



## GUIDANCE FOR PEOPLE WORKING WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Working with community members, you may be providing support to individuals and families who are experiencing domestic abuse. This guide provides information about what domestic abuse is and how you can provide a safe and supportive response to individuals and their families. COVID-19 has not caused domestic abuse, but lockdown conditions and the reduction in so many face-2-face services, has led to an increase in the severity and frequency of domestic abuse. Home is not a safe place for everyone, and can be especially dangerous in homes where domestic abuse is happening. We must help anyone who is often afraid and scared within their own home, know that help and advice is available.

### What is domestic abuse and coercive controlling behaviour?



Any 'incident or pattern of incidents 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. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, economic and emotional forms of abuse.

**Controlling behaviour** is a range of acts designed to make person subordinate and/or dependant by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their

resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of their means for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

**Coercive behaviour** is an act or pattern of acts of assaults, threats, humiliation and intimation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim

For more information go to [www.solihull.gov.uk/domesticabuse](http://www.solihull.gov.uk/domesticabuse)

## Who can experience domestic abuse?



**Anyone** can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, sexual orientation, disability, religion or socioeconomic status, however, women are much more likely to be victims than men.

Abuse can be perpetrated by partners, ex-partners and family members, including children under the age of 18, adult children and siblings.

## How to respond to domestic abuse



An individual you're in contact with may tell you that they are experiencing domestic abuse. They might not say 'I am a victim of domestic abuse' but may for example say:

- 'I don't feel safe right now' or 'I don't feel safe at home'
- 'I'm scared/frightened of my (ex) partner/family member'
- 'my (ex) partner/family member hurts me'
- 'My (ex) partner/family member won't let me out of the house', controls everything I do, is always putting me down and making me feel worthless'

You may have concerns that an individual you're in contact with is experiencing domestic abuse based on what you see/hear, for example:

- You witness abuse behaviour (aggressive, yelling, bullying, belittling, yelling controlling)
- Notice that the victim seems fearful of their partner/family member
- Notice that they are unable to speak with you alone, **see** bruises, scratches etc.

If an individual discloses they are experiencing domestic abuse, it's okay to ask them about their situation. It's up to them to decide whether to tell you more. It's important to make sure that the person is **alone** and **safe** before speaking with them about the abuse. If you are in contact remotely (phone/web), only ask 'closed' questions, which allow them to give a 'yes' or 'no' answer e.g.

- 'Are you alone?'
- 'Is it safe to ask you some questions about your relationship with \_\_\_\_?'

Below are some questions that can help to let the individual know it's okay to talk:

- 'You've mentioned that you're scared of your partner. Would you like to tell me more about that?'

- You've mentioned a few things to me about your son that sounded concerning, for example, he won't let you go on walks or meet with your friends. Would you like to talk about that?'
- 'I heard your partner shouting aggressively in the background, are you feeling safe at the moment?'



If somebody tells you that they are experiencing domestic abuse, it is important to:

- Listen to them without judgement
- Never blame them for the abuse, excuse the behaviour, ask them why they have not left, or tell them to leave
- Believe them
- Validate what they are telling you. For example, 'I'm really glad you told me', 'this isn't your fault'
- Ask them what they need, they are an expert in their own life, be patient and let them set the pace.
- If it is safe to do so, share information about how to get specialist advice and support
- Remind them they can always ring the police, 999 for an emergency and 101 for non-urgent incidents. The police provide a **silent solution** for those who ring 999, but are unable to speak.

## What to do in an emergency



If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to the victim, children, perpetrator or anyone else in the household, encourage them to call 999.

If they are unable to call the police and you are worried about their immediate safety, get as much information as you can regarding their location and call 999. **Do not call the police if there is no immediate risk and the victim has not asked you to, as this may alert the perpetrator to the victim's disclosure.**

## Inform your safeguarding lead about the disclosure

It is important to inform your designated lead, record the disclosure and follow your safeguarding procedures.

## Confidentiality and safeguarding

Your conversation is confidential but information can and should be shared with relevant professionals if:

- The individual asks you to share information with a professional, or named other person
  - An adult or child is at risk of immediate harm
- A child is living in the household where there is domestic abuse and you need to follow safeguarding procedures
- An adult is vulnerable and at risk of harm to themselves or others
- If a crime has been committed or is about to be committed

**Every effort should be made to do this with the victims consent**



## **Self-Care**

Talking to someone about their experience of domestic abuse can be distressing for you too. It is important to care for your mental health and wellbeing after responding. You may want to:

- Debrief with someone you trust, remembering to maintain confidentiality
- Take a break and be kind to yourself
- Set boundaries, be clear with the individual what you can and cannot do, know your limits

## **You are experiencing domestic abuse**

You too maybe affected personally by domestic abuse, either as victim, survivor, perpetrator, or through a friend/family member. You are not alone, there is no excuse for abuse and there is support available.

## **Resources**

**Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid Confidential helpline: 0808 800 0028**

**Victim Support Tel: 0300 303 1977**

**Rape & Sexual Violence Project Tel: 0121 643 0301**

**SMBC Adult Social Care Tel: 0121 704 8007/www**

**SMBC Children Social Care Tel: 0121 788 4333**

**Solihull Community Housing – Tel: Housing Options 0121 717 1515**

**National domestic abuse helpline Tel: 0808 2000 247**

**National Centre for Domestic Violence Tel: 0800 970 2070**

**Women's Aid the survivors handbook – [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)**

**Respect helpline for those who are concerned about their behaviour Tel: 0808 802 4040**

**Surviving economic abuse – [www.survivingeconomicabuse.org](http://www.survivingeconomicabuse.org)**