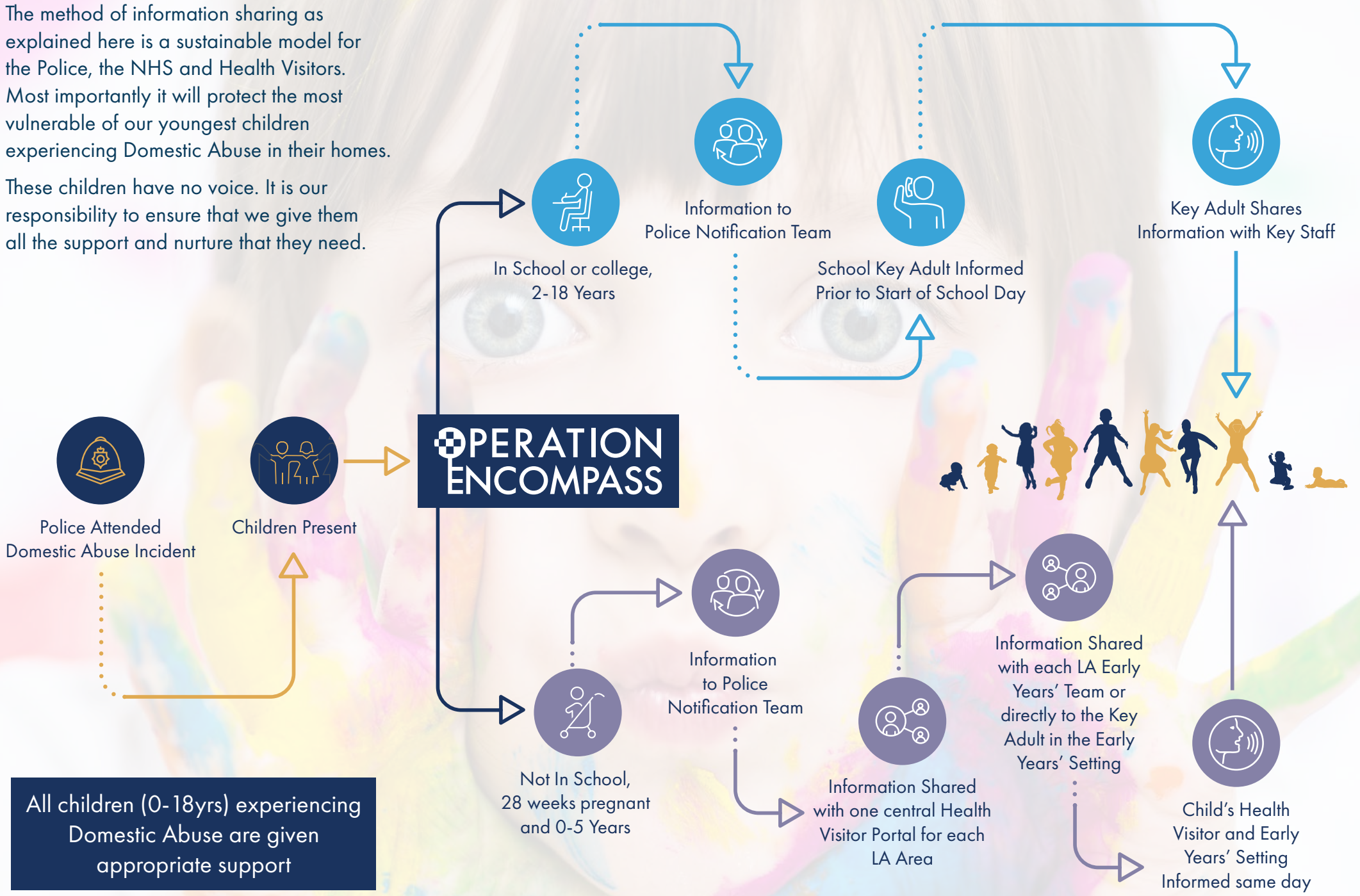
Why Health Visitors Matter

Perspectives on a widely valued service

"Health visitors are the ears and eyes on the ground. From just before the baby is born, they've got the history, knowledge, the relationship with that family, to support that baby and child's health needs from a very early point"

The method of information sharing as explained here is a sustainable model for the Police, the NHS and Health Visitors. Most importantly it will protect the most vulnerable of our youngest children experiencing Domestic Abuse in their homes.

These children have no voice. It is our responsibility to ensure that we give them all the support and nurture that they need.



Police Force

As with Operation Encompass, forces should record data about notifications to Health Visitors:

- Numbers of notifications sent
- Numbers of children within these notifications
- Time each notification sent
- Time each notification is accessed

Key Adult in Setting


The Key Adult should follow the guidance for Key Adults in schools, available in the [free online National Operation Encompass Training](#) and in the Handbooks and Guides on the [Operation Encompass website](#).

Health Visitor:

There are a range of actions which a Health Visitor make take (this list is not exhaustive):

- Visit the home (unscheduled visit)
- Visit the home (scheduled visit)
- Speak to the non-abusive parent (only if safe) about Domestic Abuse
- Provide contacts for DA support to non-abusive parent e.g. local DA services, National Helpline.
- Contact with adult victim's GP
- Contact Midwife if adult victim/perpetrator is pregnant
- Contact PVI /LA Nursery if one attended and known
- Contact /refer to Early Help
- Contact/refer to Social care
- Contact Police if additional information is known that increases the risk to either the adult or child victims or further information is required.



A close-up photograph of a baby's face, focusing on the eyes and nose. The baby has light skin and bright blue eyes, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

Mirroring our recommendations for the original model of Operation Encompass for school aged children, we would advise that forces use a phased implementation method.

Current Operation Encompass notifications to schools or Early Years' setting should remain the same, (we appreciate that this may mean that notifications for some children go the Health Visitors and to school).

Health colleagues are encouraged to work with their police force to identify one direct, secure portal, through which the information regarding all domestic abuse incidents involving children from 28 weeks of pregnancy to 5 years of age, can be shared on a daily basis.

Having received the information from the police, health professionals will then share this information with the appropriate named Health Visitor/Midwife.

"this means that we can intervene earlier in a child's life"

- Police/Health participant
in Early Years Pilot -

Supporting the work we do

All national work on the developing role of Health Visitors and the updating of the Healthy Child Programme revised health visiting and the school nursing model, which replaces the “456” model, support the work that we are undertaking.

‘The new model aims to capture the full extent of both the health visitor and school nurse offer – as many local services were offering so much more than the ‘5’ contacts, it was therefore important to ensure this was clearly articulated. The model suggests opportunities for further contacts or opportunities to provide support; Clearly, health visitors will use their professional and clinical judgement to determine if the contacts are required and what approach would work with the family.’⁴

The response to our proposal by Wendy Nicholson MBE RGN RSCN RNt FQNI, Deputy Chief Nurse,

“You are pushing at an open door”

A number of high-profile murders of very young children, (many not attending a setting outside the home) have only served to reinforce the need for this information sharing as an urgent matter.

Children’s lives matter.

“this is making us ensure that we are delivering in the best way to meet the needs of our families and children”

- Police/Health participant
in Early Years Pilot -

Support

Operation Encompass will provide support for police forces during the implementation of this scheme. Please contact us:

info@operationencompass.org

The Operation Encompass free online Key Adult training⁵ has specific Early Years information and can be undertaken by all Health Visitors and all Early Years settings in your force area.⁶

Handbooks on the Operation Encompass website offer guidance for professionals with how to support children after receiving the notification.

www.operationencompass.org

The free Operation Encompass Advice and Helpline is available for all Health Visitors and Early Years' professionals.

Key Contacts:

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⁵ www.operationencompass.org

⁶ All participants receive a certificate on completion



OPERATION ENCOMPASS

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