



Getting it right first time

A quick guide for professionals who don't work in domestic violence services

Have you ever worried that a patient or client is suffering domestic abuse? This is a practical resource to help you know what to do if you are worried about someone.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse includes any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between persons who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This includes 'honour'-based violence, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage.

Step 1: identify

Who is most at risk?

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone. Women are more likely to be victims, but men can also be the target of domestic abuse. Children can also be victims of domestic abuse – whether they live in a home with adult victims or are themselves harmed directly.

Things to look out for that may indicate domestic abuse:

- Injuries without explanation (normally people will volunteer an explanation)
- Injuries which are minimised or concealed
- A partner who is unwilling to allow a patient or client to be alone with professionals
- A patient or client who appears passive and dominated by their partner
- Anxiety, depression and being withdrawn, particularly if this is not usual for the patient or client

Step 2: ask

Find out more

If you have concerns, always try to find out more from the patient or client. Make sure the person you are concerned about is on their own, without children, partner or other family members present. And if you are talking through an interpreter, make sure they are independent of the family.

Ways to start the conversation:

- Are you happy?
- How are things in your relationship?
- Is anybody hurting you? (don't refer to 'partner' as it could be someone else)
- Are you or your children scared or upset?
- Do you feel safe at home?

Don't be tempted to ask too much or feel that you have to ask everything at once as this might be overwhelming. Be prepared for the answers and don't express shock or disgust. Treat people with respect even if you think they are putting themselves at risk or denying that abuse is happening.

Step 3: act

Based on what you have seen and heard, make a judgment about what you should do next. Think about whether the abuse is current, how urgent the situation is, and whether there are children involved.

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| If the situation is urgent – for example there are injuries or a risk of immediate harm | Call 999 |
| If children are at risk | Call your local authority children's services or follow your organisation's |

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| | child protection policy |
| If the situation is serious and the victim is scared and frightened: | <p>Option 1 – refer to Marac</p> <p>Complete a Dash risk checklist. This will tell you how much danger a victim is in. If they are at high-risk, refer them to your local Marac.</p> <p>Every area of England and Wales has a Marac, a local meeting which discusses every high-risk case of domestic abuse. They will make sure that the victim gets the help they need to get safe. And every victim discussed at Marac will get 1-2-1 support from an Idva, a trained domestic abuse specialist. Any professional can refer a high-risk case of domestic abuse to Marac.</p> <p>You do not need to get your client’s consent to refer to Marac if they are at high risk, although you should seek it.</p> <p>The Dash risk checklist is used by every police force and most other agencies across the UK. It is available at www.safelives.org.uk/dash. If you don’t know how to get in touch with your area’s Marac, email info@safelives.org.uk.</p> |
| | <p>Option 2 – follow your local protocols</p> <p>Seek advice from your service manager or your service’s domestic abuse champion. Your local authority may also have a domestic violence co-ordinator. They will know how to make sure a victim gets the right help.</p> |
| If the victim is not in immediate danger, but are scared or frightened, or unhappy in their relationship | <p>Ask them how you can help. Offer to contact a local domestic violence service or victim support for them, or to contact the police.</p> <p>Make sure the victim knows about sources of help and support, such as those listed below, as well as any local services, and encourage them to get in contact.</p> <p>Find out if you can contact them safely and ensure they know how to contact you. If possible, arrange another appointment soon. This will give you another chance to discuss how to get them the right support.</p> |

If you are still unsure about what to do, speak to a local or national domestic violence service, the police or children’s services for advice. They can suggest the right way forward and will speak initially on an anonymous basis.

Information-sharing

Sometimes people don’t act because of concerns about whether or not they are allowed to share information. You can always share information with the consent of the victim, and you often can without consent too. If you feel a child is at risk you do not need consent to tell children’s services or the police.

The best way to decide whether to share information is to complete a SafeLives Dash risk checklist. You’ll find more information about sharing information at safelives.org.uk.

Remember:

- Never make decisions for people or advise them to leave their home or relationship. This may put them in danger.
- Use your professional judgement – if you sense there’s something wrong, you should act on it
- Be human and use everyday language - people may not see themselves as victims of domestic abuse. It’s hard to talk about, so acknowledge that and thank them for being honest with you
- Make a record – make notes of what has been said to you, including the time, date and injuries, including as much detail as possible. Use the person’s words wherever you can. Your professional judgement is also important. Write down what you think or feel about the situation and why.
- Act on it - it took a lot of courage for the victim to tell you. Don’t keep what you know to yourself. The victim and family needs you to help them get help.

Helpful contacts

There is a lot more useful information for professionals on SafeLives' website: safelives.org.uk. And if you have any questions, get in touch via info@safelives.org.uk.

Help for victims

National domestic violence helpline - 0808 2000 247, 24 hours

The freephone 24 hour national domestic violence helpline, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge, is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. The helpline is staffed 24 hours a day by fully trained female workers and volunteers. All calls are completely confidential. The service offers translation facilities for callers whose first language is not English, and a service for callers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Men's advice line - 0808 801 0327, Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

A freephone confidential helpline for men experiencing domestic violence from a partner or ex-partner, or from other family members.