

Strand 2 | Relationships and Sexuality

Learning Outcome 2.6:	Students should be able to explore the root causes and consequences of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV), and outline the supports and services available, and protections under the law.
Pre-learning:	Students should first engage with LO 2.4 (gender, culture and social norms) to understand the wider context of gender inequality before discussing the root cause of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). Prior engagement with LO 2.5 (signs of abusive relationships, including coercive control and LO 2.7 (the influence of pornography on relationship expectations and behaviors) would also be important.

What is the important learning?

Learning outcome **2.6** is inviting students to explore the root causes and consequences of DSGBV. Such exploration needs to be grounded in an understanding of all violence within relationships as a serious human rights violation. Everyone has a right to personal safety, personal choice and bodily integrity.

This learning outcome presupposes prior learning about healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships, including coercive control, as well as engagement in learning about the influence of pornography.

The first part of this learning outcome asks students to discuss **root causes** which are manifold – unequal power relations between men and women, harmful gender norms, normalisation of violence against women in the media (and particularly in pornography), historical and cultural factors, etc. The learning outcome also asks students to consider the **consequences** of DSGBV, which directly affect the physical and emotional health of victims, and also impact on society more broadly.

The second part of **LO 2.6** refers to **supports, services and protections under the law**. In this context, it's important to convey the message that in Ireland everyone is protected under the law from all forms of violence and abuse. Encouraging reporting and providing information on support services and protections under the law for anyone experiencing DSGBV is a key part of the learning. Also, acknowledging and showing understanding of the barriers that can make it difficult to seek help is important. These barriers might be psychological (e.g. fear, shame, blaming themselves), economic (e.g. financial dependence, risk of losing home), social and cultural factors (e.g. stigma, isolation) or in the case of children and teenagers, fear of not being believed or of negative consequences.

It's also important to keep in mind that DSGBV can manifest in different forms – physical, emotional, sexual, financial and digital. This learning outcome acknowledges the need to provide support and show empathy to all victims/survivors. Although both men and women can be victims/survivors, women and girls are affected disproportionately, as a manifestation of historic unequal power relations between men and women in both private and public domains. DSGBV is not about sex nor is it an anger management problem. It's about power and control.

The unique harmful consequences of living with domestic violence and abuse that children and young people experience are powerfully expressed through Barnados' *Empower Kids* project. There, children talk about how living with domestic violence can take the form of psychological manipulation, coercion and the abuse of power. Previewing [these resources](#) will help inform your practice. Watch this short video created by Barnados for SPHE teachers [Supporting children and young people living with domestic violence and abuse](#) (9 mins).

Remind young people of the supports available to them, in general, and the specific support available for those living with or worried about an unsafe or abusive relationship. (See **RSE 6** for list of supports)

For guidance on how to handle a classroom situation where a disclosure of abuse occurs:

[Guidance for dealing with a disclosure about sexual abuse](#)

Approaches to consider when teaching about Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV)

- It is important that students are aware in advance that these topics will be discussed in class. They should also be made aware of support structures (both within and outside school) that they can access, before or after a lesson, if needed.
- Encourage critical and analytical thinking regarding the root causes of DSGBV, and in particular how harmful gender norms, attitudes and unequal power dynamics contribute to DSGBV.
- Use evidence-based information to challenge common myths and misconceptions about DSGBV.
- Discuss societal attitudes and cultural factors that contribute to stigma and silence surrounding DSGBV.
- In facilitating classroom discussion, cultivate empathy and avoid victim blaming – encourage students to consider how their words and behaviors may impact others.
- Use case studies and true stories to build empathy and understanding of the physical, emotional, psychological and social impact of DSGBV. Invite students to consider how women, men and children suffer unique harmful consequences.
- Present case studies and scenarios that are inclusive of all genders and all sexual orientations.
- In the context of discussing violence and abuse in the home, convey the message that children/young people are not responsible for the behaviour of adults. They don't cause it, they can't control it, and they can't cure it. Refer to where supports are available and stress how important it is to reach out for help.
- Using scenario-based learning, discuss ways that children/young people living with domestic violence or abuse can keep themselves safe and protected, physically and psychologically.
- In discussing DSGBV, broaden the conversation so that the focus is not only on intimate partner abuse within the home or in intimate relationships but also on instances of gender-based violence in the wider environment (e.g. work, school and in the community).
- Discuss possible factors that make it difficult for victims to seek help or remove themselves from abusive relationships, such as economic dependency, emotional manipulation, language/ethnicity, etc.
- Consider individuals and groups who may be particularly vulnerable discuss why this is so. See table 1.3 **Zero Tolerance, Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence**, p.20.
- Ensure that students are made aware of protections under the law and of relevant supports and services and how to access these.

Useful definitions

Domestic violence is defined as all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit. It can include any member of the family or co-habitants.

Sexual violence is defined as any sexual act performed on an individual without consent or by taking advantage of the vulnerability of the victim.

Gender-based violence is violence that is directed against a person because of that person's gender. Forms of gender-based violence include sexual harassment, stalking, cyber violence and physical or psychological coercion, abuse and violence.

Possible follow-on learning outcome:

LO 2.8: Students will be able to discuss image-based abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, and what to do and how to seek support if they or someone they know has experienced any of these.

Go to the SPHE Toolkit for **classroom resources linked to LO 2.6**