

DOMESTIC ABUSE

Factsheet

Domestic abuse is the systematic pattern of behaviour on the part of the abuser designed to control or obtain power over a husband, wife, partner or child. This includes those who may or may not cohabit. It is experienced by women, men and children of all ages, ethnic and social backgrounds, gender identities and sexualities.

It can begin at any stage of a relationship and is rarely a one-off. Incidents generally become more frequent and severe over time. People can experience domestic abuse and other forms of abuse without ever being physically abused. It is important to remember that non-physical forms of abuse can be as destructive and as undermining as physical violence.

There are many forms of domestic abuse. This can include the following but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- economic/financial
- emotional
- coercion
- modern slavery
- forced marriage
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Honour Based Abuse (HBA)

The impact of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on a person's life. Everybody reacts differently but the effects include:

- depression, anxiety, panic attacks and other mental health issues
- feelings of loneliness or isolation
- a lack of confidence or self-esteem

- feelings of guilt or self-blame
- difficulties at work or in other relationships
- trouble sleeping e.g. insomnia
- substance abuse e.g. alcohol, drugs
- self-harm or suicide
- serious injury or death

Spotting the signs

It is important to remember that domestic abuse can affect anyone. The following are some indicators to help you identify whether an adult might be experiencing domestic abuse:

- do they say that their husband, wife or partner is excessively jealous and possessive.
- is the husband, wife or partner charming one minute and abusive the next, often with sudden changes of mood.
- is the husband, wife or partner stopping the person from seeing their family and friends. Do they confide that they feel isolated.
- is the husband, wife or partner constantly criticising them and putting them down in public.
- does the husband, wife or partner play mind games and make the person unsure of their own judgment.
- does the husband, wife or partner control their money.
- does the husband, wife or partner tell them what to wear, who to see, where to go, what to think.
- does the husband, wife or partner pressure them into having sex when they don't want to.
- does the husband, wife or partner monitor their movements or check up on them via social media or by looking at their text messages or emails.
- does the husband, wife or partner use anger and intimidation to frighten them and make them comply with demands.
- has the husband, wife or partner ever threatened or intimidated them using violent language or by smashing and breaking things.
- has the person felt forced to alter their behaviour because of fear of their husband, wife or partner's reaction.
- has the husband, wife or partner ever harmed, or threatened to harm their pet.

When children are involved

Children living with abuse respond to their circumstances in many different ways. They may feel frightened, insecure and confused. Often, they learn to keep their feelings and fears to themselves – they may feel like the violence in their home life must be kept secret or is their fault. In some cases, children may take on a mediating or distracting role between their carers. In the most severe cases, children may even verbally or physically intervene. Changes in their typical behaviour may be noticeable by those that

know or care for them. You may see some of the following indicators that a child is experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse, but the list is not exhaustive:

- bed wetting, nightmares or insomnia
- problems in school or trouble learning
- tantrums
- withdrawal
- aggression or bullying
- signs of physical harm

Many children learn to cope with and survive abuse. The physical, psychological and emotional effects of domestic abuse on children is wide reaching and proven to affect their well-being, and their ability to engage in and maintain healthy, productive and happy relationships in the future.

What to do when there is a concern

It is important to remain impartial and provide a trusted, listening ear to somebody who might confide in you. It is also important to be non-judgemental and offer firm reassurance to the person that they are not to blame for what they are experiencing and you will do everything you can to help them be safe.

Handling a disclosure

A disclosure made by somebody experiencing domestic abuse, must be handled carefully and requires a particular response. Be mindful of your body language and unconscious expressions or vocalisations. The person you are listening to may present with hypervigilance, this is a safety strategy that they may use to identify triggers in their abuser. The following 'do's' and 'don'ts' will help you to understand how to handle a disclosure:

Do's

- Listen carefully, without interruption
- Remain calm, approachable and receptive. Gentle and open ended questions such as 'can you tell me more about what happened?' are helpful
- Acknowledge you understand how difficult this may be
- Make it clear that you are taking what is said seriously
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you and that they are safe with you
- Let them know that you'll do everything you can to help them
- Make a written record of exactly what has been said and only use the exact words or phrases given to you.

Don'ts

- Promise confidentiality
- Ask leading or probing questions
- Make written notes whilst you are listening. It will be distracting and you will miss

important information

- Repeatedly question or ask the individual to repeat what they have said
- Discuss the disclosure with people who do not need to know, including the person alleged of wrongdoing.

How to report a concern

Reporting a concern will vary depending on the situation in which the suspicions of abuse or disclosure come about. For example, within a setting where children are present there will be designated procedures to follow. Where the concern is from a member of the general public, there are no formal procedures for reporting a concern.

To report a concern, you can call your Local Authority Safeguarding Team, often referred to as a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). You can then speak to a social worker about your concerns or the disclosure, and they will give advice and support.

In addition to social services concerns regarding children can also be reported to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). The information taken by any of the aforementioned parties will then be processed according to the designated safeguarding procedures in place within the organisation.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. By not reporting concerns it is enabling the potential abuse to continue. There is a risk that non-reporting may be perceived by the person disclosing as collusion or protection of the alleged abuser which may deter them from making any further disclosures.

Remember! If the person you are talking to is in immediate danger or risk of harm, call emergency services on 999 without delay.

Find out more

The following list is a small selection of the wide range of organisations which publish information on domestic abuse. The MCF does not endorse or recommend any of the organisations listed.

- **Ann Craft Trust**
National charity which exists to minimise the risk of abuse of disabled children and adults at risk through pioneering training, practice reviews and contributing to world-leading research.
Visit <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/>
- **Ask for ANI**
If somebody is experiencing domestic abuse and needs immediate help, they can ask for 'ANI' in participating pharmacies. 'ANI' stands for Action Needed Immediately. If a pharmacy has the 'Ask for ANI' logo on display, it means they're ready to help. They will offer a private space, provide a phone and ask if the person needs support from the police or other domestic abuse support services.

- **Galop**

Run by LGBTQ+ people for LGBTQ+ people, it provides support over the telephone and advocacy services for people who need assistance long-term. Call freephone 0800 999 5428.

Visit <https://galop.org.uk/>

- **Independent Domestic Violence Advisors**

IDVAs provide emotional and practical advice, guidance and support to help anyone experiencing domestic abuse, and their families, to become and remain safe.

Visit <https://saferfutures.org.uk/our-programmes/idva/>

- **Local Authorities**

Contact your Local Authority Safeguarding Team to speak to a social worker about concerns or a disclosure. The local authority may operate a 'one stop shop' for anyone experiencing domestic violence. This offers free and confidential advice, information and support from a range of agencies under one roof.

Visit <http://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/find-your-nearest-safeguarding-adults-board/>

- **Masonic Charitable Foundation**

Offers confidential advice, guidance and support on a range of issues. It may be able to provide financial support to survivors of domestic abuse, in the form of grants for daily living costs, mortgage/rent/security deposits, and school equipment/extra-curricular activities. Call freephone 0800 035 60 90.

Visit <https://mcf.org.uk/>

- **Men's Advice Line**

Supports men experiencing domestic abuse. Call 0808 8010327.

Visit <https://mensadvice.org.uk/>

- **National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children**

Specialises in child protection and dedicated to protecting children from abuse. It is the only UK children's charity with statutory powers, which means it can take action to safeguard children at risk of abuse. If you're worried about a child call 0808 800 5000.

Visit <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

- **Refuge**

Empowers women and children to rebuild their lives, free from violence and fear. It provides a range of life-saving and life-changing services. Call 0808 2000 247.

Visit <https://refuge.org.uk/>

- **Respect Phonenumber**

Provides support to abusers to help them become safe around partners and children. Call 0808 8024040.

Visit <https://respectphonenumber.org.uk/>

- **Women's aid**

Provides information and support for women and children.

Visit <http://www.womensaid.org.uk>

Other information

You may also be interested in the following Masonic Charitable Foundation resources:

Factsheets

- **Mental health.** Provides an insight into mental health and how to support somebody. It provides a useful list of specialist organisations.
<http://mcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Mental-Health-factsheet-V2.2.pdf>
- **Trauma and PTSD.** Provides information on trauma and how to support somebody who has, or is, experiencing a traumatic event. It provides a useful list of specialist organisations.
<http://mcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Trauma-factsheet.pdf>

Guides

- **Alternative sources of support.** Provides signposting information to specialist organisations who provide support with finance, health and well-being, housing and other areas.
http://mcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Alternative-Sources-of-Support_Feb-2022.pdf
- **Government benefits.** Provides an overview of available state benefits.
http://mcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guide-to-Government-Benefits_October-2022.pdf

Leaflets

- **Advice and Support.** Explains the range of practical support and assistance available through the network of regional Advisers.
<http://mcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Advice-and-Support-AST-leaflet.pdf>
- **Can we help you?** Provides information for anyone considering making an application for support.
<http://mcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Can-we-help-you-masonic-support-leaflet.pdf>
- **Counselling.** Explains how to access counselling and mental health support.
www.mcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/3122_MCF_Adult_counselling_supplementary_leaflet_AW-Web.pdf

For more information, or to try the MCF's eligibility checker, visit www.mcf.org.uk/get-support

Whilst every care has been taken to verify accuracy, the information in this factsheet is for guidance only.

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