

## Coordinator guidance

October 2023



### Understanding what Domestic Abuse is

#### 1) What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading or violent behaviour, including sexual violence. All types of abuse can be destructive and lead to anxiety, depression, and addiction. It is a largely hidden crime, occurring primarily in the home.

**Crimestoppers reports that two women are killed each week** by a current or former partner. It's estimated that a typical victim of domestic abuse **endures up to 35 assaults before speaking up**. In the majority of cases the perpetrator is a partner or ex-partner, but sometimes a family member or carer.

#### Domestic abuse:

- Will affect 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men in their lifetime
- Leads to, on average, two women being murdered each week and 30 men per year
- Accounts for 16% of all violent crime (Source: Crime in England and Wales 04/05 report), however it is still the violent crime least likely to be reported to the police
- Has more repeat victims than any other crime (on average there will have been 35 assaults before a victim calls the police)
- Is the single most quoted reason for becoming homeless (Shelter, 2002)
- In 2010 the Forced Marriage Unit responded to 1735 reports of possible Forced Marriages.
- In addition, approximately 400 people commit suicide each year who have attended hospital for domestic abuse injuries in the previous six months, 200 of these attend hospital on the day they go on to commit suicide

(Living Without Abuse - <https://lwa.org.uk/understanding-abuse/statistics/>)

#### Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to:

- **Coercive control:** Coercive control is an act or pattern of acts of intimidation, threats, humiliation, intimidation, isolation and control, or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a victim. This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviour.
- **Emotional/psychological abuse:** Emotional abuse is a way to control another person by using emotions to criticise, embarrass, shame, blame, gaslight, or otherwise manipulate another person.
- **Physical abuse:** Physical abuse is use of force that results in bodily injury, pain, or impairment. This includes, but is not limited to, being slapped, burned, cut, bruised

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or improperly physically restrained. Neglect is also considered an aspect of physical abuse and this type of abuse often happens when one adult cares for another, such as in the case of an adult child caring for a parent.

- **Sexual Abuse:** Examples of sexual abuse are: using force, threats or intimidation to make their partner perform sexual acts; having sex when their partner doesn't want it or forcing them to have sex with other people; forcing them to look at pornographic material; publishing intimate material without their partner's consent
- **Financial/economic abuse:** Abusers may interfere (through restriction, exploitation and sabotage) with their partner's access to money and finances, as well as those things that money can buy (such as food, clothing, transportation and a place to live). This is economic abuse, and it is designed to limit someone's freedom. This type of abuse can create economic instability and/or make one partner dependent on the other, which can prevent victims from leaving and rebuilding their lives.
- **Harassment and stalking:** Stalking can be defined as persistent and unwanted attention that makes you feel pestered and harassed. It includes behaviour that happens two or more times, directed at or towards you by another person, which causes you to feel alarmed or distressed or to fear that violence might be used against you.
- **Online or digital abuse:** Online platforms are increasingly being used to perpetrate domestic abuse. Digital domestic abuse can include behaviours such as monitoring of social media profiles or emails, abuse over social media such as Facebook or Twitter, sharing intimate photos or videos without your consent, using GPS locators or spyware.

A wide range of people can be affected by domestic abuse, including 'hidden victims', such as the elderly, people from the LGBT+ community, the homeless and young people. Find out more here: <https://safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub/spotlights>.

## 2) Spotting the signs

People experiencing domestic abuse can change their behaviour in ways that are obvious or more subtle. If you are worried about a friend, a family member or a colleague, and you can answer yes to more than one of these questions, they may be suffering domestic abuse:

- Have they stopped doing things they used to do, like seeing friends or family, or going to work or college?
- Are they fearful of their partner's reactions to things they do; perhaps they asked you not to tell their partner about something they've done?
- Do they make excuses for their partner's behaviour
- Are they showing signs of feeling depressed or anxious, or do you notice changes in their personality
- Does their partner have control of their money? Do they worry about spending too much, or have to explain everything they spend?

- Does their partner check up on them a lot? Do they constantly receive text messages or phone calls; does the partner turn up unexpectedly?
- Does their partner get overly jealous? Do they get accused of being flirty or unfaithful?
- Does their partner put them down in public, or belittle them?
- Has their self-esteem dropped recently?
- Does their partner set lots of rules that they must follow, such as who they can see, what they can wear, what they can spend money on?
- Do they bear unexplained marks, bruises, or other signs of physical injury?

### Spotting the signs as a Coordinator

While working in your community you may come across situations in the street or at people's homes that make you believe someone is suffering domestic abuse, such as:

- Threatening and intimidating arguments, which may involve violent language or escalate to smashing up furniture
- Arguments where the partner blames the other for their actions, saying they are "asking for it" or deserve the abuse
- Individuals with bruising or other visible marks, which may have been caused by physical abuse

In these situations, if it is an emergency or you or someone else is in immediate danger always call 999.

If it's not an emergency and you'd prefer to stay anonymous, contact Crimestoppers by calling **0800 555 111** or [online](#). You will remain 100% anonymously - guaranteed.

*"As a bystander, family member, colleague or friend you may feel helpless when you know someone is a victim of domestic abuse. Whilst ultimately the victim will need to make the decision to leave the relationship themselves, we encourage you to report your suspicions. We will then pass on information to the relevant police force who, with partners, may be able to intervene away from the abuser to check the potential victim is OK."* - **Crimestoppers**

### Something to look out for:

There is a universal hand signal that someone can use to indicate they're in danger, created by the Women's Funding Network and the Canadian Women's Foundation.

<https://news.sky.com/story/the-simple-hand-signal-that-lets-people-know-youre-in-danger-and-other-ways-to-ask-for-help-12243563>



If you are unsure on what to do, we recommend you contact the 24-hour free National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247 for advice.

### 3) What can you do to protect others?

People are much more likely to confide in a friend or someone close to them, than to the police or professional services.

Don't leave it to someone else to start the conversation – **in a fifth of cases of domestic abuse last year, nobody else knew what was going on.**

Always start the conversation face-to-face – if you try and have it over the phone or social media their partner may find the messages and retaliate against them or you. Make sure you won't be overheard or interrupted.

#### What to say?

Approach the conversation with kindness and concern. Many people struggle to identify with the labels of 'domestic abuse' or 'domestic violence' so avoid these.

To start off, try asking the person how things are in their relationship, or mention things you have noticed in their behaviour or the behaviour of the abuser. For example:

- "We haven't seen much of you recently, is everything ok?"
- "I've noticed you seem a bit down, has anyone upset you?"
- "Wow, they text you a lot – do they do that all the time?"

If the person starts to talk about the abuse, **DON'T**:

- offer opinions about the relationship or the abuser
- criticise or blame the victim
- pass judgement on the situation
- offer advice – leave that to the experts.
- NEVER tell them to leave the relationship immediately, as this can be highly risky and there may be many reasons why they can't.

Instead, DO:

- let them know that you believe them and want to help
- reassure them that the abuse is not their fault
- thank them for their bravery in opening up to you, and
- let them know that help is available - make sure they know where to find the contact details of relevant support services and helplines

Just by listening you will be helping the person to admit what is happening, and this will break the silence around the situation. Ask them what they want to do, or have happen next, so that they feel in control of the situation. If the person chooses not to say anything about the abuse, you must respect this too. Just let them know you're there if they do. Ending an abusive relationship is a very difficult decision to make and the victim may take some time to decide to do this - and to work out how to do it safely. But they are the expert in their own experience, and they will know when the best time is to leave.

**NEVER confront the abuser. Do not do anything that may endanger you, the victim or their children.**

Neighbourhood Watch has a useful leaflet with guidance on what to do once they've opened up and practical ways to support them:

[https://www.ourwatch.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2020-01/SY0107\\_NHW\\_DA\\_Talking\\_Leaflet\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ourwatch.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2020-01/SY0107_NHW_DA_Talking_Leaflet_FINAL.pdf)

Remember: If you are worried about someone but don't know how best to help, call the National Domestic Violence Helpline yourself, on **0808 2000 247** to ask for advice.

The most important thing to do if someone tells you about domestic abuse they are suffering is to:

1. listen,
2. believe them,
3. provide support and
4. signpost them to where they can access specialist advice.

**What do you do if the victim confides in you about the abuse, but swears you to secrecy?**

Ultimately, the victim has a much better chance of safety and independence if they are able to make decisions about what happens next. Although you mean well, reporting the abuse to the authorities on their behalf can be unsafe, disempowering for the victim, and lead to consequences that you cannot foresee. Emphasise that you are not in a position to give them advice; only the experts can.

Give them all the relevant numbers to call and offer to be there with them.

If you are worried about someone but don't know how best to help, call the National Domestic Violence Helpline yourself, on **0808 2000 247**, to ask for advice.

#### **4) Reporting and signposting**

As a concerned friend, neighbour, colleague or citizen, you can report your concerns to the police or the specialist organisations below, but exercise caution when doing so. Making a

report on the victim's behalf may not be safe, can be very disempowering for them, and can result in consequences for the victim that you cannot foresee. If possible, try talking to the victim about the abuse in a safe and confidential space, and signpost them to help and support.

Since 2014, individuals have had the 'Right to Ask' about the offending history of their partner, potential partner, or person they know, known as [Clare's Law](#). Police have the power to disclose previous violent offences and spent convictions, with the aim of protecting potential victims.

## REPORTING

### Police

- Call 999 in an emergency or if:
  - the offender is still present
  - you feel like the situation could get heated or violent very soon
  - you or anyone else is seriously hurt or in danger
- In a non-emergency dial 101

### **What will happen if I choose to report to the police?**

If the police become involved, they should always investigate and may arrest or bring charges against the abuser, if there is sufficient evidence.

Even if there is not enough evidence to charge someone with committing a crime, there are a range of protection options available, including a Domestic Violence Protection Order, which can ban the perpetrator from returning to a residence and contacting the victim for up to 28 days. This allows the victim a level of breathing space to consider their options, with the help of a support agency. Longer-term measures to keep victims safe are also available to courts, such as an injunction.

If it's not an emergency and you'd prefer to stay anonymous, contact Crimestoppers by calling **0800 555 111 or online**. You will remain 100% anonymously - guaranteed.

If you are unsure on what to do, we recommend you contact the 24-hour free National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247 for advice.

**Commented [GU1]:** we can check with Crimestoppers if they are happy for us to quote them in this line from their website? I could contact Head of Comms - Michelle?

## SIGNPOSTING

### **Specialist domestic abuse organisations:**

#### **Freephone National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge**

0808 200 0247

[www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

#### **Galop (for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people)**

0800 999 5428

[www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)

**Live Fear Free helpline (Wales)**

0808 80 10 800

[www.livefearfree.gov.wales](http://www.livefearfree.gov.wales)

**Men's Advice Line**

0808 801 0327

[www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk)

**Rape Crisis (England and Wales)**

0808 802 9999

[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

**[Women's Aid Survivor's Handbook](#)**

**[Neighbourhood Watch Domestic Abuse Toolkit](#)**

**Victim Support**

0333 271 0094 (free 24 hour line)

Live chat on their website <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>

**Supporting victims or reporting an incident can be upsetting for you too.**

**PROTECTING CHILDREN**

If you are at all concerned about the safety or welfare of a child as a result of domestic abuse, you can get in touch with their school who can investigate safeguarding concerns.

You could also report your concerns to the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000**.