

Practice Briefing: Non-Fatal Strangulation (NFS)

Audience: Adult Social Care Practitioners

Source: Walsall Safeguarding Partnership, IFAS
(Institute for Addressing Strangulation)

Definition - Non-fatal strangulation (NFS) refers to the obstruction of blood vessels and/or airways by external pressure to the neck, resulting in reduced oxygen supply to the brain, without causing death.

Why It Matters;

- NFS is a high-risk indicator in **domestic abuse cases**.
- Victims of NFS are 7 times more likely to be killed later.
- Often under-identified due to lack of visible injuries.
- Victims may describe it as “choking” or “being grabbed by the neck”.

Key Indicators;

- Psychological trauma: fear of death, dissociation, hypervigilance
- Voice changes, difficulty swallowing, neck pain
- Loss of consciousness, incontinence, petechiae (tiny red spots)



The absence of physical injuries does not negate the offence

Safeguarding Actions;

- Immediate Risk Assessment: Prioritise safety and medical evaluation.
- Medical Referral: Call emergency services or refer to GP/Secondary care as appropriate (high risk).
- Documentation: Use body maps and photographs for visible injuries.
- Police Involvement: Strongly encourage reporting, Practitioners have a duty to report crime
- Trauma-Informed Practice: Validate the victim's experience and avoid re-traumatisation.
- **Referral required to MARAC**([Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference](#)) and [Domestic abuse Organisations](#), as NFS is deemed as **high risk**.

Statistics;

IPV Research (*Strack GB et al. 2001*)

- In a study of 300 cases **50% of survivors of strangulation had no visible markings to the neck**
- Up to **40% of fatal** strangulations have no external signs.
- Up to **4 weeks** after the event, NFS can lead to death.

Sexual Assault Research (*White et al. 2019*)

- In a study of 204 cases where strangulation was part of sexual assault **52% of cases there was no visible head or neck injury.**

Resources

- IFAS (Institute for Addressing Strangulation): <https://ifas.org.uk>
- Safe Lives Training: <https://safelives.org.uk>
- [Strangulation and suffocation | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)
- [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)
- Online learning events for practitioners. The recordings can be found on the Safer Communities Portal, alongside additional resources. If you do not currently have access to the portal, email: kentcommunitysafetyteam@kent.gov.uk
- [Dash risk assessment resources for professionals - SafeLives](#)

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