

Recognising and responding to domestic violence and abuse

A quick guide for social workers



Social workers can help people to talk about domestic violence or abuse, to know they are not alone and to feel that they will be believed

Domestic violence and abuse is defined by the Government as any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

It includes psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse, as well as 'honour'-based violence and forced marriage.

Having a long-term illness or disability, including mental health problems, increases a person's risk of experiencing domestic violence or abuse. The law emphasises freedom from abuse as essential to a person's wellbeing (Care Act 2014) and highlights the harm to children who experience domestic abuse (Children Act 2004).

Asking about domestic violence and abuse

Asking about a person's experiences in their relationships and recognising the signs of possible domestic violence or abuse are the first steps in making sure they receive the right help and support.



Be aware of the potential impact of equality and diversity issues:

- Your assumptions about people's beliefs, values, age, gender identity or sexuality may affect how you recognise and respond to domestic violence and abuse
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people are also at risk of forced marriage
- 'Honour'-based violence may be triggered by someone's gender identity or sexuality.

Make sure you know about the services available locally to support people who experience or perpetrate domestic violence or abuse and how to make a referral.

Training and supervision

You should receive ongoing training and regular supervision to support you in developing the knowledge and skills necessary to understand domestic violence and abuse and the role of professionals in ensuring people's safety. If your role is specifically about safeguarding, you should also be confident in identifying and assessing risk (often by using the DASH – domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and 'honour'-based violence – tool), safety planning and liaising with specialist support services.

Responding to domestic violence and abuse

Everyone involved in situations of domestic violence and abuse should be offered support.

After a disclosure

If a person makes a disclosure of domestic violence or abuse, their safety and the safety of others, including any children who may be affected, is the first priority.

1. Make sure you are aware of the Data Protection Act (2018), professional guidelines and local protocols about confidentiality and information sharing. Check that you know about:
 - Getting consent from people to share their information
 - Telling people when and with whom their information is being shared
 - When it may be necessary to share information without consent to keep the person safe
2. Share information about specialist services and offer a referral, including to a local support group
3. Consider the type of support needed, both immediately and longer-term
4. If the person appears to have additional needs associated with alcohol or drug misuse or mental health problems, offer to refer them to the relevant service, as well as to domestic violence and abuse support
5. Record your discussion and the actions you have agreed



Specialist services

You should know what your local specialist services can offer and how to refer someone for this support.

1. Domestic violence and abuse services can help address emotional, psychological, physical and sexual harm. They can offer advice, help develop future plans and increase the person's safety.
2. Services include refuges, advocacy, floating support, outreach support, specialist support for perpetrators, and tailored interventions, as well as housing workers, independent domestic violence advisors (IDVA) and a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for people at high risk.
3. Be aware that some people may find domestic violence and abuse services more difficult to access or use. This may include older people, men, people with disabilities, people from black and minority ethnic groups, and lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans people. It may also include people who are not entitled to benefits, housing and other public services, usually due to their immigration status. Advocacy and additional support may help with this.



Children and young people

Children and young people can be directly affected by domestic violence and abuse, including fearing, hearing or seeing it within their families or worrying about its effect on someone else. They can also experience it within their own intimate relationships if they are aged 16 or over.

Make sure you can recognise the signs in children and young people, and understand how it may affect them. **You should also:**



Know how to talk to children and young people about domestic violence and abuse.



Know when and how to **refer to child protection services** and who to contact for advice about whether a referral is needed.



Gather and share information to form a clear picture of the circumstances, risks and needs of the child or young person.



Know about **local policies and procedures** on domestic violence and abuse. Be aware of how to access services that can provide support where children and young people are affected by domestic violence and abuse.

Further information

[Domestic violence and abuse: multi-agency working \(PH50\)](#) – NICE guideline, including a list of indicators of possible domestic violence or abuse and information on levels of training for different staff groups

[Domestic violence and abuse \(QS116\)](#) – NICE quality standard

[Decision-making and mental capacity \(NG108\)](#) – NICE guideline, including recommendations about supporting decision-making and ensuring it is free from coercion

[Child abuse and neglect \(NG76\)](#) – NICE guideline

[Adult safeguarding and domestic abuse: a guide to support practitioners and managers](#) – LGA/ADASS

[SafeLives](#) – charity providing a wide range of resources for professionals, including

[Spotlights: Hidden Victims](#)

This content has been co-produced by NICE and SCIE and is based on NICE's guideline and quality standard on domestic violence and abuse.

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