

Guidance

Supporting people who may be experiencing domestic violence and abuse

1. Introduction

Every person has a right to live their life free from violence, abuse, intimidation and fear.

People experience domestic abuse regardless of their social group, class, ethnicity, age, disability or sexuality. Most abuse is carried out by men against female partners, but abuse can be inflicted by women on men, and can also occur in same-sex relationships. Some parents are abused by teenage children and some elderly people are financially, physically or sexually abused by other family members.

Where domestic abuse occurs it is entirely the responsibility of the abuser and there are no acceptable excuses.

Incidences of domestic violence and abuse may be recognised or brought to the attention of priests, religious, employees, volunteers or members of the parish community. In order to be able to respond appropriately, sensitively and effectively it is important to have an understanding of domestic violence and abuse and of your role in supporting victims and survivors.

Children in the family are also victims of domestic abuse, directly and indirectly. Section 120 of the Children and Adoption Act 2002 defines 'harm' to include 'impairment from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another'. Being a victim or witness of domestic abuse can have a severe effect on a child's behaviour, health and educational attainment, including low self-esteem, withdrawal or anxiety, and behavioural problems, being overly anxious to please and unnaturally well-behaved.

Children are often more aware of the abuse than their parents realise.

In nearly all scenarios there are steps that can be taken to increase safety for the survivor and other members of the household, such as children, who may be affected.

Where there are children in the household, concerns must be passed to the statutory authorities. This can be done via the Safeguarding Coordinator.

Recognising domestic violence and abuse

Domestic violent and abusive behaviour covers a broad remit and can be:

- **Physical**
such as, hitting, pushing, retraining, kicking, punching, imprisoning, forced use or removal of drugs/medication, assault with implements, etc. Domestic abuse also refers to 'female genital mutilation', forced marriage and 'honour'-based violence.

- **Psychological**
such as, blaming, demeaning, shouting, frightening, ignoring, humiliating, threatening harm to children, using the children as a weapon, ridiculing appearance and skills, setting rules about sleep, leisure time, contact with others, isolating from family and friends, threatening suicide or self-harm, and 'gaslighting' (manipulating someone by psychological means into doubting their own sanity).
- **Financial**
such as, illegal or unauthorised use of someone's property, money, keeping in poverty, demanding to know what they spend, taking over finances etc.
- **Sexual**
such as, forcing sexual activity without consent, sexual name calling, imposition of dress codes, knowingly passing on STIs, involving partner in sex trade or pornography etc.
- **Neglect**
depriving someone of food, shelter, access to medical care etc.
- **Spiritual**
not allowing worship, using faith as a weapon for abuser's personal pleasure or gain, using religious teaching to justify abuse or to compel forgiveness.

For further information see the **Domestic Violence and Abuse Procedure**.

2. Your Role

If you become aware that someone within your parish or religious community is experiencing domestic violence and abuse, then **a response is always required**.

Where there are children in the household, concerns must be passed to the statutory authorities.

If you do not feel able to respond yourself, you should bring it to the attention of someone who may be able to help such as a Priest or Deacon, a member of the parish council or pastoral team, the Diocesan or Religious Safeguarding Coordinator.

The role of the person making a response is to focus on the safety of the victim or survivor and any children where they are involved. The role is not to instruct or advise about a particular course of action or act as a caseworker.

Guidance on supporting someone experience domestic violence or abuse

- Talk to the person and help them to open up. You may have to try several times before they will confide in you
- Try to be direct and start by saying something like, "I'm worried about you because" or "I'm concerned about your safety..."
- Do not judge the person

- Listen to and believe what the person tells you – too often people do not believe the person when they first disclose abuse
- Reassure the person that the abuse is not their fault and that you are there for them
- If the person has not spoken to anyone else, encourage them to seek the help of a local domestic violence agency that understands what they are going through and offers specialist support and advice
- Don't tell the person to leave or criticise them for staying. Although you may want the person to leave, they have to make that decision in their own time (research shows an abused woman is at most risk at the point of separation and immediately after leaving an abusive partner). Leaving takes a great deal of strength and courage. An abused person can face huge obstacles such as nowhere to go, no money and no-one to turn to for support
- Talk about how the person can keep themselves and their children safe
 - Talk about how it isn't children's responsibility to protect their parent but in an emergency they could call for help from the police, go to a neighbour, or a relative or someone they trust
 - Suggest a code word or action that is only known to the person and somebody who is supporting them so they can signal when they are in danger and cannot access help themselves
 - Find out information about local services and suggest they identify somebody that can keep spare sets of keys or important documents, such as passports, benefit books, in a safe place so that they can access them quickly in an emergency
- Focus on supporting the person and building their self confidence
- Acknowledge their strengths and frequently remind them that they are coping well with a challenging and stressful situation
- Where appropriate, provide religious guidance emphasizing aspects of our Catholic beliefs which prioritise equality, the dignity of our lives, the rights to be free of violence and intimidation
- Be patient. It can take time for someone to recognise that they are being abused and even longer to take be able to take safe and permanent decisions about what to do. Recognising the problem is an important first step

3. Privacy and Confidentiality

It is important to create safe times and places for people to have an opportunity to talk about what is happening to them.

When a report is made about risks of harm to a child or an adult the person making the allegation or raising the concern is often concerned to do so 'in confidence'. It needs to be made clear that full confidentiality can never be promised.

Where you have reasonable cause to believe that a child or young person may be suffering or may be at risk of suffering significant harm, the matter must be referred to the Safeguarding Coordinator who will consider the need to refer the concerns to children's social care or the police.

Information should be shared in accordance with the [Information Sharing Protocol](#). It is important to explain why, as well as how, the information that is about to be shared will be managed. Reassurance should be given that the information will be shared only with people who need to know in order to take action to intervene and protect the child or adult.

Giving reassurance about the timing of interventions and feedback to the person raising a concern will assist in managing the process.

4. Protection in the Family Court

If an individual needs to apply for court action to prevent abuse ongoing, there are two types of injunctions that they can apply for in the Family Courts:

- 1) an **occupation order** to exclude someone from their home
- 2) a **non-molestation order** to prevent someone from being violent, threatening violence, harassing or intimidating them

The thresholds are high for these orders so victims and survivors may need to be supported in producing appropriate evidence for the authorities.

For advice about eligibility for and support in seeking these, the individual should contact the [National Centre for Domestic Violence](#).

5. Support Services

The type of services available will depend upon the circumstances of the domestic abuse and where the individual lives.

- **Domestic Abuse and Support Services;**
- **Legal Services;**
- **Housing Services.**

Domestic Abuse and Support Services

Action on Elder Abuse

T: 0208 765 7000
Helpline: 0808 808 8141

Elder Abuse website

A national organisation that aims to prevent abuse in old age by raising awareness, providing education and promoting research.

Broken Rainbow

Freephone Number: 0800 999 5428
Helpline: 0300 999 5428

Broken Rainbow website

Provides information and a support service to lesbian, gay and bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic violence.

Eaves Women's Aid and Eaves Supported Housing

T: 0207 735 2062

Eaves for Women website

Provides homeless women across London with high quality supported housing. The organisation also delivers domestic violence services, and undertakes campaigning and development work around violence against women, prostitution and trafficking

Greater London Domestic Violence Project (GLDVP)

T: 0207 785 3860

GLDVP is a second tier charity that works to ensure that good practice in domestic violence work is transferred across London, bringing together key agencies to develop London-wide policies, raise awareness about domestic violence and increase the effectiveness of multi-agency work. The Stella Project is a partnership between GLDVP and GLADA.

Hidden Hurt - Domestic Abuse Information

Hidden Hurt website

This site has been written by a survivor of domestic violence, and provides advice and information to those who are in an abusive relationship.

London Irish Women's Centre

T: 0207 249 7318

London Irish Women's Centre website

Offers advice for women in housing need including women fleeing domestic violence in London. Also offers training and support services.

Men's Advice Line

Helpline: 0808 801 0327

Men's Advice Line website

A national helpline which provides practical and emotional support for men experiencing domestic abuse.

Refuge

T: 0207 395 7700
Helpline: 0808 2000 247

Refuge website

Refuge is a national organisation that runs the 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline (in partnership with Women's Aid). Refuge provides accommodation and children's services for those fleeing domestic violence. Refuge also provides individual and group counselling to survivors of violence. Their Community Outreach Project works across a number of South London boroughs with BME women and children.

Respond

T: 0207 383 0700
Helpline: 0808 808 0700

Respond website

A national organisation providing services for people with learning disabilities that have been victims or perpetrators of sexual abuse and/or have experienced other trauma. Also provides training and support to those who work with them.

Samaritans

Helpline: 08457 90 90 90

Samaritans website

A national helpline providing 24 hour confidential emotional support for anyone in a crisis.

Victim Support

Helpline: 0845 30 30 900

Victim Support website

Offers information and support to victims of crime, whether or not they have reported the crime to the police.

Women and Girls Network

T: 0207 610 4678
Helpline: 0207 610 4678

Woman and Girls Network website

A pan-London service offering a holistic healing centre for women and girls overcoming the experience of violence whether physical, sexual or emotional. Also provides counselling and body therapies.

Women's Aid Federation of England

Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (24 hours)

Women's Aid Federation of England website

Runs the 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline (in partnership with Refuge). Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic violence against women and charity. They can offer support, advice, accommodation and information on all aspects of domestic violence.

Women's Trust

East T: 0208 522 7856/7455
West T: 0207 034 0303/0304

Women's Trust website

A pan-London Service that provides independent, confidential, women-only services to women who have been or are affected by domestic violence.

Childline

T: 0207 650 3200
Helpline: 0800 1111

Childline website

The free 24 hour confidential helpline for children and young people.

The Hideout

The Hideout website

The Hideout is the first national domestic violence website for children and young people. The website has been designed to inform children and young people about domestic violence, help

them identify whether it is happening in their home and signpost them to additional support and information.

NSPCC

Child Protection Helpline: 0800 800 5000
Bengali/Sylheti: 0800 096 7714
Gujurati: 0800 096 7715
Hindi: 0800 096 7716
Punjabi: 0800 096 7717
Urdu: 0800 096 7718
ASIAN Helpline Service in English: 0800 096 7719
Textphone: 0800 056 0566

NSPCC website

The NSPCC is a national charity that works to end cruelty to children. If you're worried about a child's safety or welfare or if you need help or advice, ring the free and confidential helpline (24 hours).

The Tulip Project

T: 0151 637 6363
Support for parents that have experienced violence from their children.

Legal Services

Children's Legal Centre

T: 01206 872466 (head Office)
National Education Line via Community Legal Advice: 0845 345 4345
Young People Freephone line: 0800 783 2187
Child Law Advice Line: 0845 120 2948
Family Law Advice via Community Legal Advice: 0845 345 4345

Children's Legal Centre website

Based in Essex, with an office in London. Provides legal advice and representation to children, their carers and professionals throughout the UK. Also runs a Refugee and Asylum seeking children project. Produces publications and provides training.

Community Legal Advice

T: 0845 345 4345

Community Legal Advice website

Government agency which provides information about legal aid and free and confidential legal advice paid for by legal aid. Provides information on where and how to access legal help in England and Wales.

The Law Centres Federation

T: 0207 387 8570

The Law Centres Federation website

The national network of community based law centres which can provide information and your local law centre for free legal advice.

Rights of Women

T: 0207 251 6575/6

General legal advice line: 0207 251 6577

Sexual violence legal advice line: 0207 251 8887

Rights of Women website

Services for women by women. Provides free confidential advice on range of issues, including domestic violence, children and contact issues, divorce and relationship breakdown. Lesbian parenting, sexual violence, child sex offences, family related sex offences, trafficking and general criminal legal advice. Produces free information sheets on various legal issues and provides training.

Housing Services

Crisis

T: 0870 011 3335

Crisis website

Crisis is a national charity that provides services and programmes to empower homeless people. Works with single homeless people.

Gay Men's Shared Housing

T: 0208 743 2165

Provides accommodation based medium term temporary housing and support to gay men who have been the victims of same-sex domestic violence, homophobic violence and/or gay related hate crimes in the London boroughs of Wandsworth and Hammersmith and Fulham.

Homeless Link

T: 0207 960 3010

Homeless Link website

Homeless Link is the national membership organisation for frontline homelessness agencies in England.

Resource Information Service (London Hostels Directory)

T: 0207 939 0641

Resource Information Service website

A national resource for advice workers, hostel staff, day centre, Social Services and anyone in contact with people with housing problems. Also produce publications and manage various housing and advice related websites.

Shelter

Shelterline: 0808 800 444

Shelter website

A national organisation providing telephone housing advice and information. Issues include finding accommodation, hostel referrals, housing benefit/rights, illegal eviction, domestic violence and emergency accommodation.