



# What is domestic abuse?

## 1 What is it?

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner, ex-partner, a family member, or carer.

**The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provides a legal definition for what domestic abuse is and includes a range of powers to tackle it.**

## 2 Who does it happen to?

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone. Abuse can begin at any time in a relationship, after a relationship has ended or within a family, and it takes place at all levels of society, regardless of social class, race, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability. Individuals may experience abuse or be affected by it long after they have left their abuser.

**Domestic abuse is defined as taking place between individuals aged 16+. However, children are also directly recognised as victims in their own rights as part of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.**

## 3 Types of abuse

Domestic abuse is not always physical and can take different forms, including:

- ▶ **Emotional:** consistently putting you down, isolating you from friends and family, name calling, and checking up on you
- ▶ **Psychological:** accusations, mind games, jealous behaviour, manipulation, gaslighting, threats to kill the person or the children, sleep deprivation.
- ▶ **Sexual:** forcing you to have sex against your will, sexual assault, forced prostitution, forced to watch or act in pornography.
- ▶ **Economic:** preventing a person from getting/keeping a job, taking or controlling finances and the things that money can buy such as clothing, transport and a place to live, building up debt in your name
- ▶ **Physical:** assault, punches, kicks, hitting, forced imprisonment, biting, strangulation, burning, dragging, using weapons, throwing objects.

“ Domestic abuse is not always physical ”

## 4 Types of abuse (continued)

This also includes:

**Controlling behaviour:** designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent on the abuse, including:

- ▶ isolating them from support
- ▶ exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain
- ▶ depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape
- ▶ regulating their everyday behaviour.

**Coercive behaviour:** 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 also includes so-called, honour-based abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

**Stalking and harassment are also criminal offences and can be a part of domestic abuse behaviours.**

## 5 Why it matters

**Domestic abuse affects 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men. And yet this is the tip of the iceberg as most incidents are unreported.**

Children can suffer lasting emotional and psychological damage even if they aren't involved in any violence – contributing to trauma caused by ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

The sooner someone starts talking about their experience, the more likely they are to engage with support services and make lasting positive changes.

## Stalking and harassment are also criminal offences

## 6 Questions to consider

- ▶ Have you noticed a negative change in the person's behaviour, or in their children's – nervous, anxious, withdrawn, physical injuries?
- ▶ Before you speak to someone about your concerns – are they in a safe space? Are they alone without someone listening to what they say?
- ▶ Do you know where to get further help and support?

## 7 What to do

- ▶ If you are able to, ask the person directly if they need any support.
- ▶ Listen to them and offer reassurance that help is available.
- ▶ Give them some information on support services available. In an emergency they should always call 999.
- ▶ Don't ignore any child safety concerns – think about making a child safeguarding referral.
- ▶ Think whether there are any other vulnerable adults in the household who might also need support – adult safeguarding referral.

**For more information and advice visit:**  
[www.sefton.gov.uk/domestic-abuse](http://www.sefton.gov.uk/domestic-abuse)