

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional or financial and committed by an intimate partner or family member.

If someone is forced to alter their behaviour because they are frightened of their partner or family member's reaction, they are being abused.

The Home Office (March 2013) defines domestic abuse as:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or are or who have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. This definition includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

The UK government has recently passed a new law which classes controlling and coercive behaviour as criminal offences. There is no legal definition of coercive behaviour but the UK government says this includes, but is not limited to; threats, humiliation, intimidation or any other abuse that is used to punish, harm or frighten their victim.

Stalking and harassment are also criminal offences.

Sexual violence is often a part of domestic abuse. It is recognised as any unwanted sexual act or activity. There are many different kinds of sexual violence, including but not restricted to: rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, rape within marriage/relationships, forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and ritual abuse.

Who does domestic abuse happen to?

Abusers and victims come from all different walks of life. This violence has no respect for social background, age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability, lifestyle or gender.

Most often domestic abuse is committed by men against women, but it also happens in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender relationships. Sometimes women abuse men and sometimes other family members may be involved.

What causes domestic abuse?

There is no single cause of domestic violence and abuse. It comes from a combination of factors, including society's attitudes, community responses, and the individual nature of the abuse and the abused. >>

How does witnessing or being exposed to abuse or violence affect children?

- Children of all ages can be affected in a range of ways. Exposure to domestic abuse can have a negative effect on their behaviour, learning and development.
- They may get caught in the middle of an incident, possibly trying to stop it.
- They may be sitting on the stairs or in another room and hear the abuse.
- They may see their parent's injuries following an incident.
- They may be forced to take part in abusing the victim.
- They may be forced to watch or take part as sexual abuse takes place.

Warning signs to look for

Victims of domestic abuse may:

- be apologetic and make excuses for their partner's/family member's behaviour.
- get nervous about talking when their partner/family member is around.
- seem to be sick more often and miss lots of school or work.
- try to hide bruises by wearing long sleeves and high necks even in summer.
- make last minute excuses about why they can't meet you, friends or family.
- seem sad, lonely, withdrawn or fearful.
- mentions things about their partner/family member controlling their finances, checking their mobile phone, etc.
- always attend appointments with their partner or family member, who may then be reluctant to leave the victim alone with a professional.

What can professionals do to support victims?

- Ask the question! Most victims of domestic abuse say they wanted someone to ask them at the time if they needed help but are less willing to volunteer information themselves. Support is available to help you do this safely.
- Remember it can be very difficult for someone to leave an abusive relationship. The victim may have been subjected to this behaviour for years and so rebuilding their resilience and confidence may also take some time.
- Talk to them about what they want to happen and what choices they have – not everyone wants to end a relationship, but everyone wants the abuse to stop.
- If you have a good relationship with the victim or a member of their family, encourage them to talk about what is going on. When they are ready you can signpost them on to a specialist support service to provide further ongoing support.
- > Give them some information on the support services available – Behind Closed Doors posters and leaflets are available in hardcopy and online at <http://www.sefton.gov.uk/behindcloseddoors>.
- Encourage them to report incidents to the Police in order to evidence the abuse. In an emergency they should always call 999.
- It is important that a person in an abusive relationship knows this behaviour is not their fault – the perpetrator is 100% responsible.
- Remember children can also experience the effects of domestic abuse in the family home – consider the impact it may be having on them.
- > If you have any concerns about child safety always consider making a safeguarding referral to the Sefton MASH team. Go to <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/1924> for more information.
- > For more information contact:
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Tel: 0151 934 4841 or
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