

## Loyalty and conflicted feelings

## Intro

This activity explores the complex nature of domestic abuse and how the young people experiencing difficult things at home will often feel conflicted about them and the people involved. This is often because they are people very close to them who they love and who may not intentionally be causing them harm or hurt. Children and young people have an understanding of this and it can be a significant factor in not asking for support or telling someone what is going on.

It could be useful to have already covered **activity 6** about different roles before doing this activity as it will offer an opportunity for development.

## Activity

## Part 1

Ask the young person to choose a character from one of the stories and use the worksheet to write down some of the conflicted thoughts and feelings they might be having.

If they struggle to identify conflicted thoughts and feelings, use the prompt below and refer to the examples for each story.

## Prompts:

For example, really, Alfie's mum should be looking after him and getting him up for school, but, on the other hand, Alfie understands his mum is struggling since losing her job and so might not blame her.

## Focusing on one side of the thought and feelings, ask questions such as:

- What might the character also feel about this?
- How do the behaviours from others make the character feel?
- What is the person they have a relationship with (mum in this case) supposed to be doing in this situation?
- What might the character feel they should be doing?

## Part 2

Review and discuss what the young person has written.

## Points for discussion:

- What do you think they might be thinking and feeling?
- What is making them feel that way?
- Why may the character not want to share this?
- What is it like for a young person when they don't tell anyone what is happening in their life? How might that make them feel and behave?

## Loyalty and conflicted feelings

Often feelings of loyalty are reasons behind why people don't share things and feel conflicted. This can be introduced through these discussion points by suggesting things such as:

- They know their parents care deep down
- Parents aren't supposed to do hurtful things
- The parents also feel bad or upset about what is happening
- One parent may also be a victim in the situation affected by the harmful behaviour of another person (whether this be the other parent, step parent, or, as in Ted's case, their child)

Use the examples the young person has written to ask about where they may be conflicted or motivated by loyalty and therefore reluctant to share what is going on at home. It is important to reiterate that even if a young person feels loyal to people in their life, some behaviours are not ok and it is actually ok to share if these things are happening.

It is also important to bear in mind that in some family contexts, both the young person and one of their parents may be victims of harmful behaviour at the hands of someone else (whether this be the other parent, step parent, or, as in Ted's case, the parent's other child). If the young person feels loyal to, or protective of, the affected parent, it could be worth exploring the possibility of support for both the young person and the affected parent. It is worth bearing in mind that the affected parent may well be risk-managing the situation they are in, and leaving an abusive relationship can risk abuse intensifying so any support that is offered needs to be mindful of this. It is not automatically safe to leave. Displaying this kind of understanding around the complexity of the situation the young person is experiencing will help them feel supported rather than that anyone is unfairly criticising a parent they may feel understandable loyalty towards.

### Additional guidance notes

During this activity, it is important to emphasise that there is support available if a young person does have something to share. Young people may feel concerned about sharing because they not only feel loyalty but do not know what support is available. A way to discuss this could be through referring back to the things that happen in the stories which are supportive and how the characters get support. Or it could feel more appropriate to reference the support available locally. Details are on the additional support page of the book and website, or you could refer specifically to the support available in your school or organisation.

