



# LENS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A SLIGO LEITRIM RESPONSE TO  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEES

Sligo Leitrim

## A word of thanks

We wish to thank the Sligo Leitrim Children & Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) Safe and Protected from Harm Working Group who, since January 2021, have facilitated members of the Domestic Violence Working Group to focus specifically on children, young people and domestic violence. We are grateful to the organisations and individuals who responded to the call to feed into the Mapping Exercise survey enabling us to gather very important local information. Thank you to the Children's Support Worker, co-ordinators and Managers in domestic violence services around the country who generously shared examples of their work, their reflections and their recommendations so that researcher Siobhan O'Neill could augment her desk-based research findings and deliver a research document that will continue to be a useful resource for us as our work progresses. Thank you to Siobhan for her thorough and detailed work with us. We are very grateful to the teachers and principals of every second-level school in the area who encouraged full engagement from their first-year students so that Home Youth Liaison Service teams could facilitate their well-received programme. We hope this work will continue.

Thank you to Lisa Marmion, Safe Ireland and Áine Costello, Barnardos who gave their time and expertise, as interviewees in the research project and also as a resource and sounding board for members of the Domestic Violence Working Group during the past two years. Thank you to all the participants, presenters and trainers who attended, delivered, facilitated and trained at the Lens on DV launch, awareness-raising and training event. By working together over these two days we have enhanced our community's understanding of the impact of domestic violence on children and young people and strengthened our resolve to provide the supports, services and responses needed in Sligo and Leitrim.



# Lens on Domestic Violence: A Sligo Leitrim response to children and young people

In March 2020 the Irish public were asked to 'stay at home' to slow the spread of the Covid-19 virus in Ireland. Many of our community and statutory supports for children and families paused while the population grappled with the impact of the global pandemic. Home schooling, working from home, shopping for groceries online, restricted living arrangement and limited journeys became the expected norm for much of 2020 and continued throughout 2021.

Many of us understood at once that these restrictions would have serious implications for those whose lives were already curtailed and restricted by controlling and abusive partners and fathers. Recognising the negative potential of these restrictions Sligo Leitrim Children & Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) Safe and Protected from Harm Working Group identified the need for a dedicated group to link and work with Domestic Violence Advocacy Service, Sligo, Leitrim, West Cavan (DVAS), the local domestic violence service, to support and promote this organisation and its work.

During the first six months of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Ireland nearly 3,500 women contacted a domestic violence service for the first time. Over 50,000 helpline calls were answered by domestic violence services across the country. Direct support and advocacy was provided to over 11,000 women and over 3,500 children annually (Ref: Safe Ireland)

During the Covid-19 pandemic DVAS experienced a 55% increase in demand for its support, information and advocacy service from women living with domestic violence and coercive control. In 2019 146 women in Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan received DVAS's one-to-one support service. In 2020 this number increased to 227 and has continued to be high.

This summary report, **Lens on Domestic Violence: A Sligo Leitrim Response to Children and Young People**, documents the work carried out over the past two years by CYPSC's Domestic Violence Working Group and presents recommendations arising from that work. At the core of this Working Group has been effective partnership work; a recognition that we need to build on our shared understanding that children and young people living with domestic violence and coercive control are direct victims and are also active beings; and a willingness to address the very considerable gaps in specialist service provision for children and young people in Sligo and Leitrim with a lived experience of domestic violence and coercive control.

3,500

women contacted  
a DV service  
for the first time

Over  
50,00+  
helpline calls  
answered

direct  
support and advocacy  
provided annually to  
11,000  
women  
3,500  
children

Demand for  
DVAS's service  
increased by  
55%  
during the  
Covid-19  
pandemic

146  
women supported  
by DVAS in 2019  
227  
women supported  
in 2020

214  
women  
supported  
in 2021

**Table 1: CYPSC's Domestic Violence Working Group Actions 2021-2022**

Sligo Leitrim CYPSC Domestic Violence Working Group Actions		Dates
<b>Action 1</b>	CYPSC Domestic Violence Working Group established, Terms of Reference agreed. Focus on provision of specific domestic violence-informed responses for children and young people in Sligo and Leitrim.	January 2021
<b>Action 2</b>	Presentation on ' <i>Children and Domestic Violence, impact, children's resilience and best practice responses</i> ' from Lisa Marmion, Safe Ireland	March 2021
<b>Action 3</b>	<b>Mapping Exercise</b> to identify supports and services available to children and young people affected by domestic violence in Sligo and Leitrim. This was undertaken by DCU student Rachel Mehta as her MACE placement project, while completing the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Degree. <a href="#">Sligo Leitrim CYPSC Domestic Violence Mapping Exercise Report 2021.pdf</a>	May 2021
<b>Action 4</b>	<b>Healthy vs Unhealthy Relationships Programme.</b> This MACE-funded programme was delivered to 1,666 young people in 19 post-primary schools Sligo and Leitrim by experienced Home Youth Liason Service workers.	September – December 2021
<b>Action 5</b>	<b>Circle of Security</b> , an attachment-based parenting training programme delivered in Sligo and Leitrim and later right across the Southern Border area.	2021 and December 2022
<b>Action 6</b>	<b>Domestic Violence Research – A Review of Evidence-Based Programmes and Interventions for Children and Young People and survey of current provision of domestic violence responses in Ireland.</b>	September 2021 – June 2022
<b>Action 7</b>	<b>Lens on Domestic Violence: A Sligo Leitrim response to children and young people.</b> An awareness-raising and training event was held over two days in November 2022 to share the learning from the Domestic Violence Working Group, to launch Domestic Violence resources for Sligo and Leitrim and to deliver domestic violence awareness-raising with inputs from local and national specialist practitioners and training from Professor Jane Callaghan and Associate Professor Lisa Fellin. All organisations, agencies, statutory services and individuals with a remit to engage with families, children and young people were invited to participate. At time of printing 85 people had booked to attend.	9th / 10th November 2022

## **ACTION 1: ESTABLISH A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WORKING GROUP**

**Resulting from discussions between DVAS Manager, CYPSC Safe and Protected from Harm Working Group's Chairperson and CYPSC Coordinator, the Domestic Violence Working Group was established in January 2021 and began its work by agreeing clear Terms of Reference.**

Local statutory, community and voluntary organisations were represented in the membership of the Domestic Violence Working Group by An Garda Síochána, Domestic Violence Advocacy Service (DVAS), Foróige, Mohill Family Support Centre, Home Youth Liaison Service

(HYLS), MACE (Multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences), Sligo Leader Partnership Company, Sligo Rape Crisis Centre, Sligo Springboard Family Support and Sligo Leitrim Children & Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC).

## **ACTION 2: INCREASING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**In March 2021 Safe Ireland's Service Development Manager Lisa Marmion was invited to deliver a presentation to the Domestic Violence Working Group to enhance members' understanding of domestic violence and how it impacts on children and young people.**

Lisa Marmion joined us via MS Teams to share her knowledge of domestic violence and its impact on children and young people. Lisa reminded us that almost one in three Irish women (31% or 470,157 women) have experienced some form of psychological violence by a partner, 15% of Irish women (227,495 women) have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner and six percent have experienced sexual violence by a partner (EU-FRA 2014).

She shared that one in five children in the UK and one in four in Australia have experienced domestic violence by 18 years of age and that the majority of households affected by domestic violence have children living in them. She highlighted that parents separating is not a vaccination against domestic violence for children due to ongoing abuse during access visits, clearly informing us that post-separation contact is frequently an abusive experience for children who can be exposed to the ongoing physical, psychological and sexual abuse of

their mother during access visits. She indicated the need to be aware of how abusers use access as an opportunity to continue their controlling behaviour and that we need to be alert to this abuse and bring into our work an understanding and awareness of children's victimisation by their separated parent.

Lisa referred to studies demonstrating the co-occurrence between domestic abuse and child sexual abuse. She explained that early and prolonged exposure to domestic violence potentially creates more severe problems and that exposure at different developmental ages and stages have different impacts and outcomes.

She shared stark and essential information while assuring us that successful interventions are very possible with some key ingredients, which are: an understanding of child development, the developmental impact of trauma on children and the patterns of Domestic Violence.

## **ACTION 3: MAPPING OF SERVICES**

**In 2021 the DV Working Group decided to explore current service provision to children and young people experiencing domestic violence and coercive control in Sligo and Leitrim.**

The group commissioned a mapping of services in the area to identify supports available to children and young people exposed to violence. A survey monkey questionnaire targeted organisations and services working with children and young people. 24 individuals from 18 different organisations responded including Tusla, An Garda Síochána, Leitrim Development Company, Sligo Family Resource Centre, The Probation Service, Foróige, Sligo County Council, Sligo Social Services.

### **Key Findings**

- 1** Most organisations (99%) stated they do not currently provide specific supports to children and young people affected by domestic violence and coercive control
- 2** Responding organisations found it difficult to quantify the number of children and young people affected by domestic violence and coercive control who avail of their service as this information is not collected

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**3** Significant gaps in services were identified as well as barriers to accessing services

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**4** 100% of responding organisations indicated their willingness to engage in further training related to supporting children and young people exposed to domestic violence

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**5** 91.30% of respondents expressed their willingness to provide support to children and young people affected by domestic violence and coercive control

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The mapping exercise highlighted the lack of specific domestic violence-aware services and supports for children and young people who experience domestic violence and coercive control in Sligo and Leitrim. Agencies were aware of the issue and offered support through listening. But the total lack of specialist domestic violence responses means that children and young people experiencing domestic violence and coercive control are falling through the gaps and many are suffering in silence. These findings gave the group a renewed energy to progress with their work in the confidence that agencies and organisations wanted to engage and were committed to making a difference.

#### **ACTION 4: HEALTHY vs UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS PROGRAMME**

**Through MACE funding, Home Youth Liaison Service were awarded a contract to deliver an awareness-raising education programme to young people in post-primary schools.**

The successful organisation, Home Youth Liaison Service (HYLS) delivered six 1-hour sessions to first year students in all eighteen post-primary schools in Sligo and Leitrim. The focus of the programme was to help students recognise if they are in or are exposed to an unhealthy relationship(s) and to help them to develop coping strategies to

empower them to bring about positive changes in themselves and their situation. Through MACE funding, Home Youth Liaison Service were awarded a contract to deliver an awareness-raising education programme to young people in post-primary schools.

#### **ACTION 5: CIRCLES OF SECURITY PARENTING PROGRAMME**

**An early intervention attachment-based programme for parents and children. MACE provided funding to train facilitators across all disciplines to deliver this programme in group or one to one settings.**

**As a result of the training, facilitators:**

- Have a clear understanding of attachment – which is hugely beneficial in their day-to-day roles in engaging people from all sectors and backgrounds.
- Have become facilitators on completion of the training, which has enabled them to support parents to understand attachment to help guide children, adults, families, and communities on how to break the devastating cycles and impacts of trauma and build resilience.
- Have built a common approach and language among agencies.

## **ACTION 6: RESEARCH TO REVIEW EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMMES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND TO SURVEY CURRENT PROVISION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESPONSES IN IRELAND**

### **The Domestic Violence Working Group commissioned a research project to support the direction of their ongoing work.**

Following the completion of the Mapping Exercise, which identified the significant need and appetite for the provision of specific responses for children and young people, the group wanted to gather information on evidence-informed and peer reviewed programmes and interventions targeted at children and young people aged between 0-24 years to support them through their lived experience of domestic violence. Researcher Siobhan O'Neill was contracted to carry out this task. As the project proceeded the researcher was asked to widen her scope to include non-peer reviewed programmes, to survey the domestic violence services to find out about services and initiatives currently being delivered in Ireland and to interview a number of people working on this issue. The full report can be accessed from Sligo Leitrim CYPSC and DVAS.

Researcher Siobhan O'Neill examined sixteen different programmes, including nine which had been peer-reviewed. These programmes included: group-based work with children and young people in different age cohorts, group-based work with parents (usually mothers as most programmes have been developed in domestic violence support organisations), individual play-based or therapy-based work with children and teenagers, and group-based work where parents and children/young people have a combination of separate sessions and combined sessions.

Studies published between 2000 and 2019 suggest that interventions are most effective when tailored to the specific needs of children and young people and which include components of trauma-specific and non-trauma-specific content. Evaluations highlight that interventions need to focus on ensuring the long-term maintenance of intervention gains. A combination of individual therapy and group therapy was considered effective and helpful.

Very few studies have focused on the views and opinions of the children and young people. However, benefits were identified by children and young people, including spending time with their mother, realising they are not alone, fun and friendship, learning violence vocabulary, learning safety planning, enhancing behaviour management and pro-social behaviour, developing emotional intelligence and resilience and enhanced self-esteem and empowerment.

Findings suggest that parents, children and young people fare best from co-ordinated multi-disciplinary and multi-agency responses. Research suggests that providing additional interventions for parents improves outcomes for children and young people. These additional interventions can either be incorporated as parent intervention elements into the child's intervention or provided as concurrent, separate supports for parents.

#### **INTERVENTION – PARTICIPANTS**

- Children/Teenagers at different ages, grouped in age brackets
- Children/Teenagers - individually and in groups
- Parent groups
- Concurrent groups with mothers and children

#### **INTERVENTION – DURATION**

- Emphasis on follow up support
- 10-12 weekly sessions lasting two-three hours
- Individualised sessions - minimum of 3 sessions

#### **INTERVENTION – TYPE**

- Child-led intervention (based on framework/structure)
- Group-based/individual intervention
- Group-based psycho-education work
- Group-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- Therapies, including play therapy and art therapy

- Preventative Programmes (education and/or awareness raising)
- Emotion Coaching
- Family-focused Intervention (parents and children/young people engaged together)

### ADDITIONAL DETAILS

- Grouping of individuals according to age, maturity and stages of recovery journey
- Mix of individual and group therapy
- Division of sessions into key areas, for example, reducing self-blame
- Understanding and making sense of mother and child’s feelings, family situations and domestic violence
- Focusing on behaviours and healthy emotion regulation
- Beginning difficult conversations and connecting with women in similar situations
- Providing practical and coping skills to mothers to help in their current situations, eg safety planning or understanding child’s responses
- Developing sense of self and self-confidence, building on bonds and relationships
- Strengthening mother and child bond

### RESOURCES

- Number of facilitators per group is important. Two per group is recommended
- DV-Informed Play Therapists
- DV-Informed Cognitive Behavioural Therapists
- Teacher or Youth Group led
- Counsellors with emotion coaching skills

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES PROVIDING SPECIALIST SUPPORTS TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Less than half of the domestic violence services in Ireland are resourced to employ dedicated child support to provide access to interventions, therapy and one-to-one supports for children and young people and to co-ordinate children and young people’s domestic violence services. Eleven domestic violence services engaged with this research project. One was unable to contribute due to Covid-19 restrictions which, at the time, prevented their service delivery to children and young people. Services provide a mix of clinical supports, standardised interventions and most have developed in-house intervention programmes for children and young people, utilising their own experience and knowledge to tailor supports inhouse interventions.

Current provision in domestic violence services for children and young people (ten services surveyed):

**Figure 1: Group-based programmes in domestic violence services for children and young people**

TLC Kidz programme (7 Services)	Incredible Years (1 Service)
After-School service (1 Service)	Groupwork activities with DV children’s worker (4 Services)
Early Years’ Service (1 Service)	Group Art Therapy (1 Service)
Youth Club/Group (2 Services)	Parent and children play sessions (1 Service)
Group play therapy (3 Services)	Helping Hands programme (1 Service)
Group counselling (1 Service)	Life story therapy (6-12 year-olds) (1 Service)

**Figure 2: Individual-based interventions in domestic violence services for children and young people**

One-to-one play therapy (5 Services)	One-to-one therapeutic play (in house and in community) (1 Service)
One-to-one music therapy (1 Service)	Psycho-educational supports for children and young people (1 Services)
Free play with Domestic Violence children’s worker (1 Service)	Psychotherapy (12-18 year-olds) (1 Service)
Art therapy (3 Services)	One-to-one counselling (1 Service)

**Figure 3: Other supports offered by domestic violence services for children and young people**

<p><b>Parenting support (including parenting under pressure and parenting when separated)</b> (4 Services)</p>
<p><b>Safety planning for children/young people</b> (6 Services)</p>
<p><b>In-house Interventions</b> (8 Services)</p>
<p><b>Referral to other children/young people's services</b> (8 Services)</p>

### IN-HOUSE INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES

Additionally, eight of the ten services surveyed have developed intervention programmes within their service, based on the needs of children and young people engaging with their service.

Meath Women's Refuge provide a play-based intervention programme for children to support their recovery of domestic violence. The programme covers topics including identifying emotions, keeping safe and coping mechanisms. The programme has been evaluated and feedback has been incorporated. When asked about this particular support, Meath Women's Refuge stated:

*Children need to have a space where they can explore their feelings and emotions around domestic violence in a safe and supportive environment. We name the experience for children in child-friendly terms such as shouting, hurting, fighting at home and we discuss how this can make us feel many different things.*

Modh Eile, domestic violence service in Galway, run a group-based programme developed by their Solas Óg Children's and Young People's Service. This ten-week groupwork programme is run in the community with a maximum of six children per group. They stated:

*"we could see what was needed - funding and appropriate infrastructure to make it happen".*

Amber Women's Refuge provide a domestic violence intervention programme entitled "Hear Our Voices". The programme was designed specifically to deal with issues faced by mothers and children. Cuanlee work with children using an age specific workbook that explores their understanding of why they are in refuge and their experiences of domestic violence. Cuan Saor provide one-to-one tailored programmes and stated:

*We have developed interventions that we feel provide a safe and secure environment for working with both mum and child.*

ADAPT Domestic Abuse Services has developed a suite of interventions, including an intervention for teenagers, a baby support programme and a healthy relationship programme. The Domestic Abuse Teen Support programme (DATS) explores a range of topics including the Power and Control Wheel, victim blaming, cycle of abuse, "how I feel about family", coercive control, red flags in relationships and mindfulness. The baby support programme offers one-to-one time for babies with childcare staff. The Healthy Relationships programme is delivered in schools and focuses on domestic abuse awareness, coercive control, red flags and green flags in relationships.

Women's Aid Dundalk provide a number of in-house interventions including a parenting programme and a schools-based programme. The Parenting Through Trauma programme is an eight-week, group programme, which aims to empower mothers and develop their understanding of domestic violence and its impact on their children and their parenting capacity. This programme runs four times a year, with eight women per group. The Safe Hands programme is a six-week programme delivered in six national schools (4th - 6th class) each year by two facilitators. The programme focuses on understanding domestic violence and provides supports for children in relation to accessing safety, seeking support and managing emotions.

Another respondent (Anonymous) offers in-house support sessions for mothers focusing on the parenting challenges specific to domestic abuse and providing services to children and young people after assessing their individual needs. This service stated that they:

*...recognise the individuality of each child and young person attending and the resulting different needs for each client and family.*

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1 A multi-agency, multi-level approach is recommended to ensure appropriate service provision for children and young people across a range of situations and experiences
- 2 A dedicated role to co-ordinate domestic violence supports for children and young people in Sligo and Leitrim is recommended

- 3 Interventions and supports work best when tailored to the individual needs of the children and young people
- 4 Interventions and supports are enhanced when they include interventions with parents
- 5 Combining group-based and individual engagement is effective and helpful
- 6 No one single intervention will meet all the needs of children and young people
- 7 Specialist local domestic violence services (DVAS) need to be central in planning and developing responses for children and young people

## ACTION 7: LENS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A SLIGO LEITRIM RESPONSE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

**To share the learning from the Domestic Violence Working Group, a two-day awareness-raising and training event was held in Sligo on 9th and 10th November 2022.**

At the awareness-raising and launch event on Wednesday 9th November 2022, attendees heard presentations from local and national domestic violence advocates and practitioners and received a set of domestic violence resources, the Sligo Leitrim Domestic Violence Resource Handbook and the Sligo Leitrim CYPSC Domestic Violence Working Group summary document, *Lens on Domestic Violence: A Sligo Leitrim response to children and young people* summary document. In addition, attendees were directed to links to access the Sligo Leitrim CYPSC research project report 'A Review of Evidence-Based Programmes and Interventions for Children and Young People and survey of current provision of domestic violence responses in Ireland' and the mapping exercise report *Identifying Supports and Services available to Children and Young People affected By Domestic Violence across Sligo And Leitrim*. All four documents are available from Sligo

Leitrim CYPSC ([www.cypsc.ie](http://www.cypsc.ie)) and from DVAS ([www.domesticviolence.ie](http://www.domesticviolence.ie)).

On Thursday 10th November 2020 Professor Jane Callaghan, Director of the Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection, University of Stirling, Scotland, and Lisa Fellin, critical clinical psychologist and systemic family therapist, associate Professor, University of Bergamo, Italy delivered a full training day to youth workers, gardaí, social workers, medical professionals and other Sligo and Leitrim-based frontline professionals.

This training day facilitated participants to explore how they might more effectively support young people impacted by domestic abuse. Trainers used an interactive workshop-based approach to share knowledge of how young people live with coercive control and domestic violence, how this permeates their family life and how a Domestic Violence-informed response might be applied.

## CONCLUSIONS

**Supporting individuals and families exposed to domestic violence is complex, involves multiple individuals and factors and requires effective joined up working from a range of services such as An Garda Síochána, family courts, schools, community and voluntary agencies, child protection services and specialist domestic violence services.**

When collaborating across agencies to support those experiencing domestic violence, it is important for services to bring their own lens and experience to the situation but equally it is important for the work to be guided by a domestic violence-informed lens which frames the overall approach to the support.

The World Health Organisation, in its 2016 document INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children, asserts that we have growing evidence that violence against children is preventable and that we have a growing public consensus that it will no longer be tolerated.

WHO consider we already have sufficient evidence to allow us to stop the violence and replace it with safe, stable and nurturing environments in which children can thrive, suggesting we draw on the evidence we already have to take immediate, effective and sustainable action to prevent such violence and assuring us that progress in understanding and preventing violence against all children from birth to eighteen years is advancing rapidly.

This summary report, Lens on Domestic Violence: A Sligo Leitrim Response to Children and Young People, has documented the work carried out over the past two years by Sligo Leitrim CYPSC's Domestic Violence Working Group. At its core is effective partnership work; a recognition that we need to build on our shared understanding that children and young people living with domestic violence and coercive control are direct victims, active beings who need access to appropriate, high quality, domestic violence-informed services to be able to recover from their experiences and be supported to thrive. Here in Sligo and Leitrim we have demonstrated our willingness to address the very considerable gaps in specialist service provision for children and young people in Sligo and Leitrim with a lived experience of domestic violence and coercive control. It is time to move forward and deliver on the findings of our work together and find ways to implement this learning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### We are recommending:

- 1 Build on the work undertaken by Sligo Leitrim CYPSC Domestic Violence Working Group and presented in this short document
- 2 Establish a multi-agency, multi-level approach to ensure appropriate service provision for children and young people across a range of situations and experiences
- 3 Access the required resources to develop a dedicated role of Child and Young Person Domestic Violence Co-ordinator to lead out on the development of supports for children and young people in Sligo and Leitrim.
- 4 Access adequate and appropriate resources to bring much needed domestic violence-informed responses to support children and young people and their families living with domestic violence and coercive control in Sligo and Leitrim (interventions, training, awareness-raising, prevention programmes, education programmes).

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