WHAT MAKES SOMEONE’S JUDGEMENT PROFESSIONAL?

**WHY DOMESTIC ABUSE TRAINING IS NECESSARY**

Over the years, in my various roles, I have heard the term “professional judgement” used to explain why a professional made a particular decision or a rationale for a course of action taken in respect of a victim/survivor or perpetrator of domestic abuse. I have always found this to be a curious phrase which gets banded about without thought.

I am not dismissing this phrase, and, in many circumstances, it fits perfectly and is a genuine rationale for a decision made or a course of action taken.

However, I have heard this phrase used many times whilst knowing that the person using their ‘professional judgement’ does not have even a basic understanding or knowledge for their judgement to be professional or safe when it comes to domestic abuse.

* New jobs don’t usually come with an automatic understanding and enough knowledge of the complex multi-layered psychological process that is domestic abuse to make safe decisions based on ‘professional judgement’
* Few jobs come with a detailed understanding of the various methods, tactics and narrative used by abusers to perpetrate their abuse, control and sometimes violence over their current or ex-partner. Not being able to recognise or identify abusive patterns of behaviour impacts on a professional’s judgement and decision-making
* Does your induction cover ‘professional manipulation’ giving you an understanding of the methods, tactics and behaviours perpetrators of domestic abuse use on professionals which would impact your ‘professional judgement’
* If your role includes identifying or assessing risk, how much of your judgement includes a professional understanding of how the abuse is being perpetrated and the personality type of the perpetrator?
* Would your judgement and decision-making benefit from a professional knowledge about trauma and how victim/survivors may respond to trauma or what trauma signs and symptoms look like?
* Do you need to work with traumatised people in a way that is safe for the individually they are working with and for themselves? Is it safe to say a decision made or action taken about the risk or situation in general is professional judgement without at least some of that knowledge and understanding?

Most professionals will come into contact with known, suspected or unknown victim/survivors of domestic abuse; how you respond can be the difference between someone identifying their relationship as abuse, naming it as such or taking their first safe steps to a new life, free of violence and abuse **OR** it could make someone feel judged and responsible for what they are experiencing, resulting in them withdrawing back into the abuse, never to be talked about again.

Are you a professional who comes into contact with people who are perpetrating abuse?

* How would you know?
* What are you listening out for?
* How are you identifying professional manipulation towards you or your colleagues clouding your judgement about the perpetrator?
* Are you inadvertently enabling the perpetrator to continue their abuse?

I have met many professionals who genuinely have good intentions and want to do their best for their service users, patients, clients or customers but with no training or understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse, professional manipulation or trauma, there is a higher chance of them over promising then not being able to deliver or fobbing someone off with misinformation about their choices, possibly preventing that person from being able to safely leave the abuser or from getting a fair outcome or from getting appropriate, effective and safe support and delaying their healing process.

How a professional reacts and responds depends wholeheartedly on their understanding, knowledge, values, beliefs and attitudes towards domestic abuse as an issue and the people who are affected by it.

Without training we are assuming that professionals will automatically have the knowledge, understanding & skills needed to respond appropriately.

In reality without that knowledge and skill set there is a danger of **prolonging the complex trauma** experienced by the victim and **increasing the risk** of escalation in frequency or severity of violence and abuse causing serious injury or murder of the genuine victim.

***MAKE THE TERM ‘PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT’ MEANINGFUL***

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