

Domestic abuse: The symptoms, the impact, and the help available.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse, or domestic violence, is defined across Government as any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, including sexual violence. The 'domestic' nature of the offending behaviour is in recognition of the fact that the parties involved are often in an intimate relationship of some kind. The dynamics of the relationship are usually considered, (by wider society), as distorted and dysfunctional and create a universally unacceptable set of behaviours. Individuals within this relationship may not be aware of the abuse that is being put upon them and it is possible that the 'abuser' believes that the behaviours they exhibit are protecting rather than controlling.

Who faces abuse?

Men, women, and children can all be victims of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse occurs amongst people of all ethnicities, sexualities, ages, disabilities, immigration status, religions or beliefs, and socio-economic backgrounds.

According to the office of national statistics, it was estimated that 5.5% of adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in 2020*. However due to the fact that domestic abuse often goes unreported the actual statistical status remains unknown. It is anticipated that during the 'lockdown' of 2020/2021, and the increased pressures on families and individual's, that the number of reported cases will significantly increase.



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* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020>

What is the impact of abuse?

Anyone who has experienced domestic abuse will understand that the impact has many layers and has a negative effect on all aspects of wellbeing and functionality. The individual at the receiving end of domestic abuse will likely experience emotional, social, financial, physical and, in some cases, sexual abuse. The abuse can be explosive, violent, and aggressive or passive, manipulated and silent. Irrespective of the manifestations, the individual who is being abused is likely to feel fear, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. They may blame themselves for the situation they are in and feel helpless of what to do or who to go to, to get help.

What are the signs of abuse?

Spotting the signs can help identify the problem and be the first step in getting help. Domestic abuse is rarely a one-off incident and is cumulative and interlinked, but the following questions can help to clarify the situation.

- Is your partner jealous and possessive?
- Is he/she charming one minute and abusive the next?
- Does he/she tell you what to wear, where to go, who to see?
- Does he/she constantly put you down?
- Does he/she play mind games and make you doubt your judgment?
- Does he/she control your money?
- Does he/she pressure you to have sex when you don't want to?
- Are you starting to walk on eggshells to avoid making him/her angry?
- Does he/she monitor or track your movements or messages?
- Does he/she use anger and intimidation to frighten and control you?

If you think someone you know is being abused what can you do?

If you're worried a friend or a colleague is being abused, let them know you've noticed something is wrong. They might not be ready to talk but try to find quiet times when they can talk if they choose to. Use the sample questions above to help guide the conversation and establish the facts of the matter.

If someone confides in you that they're suffering domestic abuse: listen, and take care not to blame them, acknowledge it takes strength to talk to someone about experiencing abuse, give them time to talk, but do not push them to talk if they do not want to.

Acknowledge they're in a frightening and difficult situation. Tell them nobody deserves to be threatened or beaten, despite what the abuser has said. Support them as a friend, encourage them to express their feelings, and allow them to make their own decisions.

Do not tell them to leave the relationship if they're not ready – that's their decision, (as difficult as that might seem). Ask if they have suffered physical harm and if they have, offer to go with them to a hospital or GP and to help them report the assault to the police if they choose to. Be ready to provide information about organisations that offer help for people experiencing domestic abuse.

Helping a friend if they're being abused
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/getting-help-for-domestic-violence/>

If you yourself are in an abusive relationship, you can change the situation and there is support which can help you.

As well as your GP, a close friend, a trusted colleague, or an extended member of the family, here is a list of organisations that are on hand to assist you.



NHS: Getting help for domestic violence and abuse
www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/getting-help-for-domestic-violence/

Citizens Advice: Domestic abuse www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Refuge: Freephone, 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline 0808 2000 247 or visit [Refuge.org.uk](https://www.refuge.org.uk)

Calling 999 but can't speak out loud? If you need to call the police but are unable to speak out loud, don't worry, there are other ways to engage with the operator.

If you are able to, you can make yourself heard by coughing or tapping the handset, however this might not always be an option.

Calling from a mobile – If you are calling 999 from a mobile and cannot speak during the call, you will be transferred to the Silent Solution system and prompted to dial 55. This will inform police that it is an emergency and that they should attend the scene.

Calling from a landline – If you are calling 999 from a landline and cannot speak during the call there are three things the operator will look for to then transfer to a police call handler.

Standing together: Call 020 87485717 or visit <https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/>

National Domestic Abuse Helpline: Women can call this freephone helpline, run by Refuge, on 0808 2000 247 for free at any time, day, or night. The staff will offer confidential, non-judgemental information and support.

Men's Advice Line: Men can call 0808 8010 327 (Monday and Wednesday, 9am to 8pm, and Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 9am to 5pm) for non-judgemental information and support.

ManKind: Men can call 0182 3334 244 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm)

Respect: Men's help line freephone 0808 8010327 or visit <https://mensadvice.org.uk/>

Galop: If you identify as LGBT+ you can call 0800 999 5428 for emotional and practical support.

Karma Nirvana: Anyone can call 0800 5999 247 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm) for forced marriage and honour crimes. You can also call 020 7008 0151 to speak to the GOV.UK Forced Marriage Unit.



What about the perpetrators of abuse?

First and foremost, abuse of power and control over another person is wrong, The 'Domestic Violence and Abuse Act' sets out the legal framework, (which is currently being strengthened), but essentially aims to protect the vulnerable and prosecute the perpetrator.

People who demonstrate abusive behaviours may have personal vulnerabilities which explain, but not excuse the behaviour and often these people themselves may be in need of help, direction and guidance. If you feel you exhibit abusive behaviour or know somebody who does it is important to get help.

It is important to recognise and understand that abusive behaviour is a choice, choosing to stop the abuse should be the focus, it is possible to change and manage behaviours with the right support and guidance and your GP, mental health services and local support groups and or charities can assist. The consequences and cost of not dealing with the issue may include arrest; prison; loss of relationships; long term physical and emotional damage to your partner and children; loss of contact with children; being dismissed from work; loss of the home and financial losses etc. All of these can be devastating and long standing.



When abuse is occurring, whether you are the victim or the perpetrator, the situation is serious. To do nothing is potentially life endangering. Seeking help is not as difficult as it might seem and has a far more positive outcome.

